

Church Bible School (CBS) + Internet-Bible-School (IBS)

2nd THESSALONIANS

(Lesson 17) -

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

www.nnk-berlin.de

E-Mail: pastor@matutis.de

Concerning the study

I **recommend** you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminar**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

MISCELLANEOUS

Both Epistles to the Thessalonians start identically: „Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to the church of Thessalonica...“ etc. It is also to be mentioned that the second letter is closely related to the language and style of the first epistle. But the message is so different that you might think somebody else would be the author of the epistle.

While the other letter was very **personal** this epistle almost seems **impersonal and objective**; the text could almost apply to any church. The author of this second epistle seems to doubt **certain things concerning the Parousia**: „*Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us.*“ (2Thess 2,2). It seems as if the believers think that the „**day of the Lord**“ has already come or is already over and they had missed something.

During the time when the first church was established everything happened quickly – Jesus died and rose after three days and 40 days later He ascended to heaven. Shortly after that, 10 days later the promised **Holy Spirit came**. A great, living church was established and scattered soon so that many small new churches were planted and many Gentiles even came to faith. And they thought that the **day of Jesus' return** would also come quickly. But then they experienced a disillusionment. It was followed by inner tension and disagreements, false teachings and persecution came. Some apostles and older Christians died or were executed, others were tempted and fell away from the faith. Many former Christians became „Antichrists“, false prophets or started one of the many spiritual movements that came up. In the meantime Jerusalem was destroyed, the Jews were exiled and scattered. All that was prophesied, for example in Mt 24 and other scriptures became true, but the return of Jesus had not yet appeared.

The hopeful world view of some Christians was totally destroyed and the enthusiastic **faith of the Thessalonians was deeply shaken**.

Thus this second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians is a **document of counsel** that carefully corrects the exaggerated imaginations and expectations of the believers and brought them down on solid ground. Furthermore the Christians were not supposed to participate in the rebellion of the Zealots against Rome. The 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians is a **clear rejection** of the orthodox Judaism.

With great wisdom he exposes to the church **the simple foundations of the return of the Lord**. The situation of the young mission church had not become easier, on the contrary: the pressure of persecution had even more increased. But also had the intense search for the pure truth and meditation and thinking about revelations of God. Paul and the brethren quickly realized that they had to write another letter as an amendment. There were many unhealthy and non-sober prophesies and messages at the church concerning the „**day of the Lord**“. Even when they were only some months old in their faith (1Thess 1,9-10), they should know and hear what divine truth is and receive information about the whole plan of God's salvation.

AUTHOR

2nd Thessalonians is **very short**. It speaks a **different language** than the 1st letter so that again it seems as if somebody else would be the author. But the whole content and the way the author deals with the problems of the Thessalonian church still makes us assume that **Paul**, the spiritual father of this church wrote this letter.

The **ancient tradition** confirms the authorship of Paul on one accord. According to 2Thess 1,1 Paul is the author of the letter. The second letter as well as the first claims the authorship of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. According to that information this letter must have been written some time during the 2nd mission journey, because only on that journey all three of the brothers travelled together. In the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians we find a totally **new- defined eschatology** (thoughts and remarks about the return of Jesus) by Paul.

While 1st Thessalonians deals with **the resurrection of the dead and Parousia of the risen one**, 2nd Thessalonians deals with the **appearance of the Antichrist and his destruction** (1Thess 4,13-18/ 2Thess 2,1-12). Those are two very different issues or situations that are being dealt with – one is about that what happens in the **heavenly realm** and the other what happens **on earth**. The **1st letter** was also very personal because the church and the believers closely walked with Jesus. While the **2nd letter** was very impersonal and objective because it addressed unbelief and Judaism. It conveys information about the destiny of the apostates, backsliders and „Antichrists“.

The author no longer deals with the destiny of those **who die before the rapture** (1Thess 4,13) but more about the topic of the anticipated **return of the Lord Jesus Himself**. The preparation for the rebellion of the Jews against Rome was in preparation and they tried to get the Christian churches involved too. In many churches there were Jewish Christians who once used to be strongly influenced by the zealots and the Essenians, who waited for the coming of the kingdom of God. This **exaggerated expectation** was triggered by prophecies, alleged oral or written remarks of Paul or others (2Thess 2,1-2). This led many people to lead a **life out of order**, which means a critical neglect of work and daily assignments (2Thess 3,10-12). In the first letter we find first signs of such a situation. Understandably Paul does is no longer satisfied with **sheer exhortations** (1Thess 4,11-12), but calls the Thessalonians to church discipline and former order (1Thess 3,6,11-15). After the first letter was not successful to accomplish the desired effect he wrote another letter.

RECIPIENTS

The way he addresses them reveals it: „to the church of Thessalonica in God“ (1,1). (review IBS-material of 1st Thessalonians)

COMPOSITION

The few concrete information of the 2nd epistle make it impossible to tell where and when it was written. The theological profile of the letter would suggest the time frame of the second mission journey of the apostle Paul. Asia Minor could be the place where the epistle was written.

AUTHENTICITY

The confirmations in favor of the second letter in the first 2 centuries are the same as for the first letter and they also originate from the same sources.

Polycarp already referred clearly to some of the passages of this letter. Later, around 150 AD **Justin the martyr** referred to 2Thess 2, 3. The **canon of Marcion** (140 AD) referred to passages of the letter by calling it 2nd Thessalonians and many church father and apologists did likewise. Also read authenticity 1st Thessalonians.

PURPOSE AND GOAL

Even though the apostle Paul was happy about the progress of the church (1,3-4), his first letter did not seem to have the desired effect. Under the persistent pressure of persecution the **feverish and exaggerated expectation** of the return of Christ had even grown stronger. The 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians therefore deals with Parousia and the church. Therefore this is not an actual letter but rather **writing of exhortation** of the apostle Paul. The author's main focus is (2Thess 2,1-12) „The marks of the Last Days“. In the church there should be a correct understanding and teaching of the coming of Christ.

The first generation of believers (comp. 1Thess) thought that the return of Christ was going to be immediate. This led to a „**last days life style**“, which means that they thought all work and effort would be a waste because the Lord would be coming back very soon. Then they realised that the Lord was not coming so soon and were disappointed. The central point of the 2nd Epistle was the delay of the **second coming of Christ**.

This letter wanted to oppose **all enthusiasm and neglect of work** because they thought the day of the Lord was coming very soon (Thess 2,2). The apostle **reacted** upon their enthusiastic version of ancient Christian eschatology which was proclaimed by some prophets.

The author wants to lead the church back to order and sobriety. When Parousia was delayed the credibility of the true doctrine was jeopardised. If that which a person hopes for does not happen faith suffers. Christianity would be smiled upon by the world. Therefore it was necessary that after the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians a second one would follow containing sound teaching. **Every kind of false hope was rebuked**. Christians were supposed to live in the present and devote themselves to their daily duties again.

The focus of »2nd Thessalonians« is:

- Apostasy (2 Thess 2,3),
- Sin as it relates to apostasy,
- The Holy Spirit and the rapture (2Thess 2,7),
- Salvation from the evil ones (2Thess 3,2),
- Withdrawal from the brethren (2Thess 3,6,11-15/ 1Cor 5,9-13),
- To avoid those who live an unorderly life,
- Church discipline (1Cor 5/ 2Thess 3,14/ Tit 3,10/ Rom 16,17)

Overview of 2nd Thessalonians

- **2Thess 1,3-12** – Paul explains in detail **the coming and righteous judgment of God**.
 - The persecution the church would have to suffer is going to be a sign of that judgment.
 - In Him God will execute vengeance for the oppressed of the church.
 - The author asks the church to walk worthy of their calling.

What is going to happen when Christ returns?

- Christ is going to come back with His angels surrounded by flames of fire (2Thess 1,7-8).
- He would be glorified and worshipped in the midst of the saints (2Thess 1,10).
- **He would punish the evil ones, which means:** (2Thess 1,6,9-9),
 - those who do not know God (2Thess 1,8),
 - those who do not follow the gospel (2Thess 1,8),
 - those who do not believe the truth (2Thess 2,12),
 - those in whom there is no love for the truth (2Thess 2,10),
 - those who rejoice in injustice (2Thess 2,12).
- **He will give His children rest** (2Thess 1,7).
- **The appearance of the Antichrist heralding the Parousia of Christ**
- In the church there were Christian prophets who called upon the name of Paul and who preached that Christ has already come or that the coming is at hand. Their teachings obviously lead to confusion among those who heard it (2,2). Paul reminds them of the doctrine that he gave them, which tells them that before the Parousia there would be a time of great apostasy and the Antichrist would come.
- **2Thess 2.1-12 - At present the time of the Antichrist has not yet come and he is still concealed**. After he is revealed the Lord Jesus will return (2Thess 2,8).

- **2Thess 2,13-3,5 – The delay of Parousia is a work of God's grace.**
- **2Thess 3,6-16 – Exhortation to the believers**
He calls them to a life of commitment and order. They were supposed to live in order and follow the example of the apostle. **If someone does not listen and obey they should be avoided.** At the same time the emphasis of signing the letter with his own hand writing this approves the authority of the letter. A blessing closes the letter, there are no personal greetings.

CONTENT AND DIVISION

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|--|---------------------|
| 1. <u>Personal part</u> (A word for everyone!) | <u>Ch. 1</u> |
| ● Adress and blessings | Vers 1-2 |
| ● Thanksgiving for those who persevered | Vers 3-5 |
| ● Comfort in regard to Parousia | Vers 6-7 |
| ● Warning to the unconverted members | Vers 8-10 |
| ● Prayer for new faith and strength | Vers 11-12 |
| 2. <u>Teaching part</u> (A word to the dreamers!) | <u>Ch. 2</u> |
| ● Warning against impatience | Vers 1-2 |
| ● Marks of the Parousia: apostasy, Antichrist | Vers 3-12 |
| ● Thanksgiving for the elect | Vers 13-14 |
| ● Exhortation to hold fast to the word | Vers 15 |
| ● Prayer and doctrine | Vers 16-17 |
| 3. <u>Practical part</u> (A word to the church!) | <u>Ch. 3</u> |
| ● Call to intercession | Vers 1-5 |
| ● Call to work | Vers 6-12 |
| ● Call to order | Vers 13-15 |
| ● Greetings and blessings | Vers 16-18 |

Key word: **sign**

Key verse: „**Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for [that day will not come] until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.**“ (2Thess 2,3)

Paul had written to the Thessalonians concerning the **sudden come back of Christ** (1Thess 5,2-3). In the first letter he himself thought the coming of Christ would be soon and even during their time. **So the whole ancient church** thought he would come back very soon. But God must have given him a revelation that this is not the case. He must have recognized that the day of the Lord's return is **a great „mystery“**, and that nobody knows (Mt 24,36,43,44,50; 25,13/ Mk 13,32/ Lk 12,40,46). All Christians should always be ready for His return and keep up this posture of patiently waiting.

Paul tries to calm down the believers by reminding them that this event is yet to come because before it happens there have to be the signs of a spiritual apostasy and the personal appearance of the „man of sin“, the „child of doom“, the „adversary of God“, the „Antichrist“, who will represent the rebellion (s. 2Thess 2,3-4/ 1Tim 4,1-3/ 2Tim 3,1-9).

Thoughts about the topic: **The Antichrist.**

According to 1Joh 2,22 the „**Antichrist**“ is a „**movement**“ (trend, attitude) against Jesus. Therefore the Antichrist is everything that consciously opposes Christ. The Antichrist is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, Messiah and anointed one. And that are all traditional **Jews**, for example, who reject Christ. The adversary of Christ already existed in the past, according to Paul and John. But before the return of Christ he has to display religious and political power and even for a short time be the only one to execute rulership on earth. According to the **revelation of John** this satanic spirit will be **released for only a short time** (Rev 20,7) to agitate all people against Christ before he comes back and will destroy him and his followers forever.

The Antichrist and antichristian followers already existed when the apostles lived and ministered. It is nothing new (1Joh 2,18-19). When the apostles speak of the „**Antichrist**“ they use this as a pseudonym for the unbelieving Jews who even reject Jesus up to this day (1Joh 2,22/ 2Joh 7). In the bible the apostle explains in 2Thess 2,3-8 very precisely the appearance of the Antichrist: At first (before the return of Jesus) the

adversary has to appear in the form of a man (Antichrist) ... Because **the secret power of the adversary is already at work ...**".

Lawlessness is going to prepare the way of the Antichrist. And only after the Antichrist has appeared and displayed his power (Rev 13) only then will Jesus return and destroy him forever.

The **Antichrist can only appear** when that which is still holding him back will be put away. There have been many speculations who or what it is. Some say it is the Holy Spirit and others say this is the church. When the love will grow cold and unrighteousness takes over (Mt 24,12), the **Holy Spirit will not be there any longer**, then the godly church is dead, the salt has become useless (Mt 5,13). Jesus says, do you think the Son of man will find anyone who believes when He comes back? (Lk 18,8).

Also in the unbelieving **shallow church** (and not only Judaism) the Antichrist will establish his throne. The sleeping virgins (souls without love for the Holy Spirit) have not recognized Him (Mt 25,1-13). The apostle have already pointed out these people and exposed them to warn the believers (Phil 3,2-3/ Tit 1,10-14/ 2Joh 1,7/ 1Joh 2,19-22/ 2Petr 2,1/ Gal 2,4/ Jud 4-12/ Gal 1,6-7; 3,1-3; 6,12/ Acts 21,17-24/ 1Thess 2,14-16).

These **intruders** were and are always the same kind of people, **people who do not want to receive Jesus and obey God**. The honest believer who reads the bible will not find it hard to find them out. During the time of composition of the NT there were **two Jewish rebellions against Rome**: The first one was put down by Titus 70 AD. It led to the complete **destruction of the temple** of Jerusalem. The **second rebellion** was led by Simeon Ben Koseba (Bar Kochba) between 132 to 135 AD. He was able to conquer Jerusalem. He was then acknowledged as Messiah by the **rabbi Aqiba** as the prophesied star of Balaam (Numb.24,17), therefore his name was Bar Koseba, which means „Son of the star“. He persecuted especially **the Jewish Christians** because they refused to participate in the **rebellion against Rome**. He died in August 135 AD and was besieged by Severus.

When Paul speaks about the evil power which is already at work he also points to the **political – religious** conditions. The movements were solely led by Jews who **refused to accept Jesus as Messiah**. Therefore they rather accepted somebody else who came **in his own name** as Messiah. This will also happen at the end of time (Rev 13,3). Only the true believers who know the truth of God's word and understand it will be spared (Mt 24,11-13 / Lk 21,34 / Rev 3,10).

The Antichrist definitely stands against Christ, that is and will remain **the center of Antichristianity**. He is the opponent of Christ (Mk 13,22). He is the false Messiah (Mk 13,6/ Joh 5,43). An Anti-Messiah (2Thess 2,1-12), a lawless man.

Jesus defeats Satan (Mt 4,1-11/ Mk 3,23), the prince of this world (Joh12,31), the evil one (Mt 6,13) with a final victory (Is 27,1/ Ez 38/Hag 2,22/ Zach 12,2-11).

The N.T.-term **„Antichrist“** is mentioned in Mk 13,22 for the first time (Mt 24,24;24,5/ Mk 13,6/ Lk 21,8). It says that many people will be **„deceived“** and **„tempted“**. This temptation is in relation to the traditional **„expectation about the return of Christ“** which is based on **traditional Judaism** (2Thess 2,1-12/ 2Petr 3,8-10). The question to Jesus then was: **„When will you establish the kingdom of Israel?“** And because Jesus did not fulfill **the desires of the Jews** they made war against Him. They tried to replace him by all means (Acts 5,36f./ Joh 5,43).

The **„others“**, who came in their own name are competitors of Jesus and therefore **Antichrist-figures**. This only applies to their appearance. They must not necessarily have understood themselves as Antichrists with their attitude and claims.

With the appearance **of false Messiahs** the work of false prophets is closely related (Mk 13,22). That performance of **pseudoprophets** is a sign of the coming end time (Mt 7,15; 24,11/1Joh 4,1). Up to this point Paul had not yet dealt with the **„Antichrist-issue“**. Here in 2Thess 2,1-12 it appears for the first time and it is very detailed. Up to this point he was only speaking about two rulers, powers and authorities and death as the ultimate enemies. But where these powers would be defeated by Christ are those in an **Antichristian position** and are generally all powers who oppose God (comp. 2Cor 4,4 o. 2Cor 6,15).

2Thess 2,1-12 is addressing people who support the assumption that Christ would return soon and therefore have a certain attitude towards life in the present time. Paul highlights the time distance before the return. Before Jesus comes back the **signs of the Last Days have to appear**.

Only when the power which is preventing the evil power to take over will make room, then the great apostasy of the Last Days will come. The decisive figure is the „man of lawlessness“ respectively the son of perdition“ (2Thess 2,3). He rebels and exalts himself against all that is affiliated with God or service and he will be sitting in the temple of God and present himself as God.

This **adversary** (the lawless man) will appear when the power holding him back is gone and he will cause the great apostasy of the Last Days. His appearance will occur with the power of Satan, which means with great power and deceiving signs and wonders as well as any temptation to unrighteousness among those who have not accepted the love for the pure divine truth and therefore cannot be saved.

This **lawless man** with supernatural power will be destroyed by Jesus with a breath of His mouth. **He is someone** who claims authority that was not given to him, someone who unrightly claims a throne or a position as ruler in a nation.

So is this **man of lawlessness**, called son of perdition, a lawless adversary of Christ who stands in sharp contrast to Christ. He will also proclaim **revelation** and a **parousia** but representing a different power which he will display with signs and wonders. His character will be the opposite of Jesus and in all of his being he is the counterpart of Jesus, even though this term is not used. Both aspects are, however, typical of the Antichrist and are clearly expressed in 2Thess 2.

The **New Testament** (N.T.) explains **Antichristianity** with a rejection and denial of the person of Jesus by His adversary (Joh 8,44/1Joh 2,18;4,3).

We can see a clear picture of the **Antichrist** in the apocalypse of John. There he describes the **evil trinity** and his manifestation (Rev 16,13;20,10), but without using the word „Antichrist“. He speaks about a **dragon** with 7 heads and crowns as well as 10 horns (Rev 12.3-18), the **snake** (Rev 20,2) and the „**two beasts**“, who are going to act on behalf of the dragon for some time (Rev 13,4). All these descriptions are only other „**terms**“ for a very **concrete political, religious, anti-christian figures** who already existed a long time ago. The insiders already know who and what this was about.

The whole **Antichristian system** imitates Jesus and the Holy Spirit and tries to attack all areas of human life and is a counterpart of Christ in a special way (Rev 13;17,3). It is the gift of „**persuasion**“ which accomplishes „great signs“ (Rev 13,12,13).

Paul calls the Antichristian concept the „**mystery of the lawlessness**“, because a „**lying spirit**“ is behind it and stirs up rebellion against the universal and eternal orders of God (2Thess 2,7-10). Every spirit who does not acknowledge the incarnation of Jesus is already an Antichrist (1Joh 4,2-3).

But as long as the true and living **church of Christ** and the **Holy Spirit** are still on earth the power of the Antichrist is still detained. There is a delaying power. Only when it is taken away the Antichrist will be able to „**claim the throne of God**“ here on earth (2Thess 2,3-4).

In 1 Tim 4:1 Paul describes how this will happen. ***The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.*** (s. a. 2Tim 3,1-5).

God had established protection against sin through **the law** in order to keep the children of Israel from perdition. Through Jesus the law of God was perfected. Now it is not anymore **the law of the letter**, but the law **of the spirit** and that is much more **valuable** and more powerful to protect us from the power of evil (2Thess 2,9). And the Antichrist will try to change exactly that and tries to draw people back to the **Judaism**“ respectively „**legalism**“ with its paragraphs, regulations, statutes and rituals. Then people start to talk about humanism and forget the fear of God, one speaks of human rights and forgets about the true commands of God.

„**Lawlessness**“ refers to a deliberate choice of lifestyle against the revealed will of God and a rebellion against Jesus, His son.

The mystery of lawlessness includes the fact that God will allow the unfolding of this power and will allow **evil** as soon as the delaying **spirit of truth** will make room for the power of lawlessness. This will cause an outbreak of demonic power (s. 2Thess 2,11-12/ Rev 17,1-2/ Mt 24,12).

Only the absence of the Holy Spirit will cause the final apostasy and rebellion against God until the Antichrist will be completely destroyed. Similar as in the **Jewish war** (66 – 73/74 AD) the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and Judaism where finally the last **who survived committed suicide in Massada**.

God allowed the destruction of the temple and the nation of Israel. This was the fulfillment of Jesus prophecies. Ever since it is impossible to prove **ancestry of Abraham** which was a vital aspect of Judaism.

The church of Jesus and the first Christians withdrew from that place and were not affected by **the Jewish catastrophe** when God judged the ungodly and lawless Israel.

Detailed Interpretation

The **main point** of 2nd Thessalonians is the **correction of the exaggerated expectation concerning Parousia** which was wide-spread in Christianity back then. Because of the false and misleading **messages** the Thessalonians thought they already are in the „**great tribulation**“ (day of the Lord) and had missed the rapture of the church. At that time there were many false „**prophets**“ who proclaimed false messages (2Thess 2,2).

In this **letter Paul is trying to calm down the Thessalonians** by explaining that there are certain events that must occur before the day of the Lord comes (2Thess 2,1-4). In the **first letter** Paul taught that the saints who died before the rapture would still participate in the rapture and in the **second letter** he points out that the day of the Lord is not as soon as they think it is;

- in the **first letter** he also teaches that the return of Jesus will be a very **sudden event**;
- in the **second letter** he also points out that „sudden“ does not mean immediate.

The faith in **the immediate return of Jesus inspired** inspired the Thessalonians

- a) to honorable piety, growth in their faith and deeper love (2Thess 1,3) as well as
- b) great patience and trust in perseverance (2Thess 1,4).

2nd Thessalonians should also **warn them** that before the day of the Lord there will be **great unrighteousness and the love will grow cold** among the people. Evil will increase and mature to a level that it cannot be overcome. This **condition of humanity** and this level of rebellion (as once with Pharaoh) will cause the wrath of God and the day of judgment (2Thess 1,5-7). Before the return of Jesus the **malice of humanity** will excel and reach its peak in the „man of sin“. Only when the Lord has raptured the ones that belong to Him the lawless man will appear.

The **divine secret** is that **God humbled Himself to the lowest level** and became man, the secret of evil is that man will exalt himself and worship himself so much that he attempts to become like God.

This verse in 2Thess 1,7-12 **disproves the view** that the Lord will return after the whole world has accepted Him.

Since the crucifixion of Jesus the world of the unbelieving **including all Jews** will **not see Jesus** as such. He was rejected by His own people. After the resurrection Jesus **did not** appear to the unbelieving Jews, Pharisees, scribes and highpriests. He appeared only to His disciples (1Cor 15).

When Jesus returns He will only return **on the clouds** and with Him all the believers will be taken up in the rapture (1Thess 4,17/ Mt 24,30;26,64/ Mk13,26;14,62/ Lk 21,27/ Rev 1,7;11,12;14,14).

The longsuffering delay of the return of the Lord **is a great blessing for the world** because it gives the believers the unique opportunity to serve others on behalf of God (2Thess 2,13 bis 3,18) and to remain faithful to Jesus in that time (2Thess 2,15), to experience tests of our faith and living out sanctification (2Thess 3,6-14) and to encounter those who are still seeking with forgiveness and patience (2Thess 3,15).

Chapter 1

2Thess 1,1-12 – Living faith is a process. The spirit man, the inner man must grow and mature just like the outer man (2Thess 1,3). Therefore it is also understandable that this believer will grow **in knowledge** concerning the return of Jesus. A conscious Christian grows in the spiritual virtues, gifts and abilities, respectively in their perseverance and steadfastness. In a **healthy and natural growth** everything must mature. The good as well as the bad. Jesus told the disciples in His parables that everything must grow until harvest time (Mt 13,30). This refers to the judgment in the end, respectively the announced return of Jesus.

Paul uses the characteristics **of Jewish apocalyptic** (2Thess 1,7/ 1Thess 4,16) and extends the judgment toward all who do not know Jesus and do not obey Him (2Thess 1,8). All who reject the gospel of love of Jesus Christ **including the Jews will be rejected** (1Thess 4,5/ Röm 10,16).

2Thess 1.1 – Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy wrote to the church of Thessalonica. **Silas** (Silvanus) was a **prophet of the Jerusalem church** who had the assignment to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to proclaim the decisions that were made at the **Apostolic council** in Jerusalem (Acts 15,22,26,32,40). And then he connected the Thessalonians to the church of Jerusalem with this proclamation.

For this reason **Paul mentioned Silvanus** as the companion of his **second mission journey**. Paul did not want to do anything but share what the first apostles had received from Jesus. That **Silas** was with him and is mentioned as **one of the co-authors** proves and demonstrates the apostolic and ancient Christian congruency and reliability of the traditions and teaching they conveyed about the return of the Lord to earth.

From Acts 17,5-9 we know about **persecution and tribulations** of the believers in Thessalonica and that the resistance and misunderstandings in the church did not cease after the first letter of Paul. On the contrary, there were **even more issues** that needed to be addressed so that there needed to be another letter to explain to them things concerning the Parousia and the day of the Lord, when God will hold righteous judgment over all His enemies (vgl. Phil 1,27-30/ Mt 5,10-12; 13,40-43; 25,31-46/ Rom 8,17-18/ 1Pt 4,12-13).

2Thess 1,3 – At first Paul gives thanks to God for the preserving of the Thessalonians and their faith. He knows that **without God's support** and without His eternal grace they could not have made what they have accomplished. That they still stand firm in their faith and could endure the perseverance and even continued to grow was obviously a work of God **and a direct answer of his prayers for this church** (1Thess 1,3;3,12).

Paul had an important request and that was that the Thessalonians would remain steadfast and also continue to grow. They were supposed to accept each other **in a healthy way** (1Thess 3,12), encourage each other in their faith and motivate each other. Love and faith were supposed to grow and flourish in the church like a garden.

2Thess 1,4 – Nowhere could their growth in faith and love be seen as in their **patience and faithfulness in times of tribulations** and **suffering** caused by the enemies of Christ (1Thess 1,8). True Christians „**suffer**“ **without resentment**, yes they even suffer on behalf of Christ **with joy** (Acts 4,23-31/ 2Cor 1,5-7;4,17/ 1Thess 3,3/1Petr 5,19/ Hebr 10,32,33).

Suffering should not be understood as a sign that God has forsaken His children. In **2Thess 1,5** – the **evil attacks against the disciples** are already a sign of the coming righteous judgment of God.

Who wants to prove worthy before God in this life (1Thess 2,12), should live in a way worthy of their calling (Eph 4,1) in obedience to the gospel of Jesus (Phil 1,27) and according to the regulations of the word of God (2Thess 1,5,11). This person must also live **with all kinds of hostility**, endure them and move on.

The believers will judge the world with Christ (1Cor 6,2;4,5/ 2Thess 2,11-12) but only after they themselves are counted „**worthy**“ (2Thess 1,6-10/ 1Cor 11,31-32). **God** the Father will Himself cause those to be in trouble who are causing trouble for the believers now when **His son** Jesus appears. Therefore the believers are encouraged to keep the right attitude toward **suffering**.

Although the true Christians already enjoy **the blessings** of their belonging to God's heavenly kingdom, they have to suffer for this kingdom while they are still on earth (Acts 14,22). To be a **citizen** of the kingdom of heaven **provokes** the **hostility** of demonic and evil powers. An attitude of endurance is a visible sign and positive proof that God **is at work** and purifying them to make them perfect.

Through this **perfection** (Jam 1,2-4/ 1Petr 5,10) God helps His beloved children to become more worthy of His kingdom (2Thes 2,12). **If believers** want to live out Christian character in an evil world they have to expect **much suffering and opposition** (1Thess 3,3), and understand that as a sign that God is trying to prepare and sanctify them (Mt 5,10/ Rom 8,18/ 2Cor 12,10). Therefore the Thessalonians proved that their salvation by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ was real because they were ready to suffer for His kingdom just like Christ. They suffered the wrath of people who were against Jesus and opposed Him and His kingdom (Act 5,41/ Phil 3,10/ Col 1,24). Jesus said: „My kingdom is not of this world ...“ (Joh 18,36).

Paul was trying to encourage the believers in Thessalonica and to take away the heaven burden of their souls and therefore tried to explain to them **the purpose of their suffering**, their tribulations and distress and temptation. All of this is **perfectly normal** in human life, also for Christians. **Enduring and overcoming suffering** are **marks** of true faith (Ps 73,29).

2 Thess 1,6 - God will take revenge on those who threaten His children. While the tribulation of Christians here is temporarily limited the punishment will be eternal. Jesus says „Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh! “ (Mt 18,7/ Lk 17.1-2/ Rom16,17).

Just like **the righteous judgment of God** will serve the perfection of the believers (2Thess 1,5), it will serve as »**revenge**« of the ungodly (2Thess 1,8). Not man has to take care of the revenge when they are persecuted but God Himself will do it (Deut 32,35/ Pro 25,21.22/ Rom 12,19-21/ 1Thess 5,15/ Rev 19,2). When and how God revenges is up to Him alone.

2Thess 1,7 - Paul also **suffered for the righteous cause of Christ**. Just like the Thessalonians he also hoped for the **future peace and reward** for the suffering on behalf of the kingdom of God, which would come when **Christ returns and judges the ungodly**. The Lord Jesus has promised us **His return and peace and revenge** (Mt 13,40-43;24,39-41;25,31-33/ Lk 21,27.28,34-36/ Joh 5,24-29) through the revelation of the divine Lord Jesus as judge of the world.

At the end of the time of tribulation (Mt 13,24-30.36-43;24,29-51;25,31-46/ Rev 19,11-15) HE will finally arrive, visible to everyone as the judge of this world. This will happen after the appearance of the Antichrist (Rev 20,11-15).

When Christ comes to **judge the world** He will arrive with His **angels** and **those who were taken up in the rapture** (Mt 13,41.49;24,30.31;25,31/ Rev 14,14.15). That is a „**self-revelation**“ of God (Exod 13,22;19,16), which refers to a **God- appearance** (1Thess 4,16). This is when Jesus will reveal His full power and glory.

This is referring to the judgment of God and Jesus „**the judge**“. Everybody will receive their righteous reward. In these sentences we can clearly see a **thought of revenge** which was dominant in the late Old Testament and Judaism at the time when Jesus lived.

Those who **are afflicted and suffering** may breathe and can rest assured that their cause will be justified (Rev 6,9;20,4). Such as e.g. **the martyrs and other saints of God** who were crying out for righteousness, but not for **selfish reasons but according to the righteousness** of the throne of God (Rev 6,10).

The believer expects not only divine revelations from heaven but also the coming of the eternal and only Lord in the Last Days. Especially in times of tribulations people are longing for peace and rest (2Thess 1,7a). However, we do not know what kind of experience lies behind this particular text.

2Thess 1,8 - „**Fire**“ is a **biblical image of judgment** (Exod 3,2;19,16-20/ Deut 5,4/ Ps 104,4/ Is 66,15.16/ Mt 3,11.12/ Rev 19,12). **Fire** also symbolises revenge and punishment (Deut 32,35/ Is 59,17; 66,15/ Ez 25,14/ Rom 12,19) of those who do not acknowledge God or do not know Him (1Thess 4,5).

Furthermore: The element **fire also belongs to God's powerful revelation of Himself** such as in the burning bush (Exod19,18/ Hebr 12,18). God's throne is made of fiery flames (Dan 7,9).

The **revenge** will not be executed because of the **persecution of Christians** but because they have not obeyed the command of God to believe in Jesus and His teachings (Acts 17,30.31/ Rom 1,5;10,16; 15,18;16,19) and have also not called on the name of the Lord to be saved from their sin (Rom 10,9-13/1Cor 16,22/ Hebr 10,26-31).

Salvation will not be accomplished by works, but always by putting all faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 2,8-10). **Those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel**..., those are **the Gentiles**, the children of this world (1Thess 4,5). This also applies to the **unbelieving Jews** (Rom 10,16). They are the condemned (Rom 1,18-20).

In 2Thess 1,8-10 the judgment of God is described more negative - „with a consuming fire“, with revenge far away from God, His power and glory, eternal perdition instead of **eternal joy**.

If **judgment comes to destroy or to heal** depends on the faith of each individual, which mean that it depends on their personal belief about Jesus Christ. Whether one has accepted the offer of grace by God or not.

2Thess 1,9 – The eternal perdition - the doctrine of eternal punishment (Is 66,24/ Mt 25,42,46/ Mk 9,43,48), was terrifying for the Thessalonians and intimidated them, but at the same time this is exactly **our warranty for the perfect righteousness of God** which will triumph at the end. We should **not revenge ourselves** for all the tribulation we have to suffer (1Thess 5,15/ Rom 12,17-21), instead we should trust the righteous judgment of God who will judge rightly (1Pet 2,23/ Jer 17,10/ Act 17,31/ Rom 2,6,11,16/ Rev 22,12).

The term: "**eternal perdition**" does not mean „**eternal destruction**“, but rather „**eternal suffering**“, and a **condition** of awareness thereof (Luk.16,19-31), which is surely worse than everything they could ever have done to other, especially Christians (Rev 20,14,15). In the end they did not only do it to the people but to God and Jesus (Mt 25,40,45).

This **condition** of perdition is described as an **eternal separation** from the presence of God and His glory and all of His blessings (Mt 8,12; 22,13;25,30/ Lk 16,24-26).

2Thess 1,10 - ... when He comes, which means when the **day of the Lord** comes (1Thess 5,2) and revenge will bring destruction to the unbelievers, all those who believe in Jesus will enter **divine rest with God** and leave behind **all the earthy suffering for ever**. Just like **perdition of the godless** will be eternal, the **divine joy of all believers** will also be eternal for those who believe that Jesus is the the way, the truth and the life.

2Thess 1,11 - In this letter we see 4 specific examples of Paul's prayer life (2Thess 1,12; 2,16.17; 3,1-5.16). He prayed for the Thessalonians that they would act **in accordance** to their confession and calling and act like true Christians (1Th 2,19/ Eph 4,1/ Col 1,10). If they live their life worthy of their calling (Rom 8,30;11,29/ Gal 4,13-15/ 1Cor 1,26/ Col 1,3-5/ 1Thess 2,12) then this life will also be characterised by good and perfect works of faith. „**Through that**“ they walk worthy of their calling and God the Father can be glorified through them in this world (2Thess 2,14/ 1Cor 10,31/ 1Pt 4,11).

The daily testing while faith is growing is one of the most important tasks of each Christian. God helps us with that, but everyone must freely choose it and work diligently at it. He has to work at it to walk worthy of his calling and persevere. The author is pointing back to the ancient Christian, apostolic foundations. „**Faith without works is dead in itself**“ (Jam 2,17). Therefore the text is different in style and content than that of the Pauline scriptures, where only the grace of God and faith are pointed out.

Chapter 2

In this chapter the apostle warns the believers of **an immediate expectation of the return of Jesus** and he tries to explain why. At first the Antichrist must be revealed to the world. The **1st coming of Jesus** was only to redeem us from the power of sin and Satan. The **2nd coming of Jesus** is aiming especially the source of evil, which is Satan himself. But before the **evil** and the **good** have to **increase** (Mt 13,30/ Joh 15,5-6). The good and true, the omniscience of the Holy Spirit, the believing church and the faithful believers are the things that are still holding back the evil and demonic powers to take over.

Thought about the day of the Lord

The **day of the Lord** is the topic of Paul in the first half of the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians.

He points out **3 signs** that are related to the day of the Lord. In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul **made a difference** between the "**rapture**" and "**the day of the Lord**". Both events **are closely related events of the Last Days** but they are **not the same**:

- During the **rapture** the Lord Jesus returns **to take up all true believers** and to be with them in eternal glory. This doctrine is explained in detail in 1st Thessalonians 4.
- And the **Day of the Lord**, which is described in 1st Thessalonians 5, contains the events **about the return of the heavenly Lord to the earth**, to establish His glorious, spiritual kingdom in the hearts of His true children and to bring the time of tribulation which follows after the rapture, it is the return of the Lord to judge and the era of His kingdom here on earth (Act.3,19-21).

The term "rapture" is not used in the bible. It is derived from a Latin word with the meaning "**snatch**"; and so will the Lord come to snatch up His true church, also called the rapture. In 1Cor 15 Paul calls it a **mystery**.

It is a doctrine **that was not yet revealed in the OT** but now it is revealed and it sheds a new light on the New Testament. As a matter of fact this truth was revealed to the apostle Paul directly from God: "We tell you this in the name of the Lord ..." (1Thess 4,15). Even though **Enoch** and **Elijah** were taken up into heaven, the imagination of the **„rapture“ of the believers** was only a secret up to this point.

But since the ministry of Jesus the coming **„Day of the Lord“ is no longer a mystery**. Jesus revealed these truths in His speech on the Mount of Olives to the church and His disciples (Mt 24-25/ Mk 13/ Lk 21).

The „rapture“ could happen any time. It will be very soon! The Lord Jesus will come like a thief in the night (Rev 16,15;3,3/1Thess 5,2,4). It will be very surprising. There will also not be any prophetic signs that have to be fulfilled before the Lord Himself will come on the clouds, the spiritual metaphor of the fatherly mercy of God (1Thess 4,17), to take the Christians home. On the other hand there are certain **signs that will appear** that are directly related to the days until He comes back.

There were also many false teachings and prophecies and even a **fake epistle that suggested it was written by Paul** but it was proclaiming false doctrines, saying that the Day of the Lord had already come. Therefore Paul had to correct these misunderstandings and false imaginations about the matter and offer sound biblical arguments. He told the believers that they should not worry about the day of the Lord's return. He has not yet come and they should not be bothered by anybody who says otherwise.

Paul gives the Thessalonians 3 signs of the time before the return of the Lord: Before that the great apostasy and rebellion against God has to become revealed and then the certain "man of sin" resp. the "man of lawlessness" has to appear publically, but before even that can happen the power that is still holding him back must be taken away.

In his teaching part he explains it in detail:

- **The great apostasy has not yet come** respectively has not taken over the whole world (Rev.3,20). There are still people who hold on to the word of God. The Holy Spirit and the church of Jesus are still present. There are still honest and sincere children of God. Not all already worship a man or a system. Even though there are many deviations of the truth and many sects, there have not yet been masses who joined together to deny God and the Christian faith has not yet been given up. There are still **too many who believe that God became man in Jesus** and agree that the bible is the word of God, etc. (Rev 2,13;3,8), and this is perhaps a good sign. The day of the Lord cannot come until **this man of sin has been revealed**. It is a **hidden identity**. It is not the spirit of Satan but a child of Satan (Joh 8,44;13,2/ Act 13,10/ 1Tim 3,6/ 1Joh 3,8/ Rev 18,2).
- The Antichrist will sit in **the temple of the Jews** (Rev 13.14). He will try to restore **old Israel / Judaism** and all the sacrificial rituals. He will try to diminish the redemptive work of Jesus and mock Christ, causing the people to crucify Him again and call God a liar. Daniel already prophesied it (Dan 9,27;12,11), and Jesus referred to it (Mt 24,15).
- But the day of the Lord cannot come before the man of sin is not revealed or until the power that is holding him back has not been taken away. The Holy Spirit has come upon the church at Pentecost (1Cor 3,16/ Joh 14,15-18.26-27) and upon all true believers (1Cor 6,19). Everybody who has accepted Jesus into their life and call Him Lord has the Holy Spirit. As long as this is still the case Christians are still the salt of this earth (Mt 5.13).

The „rapture“ will take up all Christians away from this world, and then the **Holy Spirit**, the perfection of God who has not yet allowed rebellion and evil to triumph, will be taken away. An then a tribulation will come over this world as it has never seen it before (Mt 24,21).

2Thess 2,1-12 – Christian hope and the Day of the Lord. Now the author approaches his actual concern – the misunderstanding **that the day of the Lord has already come**. Such proclamations caused the people to be confused and upset.

Therefore he **warns them not to be deceived**; there were so many Christians and there are today, who say that the coming of Christ is **„immediately“** before us. But they only cause confusion in the church. The believers have to be brought back to soundness of mind. In order to calm them down Paul points to two important events of the Last Days that apparently have not happened yet – on one hand the appearance of

the **man of lawlessness** (2Thess 2,3-9) and on the other hand the **spiritual apostasy**. Many Christians would give in to temptation and fall if time was not shortened for us (Mt 24,22/Mk 13,20).

The „**elect**“ are a small group of „righteous ones“ such as Lot (Gen 18,23-33) who was saved from perdition.

The **man of lawlessness** is also known as the **adversary** from the OT (Ez 28,2/ Dan 9,27). Also the N.T. Tell of an adversary, the **Antichrist**: „If somebody says to you: Behold this is the Messiah! Or: This is He! Do not believe it. There will be many false Messiahs and many false prophets and they will work great signs and wonders to lead astray the chosen ones of God (Mt 24,23f.).

2Thes. 2,1 - The **future of the Lord begins** with the „**rapture**“ of the church (1Thess 4,17). Only when the members of the body are united with the head Jesus, purified and made perfect this body will attack Satan and his work. Before that it is impossible. Therefore Paul calls all the believers to a **sound mind** resp. Logical thinking. „*Do not be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.*“ (2Thess 2,2)

Some „**un-sober**“ **people** had started to spread the **rumors** that the events that would announce the Messianic era had already **happened**. It could be true that some deceitful letters were spread or that some passages of apostle Paul's 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians were interpreted as confirmation of that expectation.

They should stay calm and reasonable and not confused or influenced by false excitement or expectations. Some Thessalonians apparently neglected their daily duties and practical work (2Thess 3,11).

The events of the Parousia were respectively are determined by God and have to be understood in view of eternity. The day is coming soon in the sense that God in His omniscience has already determined it but the „**day of the Lord**“ has not yet begun yet.

In Christianity one often has the impression **some Christians** live **more** with the expectation of the **Antichrist** than in expectation of the Lord Jesus.

2Thess 2,1-12 – Here the apostle Paul tries to bring back the readers **to serious objectivity and soberness**, especially those who are thinking about **the Last Days**, the future and the Antichrist so much that they forget to live in the present.

Some would have **expected the Lord Jesus** to return very soon because they did not know how to deal with their problems and hoped Jesus return would take care of all their mess. But **real Christians do not run** from responsibilities or try to escape the problems in their life, but **they solve them** by the power and guidance of God and in their heart and face the issues of their life (comp. Pro 28,1/ Joh 10,12-13).

Trying to escape or lethargy of any kind will always make things worse. Therefore Paul wants to give the Thessalonians a "**Theology of hope**" – to bring them back to the reality of life and to use their time wisely. He asks them not to follow analyses of this age but to rather follow the Lord Jesus and make Him the center of their life.

Some preachers had confused the young Thessalonian church by saying that the „**time of great tribulation**“ has already begun. The believers were **astonished** that the day of the Lord had already begun and they were still there. Did Paul not teach them that the church would be **raptured before the time of tribulation?**

The **confusion in the church was possible** because they did not see a difference between their present tribulations and the tribulations that should appear before the Day of the Lord.

Paul warned them not to be shaken or frightened:

- not by spiritual things through impressions or visions, etc.
- not by words through sermons or conversations, etc.
- not by letters through written or oral presentation, etc.

Paul speaks of **3 events**, that have to happen **before the Day of the Lord:**

1. apostasy (2Thess 2,3),
2. revelation of the man of evil (2Thess 2,3,4,8)
3. the drop of the walls that held evil captive (2Thess 2,6-7).

The man of sin has not yet been fully revealed. This man is not the Satan (2Thess 2,9). It is a common man who will raise the claim to be „**God**“ and who will let others worship him and who worships himself (2Thess 2,3). It is the man who surrenders completely to Satan's temptation (Mt 4,8-11).

Up to this day it is very dangerous when **believers are lead astray** and try to get their information from questionable sources, such as:

- **Only from the spirit:** Be careful when people want to be lead by the spirit alone. They usually do not let the brethren or the word of God talk to them.
- **Only from the word:** Everything that we receive must be confirmed by scriptures – also the sermons (Acts 17,11). However, our faith cannot only be based on „**logos**“ (the written word) but also on „**rhema**“ (the inspired / related to the present situation word of God) (Rom.10,17). Take a look at the temptation of Jesus where He answers to „**Logos**“ with a „**Rhema**“ word (Mat.4,3-11).
- **Only from the letters:** Also the written or printed word must be confirmed by the Word of God. Not everything is in line with the word of God.

This confuses the Christians. Most of them lack the **gift of discernment**, the **life experience** and **spiritual maturity**. They cannot discern what is real or not real. Usually because they do **not know the reality**. They believe everything as long as it sounds biblical or enlightened it must be from God and good. If we think of the **temptation of Jesus** we realize that he is a specialist to **twist the truth** and scriptures.

The apostle reacted like a mature and tested Christian who is trying to help the confused Thessalonians by **objective explanation**. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians not to be deceived or led astray by other people, no matter how **trustworthy** they may appear or how good they sell their doctrines, trying to claim the authority of God. He is warning them not to be **gullible** (Eph 4,14).

2Thess 2,1 – In this chapter the return of Christ is mentioned for the **fifth time** in the Epistles to the Thessalonians (1Thess 2,19; 3,13; 4,15; 5,23). This special aspect of His return that it is about is our **»unity with Him** (word by word: our gathering towards Him)«, which conveys the thought that all believers will be one in the Lord Jesus.

This obviously relates to the **rapture of the church**, which is described in 1Thess 4,13-18 and Joh 14,1-3. The Thessalonians are waiting for this event (1Thess 1,10; 3,13; 5,9). In his explanations in 1Thess 4,13-5,11 **Paul refuses to say something about the time of Jesus return** (1Thess 5,1).

In 2nd Thessalonians Paul does no longer speak about the **lot of the living** and the dead, but rather tries to emphasise that the return of the Lord is not **immediate** and that there will be visible signs (such as apostasy).

In **2Thess 2,2** of our passage the apostle Paul is clearing up **with some false opinions** regarding the **return of Jesus** and the false teachings of false prophecies and even a false epistle that claimed to be authored by Paul.

Paul is making **corrections** and says: „**The day of the Lord cannot come** until there has not been a great **apostasy**“. **Apostasy from faith** means a **»turning away** from the truth that was once received and experienced (Hebr.6,4-8). It is a denial and abandonment of faith.

In all of church history there was apostasy and people who fell from faith but here Paul speaks about **a great turning away** from faith and a **great rebellion against God** – an apostasy as it has never happened before and that will affect all of Christianity worldwide (Rev 3,10-11). As long as this open rebellion and the turning away from faith has not happened, and as long as the man of lawlessness has not taken up his seat in the **»Jewish temple**“ the **day of the Lord will not come**.

2Thess 2,2 - „**Do not be quickly shaken**.“ The original word was also used for **earthquakes** (Apg 16,26). Together with the term **»to be alarmed**« this describes **a condition of rebellion** and **the fear** that had taken over the whole church.

Paul refers to the source of this false claims a »**spirit**«, »**word**« and »**letter**«.

- »**Spirit**« perhaps refers to a false prophet who claimed to have received a new revelation from God, such as in 1Joh 4,1-3.
- »**Word**« could refer to a sermon or presentation and
- »**Letter**« a written message.

This false information may have been so influential and damaging because it claimed to be authored **by the apostle Paul**. Whoever wanted to tell the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord has already come are trying to make the Thessalonians believe that this would be an Epistle from Paul who had spoken to them, taught them and wrote to them. **They tried to disguise their lies under apostolic authority and caused them to be afraid.**

Obviously they were waiting for the rapture and the day of the Lord. If they had thought the rapture would happen after the day of the Lord then they would have been happy that the return of Christ would be near.

In this letter the **apostolic authenticity** was important because this could correct this error. Therefore Paul was eager to end this letter with his hand writing (2Thess 3,17/ Gal 6,11).

2Thess 2,3-4 - Worse than confusion is the temptation (Hebr.10,21-31,35-36,25). There is only one thing that helps against both: **clear, sober information** – or in other words, the healthy teachings of the Holy Scripture. And that is exactly what Paul extends in the following verses. This is not **a uninterrupted schedule for the Last Days**. But it gives some essential information that all Christians should know.

The events of the Last Days will start with „apostasy“. The apostle Paul does not say that there will be a great **revival** but rather there will be temptation,apostasy and the Antichrist! (2Thess 2,3)

We can also recall **the parable of the 10 virgins**. They all went to see the bride groom and had lamps (light) and oil (love) but some were sleepy and fell asleep (Mt 25,1-13). This is referring to Christians who are waiting for the bridegroom but his arrival is „**delayed**“. This is a prophetic indication of the delay of Parousia.

2Thess 2,4 shows that the future Antichrist will sit in the re-erected **Jewish temple** and claim to be **God Himself**. From there he will require **worldwide worship and acknowledgement** (Rev 13,14,15/ Dan 9,27;12,11/ Mt 24,15). The **Antichrist will have a lot to do** with **Judaism** and the **state Israel** (Joh 5,43;7,18; 1,11-12).

The **Antichrist is the other one** who comes in His own name and whom the Jews will receive with great joy. The bible gives him **different names** and **different explanations**. Paul speaks of the man of lawlessness and the son of perdition.

John calls him „Antichrist“.

- Anti = against – Against Christ, adversary.
- Anti = instead, instead of – He comes in the place of Christ.

And he does **2 essential things**: (1) He exalts himself above all. (2) He will let himself be worshipped as God just like Lucifer who wanted to be like God.

Then we will see who is a spiritual child of this man. Just like God once revealed Himself in Jesus the devil will reveal himself in the Antichrist.

In 2Thess 2,7-8 Paul tells us something is holding back the Antichrist and his development is delayed. Somebody and something is taking care that evil cannot prevail and that this man cannot appear yet.

„**Evil**“ is one of the **many mysteries**“ of the New Testament (Rom 16,25/ 1Cor 2,6-12/ Eph 1,9; 3,3-5/ Col 1,25-27). Such a mystery is a „**new**“ **truth** that was hidden before until the present time.

In the case of „evil“ it is a revelation of a future increase of evil in the world. In the history of the church there have been different opinions and interpretations **who could be that one who is holding back the outbreak of hell and the Antichrist.**

1. the Roman Empire,
2. the Jewish state (before the fall of Jerusalem 70 AD),
3. the church (Roman – catholic church, Vatican, the Pope),
4. the principle of law and order – the officials, the government (Rom 13),
5. God Himself,
6. the Holy Spirit and
7. the true church where the Holy Spirit lives.

The **Holy Spirit** is the only instance that has enough supernatural power to suspend the evil and its functions. The Antichrist **may gain authority over humanity** but in reality he is not a tough opponent for Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The breath of Jesus will blow out the enemy like a candle.

2Thess 2,8 – The Lord Jesus – Himself, personally, through His presence – will end this terrible episode. The Antichrist has a certain time limit. He will not be allowed to rule or act any longer than that. And then he will be blown away by Jesus. The Lord Himself will do that and it will not be the work of man. It can also **not happen by human action**. The **breath** of His mouth will be enough to throw the Antichrist and all his false prophets into the lake of fire. There will be nothing left either of him or his works. When our redemption comes, the reign of evil will be terminated by Jesus personally.

The dominion of evil is **limited**, that applies for the history of salvation as well as for our personal lives:

- The **time of persecution** is limited. There will be peace at last (Act 9,31).
- The **time of sickness** is limited. God can heal or take us home.
- The **time of burdens** is also limited. God knows when He will take the burden away.

2 Thess 2,13–3,5 – Paul develops for us a **theology of hope**. He encourages the readers to „**stand firm**“ and to stick with their good morals, which is all that they have learned from Paul and received as revelation from the Holy Spirit. He encourages them to continue to think logically and sound and to act according to it.

2 Thess 2,13-14 – is full of deep spiritual truths. The apostle gives us relations between the doctrine of salvation and election, calling and faith as well as sanctification and the glorification of God through us.

In this he also describes how the „**trinity**“ works:

- God, **the Father** calls and elects (Eph 1,4/ 1Thess 1,4),
- God, **the Son** shares His glory with His people and
- God, **the Holy Spirit** shares His gifts with the believers (1Petr 1,2).

2 Thess 2,15 – Paul encourages the readers to hold firm **to the traditions they received**. Paul himself always remained faithful to the **apostolic traditions and teachings** in all that he taught, preached and wrote in his letters (Rom 6,17/ 1Cor 11,2,23;15,3/ 2Tim 1,13). The apostolic and ancient Christian christocentric message was a fundamental for Paul. This was the only way the word of God could remain powerful and continue to work. Paul puts it this way: „Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.“ (2Petr 1,20).

The **Day of the Lord** is the topic of the apostle Paul in the first half of 2nd Thessalonians. He emphasises three signs that are closely related to the day of the Lord. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians Paul had distinguished the issues "**the rapture**" and "**the Day of the Lord**".

Both events are closely related events of the Last Days. However they are not identical and refer to two different groups of people. In the **rapture** the Lord Jesus comes back for all the true believers to enjoy the glory of God in heaven and eternity. This doctrine is explained in the second half of 1st Thessalonians 4 (Rev 20,5-6;15,51-57/ 1Thess 4,13-18).

The **Day of the Lord**, which is explained in the first half of 1st Thessalonians 5, refers to events concerning the return of the heavenly king to earth to establish His glorious kingdom on earth: a time of great tribulation will follow after the rapture and will end with the appearance of the Antichrist. Then the Lord will return to hold judgement over the Antichrist and to start the era of the kingdom of God, new Jerusalem on earth.

2Thess 2,3,4 – Before God will judge the world there will be apostasy and evil will have matured to its fullest.

This event can be clearly **identified** and is unique. The key to the identification of this event is the identification of the main character. Paul identifies it and calls him the »man of sin«. Some texts refer to him as »man of lawlessness«, but after all it does not make a difference because sin is lawlessness (1Joh 3,4).

This »**man of sin**« is the »**coming prince**« (Dan 9,26) and the »**little horn**« (Dan 7,8). He is also called »**son of perdition**«. This was also another name for **Judas Ischariot** (Joh 17,12). The prophet John calls him »**the beast**« (Rev 13,2-10.18) and the most common name is »Antichrist«.

„Apostasy“ is referred to as if it was a term that everybody is acquainted with and its meaning was evident. Everybody knew the common meaning of the word. It referred to people who had come to God and knew Him, were a part of the church and had faith, but then might, „**depart**“ and turn away from faith. A Gentile who does not know God cannot fall from Him and become an apostate.

The purpose of the second coming of Jesus is the destruction of the devil and the restoration of the honor of God. **Satan** can actually not be destroyed because he is also a „**spiritual being**“. A spirit cannot die (Mk 9,43,44,46-48). But God will reject him from His presence for eternity and banish him into deepest darkness (Rev 12,9,12/ Ps 2,2; 104,15/ Mt 24,35/ Rev 11,18; 20,11/ Jer 49,9).

2Thess 2,3-8 - "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming." Christ will not come again **until the** apostasy has taken place and the man of sin has revealed himself (Mt 13,40-42/ Zeph 1,7.2.3). The day of the Lord or judgment day will only come when God has **gathered his faithful ones** (Ps 50, 3-5).

2Thess 2,3 – Be not deceived! The great apostasy must come first and rebellion against God must be at its peak so that the man of lawlessness can claim the place of God in all high places and pretend to be God. At this point the world will be ready for judgment and we will know that Jesus will come soon.

In these verses **Paul warns** of the coming **danger of temptation**, when man will worship Satan and prefer a false Messiah instead of acknowledging God. (Jer 49,16/ Rev 4/ Hab 2,9).

A **typical characteristic of the antichristian era** will be **self-idolatry**. That does not only refer to the self-idolisation of several men such as tyrants etc, but all of humanity who will reject God and Jesus and completely ignore Him.

2nd Thessalonians encourages the believers to be **steadfast** while everywhere else in this world all men will turn their back on God. The Antichrist will appear as a **person** who will reveal himself at the end of time. He will execute his power as a tempter and persecutor against all believers (Mt 24,24/ Rev 13,1-8). **This is the last test before the return of Jesus.**

2Thess 2,5 – Paul refers to a series of sermons that he preached to them when he was with them in Thessalonica. Even then he told them why **Parousia** is not yet to be expected and what kind of power is delaying the „**outbreak of evil**“ (2Thess 2,7). Even at the time of the apostle and ancient Christianity the **antichristian creature** revealed himself in the evil **self-idolatry of men**. The **emperor** wanted to be worshiped as God, the **Jews** believed they were a superior people (such as the Pharisees – Joh 4,9). They even exalted themselves **above Jesus**, the Son of God, and called Him a sinner (Joh 8,48). The Jews were proud and conceited that they rejected the messenger of God and drove Him away until they were driven away by the Emperor (Act 13,50;18,2).

We have experienced an increase in the **self-idolatry of man**, whether it be the **pope** and his claim to be sacrosanct (dogma of 1870) or atheistic **Enlightenment**, modern **theology** and the spirit of rebellion against all foundations of biblical faith and Christian faith (marriage, family, etc.) as well as the **focus on this vain present life** (resp. materialism and consumption).

All those are **typical marks** of Antichristianity, which will unfold the most in democracy, freedom, wealth, globalism, etc. Already the old **church fathers** believed that the **Antichrist is not only a single man** but also a spiritual movement, a **group of people** (1Joh 2,18,19,22;4./ 2Joh 7). The movement against God and Christianity will at first develop in the „**dark**“ until God takes away the power that is delaying the unfolding. The believers seemed to believe that the negative development would be quicker than it was in reality.

„Remember what I told you when I was with you“ ... “For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. (Amos 3,7).

Paul must have repeatedly told the Thessalonians about the **plans of God for the future** on any occasion. He always reminds them of the facts that prove that the teachings of the other teachers were false. He also did not want to let the **false teachers claim** that he was wavering in his opinion and his message has **changed**. He pointed out to them that he already told them – when he was with them – that the day of the Antichrist will announce the return of the Lord, and since the Antichrist has not been revealed yet the day of the Lord had not arrived yet.

2Thess 2,6 - „**And now you know ...**“ - the Antichrist will not appear **unprepared**. He must develop and grow and just like everything else in the world he must mature. The secret of lawlessness **conforms** (1Tim 3,16) to the secret of blessedness (Mt 24,12). **Satan is trying to compete against God**. He is trying to imitate everything that God says and does. Just like the Holy Spirit brings freedom to every believer, Satan brings „**lawlessness**“ (false freedom), by teaching and leading them to rebel against all „**regulations**“, or to outgo them (even the laws of nature) and to create a new world order. He mobilises all the great poets and thinker, politicians, economy, preachers, art and media as well as all of modern technique until he can reveal himself fully and everybody will be so **dependant on him** that they will accept him **without resistance** (Rev 13,16-18).

The beautiful thing is that the apostle comforts us with the revelation of the **end of this tribulation**. A **breath of the Lord** (Is 11,4) will be enough to put an end to evil power. That which is still holding evil back to unfold to its fullest is without a doubt **a divine and supernatural power** which is not of this world. It cannot be something earthly which could be easily overthrown by Satan. The only earthly power can only **come from the true church of Jesus**, which Jesus is building with the help of the Holy Spirit (Mt 16,18). **Only God's effective power can hold Satan back** so that the man of sin, the son of perdition could not come yet.

The **reason for this delay** is (Rom 11,25), that the Antichrist has to be revealed at **the time that God has determined** and not earlier, as it was the case with Jesus Christ (Gal 4,4), because God also has dominion over Satan.

2Thess 2,7 - The „**secret of lawlessness**“. Before **the flood it was a similar situation** – people did not allow the spirit of God to talk to them anymore (Gen 6,3), and God had to withdraw His spirit from man. In the biblical prophecy the standard is still that: „**The end will come back to the beginning.**“ (s.a. Mat.24,37,38; Luk.17,26,27; 2.Petr.2,4-10),

Excursion: God could not give to Abraham **the land of the Canaanites** and drive them out because the measure of their sin and crime had not reached their climax. At the same time the faith of the **Israelites** had not yet matured yet. They were not yet a people, had no law or revelation of God. They also had to be exposed to lawlessness, ungodliness and blasphemy (1Joh 3,4;5,17). It was the same with the **tower of Babel** (Gen 11,4-8). **Speaking and scheming against God** have to become **acts of rebellion against God** before God intervenes and judges.

2Thess 2,8-12 – **Before the return of Jesus the son of lawlessness has to appear.**

The Antichrist (V. 9) is presented as the **opponent of Christ**: His coming is also a parousia. He works signs and wonders like Jesus and will conquer the world with seemingly good things, such as **white magic, positive thinking, humanism, globalisation, unions of all kinds, messages of peace** etc. (also with typical **Messianic signs**) and all will be deceived and tempted to follow him, all who do not have the Holy Spirit will be condemned.

Satan's appearance in the vision of Revelation 6 is displayed as a white horse. The **horse rider** on this **white horse** seems to be Jesus Christ. But the real Jesus Christ has eyes like a fiery flame. He has many crowns on His head and carries a sword and not a bow (Rev 19,11-15). This sharp two-edged sword is nothing else but the Word of God (Hebr 4,12), which comes out of the mouth of Jesus Christ to judge the thoughts of the hearts. The **conclusion** has to be **that the first horse rider in** Revelation 6 represents a world-wide trend of false Christianity which will gain power and influence. This massive temptation will peak in the claim of power of a **religious leader** who will exalt himself above all (2Thess 2,1–4,8-9).

The moment when the real Jesus appears back on the plan and where God and His spirit will start to act again all the evil, the demons and the devil as well as **the Antichrist** will become visible and active. Before that there will be silence in the worldly system that is against Jesus. He will rise against Jesus. God will never allow evil to prevail and to let evil rule the world. At the peak of his power the Antichrist will show his real face and reveal himself as a creature of hell and this deceit will be visible to all- unfortunately it will be too late. God will come into the picture again. **God and Christ are more powerful** than him who is only a created being and he will be cut off.

2Thess 2,10-11 – The first ominous sin of God's creatures against God happened in a perfect and holy surrounding: **in heaven**. This is almost unbelievable in view of the reports of scripture about heaven, the dwelling place of God. It is just as astonishing that **Adam and Eve** who were in a **perfect world and knew no sin** and were tempted by the same sin as Lucifer („angel of light“) who is later called Satan and the serpent (Rev 12,9;20,2).

This is a fact: **Everything started with Lucifer in heaven** (comp. Ez.28,12-15; Is.13,13,14). With his „**I want**“, his self-will is only concerned with his own will, **himself**; becoming greater and better, self-exaltation up to self-idolatry. This process inevitably leads to self-deception and self-destruction.

Because Satan was looking for supporters in order to execute his will and become like the most High, Satan brought lies and deceit to the world and tempted Eve with an offer to help her **become like God**.

Godhead as a goal for humanity is the religion of the adversary and it will reach its height in the man who will be possessed by Satan himself. As we can read in 2Thess 2,4 the Antichrist will be someone who will resist everything and **exalt himself above all** that has to do with God or worship, so that he will ultimately sit in the temple of God and **claim to be God**". The lie of Satan in the beginning will be the lie of the Antichrist in the end it will lead to **self-idolatry** of a man.

In the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians Paul reveals **unique characteristics of the adversary**. He is referred to as the man of evil and lawlessness, adversary, rebel, somebody who challenges God and is called son of perdition. The idea and **blueprint of this description** can be traced back to two Old Testament books such as Is 14,13f. and Dan 9,27;11,31;12,11.

1st John refers to the Antichrist as an **Anti-Messiah**, a false Christ and an opponent of Jesus Christ. There are teachers claiming to be Christians but denying that Jesus is the son of God“ (1Joh 2,22f.). In **2 Thess** the adversary of God has encompassing power. He is not only the **Anti-Christ** but also the **Anti-God**. He is an **Anti-Messiah** and he will erect his name for the worship of himself in an **Anti-kingdom**.

The author of the 2nd text indicates that Paul views Satan as the source of all opposition against the Christian proclamation and also as the tempter and false teacher of the church (1Thess 2,18 /1 Cor 7,5).

The **form of the adversary** is not described in the text. This indicates that it is not so much about the **outward appearance** but more about **the Christian promise**. More important than everything else is **the assurance** that God in Christ is mightier than the satanic adversary of the kingdom of God. He will be ultimately shut off (2Thess 2,8). A Christian must only fear those tempting powers if he does not heed to the commissions of Christ (2Thess 2,10).

2Thess 2,10 - The **influence of the Antichrist** is only limited to **the unsaved and unbelievers** and those who do not have the spirit of God can be tempted to believe his lies and follow him (Mt 24,24/ Joh 8,41-44). They will go down with him because by the power of Satan they are **blind** for the truth of the saving gospel (Joh 3,19.20/ 2Cor 4,4). **God allows it** because they freely decide to believe the wrong and accept evil and even praise the lie to be the truth. This is how God uses Satan and the Antichrist as **tools for judgment** (1Kin 22,19-23).

2Thess 2,12 – God's judgment is very simple: **“to give them up“**. God always judged willful rejection by giving them up to uncleanness and evil desires (Rom 1,24-28). The same way God will also seal the destiny of those who have set their hearts on following Satan and his false Christ. Those who continue to reject the truth will be judged and given up to the consequences of their sin. **Truth and lie** are not only influencing the mind but also have consequences on **life and works** (Joh 8,32,44/ 1Joh 3,19).

After Paul **had rebuked the false expectations about Parousia** he draws positive conclusions.

2Thess 2,13 - **We were chosen for salvation from the beginning**, which means our life is not so much determined by signs and wonders but rather **our salvation**, because we are predestined for the kingdom of God. The **believers of the church are not called to be a part in the Jewish revolution**, to **establish and defend Israel**, but rather to walk in love with the good news that was taught by Jesus and His apostles, to trust it as the only truth and to attain the glory of the Lord in Him.

2Thess 2,13.14 – Just like the **character of the Antichrist** has specific elements (2Thess 2,10-12), there are also **characteristics of the saved**. He names some of the **characteristics of the saved**:

- Paul emphasises that the believers are **loved by the Lord** and have been chosen for salvation from eternity (Rev 13,8;17,8),
- that they were **set apart from sin by the Holy Spirit** and called to eternal glory, which means to partake in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul wanted to remind the Thessalonians that they have no reason to doubt or worry about their salvation.

2Thess 2,15 – They should only **persevere and hold on to everything they have already achieved and to the traditions they received**. **Traditions** they have been taught through the word or letters of Paul or the other apostles.

This direct exhortation also called them to a reaction to the great truth that Paul had described to them. Instead of being afraid they should be strong and steadfast. Instead of following false teachings they should be faithful and hang on to the truth.

2Thess 2,15 – In order to **stand firm in faith** practical impact is important. The true faith in God is not only a **intellectual or emotional issue** but should also be expressed in works and words. Therefore the apostle highlights this strongly in the following chapter.

The believing Christian should work, unless he has received a special assignment from the Lord (1Cor 9,14). Maybe they do not have to work „**day and night**“ like the apostle Paul (2Thess 3,8-12). Because of their faith and the anticipated return of the Lord some thought they „**do not have to work**“ (2Thess 3,11), which the apostle calls **orderless life**. The first, if not the most important work of a believer **is his work to provide for himself** and his family (1Thess 4,11), which allows him to give to the needy (Eph 4,28) or to give to support the work of the Lord (Heb 13,16).

But surely the material work is not the only goal of life. In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul praised them for „**their work of faith and of love**“ (1Thess 1,3/ s. a. 1Cor 15,58/ Rom 12,11).

How **many opportunities** are there for the children: encouragement, exhortation (1Thess 5,11), visitations (Jam 1,27), practical help, mercy (Rom 12,8), not to forget the service of the word of God for those to whom God entrusted the gift. Thus Peter also encourages the believers to: „... **proclaim the greatness of Him**, who has called you from darkness into His wonderful light “ (1Petr 2,9b).

2Thess 2,16.17 – This is what expresses the philosophy of the apostle Paul: „**The Lord Jesus Himself** ...“ It is one of the many blessings of the epistles of Paul. **God Himself should work that** which the Thessalonians still lack. The apostle is asking for God's power, comfort and work in the believers that they should be established in His mercy and grace even more (2Thess 3,5.16/ 1Thess 3.3).

Summary:

- When will the rapture take place?
- Thought about the great time of distress and the time of the antichrist.

Just like 1st Thessalonians **corrected the wrongs of the believers** also the following letter gives correction in Chapter 2.

False teachers had told the believers that the **day of the Lord has already come** while Paul was gone. Their distress and persecution were claimed to be a sure sign that the day of the Lord has already come. The »**day of the Lord**« is the great and terrible day where there will be fire everywhere (Mal 3,19). The believers were very sad that this terrible day had already come. How could that be? The apostle Paul had told them that they would be **taken up in the rapture first** (1Thess 4,13-18) **and then the terrible day of the Lord**.

And then they thought: „**But if it is true** that the day of the Lord has already come then we have **missed the rapture and have been excluded** ... woe to us!“ They were very sad. Paul had said to the Thessalonians that the **day of the Lord** that they were very afraid of would not come **before** the time of apostasy where the man of sin and child of doom will be revealed. Many people nowadays read it to the other extreme: »**He will not come**.«, which means the Lord will not come **unless** ... this is something that is not in the text.

If the believers in Thessalonica were taught what many teach today, that the rapture would take place with the visible return of the Lord, which is on the day of the Lord or at least the time of great depression, then it cannot be understood why the believers were so sad. Instead of being sad they could have rejoiced. Because if their present suffering would be the day of the Lord then they would know that God our Lord would come very soon and take us up. But Paul clearly says (2Thess 2,6.7), the power that stands against God (vgl. 1Joh 4,4) has to be destroyed first.

In 1Cor 15,51-52 it says: *»Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — ...«* Paul calls rapture a secret.

A secret is something that was kept hidden just like the church itself is a secret (Eph 3,3-4), so also rapture is a great mystery. Both secrets were not revealed to the prophets 4000 years before Jesus but God chose to hide it. Those who try to teach that all scriptures that teach about rapture are talking about Jesus' return in power and might after the period of distress, are in the wrong. The visible return of God in glory was proclaimed again and again throughout the centuries of the OT. But something that is now revealed and had only been spoken of for many centuries can surely be called a secret! Already old Enoch in the time before the flood spoke about it centuries before that (Jam 14) and was taken up himself (Hebr 11,5).

In Rev 3,10 we read how the exalted Lord came down from heaven and calls to the church of Philadelphia: *»Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. «*

This scripture does not say „in“ the hour of trial but „from“ the terrible events. Just like Noah was kept from the flood. This word tells you clearly that the church would be taken away from the hour of temptation, which is the terrible time of the antichrist. Even just the progress of this revelation underlines this message. The Lord and His Holy Spirit inspired John to this pattern: The Father God tells His servant John: „Write down,

- *»what you have seen,«* (Rev 1,19). What had John seen? The exalted Lord in His wonderful majesty (Rev 1,10-18);
- *»and what there is, «*Which means what was in the days back than, namely the 7 churches (Ch. 2 &. 3), which are a prophetic shadow and reflection of the whole church history;
- *»and what would happen after that.«* (Ch. 4f.)
- After chapter 4 we do not hear or read of any church, until we hear of it again in the glory of the heavenly hosts (Rev 17,14;19,14).

With chapter 3 the topic of the church is not mentioned again. What happened to her? After Rev 4,1 John is called to: *»Come up«*. This is a role model and indication for the rapture of the church and what they experience with Jesus (Rev 4-6). In this time on earth there will be a time of great affliction where the Antichrist will present himself as Messiah (as a false Messiah). Rev 7-18 describes the time of the Antichrist. It ends with the whore Babylon (Rev 17,18), which refers to the apostate and stubborn Israel and Judaism (Is 6,9-10/ Mt 13,13-17/ Joh 12,40-43/ Acts 28,26-28), where daughter Zion becomes the whore Babylon.

The new Jerusalem will come down from heaven as the daughter Zion, adorned like a bride (Rev 21,2/ Gal 4,46-27/ Hebr 12,22-24).

In 1Thess 1,10 Paul tells us about Jesus who comes down from heaven: *»Who redeems us from the wrath of God – from the coming day of judgment. The wrath of God (the end of His patience and longsuffering) will be revealed on the day of the Lord which will come in the time when the Antichrist is revealed. Paul teaches very clearly who will be affected by the wrath of God: «The wrath of God will come over all unteacheable children of rebellion«* (Eph 5,6).

But God has not appointed us or destined us for wrath but for blessedness and to receive salvation and redemption (1Thess 5,9). When the believers are redeemed from the coming wrath and judgment of God then it is actually clear that they will not enter this condition. Subsequently they would have to be taken up in the rapture before it happens (Joh 5,24/ 1Thess 5,4,5).

Furthermore no Apostolic letter exhorts the church to prepare for the time of affliction or for the Antichrist. If the church would also have to go through the time of tribulation we would have to find exhortations that challenge us to be ready, but we do not find any. Instead we are encouraged to *»flee from all this which will happen and to stand before the Son of Man«* (Lk 21,36).

»**Flee from all this**« is relating to some terrible things during the Last Days (Lk 21,25-27/ Rev 3,10). The **church is not waiting** for the Antichrist etc, but for the Son of God who will come down from heaven (s. 1Thess 1,10/ Phil 3, 20/ Titus 2,15/ 1Petr 5,4/ 1Joh 3,2).

The **time of affliction** will especially affect **Israel**, **apostate Christians** and **the worldly nations**, but not for the body of Christian believers. The main scriptures in the bible that tell us about the great affliction are those: Jer 30, 4-7/ Ez 20,34-38/ Dan12,1/ Joel 2,1-2/ Mt 24,15-22/ Mk 13,14-23).

Those scriptures clearly show us that **the great tribulation will most affect Israel**, that is why they call it »**fear in Jacob**«. In addition we also see the **church of God** in heaven and before the throne of God before the judgment on earth will happen.

It is a picture of the **24 elders** (Rev 4,4-5,14). **Who are these 24 elders?** They do not represent angels but represent **redeemed children of God**; they embody the church in their glory before the throne of God. **But why 24?** This number is referring to the **24 priestly regulations that David set up** (Chro 24), but then also **the redeemed of the old and new covenant** because they are $2 \times 12 = 24$.

Since we see the 24 elders in all of their glory and with their crowns (their reward) in Revelation this is a sure indication that the resurrection of the saints has already taken place (1Thess 4,13-18) **How can and should the church be raptured in or after** the great tribulation when we can already see them in this glory before the day of judgment?

The genealogy of the coming glorious events with regard to the church could be the following:

- 1.The rapture,
- 2.then follows the judgment before the throne of Christ (2Cor 5,10) and the reward,
- 3.and then finally the church will appear before the Father (Eph 5, 27).

Since the church presented by the 24 elders (Rev 4) are already in the glorious presence of God, therefore the judgment and presentation of the church by Christ before the Father must happen after the revelation of the glory of the church and the 24 elders (Rev 4). Therefore it is impossible that the church would still be on earth during that period of time and does not have to go through the times of tribulation.

When the angel asks John, who are they who come out of the great tribulation John answers: »**Lord, You know it.**« (Rev 7,13,14). The apostle **John**, one of the pillars of the church (Gal 2,9), had devoted himself to the shepherding **of the Gentile Christians in a special way** after apostle Paul had died. The apostle said about the those people that **he does not know them!**

Especially this statement **that he does not know these people** is an indication that the church and these people are not the same, since they are already **taken up in the rapture**. Those people are a different group of redeemed people. The true redeemed are the ones who are taken up in the rapture **and carry crowns on their head** but those others only have **palm branches in their Hands** (Rev 7,9-17). The ones who are taken up in the rapture will **reign** with Jesus and the others will only **serve**. They are a different community (they have a different origin and development). They are the **martyrs from the time of great tribulation**. They are the ones who „**missed**“ the rapture (they are the foolish virgins) and their only possibility is to **die as martyrs** (Rev 6,9-11;20,4).

In (Rev 17,12-14) it says that **10 kings** give their power to the beast (Antichrist) and that these kings **will fight with the lamb**. But **the lamb** which is the Lord of Lords and king of kings **and overcomes**. All those who are called, elected and believers belong to Him. They are the companions of the lamb, those who partake in His victory. **But who are they?** Are they angels? No, because angels are not called by those names in scripture.

Who are they? The three terms – **the called, chosen and believers** tells us who they are. This group who is with the Lord are all those who were **already taken up in the rapture with the Lord and have become His saints** who were ready, just like the virgins who were ready (Mt 25).

That God would keep the true and faithful believers from the great tribulation can be seen in many events in the Old Testament:

➤The rescue of **Lot** (Gen 19,22-24). Before Sodom was destroyed God had saved him and led him out of the city safe and secure. Lot is a great example for the church. He was not included in the terrible judgment of the city, he was spared.

➤ While the **punishment of God came unto Egypt** the people of Israel were not afflicted but had peace with God (Ex 11,7).

➤ Also the harlot Rahab (Hebr 11,31) was led out of the fallen city **Jericho** before it was burned and destroyed (Jos 6,22-24).

In **Rev 22,16** Jesus and His coming are compared with the rise of **the morning star**. As we know the morning star rises before the sun which can burn and destroy. **The return of Jesus will happen with great power and glory** (1Thess 1,10/ Zach 14,5/ Jud 14/ Zep 1.14-15). When Jesus comes and destroys the Antichrista and his system (2Thess 2,9-10), there will be great social, religious, political and military break downs. The whole **civilisation** will break down. This is when **humanity will be finished** (2Tim 3.1-5/ Rev 1/ 2Petr 3,13/ Ps 46.2-3/ Mt 24,4-14).

Chapter 3

Here Paul is **introducing a new topic**. With the remark to the role model that he and his co-workers were he emphasises that the believers should walk in true and pure love without being an unnecessary burden for anyone.

Nobody was supposed to **be a burden** to anyone. Rather the opposite. Every one should serve the other as much as possible. We should pray for each other, comfort and encourage each other, etc. We do not walk in the love of God, the Holy Spirit and in faith if we are religious, waiting for Jesus but are a burden to other people, the church, the government, etc. Paul calls in **orderless life**. The **apostles** and the helpers that traveled with them had the right to live with other Christians and to receive their support (compare Jesus' words in Mark 10,11), but it should be seen as a **privilege** and not a necessity or must-do.

2Thess 3,1-5 – Prayer is the great **privilege of the believers** (1Thess 5,25) and the key to establish the kingdom of God. The prayers of the believers are a mighty instrument and help the mission to spread the word of God. Even when there is not much to do outwardly we can pray at all times.

Everybody can pray. It is a **gift of God** to the people (s. 2Chron 6,12-42;7.12–22/ Jam 5,14). The apostle speaks of „**intercession**“. In the Old Testament there was no office for „**general intercession**“ (Is 59,16). In the old covenant there were **single persons who were called out** when intercessors were needed. But in the NT intercession is a part of „**general priesthood**“ (Rev 1,6;5,10;20,/ Rom 15,16/ Jud 20).

2Thess 3,1 - Paul often asked the churches for **prayer support** for his ministry (Rom 15,30-3/ Eph 6,18.19/ Col 4,2.3/ 1Thess 5,25/ Phlm 22). He especially asked them to pray that the word of God would continue to spread as fast as it used to (Act 6,7;12,24;13,44-49) and that it would be received with the reverence it is due.

Intercession is also the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8,26-27), therefore Paul suggests that we work hand in hand with the Holy Spirit and remain prayerful for the saints, the church and the things of God (Rom 12,12;15,30/ 1Cor 7,5/ 2Cor 9,14/ Phil 4.6;1,4/ Eph 1,16).

Also „**praying in tongues**“ etc. is a service of the Holy Spirit through the one who prays to the church (1Cor 14.4-6,14-15). **Intercessory prayers are requests** for example for **growth** of the believers, **removal** of outward hinderances (1Thess 2,18; 3,10/ Rom 1,10) as well as **inner struggles**. (2Cor 12,8-9) or for **social well-being** (1Tim 2,1-2).

Intercession is all requests for that which is a burden to us and concerns us and to bring those requests before God (Jam 5,16). The **prayer of Christians** does not only deal with **personal requests**. They also pray that the „**word of God would have His way**“, that the gospel of Jesus Christ would become known and that more people hear the delivering truth.

2Thess 3,2 - **Also pray that** we will be delivered from **evil and bad people** and that we would be saved from them, because not all receive the faith. He refers to those who reject the gospel like the Jews and are opposing him (Act 23,12-22 – **this was an answered prayer!**). Therefore the evil ones are not only the devil, demons, etc. but also ungodly people who belong to the kingdom of darkness.

Perhaps Paul was also **referring to the attacks and enemies** who opposed him in Corinth at the time when he wrote the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians (comp. Acts 18,9-17). These enemies opposed him and the gospel with aggressive opposition.

It is almost paradox. Paul is asking the **insecure and oppressed church members** of Thessalonica for their intercession. **He knows** that only **they could understand him and feel for him** because they already suffered so much under the **persecution of the Jews** (Acts 17,5-9). Thus **intercession for one another** is a healing, connecting power of every church.

◆ **Intercession has two good sides to it: I pray for others and others pray for me.**

- It is a means against egoism, where I only care for myself. When I pray for others I do not only care for myself. When I pray for others I will also ask them how they are doing.
- On the other hand intercession is also a help **against the depressive feeling** like nobody cares and one is lonely and on his own. When I know that others pray for me then I know that I am not alone, I am involved with a **spiritual social circle**. This can carry me through the hard times when I may not even have the strength to pray for myself. Only the awareness that other loving people pray for me can give me much courage and strength.

It is still amazing that apostle Paul would ask the **oppressed Thessalonians** for prayers. But it was clear to him that **these are not just talking**, they suffered with him and would indeed pray for him.

At the same time he also gave them much comfort, encouragement and blessing : **„But the Lord is faithful who will strengthen you and keep you from evil.“** (2Thess 3,3) Paul knows what is threatening him and the brethren. It is simply a time of **„trials and temptation“** when one has to pass the test and **„prove oneself faithful“** (1Cor 10,13).

2Thess 3,3 – The Lord is faithful ... God is faithful with regard to...

- ... creation (Ps 119,90),
- ... His promises (Deut7,9/ 2Cor 1,18/ Hebr 10,23),
- ... salvation (1Thess 5,24),
- ... temptation (1Cor 10,13),
- ... pain, because He is with us when we suffer (1Pt 4,19),
- ... and also faithful in the sense of strengthening the believers and protecting them from Satan (compare Joh 17,15/ Eph 6,16/ 1Thess 3,5).

2Thess 3,4 - Paul also expects the Thessalonians to be **„faithful“** and that they would follow the apostolic commands and keep them.

2Thess 3,5 – Paul is all about the heart of the believer. They should be in line with the **love** and **patience** of God because this is the only thing which will truly bring them to the goal of perfection of their souls. In an old translations it says : **„May the Lord guide your heart towards love for God and patient waiting for Christ“**. Out of **God's love for us our love to God** should grow (Gal 5,6). The same also applies to **patience**.

2Thess 3,6 – We command you ... The **exhortations** of 1Thess 4,11;5,14 are developed into a command in the name of Jesus, by the authority of his apostolic office.

They should stay away from each brother who leads a life that is out of order and not according to the doctrines of the bible. He is still a **„brother“**, which means a child of God, but they should **avoid them** and **not fellowship with them** in the form of friendship, living together, praying together, etc. Paul is asking for a **strict separation** from disobedient brothers and sisters of faith. He even asks that they should separate themselves **from people who do not live according to the apostolic tradition**, according to the role model of the apostles, this refers especially to those who do not work and live like **freeloaders** (2Thess 3,7,10).

We have to understand the word of God right here, because Paul is not blaming those who really **cannot work** or those who are **truly not able to find a job**. But he is against the **believers who have to beg for alms or are being a financial burden to other on purpose**. Such people were already present in churches back then. **They were not supposed to treat those brethren** as enemies such as false teachers (2Thess 3,14), but rather continuously rebuke them in a biblical way (Ez 3,17-21/ Mt 18,15-17/ Lk 17,3/ 1Tim 5,19/ 2Tim 2,25;4,2/ Rev 3,19).

In **(2Thess 3,14)** he explains again how they should dissociate from such a brother or sister and what the effect of such attitude toward them should be. It was also important to point out **against what or whom they**

sin:

- against **you** (Mt 18,15,21),
- against **themselves**,
- against the **family**,
- against the **church** (1Tim 5,24),
- against **God**,
- against the **word of God**,
- against **humanity**,
- against **creation** etc.

Not all transgressions should be treated alike. Many Christians unfortunately sinned in this area and have cause much damage and trouble (1Tim 5,17-24). **Elders** or church leaders etc. should be treated and approached in a different way (1Tim 5,17-19/ 1Thess 5,12-13/ Hebr 13,17).

(2Thess 3.6-15) – This is a warning against idleness. In the ancient times idleness and laziness were the ideal lifestyle. But in Christianity idleness and laziness was called on of the **seven main immoral behaviours**. We know the saying: „**Idleness is the beginning of immorality**“. Therefore the Christians always used to say: „**Ora et labora**“ - pray and work! In the days of the apostles idleness and life out of order were a huge (spiritual) problem, so that he uses quite strong words to rebuke it (2Thess 3.10). The reasoning of the apostle reveals that people who thought of themselves **more spiritual** than the others always wanted to rebuke and correct the others (Jam 3). They wanted to be better than the others and **obtain an office in the church** and receive financial support and care.

2Thess 3.7 – When the believers imitate Paul in his commendably lifestyle they imitate Christ (1Cor 4,16/ Gal 4,12/ Phil 2,5/ 1Thess 1,6) since the apostle is a loving follower of Jesus. The men of God have an important function as **role models** (Phil 3,17/ 1Tim 1,16;4,12/ Tit 2,7/ 1Petr 5,3). Paul called the believers to follow him (1Thess 1,6) because he followed the example of Christ (1Cor 4,16;11,1/ Eph 5,1).

2Thess 3.8-10 – This deals with **diligent work**, in order to earn your own living. Even though the apostle would have had the right to receive support, he rather wanted to earn his own living and set an example (1Cor 9,3-14/ Gal 6,4/ 1Tim 5,17.18). **After the indication to the apostles example he mentions again what they had taught them.** Each should try to make his own living and nobody should boast in their laziness. Apparently some in Thessalonica thought they had more important things to do than to work. The apostles showed that each should work and consider a free-will offering or support a privilege.

2Thess 3.11.12 - Even though Paul had taught them to work and had already written to them concerning these things (1Thess 4,11), it seems that some had not followed his instructions. Therefore he heard that some still did not want to work (1Tim 5,13). He commanded them to start a regular, orderly life and work. Otherwise the brethren were supposed to separate themselves from them. In the following sentences he emphasises the diligent „good works“. If someone does not do that they should stay away from the church until they show some improvements in their lifestyle (2Thess 3,6-15).

2Thess 3.13 - It is understandable that the hard-working believers were fed up to support the lazy ones. They were ready to stop all helps and support for those who were not really in need and no longer practice this kind of love toward them. Paul reminded them that those who really needed help still had to get help and that the Thessalonians should grow indifferent toward them. Therefore he encourages them : „**Do not grow weary!**“

2Thess 3.14 – Do not associate with them, which means do not fellowship with those who lead **an idle life**. Those are people who try to take advantage of others, etc.

2Thess 3.16-18 – Paul signed the letter and added a personal greeting in his own hand writing.

Paul often wrote through a secretary (Rom 16,22). In such cases he added, such as in this letter, a personal, identifying signature (1Cor 16,21/ Col 4,18), so that the readers could be sure that he was really the author (2Thess 3,18/ vgl. 1Thess 5,28).

Test questions

1. How and in what do both Epistles to the Thessalonians differ?
2. What were the Thessalonians confused about?

3. When do you have the gift of discernment?
4. Why are so many people still gullible?
5. What arguments does the apostle use to correct their insecurities?
6. What is the schedule of end time in 2nd Thessalonians?
7. What will happen when Jesus returns?
8. Where will we believers find / see Jesus when He returns?
9. What is the difference between the rapture and the „day of the Lord“?
10. Why is the rapture such a mystery?
11. Was the rapture already revealed in the Old Testament?
12. What are the typical marks of the „Antichrist“?
13. Why do the „Antichrist“ and a time of apostasy have to come before?
14. What is still holding back the wickedness of the Antichrist?
15. Should we spend much time thinking or learning about the Antichrist?
16. What will the Antichrist be for the Jews?
17. Do the believers still have to encounter much trials and tribulations?
18. What happens to those who have missed the rapture?
19. Through whom will the Antichrist be destroyed?
20. Why should Christians work?
21. What are the characteristics of true faith?
22. Why is Silas still mentioned in the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians?
23. Why should the Thessalonians pray for Paul?
24. Why is intercession so important for Christians?
25. What is intercession?
26. How should we treat Christians who are out of order?
27. What is the true calling of the church of Jesus?
28. Why should all believers of the NT be intercessors?

Please send the answers to pastor@matutis.de

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Nest lesson – 1st Corinthians

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Pastor Joh.W.Matutis

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As strong as we are in the word of God – so strong are we in Him