

# Kingdom vs. Kingdom

*Heaven and Hell in 2 Thessalonians 1*

<sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of **the kingdom of God**, for which you are also suffering--

<sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

<sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels

<sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of **eternal destruction**, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

<sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

<sup>11</sup> To this end we always pray for you.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-11

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## *How to End the Book, How to End the Bible*

IN COMMENTARY ON IT, BARRY WEBB WRITES, “**The book of Isaiah, like the Bible itself, moves from the heavens and the earth (1:2) to the new heavens and new earth (66:22).**”<sup>1</sup>

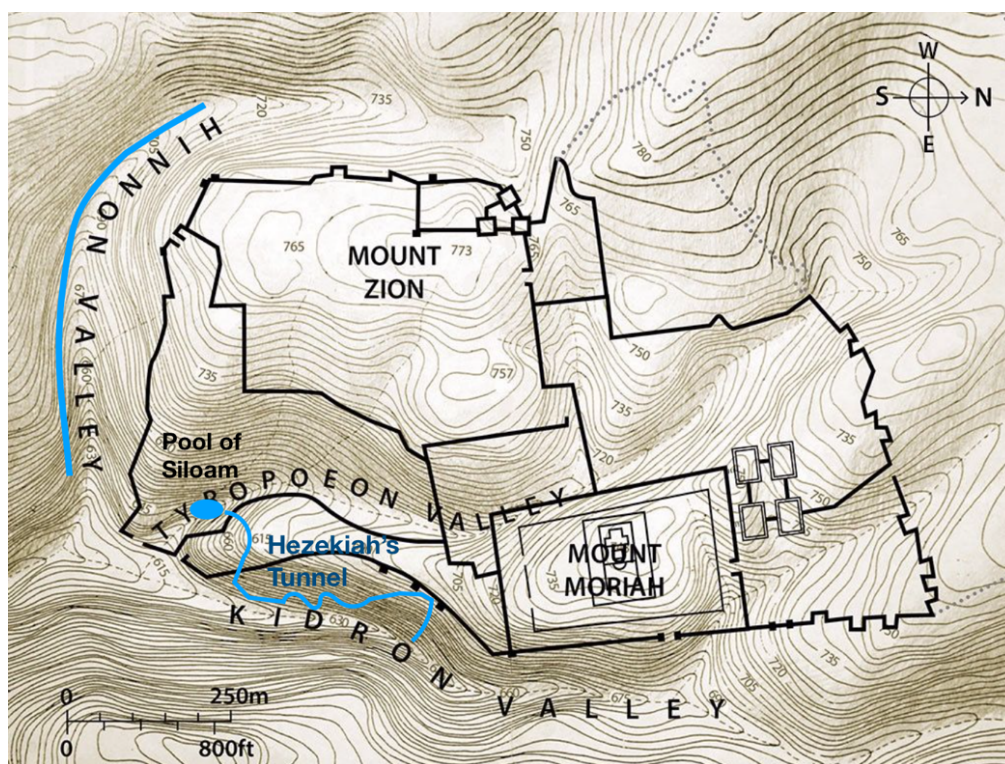
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<sup>1</sup> Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 251.

I like the idea of this, the totality of it. The Bible, of course, begins its very **first verse** telling us, “**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth**” (**Gen 1:1**). The **second to last chapter** of the Bible begins, “**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...**” (**Rev 21:1**). The **second verse** of Isaiah says, “**Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth...**” (**Isa 1:2**), and from that moment onward all living things must listen to the Word of the LORD. The **third to last verse** of Isaiah says, “**For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain**” (**Isa 66:22**).

Wonderful words. But not for everyone. The last chapter of the Bible contrasts this new heaven and earth, something closely associated with the Kingdom of God coming in its fullness, with something very much its opposite. “**Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood**” (**Rev 22:15**). This is said only seven verses from the end of the Bible. Similarly, Isaiah says, “**And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, and**

their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh” (Isa 66:24). These *are* the very last written words of the prophet Isaiah, a man whom tradition says was sawn in two at the hands of king Manasseh, somewhere near the pool of Siloam (which gets its name from this event), at the south end of the old city of Jerusalem, near the confluence of the Kidron and Gehinnom valleys.<sup>2</sup>



I find this sadly ironic given what the Hinnom Valley was used for in elder days, including by Manasseh himself. **2 Chronicles 33:6** tells us that Manasseh, “made his sons pass

<sup>2</sup> **Lives of the Prophets 1:1-2.**

through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery, and dealt with mediums and spiritists” (2Ch 33:6). Seems to me like he very much might have considered Isaiah a human sacrifice too!

Why might he do this to Isaiah? In part, it could be because of his last chapter. Isaiah 66 is a fascinating end to his masterpiece. It presents us with two contrasting things: judgment and hope, or restoration and retribution. The main bulk of the chapter forms a chiasm of sin and judgment followed by great comfort in the birth of a coming baby, followed by judgment because of sin:

A. Fourfold abominations, 3 (“blood of swine”).

B. Punishment of enemies, 4-6 (begins with “hear the word of Yahweh”).

C. **Comfort and Joy and the Birth of Messiah (7-14)** →

B'. Indignation toward enemies, 14b-16

A'. Abominations, 17 (“swine’s flesh”; ends with “declares Yahweh”).<sup>3</sup>

C. Zion gives birth, 7-9 (“says your God” at end).  
D. Jerusalem’s joy, 10-11.  
E. Peace like a river, 12a (begins with “thus says Yahweh”)  
C'. Comforted like a child with mother, 12b-13.  
D'. Joy, 14a.

Importantly, these judgments are first addressed to Jews who are not humble and contrite in spirit and who do not tremble at God’s Word (Isa 66:2). He immediately prophesies about their wicked sacrifices (3) done with evil hearts (2), and therefore severe punishment will come upon them

<sup>3</sup> This outline is from Peter Leithart, though I’ve turned his more complicated structure into a simple point C.

(4-6). These Jews are persecuting their own brothers, “**casting them out for my Name’s sake**” (6). Therefore, a sound rises from the temple and Yahweh renders recompense to his enemies.

This is likened to a **pregnant woman** who delivered a **son** before her great pain came (7). This, in turn, is a prophecy of Messiah and of a birth that he seems to bring about—a new Zion (8) which takes place prior to the great punishment upon Israel that happened in 70 A.D. Nothing can stop God from accomplishing birth (9). Therefore, all must rejoice with Jerusalem when God brings this about (10-11). Great peace will be extended to this new Jerusalem nation and it will be to the glory of the nations (12-13). This, however, signals that **more than just the Jews** and the nation of Israel are in mind in this prophecy.

Not only good news, but also bad is coming to all the nations. God will show his indignation to all his enemies, and God’s people will rejoice because of it (14). This is meant as a **word of comfort**! Yet, he will come **in fire** and anger and fury (15), and this will not comfort everyone. Remember Manasseh? This is an eye for an eye. He will come in fire and with sword against “**all flesh**” and the LORD of Hosts will

smite many enemies (16). This includes all who would profane the temple (garden) with unclean animals and rodents (17), words that have been fulfilled by both Gentiles and the Jews who helped them do it. This never-ending abomination of wicked sacrifices is something that God will on That Day eradicate from this earth.

While this ends the chiasm, the chapter finishes with more thoughts about the nations. God will **gather the nations** together to come and see his glory (18), he will send the remnant to the nations: as far as **the ends of the earth** so that the Gentiles might see God's glory (19), bring back many Jews to the city (20), and themselves become priests of God (21). He ends with thoughts of the new heavens and new earth (22), where worship happens on a never-ending sabbath-cycle (23). All good news!

*But ...* “They shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh” (24). This last verse is one of only two verses in the OT that seem to speak of an eternal torment for God's enemies. The only other one I know of is

**Daniel 12:2<sup>4</sup>**, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Let’s talk about this verse. This is about hell. **Isaiah 66:24** cannot be taken literally on hell, for worms do not eat dead bodies *forever*. What is more important is to see the mixing of metaphors here as the origin of Jesus’ language of hell. He says, “**And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’**” (**Mark 9:47**). He is contrasting two places. The kingdom of God and hell.

The word for “hell” here is not hades (the OT equivalent of Sheol). It is *geenna*. The Latin is **Gehenna**, and both of these derive from the **valley of Hinnom** or *gê-hinnōm*.

### Origin of “Gehenna”

Hebrew	→	Aramaic	→	Greek	→	Latin
<i>gê-hinnōm</i>		<i>gêhinnām</i>		geenna		Gehenna

<sup>4</sup> On the connection of **Daniel 12 (11:31, 36, 12:1, 11-12)** to Isaiah 66 and therefore 2 Thessalonians 1-2, see **Roger D. Aus**, “The Relevance of Isaiah 66:7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thessalonians 1,” *ZNW (Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft)* 67 (1976): 252-68.

Yes, we've just seen the earthly place from which the name derives, with Isaiah's death and with Manasseh's wicked sacrifices. In fact, the place gets its infamous reputation from these despicable acts. There is a myth out there that Gehenna was a trash dump that never stopped burning. This myth is fiction. There is no historical record of that anywhere.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it is that this was the place of the most abominable acts Israel ever committed that enshrines it as the place that became known as the very worst hell you can possibly imagine.

With this verse then, Isaiah is also contrasting two very different places—the new heavens and the new earth in a new Jerusalem with hell. Both are called a kingdom in the Bible. We've just seen Jesus talk about the kingdom of God. You also have the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (Matt 12:26).

So, think about what Isaiah is doing here. He is using the very place of Manasseh's sacrifices (and his own eventual death) to describe the end punishment for those whose sacrifices are so abominable to the LORD! Is there any wonder

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<sup>5</sup> See the short blog by Todd Bolen, “The Myth of the Burning Garbage Dump of Gehenna,” *BiblePlaces.com* (April 7, 2011). <https://blog.bibleplaces.com/2011/04/myth-of-burning-garbage-dump-of-gehenna.html>.



this man killed him? His last written breath seems to be a direct attack on the king! By the way, after this God brought Manasseh into captivity into Babylon where the king greatly humbled himself and repented of his sins. The story shows the almost inconceivable mercy of God towards those who are still living who have done the most hellish things in this life. Keep this in mind as we now turn to our text.

## *How to End the Book, How to End the Bible*

What I have in mind for the next two sermons is a kind of **double-feature**. Last time I mostly just glanced at the middle portion of 2 Thessalonians 1 as we looked generally at the whole chapter. It was because I knew there was simply too much to talk about here. The verses I have in mind are **2Th 1:5-11**, though the real meat is **vv. 7-10**. In them, the Apostle is now contrasting to very different places. **Vs. 5** speaks of “**the kingdom of God.**” We saw Jesus contrast this earlier when he spoke of the opposite: **Gehenna**. Well, Gehenna is also in 2 Thessalonians 1, especially **vs. 9**, “**They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the lord and from the glory of his might.**” So, two kingdoms are contrasted.

The overall context is what he refers to as the “*apokalypsis*” or “*revelation*” of Jesus Christ from heaven (7). Yes, this is the same word from which we get the name of the last book of the Bible. **Vs. 10** refers to it as his “coming” (*erchomai*). This in turn paves the way for the main subject of this letter which begins in Chapter 2, “**Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him...**” (2:1). This “coming” is the word *Parousia*, and we saw him discuss it in some detail in the first letter. In other words, 1:7-10 is the necessary prerequisite for understanding 2:1-12.

I wanted to do this all together in one sermon. Here’s the problem and the reason why I want to do this in two sermons. Someone has said, “**To give a full account of the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 would be almost the same thing as to write a history of Christendom.**”<sup>6</sup> In other words, we will have a lot of work to do in that chapter. It is almost overwhelming to even think about trying to figure out what is being said.

I think, however, that a proper understanding of Ch. 2 is to be rooted in a proper understanding of Ch. 1. This is

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<sup>6</sup> **George G. Findlay**, *Thessalonians* (CB) (Cambridge, 1914), 170. Cited in **Desmond Ford**, “The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology,” A Thesis Presented to the University of Manchester (July 1972): 221.

something very few people do when explaining their theories of the many interesting things in that chapter. What I want to do today then is share with you [the background](#) of Chapter 1 which also happens to be the background of Chapter 2. Hopefully, this will unpack the meaning of both.

I will do this with the one objective hermeneutical rock I know of: [interpreting Scripture with Scripture](#), exactly what the Confession of Faith tells me to do (LBC 1.9). Something people often seem to forget when talking about eschatology is that the Apostles were deeply rooted in Scripture. When we aren't taking into consideration *first* whether or not they are actually using the OT to derive their theology, then no amount of historical investigation or theological harmonizing is going to be able to get at the intended meaning, unless it just happens to be by chance. I'll give you a good example of [this next week](#) with the preterist reading of Chapter 2, which when I look at it, I just can't find much wrong with it. Yet, nothing is said in this interpretation about the OT parallels and how they must inform our interpretation.<sup>7</sup> When that is taken into consideration, as much

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<sup>7</sup> I will be using the excellent article, [Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.](#), "The Man of Lawlessness: A Preteristic Postmillennial Interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2," Covenant Media Foundation, <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pt550.htm>.

as that interpretation can be helpful, it is simply not capable of going beyond its own narrow focus.

## Paul and Isaiah

Here's the point of everything I want to say today. It is the reason I began the sermon looking at Isaiah 66. 2 Thessalonians 1-2 is not some crazy vision that Paul had put into writing. Rather, it is his very careful **exposition and application** of Isaiah 66<sup>8</sup> to a group of deeply **suffering** Christians who, because of their suffering, were afraid that Jesus had come back. These two chapters are Isaiah come back to life, if you will.<sup>9</sup> If you can understand that, then you can read that chapter and therefore understand much of what Paul is talking about. And when you do, suddenly, many things that Christians have been arguing about for 2,000 years comes clearly into focus.

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<sup>8</sup> Among the other multi-cited passages in mind are Obadiah 13 (2Th 1:9) and 14-15 (2Th 1:6); Psalm 89 [88 LXX]:9 (2Th 1:10) and vs. 17 (2Th 1:11); and as I noted above, Daniel 11:31-12:12 is circulating around this too. As this is a sermon, I will not delve into most of these in any way other than perhaps a comment or two.

<sup>9</sup> It isn't only these two chapters that do this. Jesus' Olivet Discourse follows the same basic structure with many parallel ideas as 2 Thessalonians. Therefore, Jesus is doing the same thing. See the appropriate chart at the end of the sermon. This does add some interpretive intrigue, as the portion of Jesus' sermon that most closely follows Isaiah 66 also happens to be the portion that deals with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This makes the preterist case quite strong. But as we will be by the time I'm done with both sermons, it proves to much to say that Paul's "Parousia" is *only* talking about 70 A.D.

As we get into this, I will skip over vs. 5 for now, except to mention that it begins with, “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God.” “This is” refers to their suffering and enduring of afflictions. That is, their suffering and enduring of afflictions is evidence of the righteous judgment of God. How so?

We immediately have to think of their circumstances. Recall that when the Apostolic band arrived in this city, it was to a very hostile group of Jewish religious leaders with whom they were about to share the gospel. Once they heard that Jesus was being proclaimed Lord, they decided they needed to do something about it. That something was not to believe the message but rather to persecute first the Apostles and second those who became Christians because of their message.

This setting is vital because it is the very same setting that the early portions of Isaiah 66 talk about. “I called them, and they did not hearken to me; I spoke, and they heard not; and they did evil before me...” (Isa 66:3 LXX). This is the Jews. “Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my Name’s sake,” they will be put to shame (5). This is exactly what the Jews were now doing to Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Thus, it is appropriate to use Isaiah 66 because the circumstances are similar. As is the application: comfort. But that get us ahead of ourselves.

The first word-allusion to Isaiah 66 comes from **2Th 1:6** and the word “**repay**.” “**Since indeed God considers it just to repay (*antapodidomi*) with affliction those who afflict you**” has the same word as **Isaiah 66:6**, “**a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord repaying (*antapodidomi*) recompense (*antapodosis*) to his adversaries.**” So, God is going to do to the God-forsaking Jews, who mock the Word and the Name and kick them out, exactly what they are doing to the believers. As we will see next time, **this is a link to the partial fulfillment** of this passage in 70 A.D.

Curiously, in the Targum it is “**the voice of the Memra of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies.**” In other words, the **Messiah will do this**. This is told to the Thessalonians early on in this second letter in order to give them comfort. But it is comfort that long before Paul, Isaiah gave to God’s true Israel.

**Vs. 7** now gives the **timeframe** of when this repaying will occur. This is where things start to get thorny for interpreters. It says that God will “**grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed**

from heaven with his mighty angels...” This fits very nicely with the Targum’s bringing in the Word who is carrying out judgment. But there’s more.

As I said earlier, “revealed” is the word *apokalupsis*. Now, when you think apocalypse, your mind is probably like mine: it goes to the end of all things. This is correct, but it takes a bit of a detour for us to get there. This word “revealed” is our second word-parallel to something in Isaiah 66. This time it comes from the Targum. “Before distress comes to her she shall be delivered; and before shaking will come upon her, as pains upon a woman in travail, her king will be revealed” (IsTarg 66:7). The ESV says, “Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.”

In other words, judgment is being interrupted by a great birth. It is the birth of a king, **the birth of ... Messiah!** Curiously, though the Hebrew doesn’t say “king” or “Messiah,” this was clearly the expectation ... among Jews. Midrash Rabbah Genesis 85, Leviticus Rabbah 14/9, and Targum Jonathan Isaiah 66:7 all interpret this messianically.<sup>10</sup> This, of course, makes sense. Because if Messiah is going to judge,

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<sup>10</sup> Aus, Relevance, 257ff.

Messiah must first *be born*. Thus, at least part of the fulfillment of Isaiah 66 takes place at the birth of Jesus. As such, there is a delay of judgment! To put it another way, the Gospel is the detour! This is both good news and bad news, depending upon who you are. It might be bad news for those who need or want swift justice, who can't wait for the Day of the LORD. It is good news for someone who is currently rebelling against God. Someone like Manasseh in Isaiah's day! No one deserved hell-fore more than him, yet he repented and God saved him. God saved even him!

2 Thessalonians, while using the allusion of Jesus coming in a manger and swaddling clothes, skips past this to something beyond. In it, Jesus comes “with his mighty angels in flaming fire” (2Th 1:7-8). A better way of putting “mighty angels” would be “angels of his might” so that the word “might” stands by itself. The angels are the instrument of a mighty God. We have more Isaiah 66 here, again from the Targum. “All these things my might has made” (66:2). “The might of the LORD shall be revealed” (66:14). Most importantly, “The might/strength of his anger, and his rebuke with a flame of fire” (15). Each of these uses of “might” are additions of the Targum not found in the Hebrew. While I



could speculate why the author would do that, it is no speculation that Paul is using the term here also of coming in might and fire, just like Isa 66:15 Targ said.

**Angels** reminds me of a parallel from Jesus' **parable of the weeds** (**Matt 13:36ff**).<sup>11</sup> Jesus says, "The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels ... the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (39, 41-42). This is clearly talking about **the Second Coming** and another image of **Gehenna** is here. It parallels **2 Thessalonians 1:7-8** and gives us our first absolute glimpse of the timing: The Second Coming of Christ. When Jesus comes with the angels of his might in flaming fire, remember that it says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire" (**Heb 1:7, Ps 104:4 LXX**).

And yet, **Isaiah 66:15** also talks about this as I just mentioned. "For, behold, the Lord will come as fire, and his chariots as a storm, to render his vengeance with wrath, and his rebuke with a flame of fire." It's the same thing. And the

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<sup>11</sup> Angels play a role in the Olivet discourse as well. But in that instance, their role comes immediately after the destruction of the temple, where their trumpet will blast to begin bringing in the elect from the four corners of the earth (see Matt 24:31, which France puts in the "past" section of this prophecy).

language of vengeance is also found in 2Th 1:8. (This gives us a clue that Isaiah 66 isn't just about judging the Jews in 70 A.D. It goes beyond that both in scope and timing). Are you beginning to see how Paul is using Isaiah 66 as the basis of his opening thoughts on to these suffering Christians?

## Obeying the Gospel

There is a curious statement that Paul makes at the end of vs. 8. It says that judgment is coming on “those who do not obey (*hupakouo*) the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” This is the only place I'm aware of that uses the language of “obeying” the “gospel.” In the strictest law/gospel paradigm, it makes no sense to talk about obeying the gospel. Instead, you obey the law. Some, especially Lutheran theologians, will flat-out say we do not obey the gospel in any sense. This is why theological constructs are, at the end of the day, just that. Constructs. We create them to help us. But we must not use them to press a thing so far that we end up destroying the Word of God.

But what would it mean to obey the gospel? Again, Isaiah 66 comes to the rescue. “I also will choose their mockeries, and will recompense their sins upon them; because I

called them, and they did not obey (*hupakouo*) me; I spoke, and they heard not: and they did evil before me, and chose the things wherein I delighted not” (Isa 66:4 LXX). What are they not obeying here? **The call of ... the gospel** (remember the whole “calling” idea that we looked at last week)! To not obey the call is to not come to Christ, to not believe. “Who has believed our message, and to whom has the Arm of the LORD been revealed” says Isaiah (53:1). This verse begins the very heart of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Suffering Servant going to die on the cross. Rather than believe this message, the Jewish Rabbis not only would not heed, but they positively went off and did wicked abominable acts to Christians. Paul would know. He was at one time one of them, until God saved him too!

This is why it is so **vital to pay attention** when you sit before the Word of God. As it is unfolded to you, God is giving you good news. This is news that few today have ever heard. This week, New York State passed the most radical abortion bill in American history. It is grievously evil, though no more than any abortion is. I made a comment to someone that I would not be surprised if the total number of people in the entire state of New York at this time who have heard the actual biblical gospel is less than 1%. I have no way

of proving it, but that's my gut feeling. It is rare indeed. And people are swaying to and fro like a man lost in a desert with no water, hoping to hear the news. But it isn't being proclaimed.

What is this news? It is news about the Messiah who has been born and who has now died on the cross to take away the guilt of our many transgressions against God. To not heed this is to disobey the gospel call: Come to me all you who labor, and I will give you rest. When you refuse this call, you inevitably go off and do your own wicked things.

## Back to Hell

At this point, 2 Thessalonians talks about that most terrible of places. “They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2Th 1:9). On the doors of *The Inferno* Dante writes,

THROUGH ME IS THE WAY INTO THE SUFFERING CITY;  
THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO GRIEF ETERNAL;  
THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG LOST HUMANITY;  
  
JUSTICE MOVED MY MAKER CELESTIAL;

I WAS CREATED BY THE DIVINE POWER,  
BY THE SUPREME WISDOM, AND BY LOVE PRIMEVAL.

ONLY ETERNAL THINGS ARE OLDER  
THAN I; AND I WILL FOREVER ENDURE.  
ABANDON EVERY HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER.<sup>12</sup>

Eternal destruction. What does that even mean? Perhaps Dante captured it well, and it is terrifying. I think each of us has thought long and hard about eternal damnation. It is such a horror of a doctrine, it scarcely seems possible that any God, let alone the Christian God, could ever think up such a thing.

The word “[suffer](#)” in the ESV, however, is one I’m not fond of, not because the place isn’t one of suffering. We get that from other places. But because it more literally reads, “[pay the penalty of.](#)” In other words, the focus here isn’t on pain but on retribution, judgment, and justice.

As difficult as it is, one of the things that can help put our mind into a better state is to consider [why people go there](#). Each time Paul talks here he speaks of people [getting what they deserve](#). Suffering for suffering. *Just* retribution.

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<sup>12</sup> Dante, *Inferno*. III, 1-9.

Paying back for what they have done. This is not difficult to understand. In other words, hell is *fair*.

People are always talking about hell in terms of God not being fair. “How dare God not \_\_\_\_\_, that’s not fair.” But that’s exactly what hell is. It is God giving to each person according to what he has done. I don’t know exactly what all this means. I do know that it will be worse for some than for others, Jesus says as much. I do know that God is just and always does what is right. When we think it isn’t fair, then my friends, we have thought too little of sin and not highly enough of God. We have no idea what sin is when we speak like this. We have no idea of the holiness of God.

I also know that this same basic idea is to be found in [the last verse of Isaiah](#), and I’ve already said that it may be the thing that got him killed. He spoke openly and forcefully about the wickedness of especially religious people who pretend to be on God’s side but actually do the very things that he detests most. Pastor after pastor praising the New York decision this week, smiling for the cameras while the governor demands that the lights of One World Trade Center (couldn’t have picked a more appropriate icon than that) be turned pink to celebrate it! This is no “safe but rare” procedure these people want. It is an all-out holocaust. And, like

the Germans dancing in the streets while the Jews burned in their backyards, so also the satanically gleefully giddiness about this atrocity is smirked all over their faces. It is like the Jews themselves who bragged about the murder of Christians, all the time refusing God's sweet overtures of mercy and grace in Jesus Christ. When God goes to all this trouble to send his Son, even vindicating him by raising him publicly from the dead, and people still act like this, friend what else is there than such a thing as this?

It's interesting that it talks about being “**away from the presence of the Lord.**” People often think that **hell is the absence of God**, probably because of this very verse. But the word “Lord” here is important to know. It is not *Theos*, the general word for “God.” Rather, it is *Kurios*, the word the LXX translates for Adonai rather than Elohim. This word is the word that almost always refers not to the Father, but to the Son. “The LORD (Yahweh) said to my Lord (Adonai).<sup>13</sup> It is not that “God” is absent. God is omnipresent. It is Christ who is absent.

There's another word here that is important. This is the word “**presence.**” In the OT, the presence or “face” of God

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<sup>13</sup> Kurious also translates “Yahweh” in this verse, so this isn't an absolute proof that Christ is in view by the word “Lord.” However, two things can be said. First, the Son is often Yawheh in the OT. Second, the title Kurious is the title that Jesus takes upon himself, for he is the Lord!

is the Angel of the LORD. So, to be away from the presence of the Lord is in a word to be away from the kind mercies of Jesus. It is God's Presence, Christ, who brings peace, not his absence. "May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Col 3:15). "May the Lord [that is Christ] of peace [the Prince of Peace] Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance" (2Th 3:16). It is the presence of God *in Christ* that brings peace. Thus, eternal destruction means that while God is present in hell because God is present everywhere (he is omnipresent), Jesus Christ will not be there to intercede for them.

I cannot help but think of the story of the rich man and Lazarus, both of whom were in the place of the dead (Sheol/Hades). One was suffering in fire; the other was in Abraham's bosom. "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame" (Luke 16:24). But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish" (25). Now imagine that Abraham is Christ. He is not there to comfort, for this is the place of justice. And what more justice could there be for someone who



hears that someone has risen from the dead, and has not believed those who came before who predicted it (29) or those who come after and report about it (31)? Believe this message, little children. You do not want to spend eternity in this place.

As we draw near to the end of these parallels in our passage today, I want to call attention to the universality of prophecy in Isaiah. Again, the last verse speaks of “the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me.” With Isaiah so clearly in his mind, the Apostle clearly contrasts those who do not know God with those who have believed. This has to include first the Jew, then the Gentile.

But Isaiah’s message is not merely one of doom. It is one of comfort. And the universality of his message actually focuses more on the comfort than the doom. “The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues” (Isa 66:18). Not for Judgment, at least not yet. Instead, this gathering is so that “they shall come and see my glory” (18). There is judgment that comes in the next verse, but it is not the final retribution. God sets a sign among the survivors of the nations. He then calls six nations, most of whom are found in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10).

These God will then save! And, they shall declare God's glory among the nations, even bringing back many Jews to trust in Messiah. They shall go and worship God in his new covenant temple. And these things shall continue until the end. How does any of this relate to 2 Thessalonians? It does so in this way.

The Apostle is absolutely convinced, in no small part because of the prophecy that prior to this Great Trouble, a baby would be born. That baby appeared to him in his glorified resurrected form and took this Jew, so hell-bent on killing Christians, and turned him into a follower of Christ. Paul was then given his calling. He was to be the **Apostle to the Gentiles**. Everything in his life was driven to taking the gospel to the nations. This is why he went to this Greek city of Thessalonica in the first place. He was going to be part of that fulfillment of bringing the nations to see the glory of God. It's all right here in Isaiah, and it is the reason there even is a 2 Thessalonians. I'm going to talk about this much more **next time**, because it has great bearing on the interpretation of some very difficult phrases in Chapter 2.

For now, I want to show you that even though there is all this talk of hell and judgment in both Isaiah 66 and 2 Thessalonians 1-2, there is also great **comfort**. While there is

a kingdom of Satan that many go to, for that gate is wide and the way is easy and many are they who enter there, there is also another kingdom. The kingdom of God. Jesus said, “If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’” Its gate is narrow, and the way is hard, but it leads to life. In vs. 5, the Apostle says, “that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.” This kingdom is depicted in Isaiah 66 in the first verse as heaven and earth as God’s royal residence. It is depicted in vs. 22 as the new heavens and new earth, and in vs. 23 as the new Jerusalem to which believers go to worship the Lord.

Because of the work of those Apostles, each going to different parts of the earth, and especially the work of Paul taking so many risks in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, God’s word has pervaded and saturated the West for 2,000 years. That seed only plants one generation of people, however. And as blessed as you may be to be living off the capital created by centuries of godly Christians, their wealth does not belong to you any more than to a Jew who was born in

Israel and was blessed to have the prophets and the covenants and the promises. You must be born again.

This kingdom belongs to you only if you are **found worthy of the kingdom**. That worth, as we saw last week, comes as you are **justified** and **clothed** in the righteousness of Christ by obeying the gospel, pictured in your baptism, as you heed the call, and trust only in Jesus Christ to save you because he is the King Messiah, ruler of this kingdom and powerful to bring you into it.

**Outside** this kingdom are the dogs, the sorcerers, the immoral. **Inside**, there is paradise, a tree of life, a river of life, waters that cause you never to thirst again. Here there are streets paved with gold, buildings made adorned with the finest jewels and gems. There is no more crying, no more tears, no more sorrow. It is the fulfillment of the dreams of mankind since the day we were kicked out of Eden.

All because **a baby was born**, grew up, **obeyed** God, went to a **cross**, **died** for your sin, was found innocent by God, declared so powerfully through is **resurrection**, and is enthroned now above all rule and power and authority as he **ascended** to heaven to be at the Right Hand of the Father in majesty.

Obey this gospel. Come to Christ. Enter the kingdom. Believe the message. Trust the Word. See the glory. Honor the Name. Enter the Presence. Heed the call. “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him... The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life... Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” (John 7:37-38; Revelation 22:17; Matthew 11:28; John 6:37).

This is the comfort of Isaiah 66. This is the comfort of 2 Thessalonians 1. This is the background for understanding 2 Thessalonians 2 and all those strange and terrible things that shall happen on the Day of his Coming.

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Septuagint Texts Alluded to in 2 Thessalonians 1, with Targums Added (Bold = Same Greek Term)			
Verse and Phrase	Definite Allusion	Probable Allusion	Possible Allusion
1:6 Since indeed <b>God</b> considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you.			<b>Isa 66:6</b> A voice of the <b>Lord</b> rendering <b>recompense</b> to his adversaries. <b>Ob 14-15</b> to destroy ... in the day of <b>affliction</b> ... your <b>recompense</b> shall be returned.
1:7. When the Lord Jesus is <b>revealed</b> from heaven With the <b>angels</b> of his <b>might</b>		<b>Isa 66:7</b> Targum: Her [messianic] king will be <b>revealed</b> . <b>66:2, 14, 15, 19</b> . " <b>might</b> " of the Lord.	Dt 33:2. His <b>angels</b> with him. Zech 14:5. The saints/holy ones (agoi) with him.
1:8. In <b>flaming fire</b> Inflicting <b>vengeance</b> .. those who do not <b>obey</b> . Those who <b>do not know</b> God	Ps 79[78]:6. Not know you	Ex. 3:2. In <b>flaming fire</b> <b>Isa 66:15</b> and 66:4. Rendering <b>vengeance</b> ... recompense ... they did not <b>obey</b>	<b>Isa 66:15</b> . A <b>flame of fire</b>  Jer 10:25. Nations that <b>do not know</b> you. Isa 55:15. Nations which do not know you.
1:9. <b>Eternal destruction</b>  Away <b>from the face</b> (prosopou) of the Lord and from the glory of his might.	Isa 2:10, 19, 21. <b>From the face of the fear of the Lord, and from the glory of his might.</b>	<b>Isa 66:24b</b> . For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh  <b>Isa 66:24a</b> . And they shall <b>go out</b> and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me.	4Mac 10:15. <b>The eternal ... destruction</b> <b>Ob 13</b> : in the day of their <b>destruction</b>
1:10. When he comes on that day to be <b>glorified</b> in his <b>saints</b> , and to be <b>marveled</b> at  <b>On that day</b> .		<b>Ps 89:9</b> ; 68:36a. God is <b>glorified</b> in the council of the <b>holy ones</b> ... <b>wonderful</b> is God in his <b>holy</b> [places].	  Isa 2:11 (17, 20). <b>On that day</b> .
1.7-10. Judgment upon the enemies of God who do not obey. First Jew, second Gentiles?			<b>Isaiah 66.18-21, 23</b> . All flesh. Tarshish, Put, Lud, Tubal, Javan, coastlands.
1:11. <b>Good/Good pleasure</b>			<b>Ps. 89:17</b> . <b>Good/good pleasure</b> .
1:12. <b>So that the name may be glorified</b> : our Jesus Christ... in you.	<b>Isa 66:5</b> . <b>That the name</b> of the Lord may be <b>glorified</b> .		
2:3 The man of <b>lawlessness</b> is revealed, the <b>son</b> of perdition/destruction	<b>Ps 89:22</b> . <b>Son of transgression</b> (the enemy shall have no advantage against him ... shall not hurt him where him = messiah in Pesiq. R. 36/1.		
2:4. <b>Opposes Temple</b> Opposes and exalts himself <b>against every god</b> or object of worship His seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.			<b>Isa 66:6</b> . <b>Opponents/enemies Temple</b> Dan 11:36. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself <b>above every god</b> ... against the God of gods Ezek 28:2, 5, 6, 9, 17. King of Tyre (see Isa 66:19) seat of god heart of seas.
2:6-7. "what is restraining" (katechon, neuter) ... who now restrains (katechoun, masculine)			<b>Isa 66:7</b> . "I have also restrained" (YLT). "restrained is translated by katechein in Jdg 13:15-16, is associated with birth woes inn Jer 6:24, and the day of the Lord in Ps 48:7.
2:7. Until (the <b>restrainer</b> ) is taken out of the way.  (what is removed or "out of the way"? The mystery of lawlessness, anomia, cf. Isa 66:5, that is "our iniquities"		Dan 12:11. Burnt offering is taken away-removed-disappears.	<b>Isa 66:9</b> . "who cause to bring forth, <b>shut</b> the womb" (shut = restrain). "The Hebrew says that just as ineluctably as a woman in her birthpangs must bear her child, so certain is it that God will restore Jerusalem, who will then suckle and console her people." (545, JBL)
2.8. The <b>lawless</b> one (anomos)  Say him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and coming		Isa 11:4. He shall mite the earth with the word of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he destroy the ungodly one. (Messiah destroying he enemy of the Lord)	<b>Isa 66:3</b> . The <b>transgressor</b> who slaughters an ox.
Chart based on the chart in David Roger Aus, "Comfort in Judgment: The Use of the Day of the LORD and Theophany Traditions in Second Thessalonians 1," A Dissertation to Yale University, Yale University: 1971: 113-114; also from Roger D. Aus, "The Relevance of Isaiah 66:7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thessalonians 1," <i>ZNW (Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft)</i> 67 (1976): 252-68; Roger D. Aus, "God's plan and God's Power: Isaiah 66 and the Restraining Factors of 2 Thess 2:6-7," <i>JBL</i> 96/4 (1977): 537-53.			