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# God's Payday

## Radio Sermons



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# God's Payday

*(A Study of II Thessalonians 1)*

## Introduction

*"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." II Thess. 1:6-8.*

These inspired words, written by the Apostle Paul to the Christian assembly at Thessalonica, speak of that future time when God is going to settle the accounts of every person in all the earth. That time will be "God's Payday." The wicked will receive divine "payment" for their evil deeds when the Lord returns to earth. "Rewards of righteousness" are to be given to those who are His own at the Judgment Seat of Christ, shortly before the Lord's return in power and glory at the end of the present day of grace.

Judgment will take place at the Lord's return, in the time period known as *God's Payday*. Those "who know not God, even who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will go away into everlasting punishment. The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just. The unsaved of the earth will be caused to suffer physical death. Their souls and spirits will go into Hades to suffer torment until the day of the Great White Throne judgment. In that day, the bodies of the wicked dead will be resurrected, and (in those indestructible resurrection bodies), the wicked dead will be cast into Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, the place "prepared for

Christians) and you (all Christians) in Him." These works are not done in the Christian's own strength. They are accomplished "in accordance with the grace of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ." He who is God is the dispenser of the grace of God.

Christians await "God's Payday" at the Judgment Seat of our Lord Jesus Christ. That payday is to come immediately after the rapture of the church.

But the unsaved of the world await God's Payday at the time of the Lord's return in power and glory. "The wages of sin is death," and those wages are to be paid by the "Heavenly Paymaster."

minds to the truth, and became the willing instruments of Satan. These latter ones immediately began to oppose the missionary effort. They stirred up the population of Thessalonica against these servants of the Lord by accusing them of treason against Caesar.

There were some of Jewish background who believed the Gospel. But the vast majority came from the ranks of the "Greeks" or Gentiles. Apparently the majority of these "Greeks" who believed had previously been converted to Judaism, because the narrative appears to teach that these "Greeks" heard Paul preach in the synagogue. They were referred to as "devout Greeks."

Because of the opposition and because of the danger that he might actually lose his life, Paul and his companions were forced to flee southward. They stopped for a time in Berea where their efforts met with great success in the Berean synagogue. But they soon moved on southward and eventually arrived in Athens.

Paul was greatly concerned about the Thessalonian converts. He had been able to spend less than four weeks with them. Although he spent a great deal of that time teaching them the things of God's Word, he feared that these "newly born ones" had not matured sufficiently in the Word. He was afraid that Satan would crush them at the hands of the same renegade Jews who had been able to force him out of the city.

It was Paul's desire to return to these brethren, so that he might better establish them in the things of God's Word. We find Paul's own words expressing this desire in I Thessalonians 2:17-18: "*But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.*" The Greek expression, "Satan hindered us," literally translated, says, "Satan tore up the road." Paul's desire to return to Thessalonica could not be fulfilled.

So, from Athens, Paul sent young Timotheus (Timothy) back to the Thessalonian assembly to see how that newly-converted group of Christians were faring. After a time, Timothy returned to Paul. He was able to report that although these Thessalonian Christians were enduring great persecution, they were continuing to walk after the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were carrying on a testimony for Him. They were being tremendously successful in the spreading of the Gospel, not only in Thessalonica, but to those strangers who passed through the city on trade journeys between widely-scattered points.

### **Why the Thessalonian Epistles Were Written**

However, the Thessalonian Christians did have both doctrinal and practical questions to direct to this apostle who was responsible for planting the seed of the Gospel in Thessalonica. In answer to these questions and in response to Timothy's glowing report concerning the spiritual condition of these newly-reborn Christians, Paul wrote the letter that we know as I Thessalonians.

Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians had been delivered to Thessalonica by a courier. Very possibly that courier was again Timothy. The messenger soon returned to Paul, who still remained in Athens. The first epistle had been delivered to those Christians of the Thessalonian church. This epistle had contained detailed teaching concerning the Lord's appearing for His church, and also the coming of the day of the Lord.

The Thessalonian Christians were at that time in a period of greatly increased persecution. In addition to this, they had been the recipients of a forged letter, supposedly from Paul, which claimed that the day of the Lord had already begun. Paul sat down and wrote a second epistle to these Thessalonian Christians. It is in the first chapter of this epistle that we find the theme of "God's Payday."

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# 1.

## Signature and Salutation

*“Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” II Thess. 1:1-2.*

As is true in the majority of his epistles, the Apostle Paul organized his second letter to the Thessalonians according to the accepted letter-writing style of his day. It was customary to begin each letter with the identification of the writer, followed by the name of the intended recipient, then add a complimentary greeting.

Paul included as co-writers of the letter two faithful companions, Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheus (Timothy). A young man the apostle called “his own son in the faith,” Timothy was called of the Lord to accompany the apostle and train for pastorship. This is also the same Timothy to whom Paul later addressed two inspired epistles.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were in Athens doing the Lord’s work when both the earthly circumstances and the directing of God’s Holy Spirit caused Paul to set these words down. As the Spirit of God came upon Paul, he wrote inspired Scripture, addressed to those Christians he had left behind in Thessalonica.

Even though he had spent less than four weeks among his Thessalonian converts, a local church (“called-out assembly” or “ekklesia”) had been established in Thessalonica as a light-house of the Gospel. Therefore, Paul addressed his letter to “the church (assembly) of the Thessalonians.”

That popular trade center of Thessalonica was privileged to have a hub of Christian testimony established in its midst. The work of Paul, Silas and Timothy had taken root.

Although these servants of God were no longer physically present in that city, their "planting" continued to flourish and bear fruit.

### **The Price of True Discipleship**

As far as the circumstances of the world were concerned, the church of the Thessalonians was in great trouble. Tremendous persecution had arisen against them. Some of their members had died, probably as martyrs for their testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. To receive the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and become one of His disciples in that city, placed one not only in jeopardy of his means of livelihood, but also of his very life. Yet even in those difficult circumstances, the Thessalonian Christians were preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the unsaved. Their preaching was effective. Many received the Word gladly, and even though the new believers realized that it could cost them their lives, they followed the risen Christ.

The salutation of Paul's letter takes these faithful ones above the circumstances of the world. The apostle reminds them of their eternal position, which is far beyond the reach of all earthly circumstances. He writes, "*Unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" These faithful ones were the reborn children of God. Their rebirth into the spiritual creation of the Second Adam placed them forever in the family of God. This is a position that can never be changed nor destroyed. Knowing that they were the children of the Father and as such were under His divine protection and providence, an eternal home in His presence was their hope and assurance.

These Thessalonians were also members of His church (the one Body of the Lord Jesus Christ), His building and His bride. With other believers of all ages, they will experience the coming of the Lord for His own. Paul had written in I Thessalonians 4:16-17: "*The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then*



*we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: And so shall we ever be with the Lord."*

This group of Thessalonian Christians was most definitely "the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

### **A Prayer for Grace and Peace**

The Apostle Paul's customary complimentary greeting followed: "Grace unto you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." His prayer for these Thessalonian believers was for God's sustaining grace to be poured out abundantly upon them, so that they might continue toward maturity in spiritual things.

"Grace" is God's unmerited favor for those who deserve the very opposite. These Thessalonian Christians *knew* that they were saved by God's grace. They were also sustained in difficult circumstances by the outpouring of God's grace. The Apostle Paul, who was in a sense a direct channel through whom God poured out His grace, prayed that it might be given in great measure.


Finally, he prayed for God's peace to be given unto this newly-founded assembly of Christians. Although they were facing persecution and trials on the earth, they could still have peace within. They were eternally secure in their position "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Their relationship with God lifted them far above earthly cares. Regardless of circumstance, they could have total peace in their hearts. That peace came directly from God Himself, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary.

*"Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

## 2.

# The Growth of Patience and Faith

*"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth: So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." II Thess. 1:3,4.*



The Apostle Paul was God's messenger. The words that he wrote here were inspired words directed by the Holy Spirit of God. There was no exaggeration in this well-deserved praise that he directed to the Thessalonian brethren. He was speaking of himself, of Silas, Timothy and perhaps others in his missionary group when he wrote the plural first person pronoun, "we." Paul was speaking of their prayers of thanksgiving for the assembly of Thessalonian converts when he wrote, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren."

### **Continually Obligated to Give Thanks**

The word "bound" is translated from a Greek word that refers to the owing of a debt which must be repaid. Paul said that he and his associates were constantly obligated to give thanks to God for the work He had done in shaping the lives and in directing the activities of these relatively young (in a spiritual sense) members of Christ's body.

Paul felt a keen obligation to God for giving him these spiritual children, whom he had referred to in his first epistle as "our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing." 1 Thess. 2:19.

He knew the reality of their conversion and had evidence

of the fact that they were totally sold out to God. They were his "brethren" in the true sense of the word. Paul, Silas and Timothy had been spiritually born into the family of God, as had these Thessalonian Christians. They were brothers in Christ. Paul took great delight in addressing them as "brethren."

Their growth in faith was borne out by their continuous testimony for Christ in a hostile environment. Satan was stirring the people, and true testimony by the Thessalonian believers could actually cost them their physical lives. They had separated themselves unto Christ from the pagan practices that went on all about them. They had testified of God's wondrous saving grace in the face of those who were dedicated to the silencing of their voice of testimony for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Paul himself — Saul before his encounter with Christ — had been a sort of police officer, authorized by the rulers to hunt Christians.) Acts 9:1,2. They depended upon God daily for their sustenance, and had submitted themselves to His will so that they might grow toward spiritual maturity.

That growth was manifested in two areas. Paul brought up both of these areas as he wrote, "Because that your faith groweth exceedingly, as the charity of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth."

### **How Can One's Faith Grow?**

Paul's first statement was, "Because that your faith groweth exceedingly." Is it possible for faith to grow? One must exercise faith in God in order to become a child of God. In order to be born again into the spiritual creation of the second Adam, one must believe God's testimony concerning His only begotten Son. One must put his faith (his entire trust) in Him in order to be saved. If one is saved by faith, then how is it possible for faith to "grow exceedingly?"

The inspired author of the book of Hebrews provides a definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1. "Now faith is the

*substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" Faith is trust in things that cannot be verified by the senses. We cannot verify the facts of the Gospel by what we would normally consider as laboratory evidence. The Gospel tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, and that He arose for our justification.

Now, there is a great deal of historical evidence to confirm the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ did die on a Roman cross, and that He did arise from the tomb three days later. There is also a great deal of evidence that there are literally millions of men, women and young people who have trusted Him as their Saviour during these nearly 20 centuries since these historical facts of the Gospel took place. And with this trust there came a great change in their lives.

However, there is no "laboratory evidence" that if a specific individual turns to Jesus Christ, he will experience all the spiritual fruits recorded in God's Word. One must turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. That is, he must trust Him based upon "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Once that trust has been placed in the Saviour, He Himself provides the evidence that it is not placed in vain.

It is like the one who decides to place his weight upon a body of frozen water. One may be told by others that the ice will hold him. But until he actually stands upon it, he cannot know for sure. He places his faith in the ice by actually stepping out upon that frozen surface. If the ice breaks, his faith was in vain. But if the ice supports him, then his faith was justified. Likewise, all must step out upon the firm support of Christ by faith in Him. When that faith has been placed, then one finds the firm foundation under him. He has the evidence that his faith has been justified.

These Thessalonian Christians had placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He had saved them. They had trusted Him for eternal things, and they had found their faith

justified. But they, (just as we also must do) had to learn to trust their Saviour in all things. They trusted Him for eternity when they placed their faith in the Gospel. But they had to learn to trust Him in temporal things. They had to come to understand that He is just as all-sufficient in the things of this life as He is in the things of eternal life.

These Thessalonian Christians were encountering daily persecutions from the Lord's enemies. But they were trusting Him to see them through these trials and tribulations on a moment-by-moment basis. And with each encounter, they found their faith justified. So, their faith was "growing exceedingly." Paul saw the evidence of this, and he thanked God continually for it.

### "Agape" Love

Paul's second statement was, "The charity of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth." The word "charity" is a translation of the Greek word for the highest form of totally unselfish love. It is the Greek "agape," which refers to that totally unselfish love which comes from God Himself. In I John 3:7 we read these words, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." Again, it is a form of the word, "agape" that is translated "love" each time the word occurs in this verse. John has testified that it is only those who are born of God (born again, or born from above into the new creation of life) who have "agape" within them. And Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, "The love (agape) of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth."

When Paul wrote "aboundeth," he meant that this special love "grew without limit." A striking point about the Thessalonian assembly was that all of its members showed this true, totally unselfish, abounding love one for the other. There was not the bickering and backbiting among the brethren that is so common within local assemblies today, and that also existed in many local assemblies of Paul's day. This was an outstanding characteristic of the Thessalonian church.

Each member gave evidence of his own rebirth and of his growth in Christ as he exercised that totally unselfish love which had come to him directly from God Himself toward every other individual within the assembly.

They had followed Paul's exhortation found in I Thessalonians 5:12,13. The apostle had written, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know (to recognize) them which labor among you (those specific members whom God Himself had called, and had given gifts so that they might accomplish certain ministries within the assemblies), and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."

The Thessalonian Christians were following this exhortation, not just because Paul had written it, but because there was true "agape" in the hearts of all of the members. And Paul wrote to them, "We are obligated to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because . . . the *agape* of every one of you toward each other aboundeth."

After stating these two reasons for his being obligated to "thank God always" for them, then Paul continued with the body of his letter. "*So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.*" Verse 4.

### **An Encouraging Message to Other Churches**

The reports that Paul received from the church at Thessalonica let the apostle and his missionary companions know that this assembly was being used of God as an outstanding example of what a Christian church should be. The church was undergoing tremendous persecution that was much heavier than the average church of that day had been called upon to bear. Yet in spite of this, their faith grew exceedingly, and their agape love abounded.

Paul and his companions were only too glad to be able to pass these reports on to the churches which they visited, and

to the churches with which they corresponded. God had given them an exemplary church. They glorified in telling other churches about their growth and progress.

Therefore Paul wrote to this church, "We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God (those local assemblies with which Paul and his companions had recent contact) for your patience in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." The word translated "patience" is the Greek word for "keeping under" as related to a burden.

### **Not Asking for "The Easy Way"**

The Thessalonians were "keeping under" the burden of their persecutions without wavering. These ones reborn of the Lord Jesus Christ were not trying to take the easy way out. They were not trying to throw off the burden that had been put upon them. They were not trying to make life easier for themselves by watering down their testimony for Christ. They understood the responsibility that had been placed upon them. In spite of the tremendous resistance that Satan had generated, they were continuing in a steadfast way to carry on their ministry of preaching the Gospel and of teaching the new converts "to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded."

All the time, the faith of the Thessalonian Christians was increasing. They were learning to trust God more. Paul had previously said, "Your faith groweth exceedingly." And now he said that he and his companions "glory in their faith." These Christians had learned to trust God in all things. They knew that God was in control, and nothing could come upon them except that which was for their own good. No wonder Paul gloried in this church.

These words are not for Thessalonian Christians alone. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians was inspired by God's Holy Spirit and God saw to it that it became a part of the New Testament canon of the Holy Scriptures.

The "patience and faith" of the Thessalonian assembly

was ordained of God to be known as an enduring example of Christian growth down through the centuries of the church age.

### 3.

## Suffering for the Kingdom

*“Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.” II Thess. 1:5.*

These Thessalonian Christians were being tested, that they might be proved worthy of the kingdom of God. It was actually a blessing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name's sake.

Our Lord came into this world to suffer. He was rejected by the world. He died the death of the cross. It is to be expected that those who link themselves to Him will suffer at the hands of the world just as He did.

But the present suffering is to last only until the time of His revelation, when He will come in power and great glory to establish the earthly kingdom. Then those who have suffered with Him during this age of His rejection will be glorified with Him. The patience and faith exhibited by the Lord's people in Thessalonica comprised outward, visible evidence of God's principles being shown out in this present world. That is what Paul meant when he told them, “Your patience and faith (which are God-given attributes) are the clearly visible token of the righteous judgment of God. These are bestowed upon you, and exercised by you, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. You are now suffering for that kingdom, and in your suffering you are also glorifying God.”



The Christians of the church of Thessalonica were receiving evil, but they were returning good. They knew that this was the will of God for them. It was not in accordance with the will of the Lord whom they served that they should recompense evil for evil. The principle of the heathen is to return evil for good. The principle of the so-called civilized world is to return good for good. But the principle of the kingdom of God is to return good for evil.

In verses one through five of the first chapter of II Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul brought comfort, cheer and encouragement to those newly-converted believers who were enduring great suffering and persecution for Christ's sake. The apostle has pointed out that it is a token of the righteous judgment of God that His saints are counted worthy to suffer persecution for His Name during this age of His rejection. They will be rewarded when they return with the Lord in the day of His revelation, God's Payday. That is the day when He will return to execute judgment upon those who reject Him and persecute His people.

#### 4.

### **"Vengeance is Mine"**

*"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." II Thess. 1:6-8.*

In these words, Paul has restated the principle of divine retribution. It is *not* a righteous thing with God's people to "recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." Again, the Christian principle is to return good for evil. All judgment, all retribution, is in the hands of God Himself.

Therefore it is a righteous thing only with God "to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you."

Judgment is in the hands of God, and all judgment will be administered at the hands of the Person of God the Son. But this present age is not an age of judgment. This is the "acceptable year of the Lord." The "day of vengeance of our God" has not yet arrived. But that day is coming! That day will arrive when the Lord Jesus Christ will come to the earth a second time to take the kingdoms of the world for Himself. It is "a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble" His people.

### Day of Vengeance Coming

However, this is not all of the statement that Paul has made concerning what is to happen at the Lord's second coming when "the acceptable year of the Lord" changes to "the day of vengeance of our God."

Paul has written, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you: and to you who *are* troubled, rest with us, when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven with His angels of might." Things are all to be made right at the time of the Lord's return from heaven. To those who persecuted God's people in the earth, God will recompense tribulation. "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Gal. 6:7.

It is a righteous thing with God to judge evil and to bring treatment in kind upon the heads of those who have persecuted His people. And at the same time, He will bring rest to those who have suffered persecution for His Name's sake. The tables are to be turned at that future date, that date known only to God Himself, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His angels of might, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is our Lord's second coming, His "apokulupsis," His revelation; not the rapture of the church that is in view as

Paul writes these words. The "revelation," or the "unveiling," of our Lord Jesus Christ refers to the time of His return from heaven to bring judgment on the rebels of the earth. At that time He will bring in the kingdom to those who have received Him as their Saviour. This is the time God's people down through the centuries have referred to as they prayed, "Thy kingdom come."

### **The Meek Inherit the Earth**

This is the time when Satan will be bound, and when things will be set right in the earth. The meek will at last inherit the earth and the rebels will be purged from it by the all-inclusive judgments of the returned King. The church of our Lord Jesus Christ (which will have been caught up to heaven at least seven years before His revelation, when He comes with His "angels of might") is to reign with the King, the heavenly Bridegroom, over the kingdoms of the earth. This is indeed a time of surcease from stress and strains due to persecutions. It is to be the time looked forward to, not only by the Thessalonian Christians, but by all Christians down through this age of grace. Sufferings with Christ are only temporary. Rest from sufferings is to be complete and eternal at the time of the Lord's revelation.

The judgmental aspect of our Lord's revelation is stressed when Paul referred to the time "when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with His *angels of might*, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

### **Agents of God's Judgment**

The Scriptures tell us that the high-ranking holy angels of heaven are to be used as the agents of the Lord's judgment at the time of His second coming. The Lord Himself emphasized this when He provided the explanation for the seventh parable (the parable of the dragnet) in Matthew 13:49. "*So shall*

*it be at the end of the age: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from the just."*

The Apostle John was permitted to record the fulfillment of this parable in Revelation 14:19. *"And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God."*

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, when He returns to earth in power and great glory with His angels of might, will mark the end of the suffering of the people of God. It will bring a time of judgment on the dwellers of the earth "that know not God."

The Apostle John described this same event later in Revelation 19:11-16. *"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven (the armies of the mighty angels, and the armies of the saints of God) followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."*

The Apostle Paul has directed attention to the fact that when the Lord returns, He will be accompanied by "His angels of might." The words "angels of might" refer to the high-ranking angels of heaven; the order of the created angels that are greatest in power and authority of all the echelons of these heavenly beings.

### **Different Orders of Angels**

There are several passages in Scripture that inform us that

there are a number of different orders of the created angels who form God's heavenly host. These orders are organized according to level of authority and power. Each order of angelic being has a specific ministry to God. All the orders, organized according to rank, together form the heavenly army.

The highest ranking order of angels, Michael the Archangel and those who approach him in rank, will accompany the Lord Jesus Christ in His triumphant return from heaven. These "angels of might" are to be the active agents in carrying out the Lord's judgments in the earth.

These "angels of might" are mentioned specifically in Matthew 25:31-46. Here the Lord Himself spoke of the judgment of living Gentiles at the time of His return. In Matthew 25:31,32 we read, "*When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations (Gentiles): and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.*"

It is the holy angels who will actually gather the peoples of the earth before the Lord, and carry out the separation of the goats from His sheep. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "*The Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his angels of might, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, even that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" II Thess. 1:7-8.

Not only will the Lord Jesus Christ be revealed from heaven with His "angels of might," but he will come "in flaming fire." Fire speaks of judgment, of purging. Judgment of the living in the earth is to take place at the Lord's return. Purging of the rebels "who know not God, even who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" out of the earth is to take place at the time of our Lord's second coming.

### **The Baptism by Fire**

"Flaming fire" speaks of judgment. When the Apostle

John was later given the privilege of observing the Lord's return to earth in the prophetic vision recorded in Revelation 19, he penned one noteworthy descriptive statement concerning the unveiled God-Man who was about to re-enter the earthly sphere. He wrote, "His eyes were a flame of fire." Judgment on the wicked is to come surely and swiftly in that day of the Lord's return. This is the earth's first "baptism by fire."

John the Baptist spoke of this "baptism by fire" as he heralded the coming Messiah in his preaching of repentance to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In Matthew 3:11 we hear his words, "*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*"

### **Two Advents in One View**

John spoke of both the Lord's first and second coming as he proclaimed these words. The Lord came the first time to baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Lord Himself made that clear as He stood on the Mount of Olives in His resurrection body just before His ascension back to heaven there at the end of His post-resurrection ministry. We read His words in Acts 1:5. "For John truly baptized with water; *but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*" The Lord makes no mention of a "baptism by fire" at that time. The "baptism by fire" is not mentioned here because this baptism speaks of judgment. This interadvent age is not an age of judgment. Judgment (and the "baptism by fire") is to be brought with the Lord at His second coming.

John the Baptist (just as the other Old Testament prophets) saw both the first and second advents of the Lord Jesus Christ as one blended vision with no particular hint that an extended time period intervened. It is just as though the two advents were two mountain peaks aligned together in John's vision. The distant mountain peak of the Lord's second coming stood beyond the near mountain peak of the Lord's first

coming. From John's angle of vision, one peak seemed to blend into the next. He could not foresee that a broad valley of time actually stood between these two advents. So he announced, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that shall come after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost (at His first coming), and with fire (at His second coming)."

Just as the fire of judgment is to be applied to the superstructure of works that each Christian has built upon that "foundation which is Christ Jesus" (I Corinthians 3:11) at the time of the Judgment Seat of Christ, so will the fire of judgment be applied to the mortal population of the earth at the time of the Lord's return. This is the cleansing by fire for which "the heavens and the earth which are now" are being "kept in store." This is the earth's initial "baptism by fire." The earth is to be cleansed and renovated for the millennial reign of Jesus Christ, and this is to be accomplished by the fires of judgment. The King from heaven is to come "in flaming fire."

### **Types of Judgment to Come**

He will be "taking vengeance on them who know not God, even that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the time when God will "recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." The long-dead individuals through whom Satan worked to bring tribulation to those spiritually-young Christians of Thessalonica stand in type for those persecutors during the end-time reign of the beast. The "recompense of tribulation" to all those individuals who have troubled God's people down through the age will then be completed.

In the last clauses of verse 8, the Apostle Paul once again made it clear that there is only one way that one can know God. That way is through obedience to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was He who came to earth in the form

of a man to reveal God, so that He could be known to those who believe. The Lord Himself said to the religious leaders of Israel, *"I say therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I AM, ye shall die in your sins."* John 8:24.

When the Lord spoke the word that is translated, "I am," He pronounced the sacred "Tetragrammaton," the "four letter word," that formed the covenant name of God. It is the very same word that is translated "I AM" in Exodus 3:14. There, the God of the burning bush spoke to Moses. "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

When the Lord said, "For if you believe not that I AM, ye shall die in your sins," He was claiming to be the very God of the burning bush. And He told the religious leaders to whom He spoke, except they believe that He is "JHWH," they will die in their sins. There is no other way to know God, except through Him. He was saying to those bigoted religious leaders, "You can not know God if you obey not the good news concerning me." That is, "You can not know God if you obey not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."

### **The Only Way of Salvation**

Later, the Lord was to say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 14:6. There is but one stairway from earth to heaven; there is but one connecting link between God and man. That door by which man may enter in is the Lord Jesus Christ.

That way, by which man may know God, is through obedience to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the good news that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that on the third day He was resurrected for our justification.

To be obedient to the Gospel, one must believe. He must realize that he is lost and undone, estranged from God, dead



in trespasses and sins. That is repentance toward God. Then he must place his entire trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, just as Paul once told the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31.

Those who are to reap the vengeance of God when the Lord returns "in flaming fire" are those who "know not God, even that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." They are the unsaved. The only way of salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Way.

## 5.

### Everlasting Destruction

*"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day."* II Thess. 1:9,10.

In these verses, the Apostle Paul spoke of that wrath of God which is to abide for all eternity on those who have chosen to "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," and to go their own way. The Lord Jesus will be "revealed from heaven" at the end of the great tribulation. During the tribulation period Scripture expressly tells us that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be preached throughout the whole earth. No one will be able to say in that day of the Lord's return that he has not heard the Gospel message.

#### **The Judgment of Those Who Reject**

All will have heard it, but great multitudes will have rejected it. They will have refused their opportunity to know God through obedience to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The only source of eternal life is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And, at His return, He is to deal in judgment with

those who have willingly rejected Him, who have worshipped the beast, and who have persecuted His own that were in the world.

The Lord Himself told His disciples on the Mount of Olives what was to happen to those who, "know not God through obedience to the gospel" when He spoke of the judgment of the living Gentiles at His return as King. In Matthew 25:31,32 we read His words. "*When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory and before him shall be gathered all nations (Gentiles): And he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.*" The outcome of the judgment that takes place at this time, specifically as it relates to the "goats" (that is, those who "know not God"), is reported in Matthew 25:46. "*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*"

The Apostle Paul was speaking to the Thessalonian Christians of the same judgment of the Lord. He wrote that those "who know not God, even that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Those who are present in the earth at the time of the Lord's return, who have never been regenerated to eternal life through obedience to the Gospel, will *not* be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom. They will be destroyed out of the earth. They will suffer physical death at the hands of the Lord's "angels of might." Their souls and spirits will go into Hades (that place of torment which serves as a temporary prison for the wicked dead who are awaiting the Great White Throne judgment and their final consignment to Gehenna -- hell -- the Lake of Fire -- their eternal place of abode).

### **No Hope Throughout Eternity**

As these unbelievers experience physical death while still in their sins, they are forever separated from God. They are

spiritually dead. They (when they are cast into Gehenna) are to die the second death. There is no hope for them. As their punishment for sin, they suffer everlasting (endless) destruction. The evil that is within them will grow worse and worse as eternity moves onward. As they will be without spiritual life in the presence of God, this is a growing separation from the holiness of the Lord (there is no real life outside the presence of the Lord, but they will have eternal existence). *Those who are eternally damned will be conscious of what is going on.*

This is a destiny too horrible to contemplate. Yet it is the destiny of all those "who know not God, even that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." Whether an unsaved one is present in the earth at the time of the Lord's second coming or not, that one still shares this destiny of "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." When an individual today dies in his sins (that is, when an individual dies without receiving Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour) he dies in disobedience to the Gospel. Then the soul and spirit of that individual go into Hades (the same place of torment that received the rich man in the Lord's story of the rich man and Lazarus of Luke 16). There he awaits the day that "death and Hades" give up the dead that are in them for judgment at the Great White Throne. Revelation 20:13.

As a result of the Great White Throne judgment, that resurrected individual will be cast into Gehenna, the Lake of Fire, the place "prepared for the devil and his angels," for all eternity. That one will never know the blessings of the Lord's presence. He will never be a witness to the "glory of his power." What a contrast there is between the destinies of those who know God through obedience to the Gospel and those who know Him not. Many refuse the salvation that is offered as a free gift through Jesus Christ to all those who will receive Him!

It is those in the earth at the end of the age of whom Paul speaks when he writes, "*Who shall be punished with*

*everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*" Paul had written in his previous letter to the Thessalonians that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." I Thess. 5:2. The "acceptable year of the Lord" (the present time of God's grace) is going to come to an end in God's own time. The day of grace in which we are now living (the closing period of "the times of the Gentiles"), is to terminate at the time of the Lord's second coming.

### **The Day of the Lord**

In that day, God will once again directly intervene in the affairs of the earth. It will then no longer be "the day of man," where man is allowed to run the affairs of the earth in his own errant, sinful way. But rather, it will then be "the Day of the Lord," when God Himself, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, will directly rule over the affairs of the earth. The God-Man will have returned to earth. His personal and physical presence will once again be in the earth. The wicked (those who have refused the salvation made available to them through the shed blood of this God-Man), can not continue to live in a world in which God Himself is *locally* present. They must be banished from that world. The rebels of Israel and the unsaved of the Gentile world must be purged out of Messiah's earthly kingdom.

Man's only hope for life eternal in the presence of God is through obedience to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Gospel says, "Believe on (put your entire trust in) the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." If one suffers physical death without having trusted Christ for his salvation, then that one is lost forever. He is to die the second death, which, according to Revelation 20:14, is the casting of the resurrected body, soul and spirit into the Lake of Fire.

Because of this destiny, the Apostle Paul could tell those faithful children of God at Thessalonica that their enemies (and the enemies of God's people all down through the age) will "be punished with everlasting destruction from the

presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." It is most definitely "a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." The word "punished" refers to God's righteous judgment against those who persecuted His children and never repented of it and asked His forgiveness. Saul of Tarsus, once a great persecutor of the church, repented and became the Apostle Paul.

The Lord is the Judge of all the earth, and He has said, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Galatians 6:7. God will punish the wicked: those who reject the Gospel of His Son, and who are not obedient to Him. God has appointed a payday — a day for settling accounts. God's Payday will come at the Lord's return.

### **"Destruction" is Separation From God**

Man has an eternal spirit that will continue to exist in a conscious state throughout all eternity. That spirit must exist, either in the presence of God in the new earth which God is to create, or in the absence of God in Gehenna, "the place that was prepared for the devil and his angels."

The word "destruction" as used in Scripture does not refer to "annihilation," but to total separation from God, the only Source of true life. It refers to the continuous deterioration of everything that is Godlike in the makeup of the destroyed creature throughout an eternity spent in separation from God. As noted previously, in Gehenna everything will continue to become progressively more evil and corrupt as eternity wears on. There will never be a deviation away from this continued downward progress. *This* is what is meant by the expression, "punishment with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Paul has emphasized that this is an "everlasting" (never ending) process.

This is all to happen "when he (the Lord Jesus Christ) shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired (wondered at) in all them that believe (because our testimony

among you was believed) in that day." Judgment is to come on the earth at the time of the Lord's second coming. The enemies of God are to be removed from this present earth to make way for the glorious millennial reign. The meek shall at last inherit the earth. And the Lord Jesus Christ, at last unveiled in all His glory for those who are His own (those who are His saints, or His "saved ones"), will then be admired (or wondered at) by all who are in the earth. The time of the Lord's return shall bring in "God's Payday."

Those saints at Thessalonica, those very Christians to whom this letter was originally delivered, will participate in the worship of Messiah as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in the earth at the establishment of His kingdom. The reason: the testimony of Paul and Silas and Timothy was believed in the day that they preached in Thessalonica. They believed and obeyed the Gospel.

## 6.

# Glorifying the Name of Christ

*"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." II Thess. 1:11,12.*

The first chapter of II Thessalonians closes with these words. The Thessalonian church was suffering great persecution at the hands of their enemies. Many of their number had died as martyrs because of their testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these suffering Christians felt that the day of the Lord had already come, despite what Paul had taught

them. They believed that they had somehow been left behind when the Lord came for His church, and that they were now suffering the persecutions of the opening years of that seven-year period. Their confusion had been greatly increased by the arrival of a forged letter, supposedly from Paul (see II Thessalonians 2:2), which stated definitely that the Day of the Lord had arrived.

### **False Teaching and Intense Persecution**

Paul had written this second letter to the Thessalonians to help overcome the confusion that had been generated both by false teaching, and by the fact that local persecution in Thessalonica had been greatly intensified against these followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had opened the first chapter of this letter by a reminder to them of their position in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. That position was an unchanging position which allowed them to live above any circumstances in this life. Then he had pointed out that their testimonies in the face of the tribulations and the persecutions which they were enduring were being used of the Lord as an example to other local assemblies. He had said that they should count it a blessing that they were considered worthy to suffer with Christ in this age of His rejection.

This age of the Lord's rejection by the world is also an age of His followers' rejection by the world. But the time is coming when all of this is to be ended. God has scheduled a payday. That time is the time of the Lord's revelation, the time of His second coming in power and glory. When He returns to earth, He will bring judgment on those who persecute His people. And He will bring glory and rest to those who have been the persecuted ones. Paul had written, "*Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his angels of might.*" II Thess. 1:6,7.

### **A Very Great Contrast**

Just before these closing words of the first chapter, Paul had contrasted the destiny of the unsaved ("those who know

not God, even those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ") with the destiny of the saved, in that day of Messiah's return. The unsaved "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." But, at the same time, "He shall come to be glorified in his saints (that is, in his saved ones), and to be wondered at in all them that believe."

These saints of Thessalonica were assured that they would have their part in that day, "Because our testimony among you was believed." Paul's missionary group had gone to Thessalonica, they had preached the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and these ones to whom the letter was addressed had believed. They had gladly received the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, and as Lord of their lives. Now they were counted worthy to suffer with Him, but they would then have their part in His glory "in that day." They were His own. And when He shall come to right the wrongs of the earth, they could be assured of their part in His glory.

The final verses of II Thessalonians 1 are Paul's prayer for the members of that persecuted church there in that great trade center of Thessalonica. This prayer is not for those Christians in Thessalonica only, but for all Christians who are found in similar circumstances all down through this age. It is especially for Christians who are living near the end of this age of grace, when the great world economic and political system of the tribulation period is in the process of being formed for its part in those frightful years that open the Day of the Lord. It is for us today, because all signs point to the fact that the Lord's coming is near, even at the door.

An expanded translation of Paul's closing words would read as follows: "To which end also we are praying always for you, namely, that our God will count you worthy of the station in life to which he has called you, and fulfill every delight (you Thessalonian saints have) in goodness, and every work that finds its source in faith with power, in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you



in Him in accordance with the grace of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul prayed that every Christian would be found faithful. His prayer was that the Thessalonian converts would be counted worthy of God to that station in life to which the Lord had called them. That group of Christians had been placed in circumstances where they were called upon to suffer for His Name. From Paul's previous words, those saints could know this to be a most honorable calling.

### True Fulfillment

The Thessalonian Christians had found delight, and satisfaction, and fulfillment, in serving the Lord under those most difficult circumstances. And Paul's prayer was that God would fulfill every delight that these Christians had “in goodness, and in every work that finds its source in faith with power.”

Paul was not praying that God would fulfill every *carnal* delight of these who, through faith, were the Lord's own. Rather, he was praying that God would fulfill every delight *that comes from a life and testimony lived in obedience to the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ*. These Christians had been stationed in a place of service. Paul was praying that they would serve well in spreading the Gospel to those who were still the bondslaves of Satan and who were also their persecutors. He was praying that God would fulfill their delight “in goodness (that is, in righteous living), and every work that finds its source in faith with power.” Those works of service are the “gold, silver, and precious stones” in the superstructure which the Christian erects “upon that one foundation, which is Christ Jesus.” I Corinthians 3:11,12. Those works of service are the works that our Lord Jesus Christ can reward at His judgment seat (the “bema seat”) in heaven when He has called His bride home to His Father's house.

These works were to be accomplished in order “that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you (in all

Christians) and you (all Christians) in Him." These works are not done in the Christian's own strength. They are accomplished "in accordance with the grace of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ." He who is God is the dispenser of the grace of God.

Christians await "God's Payday" at the Judgment Seat of our Lord Jesus Christ. That payday is to come immediately after the rapture of the church.

But the unsaved of the world await God's Payday at the time of the Lord's return in power and glory. "The wages of sin is death," and those wages are to be paid by the "Heavenly Paymaster."

**The End**