

GLENN S. HOLLAND

The Tradition that You Received from Us: 2 Thessalonians in the Pauline Tradition

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The Tradition that You Received from Us: 2 Thessalonians in the Pauline Tradition

by
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There are two reasons why things written are not understood: they are obscured either by unknown or by ambiguous signs.

Augustine

De doctrina christiana 2. 10. 15

Preface

This study was originally a dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in June, 1986. I would like to express my gratitude to Hans Dieter Betz, who served as dissertation advisor and was always generous with his time, his encyclopedic knowledge, and his acute insights. Thanks are also due to the other members of the dissertation committee, Robert M. Grant and Arthur Droge, who provided many helpful suggestions and words of encouragement. Jerald C. Brauer, Jon Levenson, and Frank Reynolds gave impetus to this work in its earlier stages, while Adela Yarbro Collins made several valuable suggestions as it neared completion. To them my thanks, as also to Donald A. Sykes and Rex Mason, David E. Aune, Karl P. Donfried, Donald Dale Walker, and my colleagues at Allegheny College.

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December 1986

Glenn Holland

Table of Contents

Preface	VII
Introduction	1
 I. Rhetorical Analysis and Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians	 6
1. Epistolary Prescript 1:1-2	34
2. Exordium 1:3-4	35
3. Narratio 1:5-12	37
4. Probatio 2:1-17	43
5. Exhortatio 3:1-13	50
6. Peroratio 3:14-16	54
7. Epistolary Postscript 3:17-18	57
 II. A Comparison of Material in 1 and 2 Thessalonians	 59
1. Epistolary Prescript 1:1-2	60
2. Exordium 1:3-4	61
3. Narratio 1:5-12	63
4. Probatio 2:1-17	67
5. Exhortatio 3:1-13	73
6. Peroratio 3:14-16	77
7. Epistolary Postscript 3:17-18	77
 III. The Eschatology of 2 Thessalonians	 91
 IV. 2 Thessalonians in the Pauline Tradition	 129
 Select Bibliography	 159
Index of Passages	163
Index of Authors	173
Index of Subjects	175

Introduction

Our purpose is to find the place of 2 Thessalonians in the Pauline tradition. This is the movement of theological thought represented in the New Testament by the letters written either by Paul or by those who considered themselves his followers. In the case of 2 Thessalonians, the situation is complicated by the similarities between 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, similarities which, taken with other considerations, have led some scholars to doubt the Pauline authorship of the second letter. Both Bédá Rigaux¹ and Wolfgang Trilling² have traced the history of the theory of the pseudepigraphic nature of 2 Thessalonians, and we shall therefore only sketch it in here. The authenticity of the apocalyptic scenario found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 was the first question to be raised, in 1798 by Johann Ernst Christian Schmidt; he believed that its eschatology was inconsistent with that of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. Friedrich Heinrich Kern, in 1839, brought the authenticity of the whole letter into question on essentially the same grounds. Various scholars believed that the apocalyptic scenario had clear affinities with the book of Revelation, the legend of Nero *revidivus*, and echoes of the threat of gnosticism, which placed it later than the time of Paul. A new chapter in the interpretation of the letter was begun by the work of William Wrede in 1903³. Wrede undertook a comparative analysis of 1 and 2 Thessalonians and reached the conclusion that the second letter was dependent upon the first for its literary form and expression, and yet different from it in other respects, and thus had to be a forgery. Wrede effectively determined the basis on which the debate about authenticity is still carried on. The great majority of commentators on the Thessalonian correspondence still defended the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. In Germany, Ernst von Dobschütz's influential entry in the Meyer commentary series defended the Pauline authorship of the letter

¹ Bédá Rigaux, *Saint Paul: les épîtres aux Thessaloniciens*, Études Bibliques (Paris/Gembloux: Librairie LeCoffre/Éditions J. Duculot, 1956), pp. 124–32.

² Wolfgang Trilling, *Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief*, Erfurter Theologische Studien, vol. 27 (Leipzig: St. Benno, 1972), pp. 11–45.

³ William Wrede, *Die Echtheit des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur (Leipzig: I.C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1903).

(1909), as did the excellent English commentary by George Milligan (1908) and James Everett Frame's contribution to the International Critical Commentary series (1912). The magisterial commentary of Béda Rigaux in 1956 again defended Paul's authorship, but the next year saw the publication of one of the few commentaries promoting deuterio-Pauline authorship, that of Charles Masson. Wolfgang Trilling undertook a major reinvestigation of the question of authenticity in his *Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief* (1972)⁴, and wrote a commentary on the letter that provides an exegesis of its problems on the assumption of deuterio-Pauline authorship (1980). The question has continued to be debated and any consensus appears to be as unlikely as at any time since Wrede's study in 1903. Any attempt to place the letter within the Pauline tradition, therefore, must take into account the relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians which, in turn, will affect other decisions about authorship.

But how is the relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians best to be investigated? That a literary relationship of some kind exists is not open to question⁵. As Ernest Best put it briefly, "There is a great similarity between the two; this is not only of words, small phrases and concepts but extends to the total structure of the two letters which is in addition different from what is taken to be the standard Pauline form"⁶. The problem then is, how best to account for this literary relationship? There are four proposed solutions, three assuming Pauline authorship and the fourth assuming another writer. The first is that Paul wrote both 1 and 2 Thessalonians within a very short time, and that in the second letter he unconsciously imitated the ideas and phrasing of the first⁷. The second is that Paul wrote both letters and had a copy of the first before him as he composed the second, so that he consciously reworked some ideas and phrases of the first letter in the second⁸. The third is that Paul wrote both letters, but that 2 Thessalonians was actually addressed to another

⁴ Trilling, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 11–45.

⁵ This was demonstrated clearly by the analysis of Wrede, *Die Echtheit*.

⁶ Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 37.

⁷ Gottlieb Lünemann, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, trans. Paton J. Gloag, Meyer Commentary (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1884), pp. 169–73; Wilhelm Bornemann, *Die Thessalonicherbriefe*, Meyer Kommentar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1894), pp. 324–26; George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), LXXX–LXXXV; Ernst von Dobschütz, *Die Thessalonicher-Briefe*, Meyer Kommentar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1909), pp. 31–49; Rigaux, *Saint Paul*, pp. 149–52; Best, *Thessalonians*, pp. 50–58.

⁸ This opinion is represented by Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. M. W. Jacobus, 2d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), pp. 249–50.

congregation or that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were addressed to two different parts of the same congregation⁹. The fourth solution is that 2 Thessalonians is the product of a later author who consciously imitated the language and style of 1 Thessalonians¹⁰.

In any of these theories, however, there are two separate tasks which must be performed to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion about the relationship between the two letters. The first is an exegesis of 2 Thessalonians in its own right, the second a comparison of 2 Thessalonians with 1 Thessalonians, based upon their common material.

The first of these steps, however, already poses a problem: what does it mean to undertake a study of 2 Thessalonians "in its own right?" There is no denying the influence, conscious or unconscious, of the text of 1 Thessalonians upon that of 2 Thessalonians. It might be argued that ignoring the influence in an attempt at an "independent" exegesis would be as dubious an enterprise as undertaking an exegesis of Matthew while ignoring the influence of Mark. Indeed, most of the exegetical work concerned with 2 Thessalonians has assumed the influence of 1 Thessalonians. That is, under the theory of common Pauline authorship, 2 Thessalonians has been interpreted in the light of 1 Thessalonians; it was assumed that it was entirely proper to make the interpretation of the second letter compatible with (and thus dependent on) the interpretation of the first. Such an exegesis of course tended to reinforce the presupposition upon which it was based, and the majority of commentators have supported the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians. On the other hand, the few exegetical studies of 2 Thessalonians not based upon the assumption of Pauline authorship have been primarily concerned with finding points of apparent disagreement between the two letters, thereby confirming the presumption of another author¹¹. Such an approach, controlled by an assumption of discontinuity between the two letters, is also not conducive to an objective analysis. Both approaches create a form of circular reasoning,

⁹ The first solution is offered by Eduard Schweizer, "Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief ein Philipperbrief?", *Theologische Zeitschrift* 1 (1945): 286–89; the second solution is offered by Adolf von Harnack, "Das Problem des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs", *Sitzungsbericht der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophische-historische Klasse* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1910), pp. 560–78; Martin Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I, II, an die Philipper*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 11, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1937), pp. 57–58.

¹⁰ Wrede, *Die Echtheit*, pp. 34–36; Charles Masson, *Les deux épîtres de Saint Paul aux Thessaloniens*, Commentaire du Nouveau Testament 11 a, (Neuchâtel/Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1957), pp. 9–13; Trilling, *Untersuchungen*, p. 132.

¹¹ An example is the exegesis of Wolfgang Trilling, *Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher*, Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 14 (Zürich/Neukirchen: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1980).

and thereby point up the fragility of an exegesis of 2 Thessalonians based upon a particular presumption of its relationship to 1 Thessalonians.

Is it possible, then, to interpret 2 Thessalonians "in its own right?" The very fact of the existence of the letter argues that it is possible. The author, either Paul or some other, felt it necessary to write the letter to convey information not present in 1 Thessalonians. The letter must make sense in and of itself. It appears that the second letter addresses a different situation than the first, perhaps a situation which arose out of a misunderstanding of 1 Thessalonians. In any event, the new situation can be discerned only through a proper exegesis of 2 Thessalonians. The use of phrases or ideas from 1 Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians does not necessarily influence the meaning of the latter letter; indeed, 2 Thessalonians appears to be a re-presentation of the material of 1 Thessalonians intended to clarify that material as it relates to a new situation. But in either case, the second letter provides an interpretative explanation (indeed, possibly the first interpretative explanation) of 1 Thessalonians¹². Just as a commentary provides a particular understanding of a given book of the Bible, so 2 Thessalonians, by its use of the material of 1 Thessalonians, provides a particular understanding of that book, whether that of Paul himself or of some other writer. 2 Thessalonians, whoever its author, is one of the earliest extant commentaries on one of Paul's letters.

It should be clear, then, that a proper exegesis of 2 Thessalonians will also clarify its author's understanding of 1 Thessalonians and can form the basis for examining the relationship between the two letters. It is also clear that such an exegesis must be undertaken without any regard for "consistency" or "inconsistency" in relation to 1 Thessalonians or its supposed meaning. It is this work of exegesis which will constitute the first three chapters of this monograph.

The basis for this work of exegesis will be a rhetorical analysis of 2 Thessalonians. Hans Dieter Betz has demonstrated that "Paul's letter to the Galatians can be analyzed according to Greco-Roman rhetoric and epistolography"¹³, and others have applied this method with varying degrees of success¹⁴. The

¹² Cf. the remark of Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 2:131; although we would not endorse his view of the function of the second letter in regard to the first, we would agree with his general view, "in a certain sense 2 Thessalonians is a commentary on 1 Thessalonians."

¹³ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 14.

¹⁴ George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), offers an analysis of 1 Thessalonians (pp. 142-44); of the second letter he says only "second Thessalonians resembles 1 Thessalonians but is much shorter and omits the narration" (p. 144). Robert Jewett proposed a rhetorical analysis of both letters in "The Thessalonian Church as a Millenarian Movement", a paper presented to the Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation Consultation at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature, 8-11 December 1984,

fact that 2 Thessalonians can be shown to conform to the rules of rhetorical composition should cause no surprise. Paul was clearly familiar with these rules¹⁵, and any other who wished to imitate his style would of necessity be familiar with them as well. While it is true that the conventions of composition in the ancient world might vitiate some of the similarities between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they also remove some of the difficulties another author would have faced in imitating Paul's "style".

The first chapter of this study will be devoted first of all to a rhetorical analysis of 2 Thessalonians, and second to an exegesis of the letter based upon that analysis. The second chapter will investigate the relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians on the basis of the earlier analysis and exegesis and will also be concerned with the question of authorship. The third chapter will be devoted to the apocalyptic material in the letter, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 and 2:1-12. There are several major exegetical problems presented specifically by the apocalyptic scenario of 2:1-12, and these will be investigated at that point. The fourth and last chapter will be devoted to the problem of placing 2 Thessalonians within the larger context of the New Testament literature and more specifically within the Pauline tradition. It is hoped that the conclusions will prove enlightening not just to the study of the legacy of Paul in the early church, but to an entire movement within the church of the late first century.

in Chicago. He divided the letter as follows: 1. *Exordium*, 1:1-12; 2. *Propositio*, 2:1-2; 3. *Probatio*, 2:3-3:5; 4. *Exhortatio*, 3:6-15; 5. *Peroratio*, 3:16-18. Both Kennedy and Jewett have overlooked the significance of ἐνδεῖγμα (1:5) as an indication of the rhetorical division of the letter. Jewett has also interpreted the thanksgiving concluding the *probatio* (2:13-17) as a second proof, because he has misconstrued the meaning of the false proclamation and taken the general subject of the *probatio* (parousia and in-gathering) as its specific subject (compare our analysis in chap. 1). He does not recognize 3:14-15 as part of the "summation" common to the *peroratio*. He also makes 3:17-18 a part of the rhetorical argument, when its inclusion is (1) related to the conventions of letters (as is that of the prescript, 1:1-2), not those of rhetoric, and (2) a device related to pseudepigraphy.

¹⁵ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, pp. 9-10; Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 14-15.

Chapter I

Rhetorical Analysis and Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians

The particular species of rhetoric found in 2 Thessalonians is deliberative. It is intended to persuade the readers to choose a particular course of action¹, in this case to “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught” (2:15a). The elements of deliberative rhetoric are exhortation and dissuasion, “since the exhorter advises a thing as being better, and the dissuader opposes it as being worse”². In the case of 2 Thessalonians, the author exhorts the readers to obey the Pauline tradition so that there may be “peace” (3:14–16) and dissuades them from heeding the false proclamation that “the Day of the Lord is here” (2:1–2).

An analysis of the rhetorical composition of 2 Thessalonians will illustrate the argument of the letter and will serve as the basis for exegetical comment. It is not our intention to provide a commentary on 2 Thessalonians but rather to understand the intentions of the author, the nature of the doctrine he promulgates, and his own perception of the function of the letter. Because of our concern with the relationship between 2 and 1 Thessalonians, such an analysis also provides an opportunity for schematic arrangement of the material in 1 Thessalonians parallel to similar material in 2 Thessalonians. By arranging the parallel material according to a compositional outline of 2 Thessalonians, the repetition of material from 1 Thessalonians and its use in particular parts of the argument of the second letter will be made clear. It will be seen that the author of 2 Thessalonians used the first letter selectively and referred several times to the same parts when it served his purpose.

Therefore our compositional analysis of 2 Thessalonians will be divided into four columns. The first column will present the analysis in outline, the second, the text of 2 Thessalonians arranged according to the corresponding categories of the analysis. The third column will present the parallel material in 1 Thessalonians, specifically the parallels that appear in proximate position

¹ Aristotle, *Ars rhetorica* 1. 1358b; Jonathan A. Goldstein, *The Letters of Demosthenes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 100–7.

² Aristotle, *Ars rhetorica* 1. 1358b.

in that letter as its parallels in 2 Thessalonians; and the fourth column will present thematic parallels in 1 Thessalonians and parallels in other parts of 2 Thessalonians itself³.

³ Wrede, *Die Echtheit*, pp. 4–12, undertakes a demonstration of the similarities between 1 and 2 Thessalonians by use of parallel columns. Our analysis includes the rhetorical analysis and secondary parallels, but of course incorporates Wrede's parallels as well.

I. Epistolary Prescript 1:1-2		
1:1	A. Name of the principal sender	Παῦλος καὶ
	B. Names of the co-senders	Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος
	C. Naming of the addressees	
	1. Definition of their organization	τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ
	2. Description of its nature	
	a. Ethno-political affiliation	Θεσσαλονικέων
	b. Religious affiliation	ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ
1:2	D. Salutation	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
II. Exordium 1:3-4		
	A. Description of an act of thanksgiving	
1:3	1. Thanksgiving formula	εὐχαριστεῖν
	2. Statement of obligation	ὀφείλομεν
	3. One addressed in thanksgiving	τῷ θεῷ
	4. Appropriate time of thanksgiving	πάντοτε
	5. Object of thanksgiving	περὶ ὑμῶν
	6. Address	ἀδελφοί
	7. Liturgical statement of obligation	καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν
	8. Reason for thanksgiving: virtues displayed	ὅτι
	a. First virtue displayed	
	1) Evidence of increase	ὑπεραυξάνει
	2) Virtue	ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν
	b. Second virtue displayed	
	1) Evidence of increase	καὶ πλεονάζει

Παῦλος
καὶ
Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος

τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ

Θεσσαλονικέων

ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ [ἡμῶν] καὶ
κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ
χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη
[ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν
καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ
Χριστοῦ] (1:1)

εὐχαριστοῦμεν

τῷ θεῷ

πάντοτε

περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν (1:2a)

ἡμεῖς δὲ ὀφείλομεν εὐχαριστεῖν
τῷ θεῷ

πάντοτε

περὶ ὑμῶν

ἄδελφοὶ (2 Thess. 2:13a)

μνημονεύοντες
ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως
καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης (1:3a)
ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι
καὶ περισσεύσαι

* “Primary” denotes a parallel in the same or proximate location in both 1 and 2 Thessalonians, or the probable primary reference of the author of 2 Thessalonians. Other parallels appear in the fourth column.

	2) Virtue	ἡ ἀγάπη
	3) By whom displayed	ἐνὸς ἐκάστου πάντων ὑμῶν
	4) Towards whom displayed (subject = object)	εἰς ἀλλήλους
	B. Description of an act of boasting	
1:4	1. (Re-)identification of actor	ὥστε αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς
	2. Object of action	ἐν ὑμῖν
	3. Action	ἐγκαινᾶσθαι
	4. Persons addressed	ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ
	5. Content of boast: virtue displayed	ὕπερ
	a. First virtue	τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν
	b. Second virtue	καὶ πίστεως
	c. First circumstance	ἐν πάσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν
	d. Second circumstance	καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἷς ἀνέχεσθε
	III. Narratio: Episode in the Last Judgment 1:5-12	
	A. Evaluation of the narrative	
1:5	1. Type of narrative	ἐνδειγμα
	2. Topic	τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ
	3. Examination of the verdict	
	a. Purpose: action towards Thessalonians	εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι
	b. Direct object	ὑμᾶς
	c. Indirect object	τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπερ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε
	d. Affirmation of the righteousness of the verdict by appeal to the <i>lex talionis</i>	
1:6	1) Affirmative conditional	εἴπερ
	2) Principle of retribution	δίκαιον παρὰ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι
	a) Negative result	τοῖς θλιβουσιν ὑμᾶς θλίψιν
1:7	b) Positive result	καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς θλιβομένοις ἄνεσιν
	c) Result of solidarity with "Paul"	μεθ' ἡμῶν

Index of Passages

Hebrew Bible

<i>Genesis</i>			2,12-17	97
6,5-7	123		2,19	38n, 86, 92
16,9-11	112n		2,21	38n, 86, 92
18,1-33	112		6,9-10	148
22,11-12	112n		13,1-22	97
			13,10	135
<i>Exodus</i>			34,1-17	97
4,21	148		34,4	135
10,20	148		40,1-2	38
10,27	148		61,1-3	97
11,9	148		66,4	38n
11,10	148		66,15	38n
14,8	148		66,16	92
14,17	148			
14,19	112n		<i>Jeremiah</i>	
14,20	112n		6,14	137
			8,11	137
<i>Numbers</i>			10,25	38n, 92
22,34	112n		23,11	137
			23,13-17	137
<i>Judges</i>			23,18	111
6,19	112n		23,21-22	137
6,20	112n		23,22	111
			23,25-32	137
<i>1 Samuel</i>			25,11-12	133
20,31	107n		29,10	133
<i>Job</i>			<i>Lamentations</i>	
33,19-30	38		1,12	97, 98
			2,1	97, 98
<i>Psalms</i>			2,1-22	120
67,36	38n		2,21-22	97, 98
79,5-7	38n			
88,8	38n		<i>Ezekiel</i>	
			7,1-27	97
<i>Proverbs</i>			13,10	137
3,11-12	38		30,1-9	97
			32,7-8	135
<i>Isaiah</i>				
2,10	38n, 86, 92		<i>Daniel</i>	
2,11	38n		7,1-9	133

7,13-14 135
 9,1-3 133
 9,20-27 133
 9,27 138
 10,13 122
 10,18-11,1 112
 10,20-21 113n; 122
 11,30 136
 11,31 136, 138
 11,36 107
 11,36-12,1 123
 11,37 107
 12,1 37n
 12,9-13 110n
 12,11 138

Joel

2,10 135
 2,12-17 97
 2,15-29 121, 127
 2,18-32 97
 2,31 135
 3,4 137

3,15 135
 3,17-21 127

Amos

5,18-20 96-7

Obadiah

15-21 97

Zephaniah

1,7-18 97
 2,1-3 97, 121, 127
 3,8-10 127

Zechariah

3,1-10 111
 14,1-21 97
 14,5 92,145
 14,6-21 127

Malachi

3,13-4,6 97

New Testament

Matthew

1,20-21 112n
 2,19-20 112n
 5,4 93n
 5,10-12 36n, 93n
 7,21-23 94n
 10,16-22 93n, 135, 141
 10,18 141
 10,22 51n, 75
 10,34-39 93n
 13,21 36n
 13,36-43 94n
 16,28 132n, 142
 19,30 93n
 20,16 93n
 20,25-28 93n
 24,4 118, 135, 141
 24,5 135, 136, 137, 140, 141
 24,5-9 135, 136
 24,6 135, 141
 24,7 141
 24,8 141
 24,9 137
 24,9-12 136

24,10 136, 137, 140, 141
 24,11 135, 136, 137, 140, 141
 24,12 136, 140, 141
 24,13 136, 140, 141
 24,14 136, 140, 141
 24,15 135, 136, 141
 24,15-24 137
 24,21 37n, 39n, 135, 141
 24,22 136, 137
 24,23 135, 137, 140
 24,23-26 135
 24,24 118, 135, 136, 137, 140, 141,
 147
 24,25 136
 24,26 135, 137, 138, 140, 141
 24,27 98, 136, 138, 140, 141
 24,28 98, 138, 140, 141
 24,29 135, 136, 137, 139, 141
 24,30 135, 136, 137, 141
 24,31 95, 135, 136, 137, 141
 24,32 136
 24,33 136
 24,34 132n, 136, 142
 24,39 71

25,1-13	94n	16,25	93n
25,31-46	93n, 94n	17,24	98, 140
28,19	141	17,37	140
		21,32	132n
<i>Mark</i>		21,34-35	71
4,10-12	148	21,36	109
9,1	132n, 142	23,42-43	94n
10,31	93n		
13,4	109	<i>John</i>	
13,5	118, 135, 138, 141	1,1	47n
13,6	134, 135, 136, 141	4,1	82
13,6-13	134	6,70	107
13,7	134, 135, 136, 141	15,27	47n
13,8	134, 135, 136, 141	17,12	107
13,9	134, 135, 138	19,35	142, 143
13,9-13	137, 141	21,20-23	132n, 139, 142, 157
13,10	134, 135, 138	21,22	143
13,12	134	21,23	142, 143
13,13	51n, 75, 134, 135, 136, 138, 140, 141	21,24	142, 143
13,14	135, 136, 138		
13,14-18	135	<i>Acts</i>	
13,14-23	134, 135, 137, 139	2,20	137
13,19	37n, 47n, 135, 141	2,22	116, 122
13,20	135, 136, 137	12,24	73
13,21	135, 139, 141		
13,22	118, 135, 136, 139, 141	<i>Romans</i>	
13,23	110n, 135, 138, 139, 140, 141	1,7	67
13,24	135, 136, 139	1,8	36n
13,24-27	98, 137, 141	1,8-15	153
13,25	135, 136	1,13	153
13,26	135, 136	1,18	110, 119, 149
13,27	95, 135, 136	1,18-32	149, 150, 151
13,28-31	136	1,21	103n, 149
13,29	109, 139	1,22	149
13,30	109, 132n, 139, 142	1,23	149
13,31	139	1,24	110, 119, 149
13,32-37	139	1,25	119, 149
13,35	138	1,26	110, 149
13,36	138	1,27	149
13,37	138	1,28	149
		1,29-32	149
<i>Luke</i>		1,32	88, 103n, 122, 149
1,11-13	112n	2,1-2	103n
1,19-20	112n	2,5	102
1,26-30	112n	2,5-16	104
4,21	96	2,12-16	107
6,21	93n	2,16	102
6,25-26	93n	2,17-24	103n
9,27	132n	3,3-4	51
12,39-40	103	3,21-28	134n
13,23-30	94n	3,24	49n
13,30	93n	4,16	49n
		5,1-2	94n
		5,1-11	134n

5,2 49n
 5,3 36n
 5,3-5 93n
 6,1-11 134n
 8,1-11 134n
 8,2-10 78
 8,14-17 103
 8,31-39 94n
 8,35 36n
 10,19-21 103n
 12,1-21 43
 12,12 36n
 13,1-7 111
 13,2 111
 13,11-14 104
 13,12 104
 14,6 101n
 14,8-9 101n
 15,17-29 138
 15,19 117
 15,33 85n
 16,1 34n
 16,3-13 101n
 16,4 34n
 16,5 34n
 16,16 34n
 16,20 85n

1 Corinthians

1,1-3 61
 1,2 34
 1,3 67
 1,4-9 36n
 1,7 101
 1,8 101, 127
 1,9 85n
 1,26 42
 2,1-5 45
 2,6-8 105n, 113n
 2,8 101n
 3,16 103n
 4,4-5 101n
 5,5 102
 5,6 103n
 6,2 103n
 6,3 103n
 6,9 103n
 6,13-14 101n
 6,15 103n
 6,15-17 101n
 6,16 103n
 6,19 103n
 7,10 86
 7,20 42

8,7 86
 9,24-27 50
 10,1-13 153
 10,13 85n
 10,31-11,1 43
 11,1 53, 75
 11,2 86
 11,2-16 86
 11,16 34n
 11,17 86
 11,18 34n
 11,22 34n
 11,23 86
 13,1-13 61
 13,13 88
 14,33 85n
 15,3 86
 15,10 49n
 15,12-28 134n
 15,12-58 109
 15,20-28 94n, 105n
 15,23 105n
 15,24 105n
 15,26 105n
 15,35-57 109, 132
 15,51 109, 114
 15,51-55 109, 153
 16,21 57, 89

2 Corinthians

1,1 35
 1,1-2 61
 1,2 67
 1,3-7 36n, 93n
 1,14 101, 127
 4,16-17 36n
 6,2 96
 6,14-15 115n
 8,1-5 37
 9,2 37
 10,7-8 101n
 11,2 41, 103, 104
 11,23-33 93n
 12,11-18 53
 12,12 116, 122
 13,11 85n, 86

Galatians

1,6 49n
 1,6-9 35n
 1,13 34n, 67
 1,14 86
 1,19 101n
 1,22 34n

2,2	50	2,2	63
2,14	38	2,5	63
3,13-14	134	2,7	29, 76
3,26-29	134	2,9	29, 63, 76
5,2	89	2,10	63
5,7	50	2,11	62, 63, 65, 66, 76
5,13-25	78	2,12	11, 15, 23, 31, 63, 65, 66, 72, 76, 79, 81, 85
6,9-10	54	2,13	21, 23, 29, 47, 64, 71, 72, 75, 79, 83, 89
6,11	57, 89	2,13-16	72
<i>Ephesians</i>		2,14	62, 64, 93n, 150
1,18	42	2,15	27, 64, 74
4,4	42	2,16	27, 64, 71, 74
<i>Philippians</i>		2,19	11, 19, 41, 65, 71, 74
1,3-11	36n	2,20	41
1,6	101	3,1-5	69, 70
1,9-11	103	3,2	25, 68, 70
1,10	101	3,3	68, 81, 93n, 150
1,14	73	3,4	19, 29, 68, 70, 76, 93n, 150
1,19-23	94n	3,6	64
2,16	50, 101, 102, 104	3,7	23, 64, 72
2,29	101n	3,8	23, 64, 72
3,1	101n	3,11	25, 27, 73, 74, 86
4,4-5	101n	3,12	11, 19, 62, 70, 73, 74
4,9	85n, 86	3,13	13, 17, 19, 21, 27, 41, 65, 70, 71, 73, 74, 78n, 79, 85, 87
4,10	101n	4,1	25, 27, 29, 31, 67, 68, 73, 74, 75, 79, 80
4,15	47n	4,1-12	74
<i>Colossians</i>		4,2	19, 70, 74, 87
1,18	47n	4,3	64, 121
4,18	58, 77	4,3-8	150
<i>1 Thessalonians</i>		4,4	121
1,1	9, 34, 35, 61, 67, 80, 83	4,5	13, 64, 81
1,2	9, 13, 23, 61, 62, 65, 83, 89	4,7	23, 72, 87, 121
1,2-10	36n, 47, 63, 72	4,8	121
1,3	9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 27, 42, 62, 63, 64, 66, 74, 78n, 79, 81	4,11	31, 76, 86
1,4	11, 23, 64, 81, 85	4,13	109
1,4-7	93n	4,13-18	1, 44, 64, 65, 68, 69, 70, 71, 80, 81, 85, 92, 94n, 95, 96, 103, 109, 132, 136, 150, 152, 153
1,5	11, 13, 21, 23, 63, 64, 71, 79, 81	4,14	15
1,5-2,16	63	4,15	73, 101n, 103, 109
1,5-3,13	79	4,16	13, 15, 17, 70, 80, 85, 101n, 109
1,6	11, 29, 63, 64, 75, 80, 101n	4,17	13, 15, 80, 85, 101n, 109, 135
1,7	11, 13, 62, 64, 80, 81	4,18	85
1,8	11, 25, 27, 62, 73	5,1	15, 19, 69, 70, 150
1,9	11, 23, 62, 64, 134n	5,1-11	1, 44, 64, 69, 70, 71, 73, 80, 81, 85, 92, 100, 150, 152
1,10	11, 13, 17, 27, 63, 64, 65, 70, 73, 74, 79, 85, 105, 121, 134n	5,2	17, 69, 85, 103, 104, 150
2,1	29, 63, 75		
2,1-12	64, 153		

5,3	17, 69, 71, 81, 85, 103, 104, 137	1,11	12, 14, 37, 40, 41, 42, 63, 65, 66, 67, 78n, 81, 87, 89, 111, 119, 121
5,4	69, 103, 121	1,12	14, 25, 27, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 48, 50, 63, 65, 66, 85, 89, 111
5,4-7	103, 104, 120, 121	2,1	6, 14, 35, 39, 44, 48, 65, 68, 70, 72, 99, 136, 158
5,5	69, 121	2,1-7	46
5,6	121	2,1-12	1, 5, 37, 52, 54, 56, 63, 69, 70, 94, 105, 106, 118, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 129
5,8	25, 104, 120, 133	2,2	6, 13, 14, 16, 23, 35, 44, 48, 49, 55, 56, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 81, 99, 100, 104, 118, 120, 135, 137, 141, 151, 152, 158
5,9	21, 23, 69, 71, 72, 80, 105	2,3	16, 44, 45, 52, 56, 67, 69, 100, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117, 118, 122, 124, 135, 136, 141, 143, 149, 157
5,11	85	2,4	16, 45, 100, 107, 108, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117, 119, 122, 124, 136, 141, 157
5,12	15, 31, 65, 68, 77, 82, 150	2,5	18, 45, 68-69, 70, 100, 109, 135
5,12-28	80	2,6	18, 45, 100, 106, 110, 112, 113, 122, 125, 141, 149
5,13	31, 77, 82, 150	2,7	18, 45, 70, 71, 74, 100, 106, 107, 112, 113, 122, 141, 143, 149
5,14	27, 29, 31, 52, 56, 75, 76, 77, 80, 82, 150, 153	2,8	18, 45, 65, 71, 74, 100, 107, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 124, 136, 141, 147
5,19	82, 150	2,9	20, 100, 106, 107, 109, 114, 115, 116, 117, 119, 122, 124, 135, 141, 147
5,20	82, 150	2,9-12	47, 56, 71, 141
5,21	82, 150	2,10	20, 23, 71, 106, 107, 114, 117, 118, 119, 135, 157
5,22	150	2,10-12	52, 71, 74, 85, 124, 136
5,23	21, 31, 33, 71, 72, 77, 80, 85	2,11	20, 23, 46, 48, 71, 88, 111, 114, 118, 119, 122, 124, 125, 149, 150, 157
5,24	74, 85	2,12	20, 23, 46, 47, 56, 71, 88, 111, 114, 118, 119, 122, 124, 125, 125, 149, 150, 157
5,25	25, 73	2,13	9, 22, 46, 47, 72, 81, 83, 85, 87, 88, 89, 111, 119, 121, 123, 72
5,26	33, 80, 89	2,13-17	72
5,28	33, 77, 80	2,14	22, 46, 72, 81, 111, 119, 121, 150
<i>2 Thessalonians</i>		2,15	6, 22, 31, 37, 39, 52, 53, 55, 66, 68, 72, 86, 87, 143, 149, 151, 152, 153, 157, 158
1,1	8, 34, 35, 80, 83		
1,2	8, 15, 61, 80, 83		
1,3	8, 10, 15, 23, 36, 37, 39, 41, 46, 61, 62, 70, 72, 83, 84, 87, 88, 89		
1,4	10, 36, 37, 39, 41, 42, 61, 62, 68, 70, 81, 87, 88, 113, 121, 130, 150		
1,5	10, 15, 38, 39, 63, 85, 93, 121, 124		
1,5-10	5, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 63, 64, 68, 69, 70, 84, 92, 94, 95, 97, 121, 123, 124, 125, 126, 129		
1,6	10, 36, 39, 43, 63, 64, 71, 85, 93, 113, 118, 121, 124, 125, 150		
1,7	10, 12, 21, 38, 39, 40, 41, 57, 63, 65, 70, 85, 93, 94, 102, 104, 113, 123, 124, 125, 147, 149, 150, 157		
1,8	12, 21, 39, 41, 43, 64, 65, 70, 74, 81, 85, 93, 94, 98, 115, 118, 121, 123, 124, 147, 149, 157		
1,9	12, 39, 41, 42, 48, 64, 65, 85, 93, 94, 98, 118, 123, 147, 157		
1,10	12, 15, 37, 39, 40, 41, 44, 50, 57, 64, 65, 66, 68, 85, 93, 94, 96, 98, 102, 104, 123, 147, 157		

2,16	24, 37, 39, 49, 51, 73, 75, 86, 119	<i>1 John</i>	
2,17	24, 27, 37, 39, 51, 73, 119, 121	1,1	47n
3,1	24, 26, 73, 80	1,5-7	143
3,1-5	73, 86, 99n	1,8	143
3,1-13	126	1,10	143
3,2	26, 73, 74, 87	2,3-6	143
3,3	26, 37, 74, 78n, 85, 87	2,9-11	143
3,4	26, 37, 54, 74, 87, 115	2,15-17	143
3,5	26, 37, 51, 74, 119, 121	2,18	143
3,6	26, 28, 35, 49, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 75, 77, 86, 87, 115, 143, 147, 149, 151, 157	2,18-25	143
3,6-12	39, 52, 54, 55, 56, 63, 75, 76, 86, 143, 147, 149, 157	2,19	143
3,7	28, 49, 53, 75, 151, 153	2,21	115
3,8	28, 49, 53, 76, 151, 153	2,22	115, 143
3,9	28, 49, 53, 76, 151, 153	2,23	115
3,10	28, 53, 76, 87, 150, 151, 153	2,26	143
3,11	28, 30, 52, 55, 76, 77, 82, 150	3,4-10	143
3,12	30, 53, 54, 55, 75, 76, 77, 87, 99n, 147, 150, 151, 153	3,7	143
3,13	30	3,8-10	143
3,14	6, 30, 39, 52, 53, 55, 56, 75, 77, 87, 115, 143, 149, 152, 153, 157	3,17	143
3,15	6, 30, 53, 55, 56, 75, 77, 99n, 130, 153, 157	4,2-3	115
3,16	6, 25, 30, 32, 53, 55, 58, 75, 77, 80, 85, 86	4,6	143
3,17	32, 57, 77, 80, 84, 89, 90, 143, 151, 154-55	4,8	143
3,18	32, 57, 58, 77, 80	5,2-3	143
		5,10-12	115
<i>Philemon</i>		<i>2 John</i>	
4-7	36n	7	115
19	57, 89	<i>3 John</i>	
20	101n	9-10	53
<i>Hebrews</i>		<i>Revelation</i>	
2,4	116	1,1	142
9,9	99	1,9	51n, 75
9,11-28	134n	2,1	147
<i>James</i>		2,5	147
5,1-6	93n	2,7	147
		2,8	147
<i>2 Peter</i>		2,9-11	93n
1,10	42	2,10	147
3,4	47n	2,12	147
3,10	127, 137	2,12-17	147
3,13	137	2,16	147
		2,18	147
		2,22	147
		2,26	147
		2,27	147
		3,1	147
		3,3	103, 147
		3,4	147
		3,7	147
		3,8-13	93n
		3,10	51n, 75, 147
		3,11	147

3,14	47n, 147	16,15	103
4,1-6	111	19,20-21	123
5,1-7	111	20,1-3	113
6,9-11	93n, 148	20,7-10	113
7,13-17	93n, 148	21,6	47n
7,14	37n	22,8	109
12,7	122	22,12-13	125
12,7-9	112	22,13	47n
12,9	148	22,16	109
13,14	148	22,20	109
16,14	137		

Jewish Writings

<i>Apoc. Moses</i>		<i>Josephus</i>	
2,1	112n	<i>Ant.</i>	
27,1-29	112n	12. 5-6	107
		18. 55-59	138n
<i>1 Baruch</i>		18, 261-309	108n
4,5-29	38	19. 4-5	108n
		19. 11	108n
<i>2 Baruch</i>		<i>Bell. Jud.</i>	
13,3-10	38	2. 169-74	138n
48,47	97n	2. 185-203	108n
49,2	97n	3. 3-8	131n
55,4-8	97n, 99n	4. 486-90	131n
78,5	38	4. 657f.	131n
		6. 316	138n
<i>Bel</i>		<i>Jubilees</i>	
33-39	112n	2,1-2	112n
		15,31-32	113n
<i>Eth. Enoch</i>		<i>1 Maccabees</i>	
10,1-16	112n	1,20-24	107
20,1-8	112n	1,41-51	87n, 107
40,1-10	112n	1,54-59	107
66,1-3	112n	2,15-18	87n
97,3	97n	2,37	41
98,8	97n	<i>2 Maccabees</i>	
98,10	97n	5,11-21	107
99,15	97n	6,1-6	107
		6,1-9	87n
<i>2 Esdras</i>		6,12-16	37
5,4-5	135	<i>Ps. Sol.</i>	
7,38	102, 104, 113	13,9-10	37
12,10-36	133		
12,11-13	133		
12,37-38	110n		
16,74	97n		

<i>Sib. Orac.</i>		4,1	135
3,796-808	135	5,5	97n
<i>Slav. Enoch</i>		<i>Test. Moses</i>	
18,6	97n	10,3-10	135
<i>Susanna</i>		<i>Tobit</i>	
55	112n	12,11-12	112n
<i>Test. Dan</i>		<i>Vit. Ad. et Ev.</i>	
6,4	97n	51	112n
<i>Test. Levi</i>		<i>Wisdom Sol.</i>	
1,1	97n	11,9-10	38
3,1-3	97n, 113n	14,20	108

Early Christian Literature

<i>1 Clement</i>		16,6	144, 145
5,7	138	16,7	145
<i>Didache</i>		16,8	144, 145
11,12	53	Eusebius, <i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	
12	53	3. 39. 3-4	131n
16,1	144	3. 5. 3	138n
16,2	144	Polycarp, <i>Ep.</i>	
16,3	144, 145	11,3,4	130
16,4	144, 145, 146, 147		
16,5	144, 145, 146		

Greek and Latin Authors

Apuleius, <i>Met.</i>		Pliny, <i>Epist.</i>	
9. 23	114n	10. 97	87n
Aristotle, <i>Ars rhet.</i>		Plutarch, <i>De Is. et Os.</i>	
1. 1358b	6n	2. 351E-352A	116n
3. 1419b-1420a	55n, 57n	Quintillian, <i>Inst. or.</i>	
Demosthenes, <i>De cor.</i>		6. 1. 1-2	55n, 57n
18. 72	52	Seutonius	
Lucian, <i>Peregrinus</i>		<i>Vita Calig.</i>	
13	53	22. 3-4	108n
Plato, <i>Apol.</i>		22. 33	108n
19b	52	<i>Vita Nero</i>	
		16. 2	131n

Tacitus			
<i>Annals</i>			
15. 44. 2-8	131n	<i>Hist.</i> 5. 9	108n
15. 44. 3-4	131n		

Index of Authors

- Aune, D., 98
 Aus, R. D., 36n
 Bailey, J. A., 78, 85n
 Bassler, J. M., 37, 111n
 Baumgarten, J., 102n
 Beker, J. C., 156n
 Best, E., 2, 52n
 Betz, H. D., 4, 5n, 35, 38, 53n, 57n, 92n,
 93n, 115n, 116n, 133, 137n, 142n, 154n
 Bornemann, W., 2n
 Braun, H., 85n
 Brown, J. P., 134n
 Bultmann, R., 4n, 142n
 Collins, A. Y., 103n, 148
 Collins, J. J., 94n, 124n
 Conzelmann, H., 103n
 Cross, F. M., 99n
 Dibelius, M., 3n
 Dobschütz, E. von, 1, 35n, 36n, 40, 42, 44n,
 45n, 47, 49, 62, 106n
 Donelson, L. R., 56n, 58n, 90n
 Donfried, K. P., 114n
 Everson, A. J., 98n
 Frame, J. E., 2, 41, 50n, 52n, 109, 111n, 130n
 Giblin, C. H., 106n, 111, 115n
 Goldstein, J. A., 6n, 38n
 Hanson, P. D., 94n, 124n
 Harnack, A. von, 3n
 Hartmann, L., 134n, 136n, 137
 Hauck, F., 54n
 Hilgenfeld, A., 151
 Himmelfarb, M., 133n
 Hoffmann, P., 132n
 Holtzman, H. J., 151
 Hooker, M. D., 134n
 Hurd, J. C., 54n, 78, 90
 Jewett, R., 4n, 5n
 Käsemann, E., 149n
 Kennedy, G. A., 4n, 5n
 Kern, F. H., 1
 Kloppenborg, J. S., 147n
 Lindemann, A., 130n, 141n, 151-52
 Lüdemann, G., 138n
 Lührmann, D., 132n
 Lünemann, G., 2n
 MacMullen, R., 118n
 Masson, C., 2, 3n, 130n
 Metzger, B. M., 102n
 Milligan, G., 2, 34n, 35n, 41, 44n, 45n, 48,
 50, 52, 87, 88n, 107n, 130n
 Mowinckel, S., 96n
 Mylonas, G. E., 118n
 Nilsson, M. P., 108n, 111n, 118n
 Orchard, J. B., 134n
 Peterson, R. J., 78n
 Plummer, A., 103n
 Polag, A., 132n
 von Rad, G., 96n
 Reitzenstein, R., 156n
 Rigaux, B., 1, 2, 36, 39n, 43n, 44n, 45n, 50-
 51, 52, 134n
 Robertson, A., 103n
 Robinson, J. A. T., 131n
 Rowley, H. H., 94n
 Russell, D. S., 94n, 108n, 124n, 136n
 Sanders, E. P., 132n
 Schmidt, J. E. C., 1
 Schmithals, W., 100n
 Schweitzer, A., 156n
 Schweizer, E., 3n
 Spicq, C., 52
 Taylor, V., 138
 Trilling, W., 1, 2, 3n, 34, 36n, 37n, 39, 42,
 43, 44n, 47n, 50, 51, 53, 56n, 60, 73n, 75n,
 111n, 130n, 151n, 152, 153n
 Weiss, J., 138n
 Wrede, W., 1, 2, 7n, 130n, 152
 Zahn, T., 2n

Index of Subjects

- Antagonist (Antichrist), 46-47, 70, 100, 107-21, 122-25, 141, 143-47, 150, 157-58
- Antiochus IV Epiphanes, 87, 107, 108-9, 122, 136
- Apocalyptic scenario, 1, 43, 45-49, 56, 64, 68-71, 78, 84, 123-26, 134-50, 158
- Authorship (of 2 Thess.), 2, 59-60, 78-90, 155-58
date, 130
theories, 2-3
- Caligula, 108-9, 111, 122
- Clement of Rome, 138
- Day of the Lord, 44-46, 52, 56, 64, 67-71, 81, 83, 92, 96-105, 106, 119-21, 123, 125, 127, 128, 134, 136-37, 141, 148, 149, 150-51, 152, 157-58
- Deception, 44-49, 56, 88, 100, 114-21, 124-25, 135-36, 139-150
- Disorderly (ἄτακτοι), 52-54, 55-56, 75-76, 77, 80, 81-82, 83, 92, 96, 98-101, 106, 121, 126, 128, 141, 147, 148, 149-51, 152, 154, 155-58
- Judgment, 37-43, 51, 56-57, 63, 65, 66, 68, 70-71, 84-85, 92-94, 95, 97-105, 109, 119-121, 123, 124-26, 133, 137
- Nero, 1, 111, 131
- Papias, 131-32
- Parousia (παρουσία), 39-41, 43, 44-46, 48, 63, 64, 65, 68, 70-71, 79, 80, 81, 83, 94, 95-96, 97-98, 99, 100-5, 107, 114-16, 120, 122, 123, 127, 132-33, 134, 135-36, 137-47, 150
- Paul, 1-2, 34, 36, 38, 45, 47, 48, 50-51, 53-54, 55-57, 60-66, 68-72, 74, 75, 76, 78-79, 83-84, 86-87, 89, 90, 91, 96, 97, 100, 101-5, 109-10, 111, 121, 122, 126, 127, 128, 132, 136-38, 142, 149, 150-58
as authority, 45
as example, 53-54, 75-76, 153
- Polycarp, 130
- Pseudepigraphy
characteristics, 62-63, 84-90, 153-54
in 2 Thess., 1, 57, 84-90, 91
- Relationship of 1 and 2 Thess., 1-4, 6, 59-90, 92, 128, 151-55
- Rhetorical analysis, 5, 6, 8-33, 58, 59-60
epistolary prescript, 8, 34-35, 60-61
exordium, 8-10, 35-37, 61-63
narratio, 10-14, 37-43, 63-67, 92-94, 95, 97, 121, 123-27, 128
probatio, 14-24, 43-49, 67-73, 84, 94-121, 123-27, 128, 147
exhortatio, 24-30, 50-54, 73-76, 86
peroratio, 30-32, 54-57, 77
epistolary postscript, 32, 57, 77, 89-90
- Satan, 46-47, 51, 111, 112, 116-18, 122, 124, 143, 148
- Second Christian generation, 91, 130-32, 155-58
- Silvanus, 8, 35, 61
- Timothy, 8, 35, 61, 68, 70
- Titus (emperor), 111, 131, 138
- Tradition, apocalyptic, 38-39, 56, 93
- Tradition, Pauline, 1, 5, 35, 45, 48-49, 52-54, 55-57, 59-61, 67-69, 74-76, 77, 78, 81, 82, 86-87, 90, 91, 96, 109, 117, 120, 121, 127, 128-137, 149-51, 153, 155-58
- Tribulation, apocalyptic, 36-37, 44, 68, 70-71, 123, 134-35, 137, 138-41, 144-47
- Vespasian, 111, 131
- Wrath of God, 65, 69, 79, 102, 104-5, 119-21, 122, 124, 127, 133, 137, 147, 148-51