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### Suffering and Eschatology in light of an Exegetical Study of 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5

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**Suffering and  
Eschatology  
in light of an  
Exegetical Study of  
2 Thessalonians 1:4–5**

by

**Richard P. Shields**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Sacred Theology degree at  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

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## I. Introduction

A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God) teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics which the Lord of this theology himself has consecrated and blessed ...

Many make pilgrimages to Rome and to other holy places to see the robe of Christ, the bones of the martyrs, and the places and remains of the saints, which we certainly do not condemn. But we lament the fact that we do not at the same time recognize the true relics, namely, the sufferings and crosses which have sanctified the bones and relics of the martyrs and made them worthy of such great veneration. And by not recognizing these true relics we not only do not receive them when they are offered at home, but even reject them with all our might and chase them from place to place, while with the greatest thirst and constant tears we should beg God that such precious relics of Christ, which are the most sacred of all, be given to us, as it were, a gift for the elect children of God.<sup>1</sup>

Luther seems to have caught the essence of Paul's view of suffering, in marked contrast to the popular "theology of glory" prophets of today. The theme of suffering was present in Paul's earliest letters, as well as his later ones. Although particular emphases changed over the years, one constant seems to have been the expectation of suffering because one is a Christian. Here are a few of the passages that show the far-ranging effect of suffering on Paul's theology.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses," *Career of the Reformer I (Luther's Works, Vol. 31)*, translated by Carl W. Folkemer, edited by Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 225–6.

Romans 8:18–23 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope, that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

2 Corinthians 4:7–12 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Philippians 1:29–30 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

This paper examines suffering in light of an exegetical study of 2 Thessalonians 1:4–5. According to rhetorical analysis the exordium includes 1:1–12, with three major parts:

epistolary prescript (1:1–2); thanksgiving (1:3–10); and intercessory prayer (1:11–12).<sup>2</sup> Thus, this text occurs near the beginning of Paul’s introductory thanksgiving.<sup>3</sup> Many commentators appear to rush through this section in anticipation of examining the heart of the letter, chapter 2.<sup>4</sup> Recently, deSilva, commenting on 1 Thessalonians, “proposes that the thanksgiving section [of 1 Thessalonians 1] functions as much more than a *captatio benevolentiae* .... Rather, it addresses a real concern for the congregation(s).”<sup>5</sup> Even more so, this is true for 2 Thessalonians 1. It is proposed that this introductory thanksgiving, and particularly verses 4 and 5, sets forth the major concern of the letter and serves as the basis for understanding and interpreting chapters two and three.

There is a near parallel to 2 Thessalonians 1:3–10 in 2 Corinthians 1:3–11, in that both passages function as introductory thanksgivings which set forth the theme and outline for both letters.<sup>6</sup> Another parallel, closer in verbal pattern, occurs in Philippians 1:27–30, although this passage does not stand in the crucial theme statement of the letter. Most critics

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<sup>2</sup> See Robert Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 81–83.

<sup>3</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (The New Century Bible Commentary), edited by Matthew Black (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 169.

<sup>4</sup> One possible exception is Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*. Sacra Pagina 11. Edited by Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1995). I say possible, because on page 31 he sees the author develop the prime issue *after* the introductory thanksgiving, while later he writes, “Clearly, one of the major functions of this long section is to introduce the reader to the letter’s major concern: discussion of the Lord’s day” (312).

<sup>5</sup> David A. deSilva, “Worthy of His Kingdom: Honor Discourse and Social Engineering in 1 Thessalonians,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> The major difficulty with this assertion is determining how the collection, chapters 8 and 9, fit into the scheme. However, the background of Acts 9:16; 14:22; and 23:11 could provide some indication of the divine necessity of Paul’s trip to Jerusalem. The collection would be the means to accomplish this journey, despite repeated prophecies of the impending tribulation for Paul.

who deny Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians because of its “coolness,” often overlook these two parallel passages, which happen to come from two of Paul’s most “personal and warm” letters.<sup>7</sup>

Two texts from the Book of Acts undergird our understanding of Paul’s teaching regarding suffering: Acts 9:16 and 14:22. In the former, Ananias, frightened by the prospect of meeting Saul, the persecutor of the church, is comforted by the Lord’s response, “...for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” Jesus’ prediction to Ananias finds fulfillment in Paul’s proclamation of the Gospel. While on his first missionary journey through Asia Minor / Galatia, Paul said, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Paul recognized the divine necessity of his suffering, which permeated Paul’s ministry and theology, occurring as early as 1 Thes. 3:3.

Turning our attention to the Thessalonian correspondence, we discover several significant passages in which Paul addresses the issue of suffering, whether his own, his companions’, or the Thessalonians’.

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 Thes. 1:6–7   | The Thessalonians received the Word in much tribulation.   |
| 1 Thes. 2:2     | Paul and his companions spoke the Word in much opposition.   |
| 1 Thes. 2:14–15 | The Thessalonians are persecuted at the hands of their countrymen.   |
| 1 Thes. 3:3–4   | The Thessalonians are encouraged to not be disturbed by afflictions, because “we” were destined for this, even as Paul had said before hand. |

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<sup>7</sup> Indirectly then, these passages could be more supportive evidence of Pauline authorship and authenticity.

- 1 Thes. 3:7 Paul and his companions are encouraged in their afflictions because of the Thessalonians' faith.
- 2 Thes. 1:4–5 Text under consideration.
- 2 Thes. 1:6–10 Paul explains the nature of God's just punishment on the wicked.
- 2 Thes. 3:2–3 Paul's prayer for deliverance and protection seems to allude to persecution and/or affliction by evil men or the evil one.

In this cursory look at the Thessalonian correspondence the theme of suffering plays a significant part. One difficulty in this study was determining an exact equivalent for suffering in Greek. The primary root, *πάσχω* (suffering), refers to the experience of Christians who endure *διώγμος* (persecution), *θλίψις* (affliction), and *ἀναγκή* (distress). For further examples see GEL (Vol 2: 324) which lists other possible Greek words that convey the idea of suffering. Although the word *πάσχω* does not appear in this context, the concept of suffering may indeed be present, as is well demonstrated by Michaelis' overview of the Septuagintal use of *πάσχω*.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in the Thessalonian passages noted above the word group, *πάσχω*, does not appear, yet the concept of suffering is definitely present.

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<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, "πάσχω," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. V, 907–8.



## II. Structure and Grammar

A major difficulty in handling this text is trying to determine the limits of the text itself. In NA<sup>27</sup> and UBS<sup>4</sup> the editors have made one sentence that runs from verse 3 through verse 10. The KJV and ASV have followed this sentence structure. Dunham notes the diversity of opinion on the issue and categorizes 18 of the more common twentieth century translations according to the number of sentences in 1:3–12; he also notes the beginning points of each sentence (see Appendix B).<sup>9</sup> Dunham proposes to solve the structure problem so that sentences would begin at verses 3, 4, and 6. His reasons are:

1. Verses 3–5 and 10–12 deal with the virtues of the saints, whereas verse 6–9 concentrate on God’s activity.
2. Verse 5 serves as a better ending for the preceding thought than as an opening statement for what follows.
3. If no break is made between 5 and 6, then one must wait until after 9 to make a sentence break.<sup>10</sup>

Arguments 1 and 2 are sound; argument 3 seems to be a matter of style more than an argument about structure and grammar. Verse 10 seems to be transitional, referring both to God’s activity and to the Thessalonians’ activity and could therefore be the conclusion of verses 6–

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<sup>9</sup> Duane A. Dunham, “2 Thessalonians 1:3–10: A Study in Sentence Structure,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (March 1981) 1:39–46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

9 or the beginning of verses 11–12. Dunham’s basic structure is accepted. Thus, verses 4 and 5 form one sentence which forms a unit for this study.

Paul expresses his thanksgiving in an unusual form in verse 3, possibly in a liturgical format.<sup>11</sup> Paul’s reasons for the thanksgiving are two-fold: the Thessalonians’ “faith is growing abundantly,” and their “love for one another is increasing.” The consequence of Paul’s divine obligation to give thanks becomes an independent thought in verses 4 and 5. Thus, while there is a close connection between verses 3 and 4, Paul advances the thought enough that verses 4 and 5 could stand alone, grammatically and structurally. Dunham’s translation of 1:4–5 is:

So that we ourselves boast about you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and trials which you are enduring— a sure sign of the just appraisal of God—to the end that you are fitted for the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.<sup>12</sup>

While his structural arrangement is appropriate, his translation leads to some confusion.

Therefore, I offer the following translation.

**Translation:**

1:4 So that (in view of this) we ourselves boast because of you among the churches of God concerning your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and afflictions which you are (continually/repeatedly) enduring,

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<sup>11</sup> Roger Aus, “The Liturgical Background of the Necessity and Propriety of Giving Thanks According to 2 Thes. 1:3,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973), 432–8.

<sup>12</sup> Dunham, 45–6.

1:5 a sure sign (proof/evidence/indicator) of the righteous judgment of God with the result that you are accounted (deemed) worthy of the kingdom of God, in behalf of which you are also (continually) suffering.

The only textual variant with any major manuscript evidence is the apparent attempt of later copyists to “correct” what would be a *hapax legomena*. Paul normally uses the simple verb *καυχᾶσθαι*; however, in this passage he uses the compound, *ἐγκαυχᾶσθαι*; and in Romans 11:18, Paul uses another compound, *κατακαυχᾶσθαι*.

One major objection scholars have raised against the sentence structure proposed by Dunham concerns the lack of a finite verb. However, if as BDF (391) notes ὥστε with the infinitive denotes result, such as in this case, then the sentence would be complete in itself. Turner (141) notes that there are a few exceptions to “the class. rule that the subject of a dependent inf. is not expressed again, if it is the same as the subject of the independent verb.” Not only is the subject (implied in the verb of 1:3) repeated in 1:4 with the infinitive, the subject is intensified (*αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς*). Such a construction and intensification supports the proposal that verses 4 and 5 constitute an independent thought, and therefore one sentence in translation.

L. Fuerbringer notes that, “According to Greek grammar ὥστε with the Indicative indicates actual result, with the Infinitive, hypothetical result ... in the New Testament the Infinitive is used promiscuously to denote either actual or hypothetical result.”<sup>13</sup> In this case actual result seems to best fit the context, especially in light of the divine mandate to give thanks. *Αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς* is intensive, not reflexive, contra Robertson (687), similar to *αὐτοί* in

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<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Fuerbringer, “Leading Thoughts on Eschatology in the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 13 (August 1942) 8:592–3.

1 Thes. 4:9. Yet, as several commentators have noted, αὐτοὺς ἡμῶς suggests a contrast, without specifying the antithesis. Best presents the possible alternatives<sup>14</sup> eventually favoring Frame's proposal: "So that we ourselves, contrary to your expectations, are boasting,"<sup>15</sup> because it has the least objections. This solution harmonizes with the divine imperative to give thanks: "it is right and fitting that we give thanks, even if you do not think so" (verse 3). This also finds confirmation in Paul's repetition in 2:13. Further support for the understanding of this as actual result is the emphatic position of ἐν ὑμῖν. Ultimately Paul fulfilled his boast about the Thessalonians in 2 Corinthians 8:1–5.

As Frame notes, ὑπέρ can be seen to be the equivalent of περί.<sup>16</sup> BAGD (839, 1f) follows this reasoning, but the meaning under 1d seems to fit the context as well, which is reflected in the translation above. The boast is "for the sake of"/"because of" the Thessalonians' steadfastness and faith. Although not a hendiadys, as Lenski observes,<sup>17</sup> there is an intimate connection between their steadfastness and faith. Calvin offers this perspective concerning the two related thoughts:

He does not say, however, that he glories in their faith and love, but in their *patience* and *faith*. It follows from this that patience is the fruit and proof of faith.

These words, therefore, should be explained in the following way: "We glory in

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<sup>14</sup> Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Black's New Testament Commentaries) (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972), 252.

<sup>15</sup> James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 223.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>17</sup> Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 389.

your patience which arises from faith, and we have been witness that it is prominent in you,” otherwise the context will not correspond.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the stress is upon ὑπομονῆς (“patiently remaining under”), which accompanies genuine faith.<sup>19</sup> Lünemann observes the distinction between its use in verse 3 and verse 4.

Whilst πίστις in v. 3 denoted faith in Christ, the expression here, as the article τῆς only placed once, is of a similar nature with ὑπομονή; whilst the reference to Christ as the object of faith steps into the background, and the idea of “faith” is transformed in the idea of “fidelity.”<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, πίστεως should be translated “faith,” not “faithfulness,” as Marshall succinctly argues.

(Patience) is singled out here in view of the increasingly difficult situation with which the church was coping and it is closely linked with faith. In the context the latter word (faith) may carry the nuance of faithfulness (cf. 1 Th. 3:5); but the primary sense is doubtless that of faith in God... It is their trust in God that enables them to undergo opposition without succumbing to it.<sup>21</sup>

Faith (trust) lets one draw on God’s strength to endure.

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<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 8), translated by Ross Mackenzie, edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 388.

<sup>19</sup> Lenski, 389. Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 197, shows the reasons why “faithfulness” is not the proper translation. For the contrary view, see Robert L. Thomas, “1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 309.

<sup>20</sup> Gottlieb Lünemann, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, edited by Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1884), 188.

<sup>21</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (The New Century Bible Commentary), edited by Matthew Black (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 172.

Paul continues by indicating the circumstances in which their faith and steadfastness are demonstrated, namely in the face of persecutions and tribulations/afflictions. Grammatically it would be possible to separate the two elements and translate it as “in all your persecutions, even the tribulations which you are now enduring.” Such a translation suggests that the persecutions may have been completed, while the results of such persecution (tribulations) are still being endured. The repetition of the definite article favors this separation, perhaps even indicating that ὑμῶν restricts only διώγμος. However, BDF (276) notes that grammatically ὑμῶν could govern both nouns.<sup>22</sup> Lenski correctly shows the relationship between διώγμος and θλίψειν, but he favors the idea that the persecutions had probably ended, even though the effects are still present for the Thessalonians.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to that view, the references to deliverance and protection in 3:1–5 convey the idea that the Thessalonians are still being persecuted. BDF (201) notes that διώγμος always relates to religious persecution. That happens to be the very program instigated by the “man of lawlessness” in his opposition to God (2:4). It might be better to consider the persecutions as sporadic rather than continuous, so that even though the persecution might temporarily subside, the effects (θλίψειν) continue, even up to the next actual act of persecution. In Acts 8:1f. and 13:50f. there are periods of actual persecution (διώγμος), even though that was not the continuous plight of the church, as even demonstrated in Paul’s life. Likewise, in 2 Tim. 3:11–12 Paul relates incidences of persecu-

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<sup>22</sup> Frame, 225–6, discusses the possible constructions. He notes that ἀνεχέσθαι does not have a dative for its object, but genitive or accusative. The expected ὧν (BDF 176) has been attracted to its antecedents, διώγμος and θλίψις.

<sup>23</sup> Lenski, 389. “‘Afflictions’ is a wider term, and covers the painful effects of the persecutions, many of which persist long after the persecution dies down...the relative clause is added, because the Thessalonians are still enduring the painful results.”

tions which he endured at various places (and at various times). In light of this discussion, διώγμος and θλίψεσιν are governed by both πάσιν and ὑμῶν.<sup>24</sup>

There is a grammatical problem related to ἔνδειγμα, namely: what is its antecedent? Is it nominative, in which case ὃ ἐστί must be supplied? Is it accusative, in apposition to something preceding? The former has the parallel in Phil 1:28, in which Paul also uses the cognate, ἔνδειξις, lending support to Best's proposal to understand it as nominative and supplying ὃ ἐστί.<sup>25</sup> Frame, on the other hand, favors the view that ἔνδειγμα is accusative, in apposition to all that precedes (not just one word).<sup>26</sup> Bassler identifies the possible antecedents for ἔνδειγμα as:

1. sufferings and afflictions of the Church
2. endurance and faith of the Church
3. endurance and faith of the Church in the midst of sufferings and afflictions
4. Paul's boasting of the Thessalonians<sup>27</sup>

Number 3 seems the most consistent with Paul's entire argument, although number 4 presents interesting possibilities regarding Paul's apostolic authority. However, his apostolic

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<sup>24</sup> Contra Lünemann who claims that “πάσιν belongs only to διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν. This is shown by the article repeated before θλίψεσιν, and by the additional clause αἷς ἀνέχεσθε which is parallel with ὑμῶν” (p. 188).

<sup>25</sup> Best, 254.

<sup>26</sup> Frame, 226. See also, George Milligan *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 87–88.

<sup>27</sup> Jouette M. Bassler, “The Enigmatic Sign: 2 Thes. 1:5,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (July 1984), 498. Best contends that ἔνδειγμα points objectively to Paul's boast. Lenski comments, “Suffering persecution would not be such an indication.... (it) must include the main concepts plus the minor” (390). Lünemann notes that it “refers to the whole preceding principal and collective idea...” (189).

authority was not under attack, based on the themes and issues of the letters and the background in Acts, which would mitigate against number 4.

Grammatically, εἰς τό with the infinitive indicates result, perhaps even final result, or “the more remote result aimed at or reached” (Moulton, 218). Thus, Lünemann observes, “Accordingly, εἰς τὸ καταξιώθ. κ.τ.λ. is not a statement of purpose (thus Alford and Ewald) but an exegetical statement of result.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the righteous judgment of God results in the believers being counting worthy for the kingdom of God. In Paul’s thought up to this point the righteous judgment can be both present and future. However, verses 6–9 stress that the primary focus is future. Plummer, however, moves to the other extreme. “The article and the singular number (τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως) show that the final judgment is meant, not the partial judgments executed in this world.”<sup>29</sup> Surprisingly, Lenski accepts the judgment as essentially present, which he sees as more consistent with result than purpose.<sup>30</sup> More recently, Richard favors the present sense of righteous judgment (for first century Christians) which would pull them away from the imminence of Christ’s return.<sup>31</sup> Given the focus of the entire verse, a more defensible solution is to regard the righteous judgment as “now, not yet,” with the view toward the ultimate judgment and reversal, but with the present reality of God even working now.

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<sup>28</sup> Lünemann, 190.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*. London: Robert Scott Roxburghe House, 1918.

<sup>30</sup> Lenski, 391.

<sup>31</sup> Richard, 318.



### III. Analysis

The Thessalonians were relatively new to the faith. Paul had left under less than ideal conditions — persecution by the Jews. His first letter encourages them in their walk of faith. In this second letter Paul responds to the progress of the Thessalonians in their faith, by giving an appropriate thanksgiving toward God with the resultant boasting among the other churches (v. 3). The word group *καυχᾶσθαι* can have either a negative or positive connotation. If the boasting is based on human accomplishments, then the negative impact of the word is intended; this is the most common use of the word group in the LXX and the New Testament.<sup>32</sup> In the wisdom literature the writers often warn of the dangers of boasting,

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<sup>32</sup> The following table helps to see the distribution of the word group.

	LXX	Wisdom	NT	Paul	James
<i>καυχᾶσθαι</i>	32	17	32	30	2
<i>καύχημα</i>	23	11	11	10	0
<i>καύχησις</i>	9	2	11	10	1
<i>ἐγκαυχᾶσθαι</i>	4	4	1	1	0
<i>κατακαυχᾶσθαι</i>	3	0	3	1	2

It seems more than coincidental that the Wisdom literature exhibits almost one-half of all occurrences in the LXX. Also, Paul and James account for all but one of the NT uses (the other being Hebrews 3:6). James has often been characterized as wisdom literature, but this data suggests that Paul acquired the wisdom tradition as a valid background for his writings. Bassler notes some of that influence and James A. Davis *Wisdom and Spirit: An Investigation of 1 Cor. 1:18–3:20 Against the Background of Jewish Sapiential Traditions in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: University Press of America, 1984) carries the thought even further. Of note here is the apocalyptic and wisdom confluence in 2 Thessalonians.

especially of man-centered boasting. Jeremiah had put a proper perspective on true and false boasting (Jer. 9:23–24)

This is what the LORD says:

“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom  
or the strong man boast of his strength  
or the rich man boast of his riches,

but let him who boasts boast about this:

that he understands and knows me,  
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,  
justice and righteousness on earth,  
for in these I delight,”

declares the LORD. (NIV)

Paul follows Jeremiah’s thought in his boasting of the Thessalonians. The intensive verb, ἐγκυχᾶσθαι, heightens Paul’s awareness of the “LORD who exercises loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.” Paul wants the Thessalonians to recognize that their own suffering falls into that category. Their present persecutions and afflictions, which from a human point of view would appear to indicate failure on their part, perhaps even displeasure on the part of God, present, in reality, the very context for seeing God’s righteous judgment being carried out in the world (1:5). This should cause the Thessalonians to rejoice and increase their confidence in the Lord. Paul intimated this to them in his first letter (1 Thes. 2:19). In the present context Paul expands this thought by focusing on their apparent God-forsakenness, a problem that arises for Christians of every age.

In a later letter Paul elaborates on the boasting that is appropriately based on God's work, even though hidden from the eyes of humans. Paul does not boast about achieving anything before God (Eph. 2:8–9), but he does boast about God's activity in saving and sanctifying people.<sup>33</sup> As Bultmann notes,

Faith implies the surrender of all self-glorifying. But for those who stand in faith there may open up a new possibility of boasting, namely, in terms of their achievements in the propagation of faith. (Gl. 6:13). For it is not they themselves who work in their labors, but the grace of God.<sup>34</sup>

With this basis Paul extends both the Old Testament view of boasting and the intertestamental interpretation of it in relation to suffering.

Paul does not merely develop more radically the OT paradox that man can truly boast only when he looks away from himself to God's acts. He also takes up and expands to the point of paradox the Rabbinic view that the believer boast of his afflictions and sufferings.<sup>35</sup>

Bultmann uses proof texts from 2 Corinthians to show that Paul's boasting is proper.

However, the genesis for that position finds expression in the earlier letters, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, particularly in 2 Thes. 1:4–5.

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<sup>33</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, "καυχάομαι," *TDNT* 3:648–53. He sets forth the distinction between the Jewish understanding of boasting and Paul's.

For Paul *καυχᾶσθαι* discloses the basic attitude of the Jews to be one of self-confidence which seeks glory before God and which relies upon itself. For this reason he sets in contrast to *καυχᾶσθαι* the attitude of *πίστις* which is appropriate to man and which is made possible, and demanded by Christ (pp. 648–9)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 649.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 650.

What does Paul find in the Thessalonians that is worthy of boasting? It is their patient endurance (ὑπομονή) and faith (πίστις) in the midst of, or during, persecutions (διώγμοις) and tribulations (θλίψεσιν). Best captures well the intertwining thoughts.

It denotes steadfast perseverance in affliction and the affliction comes not through ordinary strains and chances of anyone's life but through the persistent and constant trials that affect the Christian because he lives a Christian life and seeks to extend his faith.<sup>36</sup>

One half of the New Testament occurrences of ὑπομονή are in Paul's writings; Revelation contains the next largest number of uses.<sup>37</sup> In the New Testament, ὑπομονή consistently refers to what is needed in the trials which Christians face (i.e., Rom. 12:12; Lk. 21:19; Heb. 10:32; 1 Pet. 2:20). Consistently, Paul, Peter, and John (in Revelation) understand the trials as something to be endured, like a refining fire. This suggests that perhaps the etymology of the word (ὑπομονή "remain under") is helpful in getting the full sense of the word.

The New Testament writers also put ὑπομονή into an eschatological context (Mk. 13:13; Rom. 8:25; 2 Cor. 1:6; 2 Tim. 2:12), in which hope is associated with ὑπομονή. Paul strings together these ideas in a process — "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings,

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<sup>36</sup> Best, 69.

<sup>37</sup> This is the distribution of (ὑπομονή)

LXX	Wisdom Literature	New Testament	Paul
25	10	32	16

Among the LXX references are: Job 14:19; Ps. 9:19; 38:7; 61:6; 70:5; Sir. 2:14; 16:13; 17:24; 38:27; 41:2; Jer. 14:8; and 17:13.

Paul's references are: Rom. 2:7; 5:3; 5:4; 8:25; 15:4; 2 Cor. 1:6; 6:4; Col. 1:11; 1 Thes. 1:3; 2 Thes. 1:5; 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:10; and Titus 2:2.

because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:3–5 NIV; cf. Rom. 8:24f. and 1 Cor. 13:7). While his article does not directly address 1:5, Poythress does refer to v. 5 to support his contention in his argument against postmillennialism because patient endurance with hope is crucial to his entire discussion.

2 Thessalonians 1 is in tension with postmillennialism, insofar as postmillennialism wants to focus hopes on a coming millennial prosperity. The text of vv. 5–7 indicates that Christians may continue to expect trouble for a while. They are to anticipate relief from the second coming, not merely for a coming time of millennial prosperity, as postmillennialists would have it.<sup>38</sup>

Several passages in LXX provide an ample background to Paul’s use in the present text. In Ps. 38:7; Jer. 14:8; and Jer. 17:13, ὑπομονή is used as a descriptive title for God, the Savior, in which the Hebrew text uses מְקַוֶּה. Hartley sees the theological import of this word which carries the connotation of hope and waiting.

Waiting with steadfast endurance is a great expression of faith. It means enduring patiently in confident hope that God will decisively act for the salvation of his people (Gen. 49:18). ... Those who wait in true faith are renewed in strength so that they can continue to serve the Lord while looking for his saving work (Is. 40:31). There will come a time when all that God has promised will be realized and fulfilled (Is. 49:23; Ps. 37:9). In the meantime the believer survives by means of his integrity and uprightness as he trusts in God’s grace and power (Ps. 25:21). His

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<sup>38</sup> Vern S. Poythress, “2 Thessalonians 1 Supports Amillennialism.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (December 1994) 4:535.

faith is strengthened through his testings, and his character is further developed (Ps. 27:14).<sup>39</sup>

This idea is further developed in the intertestamental writings, particularly 4 Maccabees 1:11; 17:12, 23.<sup>40</sup> While such a statement well summarizes the Jewish view, Paul envisions even greater fulfillment in Christ. That is, the believer's "integrity and uprightness" are the means to survive because Christ's integrity and uprightness are now totally applied to the believer by faith. The two passages in Jeremiah make it clear that God is our hope (ὑπομονή), which Paul uses in Romans 15:5 ("the God of patient endurance"). That same ὑπομονή becomes the treasury of Christians. It is precisely this that Paul wishes for the Thessalonians to believe and appropriate in 2 Thes. 3:5 (cf. LXX Ps. 61:6 and 70:5 for parallels). Thus, while the Thessalonians may have been surviving they were unaware of the resources on which they were relying. Appropriately, Hebrews 11 shows who endured in the faith, while Hebrews 12 looks back at their lives but with the focus on Christ, and what He had done for them and in them. Lenski links this with the ἐνδειγμα of verse 5. "Yet this is not an indication offered by the Thessalonians, but one that Paul now points out to them, one that the Thessalonians may not have noted, but should note for their great comfort."<sup>41</sup> Again, the thought of reciprocal comfort, about which Paul is instructing the Thessalonians, finds fuller expression in 2 Cor. 1:1–7.

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<sup>39</sup> J. E. Hartly, "קִוּיָּה" *TWOT* 2:791.

<sup>40</sup> Plummer, 13.

<sup>41</sup> Lenski, 390.

As noted in chapter II above Lenski correctly distinguishes the two words διώγμος and θλίψις. While διώγμος occurs only three times in the noun form in the LXX (Prov. 11:19; Lam. 3:19; and 2 Macc. 12:23), these uses are important for the present context.<sup>42</sup> Prov. 11:19 concerns the great reversal, a common theme in wisdom literature — the righteous will gain an eternal reward while the wicked will finally get their due punishment. Lamentations 3:19 ff. corresponds so well with Paul’s use in the present text. Jeremiah calls on God to remember the persecutions (vs. 19), then recalls God’s lovingkindness, and therefore he has hope. Paul is asking / telling the Thessalonians to do the same: “look at your persecutions, but more importantly look at God who will change the fortunes of you and your enemies” (1 Peter 2:12) and “who already has given a foretaste of that in the resurrection.” Paul concludes the first half of Romans with the grand words: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation (θλίψις), or distress (στενοχωπία), or persecution (διώγμος), or famine (λιμός), or nakedness (γυμνότης), or peril (κίνδυνος), or sword (μάχαιρα)?” (Rom. 8:35). He concludes that none of these can separate us from the love of Christ. In 2 Thes. 1:4–5 Paul writes that being kept (delivered) through or from these “objects” becomes a positive reinforcement of God’s election, calling, and sanctification, a thought that Luther captures well in the hymn: *A Mighty Fortress*.

θλίψις is the more comprehensive term for affliction or tribulation. The noun appears 45 times in the New Testament, of which 24 are in Paul’s letters. The cognate verb occurs ten

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<sup>42</sup> The verb form occurs 109 times in the LXX. Some of the more prominent occurrences are: Proverbs (6x), Wisdom (6x); Sirach (6x); Isaiah (11x); Lamentation (4x); and 1 Maccabees (14x).

The New Testament distribution for διώγμος is: Matthew (1x); Mark (2x); Acts (2x); Romans (1x); 2 Corinthians (1x); 2 Thessalonians (1x); and 2 Timothy (2x).

times in the New Testament, seven in Paul.<sup>43</sup> BAGD (362) notes that the original, literal meaning was “pressing,” which then led to the figurative use of “oppression, affliction, and tribulation.” The distress can be caused by external circumstances or inner, spiritual affliction (Phil. 1:17). Schlier notes the diversity of senses which are attached to the word. It “acquires

<sup>43</sup> The word in Paul shows concentration in Romans, 2 Corinthians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Θλίψις	<b>Rom</b>	2:9	5:3(2)	8:35	12:12				
	<b>1 Cor.</b>	7:28							
	<b>2 Cor.</b>	1:4 (2)	1:8	2:4	4:17	6:4	7:4	8:2	8:13
	<b>Eph.</b>	3:13							
	<b>Phil</b>	1:17	4:14						
	<b>Col.</b>	1:24							
	<b>1 Thes.</b>	1:6	3:3	3:7					
	<b>2 Thes.</b>	1:4	1:6						

Other New Testament passages of significance are: Acts 14:22; Rev. 1:9; 2:9; 2:10; 2:22; and 7:14. The cognate verb occurs in this pattern for Paul’s letters.

Θλίβω	<b>2 Cor.</b>	1:6	4:8	7:5
	<b>1 Cor.</b>	7:28		

Others are Matt. 7:14; Mk 3:9; and Heb. 11:37

This means that 20 of the 31 uses by Paul are in 2 Corinthians and 1/2 Thessalonians. The relationship between Θλίψις and the comfort which God gives, now through Paul, is obvious.

In the LXX we find the following distribution:

	<b>LXX (total)</b>	<b>Wisd. Lit.</b>	<b>Psa.</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Wisd.</b>	<b>Sirach</b>	<b>Lam.</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Isaiah</b>
Θλίψις	105	50	36	3	0	10	0	1	13
Θλίβω	97	43	24	0	3	6	8	2	7



its theological significance from the fact that it predominantly denotes oppression and affliction of the people of Israel or of the righteous who represent Israel.”<sup>44</sup> He further relates the word to salvation history, from the captivity in Egypt to the exile in Babylon, with a view to God’s final salvation act. Significantly, the wisdom literature in the LXX carries 93 occurrences of the word group (total OT occurrences: 202). Schlier typologically connects the affliction of Israel with the affliction of the Church. “The constant tribulation of Israel in the Old Testament has become the necessary tribulation of the Church in the NT.”<sup>45</sup> However, Ahern’s observations caution against making a straight-line application from the intertestamental view of Judaism and the Christian view; the typology must pass through Christ, and in fact, must be fulfilled in Him, and only then is it applicable to Christians.

This doctrine of the Epistles to the Thessalonians might lead one to conclude that Paul’s teaching on suffering is identical with that of contemporary Judaism: i.e., the patient endurance of trial is really a blessing, for it is only by passing righteously through the messianic throes that one will enter the messianic kingdom. Fragmentary references in these letters show, however, that Paul thinks of suffering in a *Christian* light: trials are the continuation of the tribulations which Christ himself inaugurated. ... The bond between the sufferings of the Christian and Christ is based on intimate union.

To explain this bond it would suffice to invoke the dominant theme of these letters with respect to suffering and to conclude that the conformity between the suffering Christ and the suffering Christian arises from their common adherence to the design of God that all who attain messianic glory must pass through messianic

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<sup>44</sup> Heinrich Schlier, “Θλίβω,” *TDNT* 3:142.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

trial. There are indications, however, that Paul's concept of imitating Christ involves a more intimate bond.<sup>46</sup>

He finds support and justification for this claim in 1 Thes. 1:6; 2:14; and 2 Thes. 3:5. Ahern's major contention, however, that one cannot slide from Old Testament Israel to the New Testament Church without coming to grips with Christ and His sufferings, exhibits the Pauline and New Testament theme of being "in Christ." The obvious next step is to see how Paul develops this in his major treatise on suffering, 2 Corinthians. Ahern postulates the development as follows:

As the months passed, Paul witnessed a phenomenon which made a deep impression upon him. He had already seen at Thessalonika that spiritual fruitfulness was possible even under a storm of suffering. Now at Corinth he came to see that suffering and human weakness provide the climate that is most conducive to the activity of God's saving power. He was not slow to grasp the implications of this experience. It squared perfectly with the Isaian picture of redemption.<sup>47</sup>

While there is danger of psychologizing Paul, Ahern does note the importance and value of suffering in the life of the Christian. Certainly Paul's own experience of suffering would reinforce such a view.

It is the present, continuing endurance (ἀνέχεσθαι)<sup>48</sup> which has made Paul's boasting appropriate. This word, in the LXX, has a variety of meanings, only one of which specifically refers to "endure." In Job 6:11 as Job observes his present condition, persecution by

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<sup>46</sup> Barnabas Ahern, "The Fellowship of His Sufferings," *A Companion to Paul: Readings in Pauline Theology*, edited by Michael J. Taylor (New York: Alba House, 1975), 39.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Lünemann, 188.

Satan and physical afflictions, he inquires of God about his end and whether (or how) he is to endure. That inquiry provides a suitable background for understanding Paul's use in this text. The afflictions and persecutions quite likely caused the Thessalonians to question their end and whether God had desired this condition, or worse, whether God had abandoned them in this circumstance. Through his letter Paul encourages them in the very midst of their tribulation / persecution. God's righteous judgment (see below) gives them the vision to see the end of their suffering. Later, Paul reiterates the concept to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:12). Several instances of the verb ἀνέχεσθε in the LXX express God's "restraining" himself despite man's disobedience, i.e. Is. 42:14 and 64:12. In both cases when God's endurance reaches a predetermined limit then He rises up to exact punishment (with an eschatological focus). This seems to be the idea behind Jesus' words in Mt. 17:17 (Mk. 9:19 and Lk. 9:41). His question, "How long shall I endure with you?" is one further warning that God's patient endurance is reaching its limit and eschatological judgment is coming—which does come on the cross. Such an eschatological focus receives support from passages such as Rom. 2:4–5; 3:25–26; and 2 Pet. 3:7–13. All of this, thus, points to Jesus Christ as THE Sufferer and Endurer. The One who perfectly endured persecution and suffering becomes both the example to follow in suffering (1 Pet. 2:21–23) and the means by which the Christian endures in suffering (1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 12:1 ff.)

What, then, becomes the "sure sign" (ἔνδειγμα) of the righteous judgment of God? Scholars are divided (see chapter II above). However, Paul seems to emphasize the fact of the Thessalonians' endurance with steadfastness and faith in the midst of persecution and affliction. Thus, endurance by itself is no sure sign, because many unbelievers have the appearance of enduring persecution and affliction (sometimes even better than Christians).

The testimony of many Jews during the Nazi reign of terror and persecution attest to the ability of humans to endure horrible conditions. Rather, the endurance that is marked by the steadfastness that springs from faith in Jesus Christ, which includes the willingness to suffer for Christ's sake, is the sure sign. Calvin notes

There is nothing, it is true, that sustains us in tribulation as faith does, and this truth is sufficiently clear from the fact that as soon as we cease to be aware of the promises of God, we completely fail. The more, therefore, a man has advanced in faith, the more he will be equipped with patience to bear every burden with courage. So on the other hand weakness and impatience in adversity betray our lack of faith. But when in particular we are to bear persecution for the sake of the Gospel, there the strength of our faith reveals itself.<sup>49</sup>

This faith is not just a generic belief in “god” but the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for the sins of the whole world (1 Cor. 15:3–4). Ἐνδειγμα is a *hapax legomena*, although the cognate, ἔνδειξις, appears four times (Rom. 3:25, 26; 2 Cor. 8:24; and Phil. 1:28). Ἐνδειγμα denotes a result and ἔνδειξις is the actual proof by an appeal to facts, although Milligan notes that the distinction between the two cannot be taken as an absolute.<sup>50</sup> The more developed passages in Romans 3 and Philippians 1 provide excellent commentary regarding the “sure sign” and God's righteous judgment in connection with the faith of the righteous.<sup>51</sup> Richard contends that Philippians 1 is different. In the present verses

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<sup>49</sup> Calvin, 388.

<sup>50</sup> George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 87.

<sup>51</sup> Bassler (498) cautions against reading into the text from later documents/letters; however, we cannot ignore nor dismiss the connections. The analogy of faith and the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit permit us the freedom to interpret Scripture with Scripture. If anything, her method of

“the author’s focus is on growth in faith and love (in the context of suffering) as evidence of God’s judgment, not on the oppressors’ treatment. The issue is the evidence of God’s just treatment of the elect as seen in their abundant growth (1:3).”<sup>52</sup>

Because God Himself is righteous, His judgment is righteous (δικαίος). The adjective appears 395 times in the LXX, significantly 250 times in the wisdom literature.<sup>53</sup> The combination of the wisdom perspective of “righteous” and the prophetic use in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel illuminates Paul’s use of the term in this letter to the Thessalonians. Jeremiah 11:20; 12:1; and Isaiah 54:17 specifically refer to the righteous judgment of the Righteous One. The eschatological focus of this righteous judgment is picked up in Isaiah 60:21 and 61:8. The prophetic application of the righteous judgment for the individual finds expression in Isaiah 41:10 and most clearly in 53:11. The latter passage connects God’s righteous judgment with the Suffering Servant (“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many...”). Ezekiel examines the status of humans according to the righteousness of God at the time of the final judgment (Ezek. 18; 33:12–13).

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using later rabbinic theology to read back into Paul is more precarious. Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 131–147.

<sup>52</sup> Richard, 304–5.

<sup>53</sup> The distribution of δικαίος is as follows

	<b>LXX (total)</b>	<b>Wisd. Lit.</b>	<b>Psa.</b>	<b>Prov.</b>	<b>Wisd.</b>	<b>Sirach</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Eccl.</b>
δικαίος	395	250	55	109	27	10	39	10

The word also occurs 17 times in Isaiah (chapters 1–39: 4x; chapters 40–66: 13x).

The *Wisdom of Solomon* advances many of these same thoughts, especially the great reversal of fortunes for both the righteous and the ungodly at the end. Wisdom is personified and works throughout history bringing about righteous judgment. At the time of the flood, we read “Wisdom also, when the nations in wicked agreement had been put to confusion, recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God, and kept him strong in the face of his compassion for his child. Wisdom rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were perishing...” (Wisdom 10:5–6a NRSV).

Moving into the New Testament era, Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Wisdom, indeed the Wise One, who when He speaks brings into existence the Kingdom of God, but who also ushers in the eschatological judgment (appropriate justice) for believers and unbelievers. Thus, for each person the Word of the Wise One, Jesus Christ, brings about a significant moment (καίρος). That is, “now is the time” for salvation and judgment, and only faith in Jesus Christ transforms that moment into salvation. However, the speaking of the Word of the Wise One also brings with it the opposition of Satan and those under his control. This necessarily involves afflictions and persecutions of the righteous ones, even as it did for the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, who ushered in the Kingdom of God amid tribulation. The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning wisdom, righteousness, and eschatological judgment reach their climax in the Person of God’s Son. Only in light of being “in Christ” can the person escape the judgment of the unrighteous and perceive the sure sign of God’s righteous judgment before it happens.

Bassler, followed by Wanamaker, relates this future judgment and the “sure sign” to the Day-of-the-Lord issue that plagued the Thessalonians. Some claimed that the Day-of-the-

Lord had already dawned, “but their experience of persecution directly contradicted this, calling into question God’s justice since the oppression of the elect should not have persisted after the Day of the Lord had arrived.”<sup>54</sup>

The clause εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι ὑμᾶς τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ can either denote a purpose or a result. The word καταξιόω means the counting or deeming worthy rather than making worthy.<sup>55</sup> Best proposes that this clause should refer back to “the righteous judgment of God.”<sup>56</sup> Wanamaker prefers the link to the “persecution and affliction mentioned in v. 4,” correctly noting that the “dominion of God’ is qualified by the words ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε (“for which also you suffer”).”<sup>57</sup> While he affirms that this clause is result-oriented, he places the result in the wrong place: “the writer certainly wished to comfort them with the fact that as a result of their experience of affliction they were considered worthy of it by God.”<sup>58</sup> The Thessalonians are members of the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ. This necessarily entails suffering, which they are experiencing. The one who has that faith, which endures in the midst of trials, is counted (considered) worthy of the kingdom of God.

The Christian consciousness of this truth was evident from the beginning, as shown by Acts 5:41. Paul makes the same connection in his letter to the Philippians (1:29) “for to you it

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<sup>54</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 222. See also Bassler, 507–509.

<sup>55</sup> Lenski, 392 and Fuerbringer, 594.

<sup>56</sup> Best, 255.

<sup>57</sup> Wanamaker, 223.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Paul reassures them that they have been counted worthy to do both: believe and suffer. Thus, the coming to faith sets in motion the process of living out the faith, by suffering in the present, with the expectation of future relief. Here in 2 Thes. 1:5 Paul seems to stress the "now, not yet" aspect of this accounting. That is, the afflictions and persecutions are present, their faith and steadfastness are also present, but the accounting them to be worthy has the connotation of future result, bringing to mind present assurance which such knowledge and hope convey. Lenski follows this argument, noting the aspect of final judgment as the ultimate outcome, but still claiming that the judgment applies essentially to the present situation.<sup>59</sup>

The kingdom concept ("dominion" according to Wanamaker<sup>60</sup>) for Paul also highlights the "now, not yet." In his first letter, Paul wrote that they should walk in a manner "worthy of the kingdom." Elsewhere Paul addresses the ethical implications of being in the kingdom (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:21; and Eph. 5:5). The ethical injunctions appear in this letter (3:7 ff.), which immediately follow Paul's prayer for God's protection and the steadfastness of Christ.

It is on behalf of this kingdom that the believers are suffering. Paul calls this to mind so that they will understand, from God's perspective, what is really happening to them and for them. Suffering in the Old Testament seems a given, although the word group *πάσχω* is used only 21 times. Significantly, the word is *not* used for the sufferings of Job, nor for the

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<sup>59</sup> Lenski, 391–2

<sup>60</sup> Wanamaker, 223.



sufferings of the righteous ones in the Psalms, nor for the Suffering Servant in Isaiah.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, the intertestamental literature tends to use the word group for the martyrdom of faithful Israel. Of course, the next (and final) development is to behold *The* Suffering Servant who endures *The* martyrdom (by dying on the cross). In the Gospels, the word πάσχω refers neither to the persecution of the prophets nor to the suffering of Jesus' disciples. Once the accomplished fact of Jesus' suffering and death is finished, *then* the New Testament writers apply the word group, πάσχω, to His followers. In Acts, the prominent texts for followers of Jesus are: Acts 9 and 14. Jesus reassures Ananias that Paul must suffer for His name's sake. In the later passage Paul acknowledges the reality of suffering (tribulations) for Christians in this world. While the verb form of the word is spread throughout the New Testament, the noun is predominantly a Pauline word (occurring only in Hebrews and 1 Peter).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Michaelis, 907–8.

<sup>62</sup> The word, πάσχω, is distributed as follows:

	<b>NT</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>2 Thes</b>		<b>NT</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>2 Thes</b>
πάθημα	16	9	0	πάσχω	42	7	1

## IV. Conclusion

What initially appeared to be a simple introductory thanksgiving has turned into a gold mine of theological nuggets which provide a new perspective for understanding the introduction to the letter and the heart of the other two chapters. Donfried notes that this “deliberative rhetoric” gives clues to the interpreter in understanding the letter. “*First*, its genre is that of a letter, not an apocalypse. *Second*, within the genre of letter, the eschatology can be described, as can that of 1 Thessalonians, as an apocalyptic eschatology...”<sup>63</sup> Richards, on the other hand, places the letter within the apocalyptic genre. “The suffering of the righteous is a perennial theme of apocalyptic literature and its mention in the thanksgiving section prepares for its treatment later as part of the time frame for the end-time scenario.”<sup>64</sup> Bassler has provided the main clue to getting into the theology of the text by examining it in light of the wisdom literature. Particularly helpful was her summary of *Leidenstheologie* (theology of suffering) as developed by W. Wichmann. The basic elements of *Leidenstheologie* as evidenced by Wichmann is presented here (according to Bassler).

1. Firm rooting in the idea of God’s strict retributive justice.
2. Explanation of present suffering and future glory of the pious with respect to chastisement whereby they are made worthy of their future inheritance.
3. Interpretation of present fortune and future affliction of godless.

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<sup>63</sup> Karl P. Donfried, “The Theology of 2 Thessalonians,” in Karl P. Donfried and I. Howard Marshall, *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 105 (quoting Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalypticism,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1976, pp. 29–31.).

<sup>64</sup> Richard, 318.

4. Thus interpret the temporary afflictions of the elect as a sure sign of God's acceptance and justice.

Wichmann finds evidence of this in 2 Thessalonians. Note too that Aus tentatively accepts this view, although he sees problems with Paul's theology of grace. Given the four-fold view of this passage, however, God's grace is seen in the counting worthy and the provision of resources in order to endure until the great reversal.<sup>65</sup> However, Bassler examined primarily this concept related to the "sure sign" (ἔνδειγμα). Further analysis of the individual words and phrases indicates that there is a broader use of wisdom material than just concerning the righteous judgment / great reversal theme. In effect, these two verses combine wisdom, eschatology, kingdom, and suffering motifs into one comprehensive scheme. The Word, which is spoken and heard, incorporates the believer into the kingdom, gives God's wisdom, ushers in the personal *eschaton*, and at the same time brings about suffering for the sake of the kingdom.

What this means for believers, in the first century at Thessalonica and today, is that they participate in the messianic woes in two ways, but both ways through the believer's union with Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup> First, there are the present day sufferings which result from speaking and hearing the Word of God. Even here in the present realm there is an advancement beyond the rabbinic theology of suffering due to the completed work of Christ on the cross. Second, but at the same time, the world is moving toward the *parousia* of Jesus Christ when He comes to

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<sup>65</sup> Bassler, op. cit.

<sup>66</sup> Contra Richard who limits the understanding of messianic woes. "The audience is misreading its suffering as though they are part of the messianic woes when in effect they are an anticipation of 'the mystery of lawlessness' (2:7)" (p. 317).

dole out retribution, or appropriate justice, to all people. As that day moves closer, the sufferings of the believers will increase. Paul shows that this suffering in anticipation of Jesus' return is a sure sign of their role in this progressive, climactic "journey."

Paul understood the divine necessity of suffering for the kingdom (Acts 14:22) — that is true wisdom (1 Cor. 1–3) — and he wanted to be certain that other Christians understood, even more, rejoiced in, this knowledge. That included the wider scope of God's plan of salvation which suffering would tend to obscure. Richard notes:

In verses (sic) 5 the author's use of *καί* in the expression "for which you *also* suffer" already suggests to the audience that they are not the only ones who suffer for the kingdom. By stressing the common suffering of Christians the author begins to dispel the myopic notion of apocalypticists that their sufferings necessarily announce the messianic woes.<sup>67</sup>

While Richard correctly notes the expansion of the suffering motif to include all Christians, he cuts short Paul's sense of eschatology and apocalypticism as applied to the Christian. As Paul seems to suggest in Colossians 1:24, there is a certain amount of suffering to be experienced before Christ returns. If Paul can somehow incur and experience more of that suffering for the sake of the Church, then he can help hasten the return of Christ. In that sense Paul is an apocalyptic figure who does not separate the messianic woes that began on the cross and which continue in the lives of Christians until Christ returns.

Given the fourfold background (wisdom, eschatology, kingdom, and suffering) of these verses (2 Thes. 1:4–5) there seems to be a better way to approach the interpretation of chap-

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<sup>67</sup> Richard, 320.

ter 2. If, in fact, there is a strong wisdom accent in this section, then the phrase in 2:7, ὁ κατέλων, could be an oblique reference to God.<sup>68</sup> Also, as Aus has pointed out, the unity of chapters 1 and 2 consists in the problem of persecution, which then raised the issue of the “Day of the Lord.” If the Church is enduring persecution and afflictions and the “Day” had already arrived, then God’s justice must be questioned. However, Paul deals first with the question of God’s justice and only then with the “Day.” Aus noted, “... the very afflictions that would seem to undercut confidence in God’s justice are in truth the *sure sign of it*. They do not exhaust, however, God’s justice. There is also a future component to this justice.”<sup>69</sup> In essence Paul preached that the resurrection, which also inaugurated the eschatological sufferings, was the *dawning* of that “Day.” After addressing the issue of suffering and God’s justice, then, and only then, does Paul move forward to deal with the “Day,” which is still in the future. Also consistent with this initial wisdom motif is the section of ethical encouragement and commands given in chapter three. Only as a Christian properly grasps God’s righteous judgment and its implications for the believers in the present realm / age, and only as a Christian recognizes God’s activity still to come in handling the lawless one and all that accompanies his advent, can the Christian live his life appropriate to the eschatological framework. Thus, the wisdom of The Wise One (Jesus Christ) will enlighten the Christian to understand suffering, which will then inform and guide all ethical responsibilities in every activity and in all relationships.

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<sup>68</sup> Aus, 432–8.

<sup>69</sup> Bassler, 508.

As a *proömium*, 2 Thes. 1:4–5 explains the basis for Paul’s thanksgiving in verse 3. These verses are further developed in 1:6–10, concerning the righteous judgment. Paul through these verses sets the stage for dealing with the eschatological implications of suffering related to the “Day of the Lord.” Finally, these two verses present a foundation for living an ethical life, knowing that the righteous judgment of God is coming—for the Christian the fulfillment of all hopes and dreams, the eternal kingdom in heaven.

## Appendix A

The following abbreviations are used throughout the paper to denote standard lexical and grammatical works.

- BAGD Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Translated and edited by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- BDF Blass, F. and Debrunner, A. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*. Translated and revised by Robert Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- GEL *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 Volumes. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988.
- HR Hatch, Edwin and Redpath, Henry A. *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983 (reprint of the 1897 ed.)
- Howard Howard, W. F. *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek Volume 2*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928.
- MG Moulton, W. F. and Geden, A. S. editors, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament* 5th ed. Revised by H. K. Moulton. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928.
- Moule Moule, C. F. D. *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- Moulton Moulton, J. H. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek Volume 1*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928.
- R Robertson, A T. *A Grammar of the Greek N Testament*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934.
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason J. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.
- Turner Turner, Nigel. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Volume 3* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963.
- Tgr Turner, Nigel A. *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1965.

## Appendix B\*

<b>Bible Version</b>	<b># of Sentences</b>	<b>Beginning points of Sentences</b>								
KJV, ASV, Greek Texts	1	3								
Wuest, Expanded Transl.	2	3				7				
Moffatt	3	3	4	5						
Williams		3		5		7				
Amer. Transl., RSV.	4	3	4	5				9		
NASB		3		5	6			9		
F. F. Bruce, Para.	5	3	4	5	6			9		
20th Cent.		3	4	5				8b	9	
Weymouth		3a	3b	5				8b	9	
Living Bible	6	3	4	5		7		9	10b	
Montgomery		3	4	5	6			8b	9	
Knox, Cath. ed.	7	3a	3b	4	5	6		9	10b	
NEB		3a	3b	4	5	6		8b	9	
NIV	8	3	4	5	6	7b	8	9	10b	
Phillips	9	3a	3b	5a	5b	7b	8	9	10b	
TEV		3a	3b	4a	4b	5	6	7b	8	10b

\* This information comes from Duane A. Dunham, "2 Thessalonians 1:3-10: A Study in Sentence Structure," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (March 1981) 1:42.



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