

Paul clearly assumed knowledge on their part of the lordship and deity of Christ (I Thess 1:1, 8; 2:4,6; 3:2) and described God as their Father (I Thess 1:1, 3; 2:11) who had chosen and called them (I Thess. 1:4; 2:12) to salvation in Christ (I Thess 5:9). The same themes are present in II Thessalonians as well.

The doctrine most developed in both epistles is, of course, that of the Parousia, or Second Coming, of the Lord ("parousia" means "coming" or "presence"). In both letters this discussion grows out of a practical concern or question from the Thessalonian congregation. Some of the Christians had died since Paul's visit; the survivors were concerned that the deceased would miss some spiritual blessings at the resurrection (4:13). Paul therefore described the events of the Second Coming (4:15-17), emphasizing that the dead in Christ will rise first (4:16). He warns them of the suddenness of the Day of the Lord (5:1-5) using languages much like that of Jesus. Paul borrows prophetic imagery of the Day of the Lord as a day of wrath (see Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-15; Mal. 3:2-5; 4:1, 5), contrasting the fate of the wicked with the hope of the godly.

In II Thessalonians Paul responds to the fears of the Thessalonians that they had missed the parousia (2:1-2). He here outlines events before the Parousia to remind them that some things must happen first (2:3-12). His assumption of what he had already told them makes this a difficult passage to interpret and is one reason for its cryptic nature.

Some scholars see a conflict between the eschatological outlook of these two epistles, saying that I Thessalonians describes Christ's return as coming at any moment, but II Thessalonians says that some events must come first and it will, therefore, not be sudden. This is a confusion of immediacy with suddenness. Some events must take place first; Christ's return, however, will be as sudden and unexpected as the coming of a thief in the night.

#### Questions:

Are these epistles in the correct order as they stand in the New Testament? Why does Paul use such extensive apocalyptic imagery in II Thessalonians and nowhere else? Who is the "man of lawlessness"? Who or what is "holding him back"?

#### Archaeology:

Thessalonica was founded by Cassander and named for his wife, half-sister of Alexander the Great (c. 315 BC). It became the leading city of the second district of