

1 Thessalonians

INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Encouragement for a young church facing stiff persecution.

WHO WROTE IT? The apostle Paul.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians during his time in Corinth, around A.D. 50.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? First Thessalonians is probably Paul's earliest letter.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapter 1: Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians
- Chapter 2: Paul explains his actions and absence
- Chapter 3: Timothy's encouraging report
- Chapters 4-5: Living as Christians in light of Christ's second coming

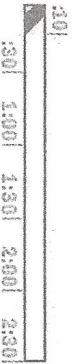
KEY CONCEPTS

- Thanks
- Love
- Hard work
- Prayer
- Holiness
- Second coming

SCORECARD

- Paul:** The writer
- Timothy:** Paul's protégé, who brought him an encouraging report from Thessalonica
- Silas:** Paul's traveling companion who helped contribute to the letter

READING TIME



WHAT'S THE POINT OF

1 Thessalonians?

Hang tough; your Master is coming back.

WORTH MEMORIZING

- **4:11-12** Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others.
- **4:16-18** The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words.
- **5:15-18** See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **USING YOUR HANDS.** Hard work is a virtue. People who make a splash and attract attention to themselves are not necessarily the most valuable. Paul praises those Christians who live quiet lives, mind their own business, and work with their hands.

BACKGROUND

Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest trade centers of the Roman Empire, thanks to its position on the Via Egnatia, a main road from Rome to the eastern part of the Empire. It was the largest city in and the capital of Macedonia. It also had a large Jewish population. Many Gentiles who had grown disenchanting with Greek paganism were attracted to the Jewish faith. As part of his apostolic ministry, Paul took these people under his spiritual wing. He ministered extensively to Gentiles who had come out of idolatry (1:9), working "night and day" (2:9) during his time in Thessalonica. While he was there, Paul received two offerings the Philippian believers sent to help him with living expenses. The personal details given in this letter mesh with those given in the Acts of the Apostles, supporting Paul's authorship, credited in 1:1, with Silas and Timothy (Silvanus and Timotheus), Paul, Silas, and Timothy visited Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey, before writing this epistle.

OUTLINE

- I. Paul Comments the Thessalonians' Faith
 - A. Greetings 1:1
 - B. A prayer for their growth 1:2-10
- II. Paul's Relationship with the Thessalonians 2:1-20
- III. Paul Comments the Good Report 3:1-13
- IV. Watch for the Lord's Return
 - A. Live for the Lord 4:1-8
 - B. Love one another 4:9-12
 - C. Comfort one another 4:13-18
 - D. Be ready 5:1-11
 - E. Honor and obey 5:12-22
- V. Final Prayer and Greetings 5:23-28

MESSAGE

After Paul, Silas, and Timothy are forced out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:9-10), Paul is concerned about the progress of the believers' faith. In this letter, he notes that his previous visit "was not in vain" (2:1), and offers words of encouragement, edification, and doctrine to assist the fledgling church to mature and develop. He commends the Thessalonian believers for remaining steadfast, exhorts them to excel—and to "pray without ceasing" (5:17)—and consoles them concerning their believing loved ones who have died. Christ's second coming surfaces throughout the epistle as a theme, and will take a more prominent role in 2 Thessalonians.

TIME

Paul wrote this epistle in A.D. 51. After Paul met Timothy in Athens (3:1-2), Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica. Paul, now in Corinth (Acts 18:1-5), wrote this epistle in response to Timothy's good report concerning the Thessalonian church.



What if no one had a copy of a New Testament in your congregation nor had even heard of one? That was a problem in the early Church. When Paul evangelized the Macedonian city of Thessalonica, for example, few if any New Testament writings were available. When we face questions or problems today, we open our New Testaments; but the young Christians in Thessalonica didn't yet have this inspired resource. That's why Paul wrote to them, and in doing so he contributed one of our favorite books of the New Testament.

The Thessalonians were especially confused about the timing of the Lord's return. When Paul had been among them, he had taught about the Second Coming. But persecution had driven him out of town before he could say all he wanted. From a subsequent report, Paul learned that the church was confused: Has Christ already returned? Could He return in our lifetime? What about our loved ones who have died believing in Christ? Will we see them again?

In 1 Thessalonians (and again in 2 Thessalonians), Paul addressed those questions and outlined the events connected with the Rapture of the Church. He exhorts us to persevere with holiness and expectancy as we await His coming. Since we don't know the precise moment of the Lord's return, it could be *any* moment. As those who belong to Christ, we should watch for His coming; and while waiting, we should live faithfully, righteously, and productively for His glory.



KEY THOUGHT:

Christ is coming quickly!



KEY VERSE:

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Thessalonians 5:23



KEY ACTION:

Since Christ may come at any moment, we should live productively, faithfully, and expectantly.



KEY PRAYER:

Lord, though I do not know the day of Your return, I will live as if today were the day.

BASIC SURVEY

1 THESSALONIANS

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul, along with Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy (1:1).

DATE: Early 50s—perhaps Paul's earliest letter.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Jesus will return to gather His followers to Him.

DETAILS, PLEASE

In this letter to another church he helped found (see Acts 17), Paul teaches on the second coming of Christ, apparently an issue of some concern to the Thessalonians. Paul describes *how* Jesus will return, but doesn't say exactly *when*. The important thing, in his words, is "We . . . urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory" (2:12 NLT).

QUOTABLE

> For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first (4:16 KJV).

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (5:2 NIV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

First Thessalonians contains two of the Bible's shortest verses: "Rejoice evermore" (5:16 KJV) and "Pray without ceasing" (5:17 KJV).

SO WHAT?

It was important for the Thessalonians to live right in view of Jesus' coming return, how much more so—with the passage of two thousand years—is it for us today?

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 1-2.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 241. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 241. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 239. →

CLOSER LOOK

CHRISTIANS SUFFERING PERSECUTION

From time immemorial, righteous men and prophets have suffered persecution. Jesus Himself was persecuted, and the early Christians in Jerusalem suffered as well. Paul was repeatedly maligned and attacked as he preached the Gospel from city to city. When he was in Thessalonica, he warned the Christians that they, too, would be persecuted—and they were.

"We sent Timothy . . . to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted" (1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 NIV). *Destined to be persecuted?* Yes. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12 NASB).



Caravaggio (1571-1610) painted *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, which illustrates the persecution that many of the early Christians faced.

Persecution comes in many forms. When it's most severe, disciples are tortured and martyred for their faith (John 16:2). In many nations, Christians are despised, oppressed, imprisoned, denied justice, and treated like second-class citizens. Even persecution in its mildest manifestations is painful to those experiencing it: former friends mock them, exclude them, and lie about them, and enemies deliberately make their lives more difficult (Luke 6:22).

Christians are not to go looking for persecution. Paul urged believers to pray "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life" (1 Timothy 2:2 NKJV), and added, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18 NKJV). And when we *aren't* being persecuted, we must remember to pray for those who are (Hebrews 13:3).

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 3 AND PSALM 108.

- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 241. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE GENTLE APOSTLE

Paul had founded the church in Thessalonica. He was the indisputable spiritual leader and could've made demands upon the disciples. Instead, he wrote, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you... our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 NKJV). What a picture of tender, selfless love! In taking on such a sacrificial, self-effacing attitude, Paul was living out what Jesus had said: "Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant" (Luke 22:26 NLT). In fact, we should *all* "by love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13 KJV).

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4 AND JOHN 12.

Paul wrote that we should display the same gentleness to other people that a nursing mother shows her infant. *The Young Mother* by Charles West Cope (1811-1899) helps us to visualize this type of affection.



HIDDEN TREASURE

NO VENDETTAS ALLOWED

One of the most powerful things about Paul's epistles is not his deep theology and explanations of complicated spiritual subjects—but how he constantly emphasizes the most basic principles that Jesus taught. For example, Paul wrote the Christians in Thessalonica, "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other" (1 Thessalonians 5:15 NIV). Jesus had said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28 NIV). (In Romans 12:14 Paul quotes Jesus almost word for word.) Paying back wrong for wrong, getting even, seems like the "right" thing to do—but for Christians, it's definitely the wrong course of action.

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5 AND PSALMS 110-112.

Personal Gold

from DALLAS WILLARD

HEARING EVEN IF YOU CAN'T SEE

After his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples in visible form only on a very few occasions over a period of forty days. His main task as their teacher during these days was to accustom them to hearing him without seeing him. Thus it was "through the Holy Spirit" that he gave instructions to his apostles during this period (Acts 1:2, NRSV). He made himself visible to them just enough to give them confidence that it was he who was speaking in their hearts. This prepared them to continue their conversation with him after he no longer appeared to them visibly.

An instructive scene from these very important days of teaching is preserved in the last chapter of Luke's Gospel. Two of Jesus' heartbroken students were walking to Emmaus, a village about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. He caught up with them in a visible form that they did not recognize, and he heard their sad story about what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth and about how, it seemed, all hope was now lost.

He responded by taking them through the Scriptures and showing them that what had happened to their Jesus was exactly what was to befall the Messiah that Israel hoped for. Then as they sat at supper with him, suddenly "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31, NRSV). But their recognition was much more than a visual recognition, and that was the whole point. They asked one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32, NRSV).

He speaks with us in our heart, which burns from the characteristic impact of his word. His presence with us is, of course, much greater than his words to us. But it is turned into *companionship* only by the actual *communications* we have between us and him.

This companionship with Jesus is the form that Christian spirituality, as practiced through the ages, takes. Spiritual people are not those who engage in certain spiritual practices; they are those who *draw their life from a conversational relationship with God*. They do not live their lives merely in terms of the human order in the visible world; they have "a life beyond."

Today we live on the Emmaus road, so to speak, with an intermittently burning heart. His word pours into our heart, energizing and directing our life in a way that cannot be accounted for in natural terms. My visible surroundings become, instead, God's gift to me, where I am privileged to see the rule of heaven realized through my friendship with Jesus.

*Spiritual people
draw their
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1 Thessalonians

BOOK INTRODUCTION

As a first-century apostle, Paul had his hands full. Lacking a completed New Testament or a body of scholarship built up over 2,000 years, he and his fellow apostles had to personally wrestle with every question that surfaced in the young church. Today, Christians simply open their Bibles to find the answers they need. But one tension remains open-ended even now: the timing of Jesus Christ's return to earth.

Jesus undeniably taught His disciples that He would both leave this earth *and* return: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). Among His true followers, then, the fact of Christ's second coming is not in dispute. It is rather the *when* that sparks disagreements.

The disciples began the questioning before Jesus left the earth: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). On the very day they asked Jesus that question—40 days after He arose from the grave—He left again, ascending into heaven (Acts 1:9). As they gazed into the clouds where He had vanished, wondering what it all meant, two angels told them that Jesus would return the same way they had seen Him depart.

Yes, but *when*? As the apostles set about to proclaim the gospel "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), His second coming still confounded them.

In one sense, the answer to their question was easy: No one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36). Still, the first-century churches had reason to believe that Christ might return in their lifetime. Paul is among those apostles who wrote that the coming of the Lord is "at hand" (Phil. 4:5). And Paul even used "we" when referring to those who would be alive when Christ appears (4:17). But the Thessalonian church—under persecution and still young in its understanding—was especially troubled about what happens to Christians when they die and whether they had missed the Second Coming.

WHAT IT SAYS | *Never without Hope*

Paul's time in Thessalonica was cut short by a fast-rising tide of persecution. Knowing the difficulties facing those fledgling believers, Paul grew increasingly concerned about the fate of the church and sent Timothy to check on them (3:1–5). Timothy brought back a positive report. The Thessalonian church, in spite of its suffering, was continuing in "faith and love" (3:6; Acts 18:5).

1 THESSALONIANS

But Timothy also brought back with him the heartfelt concerns and questions from the believers in Thessalonica: *Has Christ already returned? How will we know? Will it be in our lifetime? What if we die before He comes back? And what about our relatives who have already died believing in Christ? Do we have the same hope? Will we see one another again?*

Paul had obviously spoken of Christ's coming with the Thessalonians in person since they raised further questions after his departure. The two letters to the Thessalonians, written perhaps only six months apart, are known as his "eschatological (and times) epistles." Covering the subject in greater detail here than in any of his other letters, Paul gave much-needed answers to these young believers and also provided what is perhaps even more important: how the return of Jesus is a hope and encouragement to those who long for His appearing.

WHAT IT MEANS | *Christ Is Coming*

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian church focuses on these important themes:

- **Perseverance in Trials:** Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ—probably to counter not only the readers' concerns but the temptation to despair in the face of suffering. Paul is obviously integrating the expected trials associated with following Christ to the hope of Christ's appearing for His church (1:8–10; 2:19, 20; 3:13; 4:16–18; 5:23–24).
- **The Dead in Christ:** In details not found anywhere else in the NT, Paul outlines the events of the Rapture of the church: all believers who have died in Christ or who are alive when He appears will be gathered to Him as the signal event in the unfolding of the earth's final days (4:13–18).
- **Living While Waiting:** Paul was concerned about the holiness of the church in two realms as they lived in light of Christ's return: personal purity and personal responsibility. Warning believers against using any delay in Christ's coming as a license for immorality (4:3–8), Paul urged them to live up to every responsibility in their families and community. In so doing, they would win the respect of outsiders and not give their critics cause to persecute them even further (4:9–12).
- **Wrath of God:** Paul assured the believers that the judgment of God was reserved for those who reject the gospel, not for them (1:10; 2:16; 5:3–9).
- **Authenticity and Integrity:** Because he had been removed from them in an untimely way, Paul assured the Thessalonians that his absence did not signal a lack of commitment to them or any falsehood in his ministry and message (1:5; 2:1–12). Looking for the strongest metaphor he could find, Paul compared himself to both a nursing mother (2:7) and an attentive father in his concern for their welfare.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | *Live in Light of Christ's Return*

Two things are guaranteed for us all: that difficulty will come in this life, and that Christ is coming back to gather up His people to live with Him forever. Though no one can predict when He will return, the Lord's coming is "at hand." His return is imminent. As Paul stated, "Now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Rom. 13:11, 12).

Since we do not know the precise moment, it could be *any* moment. As those who belong to Jesus, we live in that *now* and *not yet* place that believers throughout history have lived—where we simultaneously long for His appearing, watchfully wait for it, and still seek to live carefully in the present. May our lives reflect that truth in the face of difficulty, death, and even our day-to-day duties until He comes.

When we remember the circumstances in which Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, it is not surprising that these books contain more references to the Second Coming than any other NT letters. Paul had probably instructed the Thessalonians on the second coming of Christ while he was with them. But because of persecution (Acts 17:1-9), Paul and Silas had to flee Thessalonica unexpectedly after only a few weeks, leaving the new believers with troubling questions on a variety of subjects. Those questions included the fate of loved ones who had died before Christ's return (4:13-18) and whether or not the Rapture had yet occurred (2 Thess. 2:1, 2).

Paul wrote these letters to encourage the church in Thessalonica because its people were facing persecution and some of their loved ones had died—experiences all Christians will encounter until Christ returns. Recognizing that the people needed comfort and guidance, Paul shows why the Second Coming is an important theological concept: it encourages God's people and motivates them to holy living.

The OT prophets foresaw the hope of the Second Coming, though with less clarity and definition than did Paul. After the nation of Israel split into northern and southern kingdoms, the people fell into sin and idolatry and experienced God's judgment in the form of exile under foreign oppressors (Something God warned them of in Deut. 28:15-68). The discouraged Israelites longed for God to set things right by judging their oppressors and establishing Israel once again as His favored nation (Deut. 32:1-10; Isa. 60; Zech. 2:8).

The prophets believed Israel's consolation would come at the consummation of history in an event they called the Day of the Lord (Isa. 2:12; Joel 2:1; Amos 5:20; Zech. 14:1). The apostle Peter says this "day" began with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost after Christ's ascension (Acts 2:16-18). It would conclude with a series of events at the end of the age: the resurrection and Rapture (removal) of the church before a seven-year period of judgment and tribulation upon the earth, the physical return (second coming) of Christ as judge and king, the establishment of God's kingdom on earth for a thousand years, the final judgment of humanity, and the beginning of the eternal state in the New Jerusalem. The focal point of the end of the age would be the Second Coming, when Christ would return as both King and Judge (Rev. 19:11-21).

Three Greek words are used in the NT to refer to the Second Coming: Paul uses all three in his letters to the Thessalonians. *Parousia* means "coming" or "presence." It was often used in secular Greek literature to refer to the visit or presence of a king or an important dignitary. Paul uses it to refer to "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (3:13). *Apokalypsis* means "revelation" or "unveiling" (the book of Revelation is also called the Apocalypse). Paul says the "troubled" will be given "rest . . . when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels" (2 Thess. 1:7). *Epiphaneia* means "appearance" or "visible manifestation"—Christ will destroy the Antichrist with the "brightness [epiphaneia] of His coming [parousia]" (2 Thess. 2:8).

Each of these Greek words conveys a different aspect of the Second Coming: Christ's presence (*parousia*) will be personal, His revelation (*apokalypsis*) will be mighty, and His appearance (*epiphaneia*) will be glorious. The splendor of this event is captured in John's own vision of the glorious Christ (Rev. 1:12-16) and His second coming to earth (Rev. 19:11-16) in the book of Revelation.

Even though it has been nearly 2,000 years since Christ's first coming, His second coming is certain. The testimony of Christ's own words (Matt. 24:30) tells us that Jesus will return to balance the scales of justice, gather His people to Himself in His kingdom, and establish His rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords. It is not a question of whether every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord—it is only a matter of when (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:10).

For Further Reading: Matt. 24:27; Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:5-16; Phil. 1:8; James 5:7

1 Thessalonians

166-103 BC First Jewish community in Thessalonica, émigrés from Alexandria	146 BC Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, and "the Mother of Macedonia"	42 BC Thessalonica declared a free city under Augustus	AD 15 Loss of Thessalonica's free city status during the reign of Tiberius
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"This is God's will, your sanctification" (4:3).

Who wrote 1 Thessalonians?

The Apostle Paul was the principal author. However, Timothy and Silvanus (Silas) also contributed.

Who were the recipients?

The letter was written to the church at Thessalonica, to the brothers and sisters who had come to faith in Jesus Christ as a result of Paul's brief ministry there during his second missionary journey (Ac 17:1-9).

When was 1 Thessalonians written?

First Thessalonians was written shortly after Timothy joined Paul at Corinth (3:6), bringing encouraging news about the Thessalonians' growth in Christ and their affection for Paul. He responded to Timothy's report with this letter at some point within his 18-month ministry in Corinth (Aa 5:1-2; Ac 18:11).

Where did it happen?

Thessalonica, the destination of Paul's letter, was the self-governing capital of Macedonia and seat of Roman power, situated at the intersection of major trade routes and located on the *Via Egnatia*, an important Roman highway.

What is 1 Thessalonians about?

Persecution. Paul wrote to encourage the church to press on in the midst of persecution.
Christ's return. The return of Christ is mentioned in every chapter of this book and offers hope for Christians facing tough circumstances.

Outline

- I. Delivering a Personal Testimony (1:1-3:13)
 - A. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonian Believers (1:1-10)
 - B. Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica (2:1-16)
 - C. Timothy's Ministry (2:17-3:13)
- II. The Call to Sanctification (4:1-8)
 - A. Responding to Questions (4:9-5:11)
 - B. On Brotherly Love (4:9-10)
 - C. On Earning One's Living (4:11-12)
- III. Responding to Questions (4:9-5:11)
 - A. On Brotherly Love (4:9-10)
 - B. On Earning One's Living (4:11-12)
- IV. Offering a Challenge to Christian Duty (5:12-22)
 - A. Leadership in the Community (5:12-13)
 - B. Fellowship in the Community (5:14-15)
 - C. Submission to Christ (5:16-22)
- V. Concluding Prayer, Greetings, and Blessing (5:23-28)

Christian living. Paul responded to specific questions that may have arrived via a letter carried by Timothy. Paul recognized that the Thessalonians' lifestyle mistakes were linked to their misunderstanding of doctrinal issues. He did not simply tell them to live differently but corrected the thinking that led to those choices. The connection between *orthodoxy* ("right thinking") and *orthopraxy* ("right practice") was vital in Paul's thinking.

Why should women read 1 Thessalonians?

Women will face a variety of difficulties throughout a lifetime, but God teaches in 1 Thessalonians that a Christian's response to difficulties is dramatically opposed to the way the lost world responds. Learning how to live like Christ in a culture that is so foreign to Christian ideals is a process in which a woman allows God to mold her into His image and chip away those things that are not godly.

How do you read 1 Thessalonians?

This tender-hearted pastoral epistle follows the basic structure of other letters written during the Greco-Roman period—introduction, body, and conclusion—but in a distinctively Christian manner. The letter opens with the typical identification of the authors and recipients and Paul's unique greeting, "Grace to you and peace" (1:1), but the introductory section consists of a prayer of thanksgiving (1:2-5), and the concluding section (5:23-24) contains a benediction before the closing greetings (5:25-28).

1 THESSALONIANS

- A. GREETINGS (1:1)
- B. CONGRATULATIONS (1:2—3:13)
 - 1. Paul's Commendation for Their Progress (1:2—10)
 - 2. Paul's Conduct While With Them (2:1—12)
 - 3. Paul's Concern for Their Continued Spiritual Growth (2:13—3:13)
- C. CONSULATIONS (4:1—5:22)
 - 1. Concerning Morality (4:1—8)
 - 2. Concerning Mutual Love (4:9—12)
 - 3. Concerning Deceased Christians (4:13—18)
 - 4. Concerning Accountability Before God (5:1—11)
 - 5. Concerning Our Conduct in Relationships (5:12—22)
- D. BENEDICTION AND CLOSING THOUGHTS (5:23—28)

THE BIG PICTURE

Paul and his companions Silas and Timothy first traveled to Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey (see Acts 15:40—16:4; 17:1). Many people in Thessalonica who had worshiped idols turned their lives over to God. These believers gave up their empty rituals and lives of dependence upon material things to serve the living and true God. And Paul commended them for this.

Their new lives of faith were not easy, though. Despite the positive changes God had made in the believers' lives, some people harassed and teased them. Many of their friends and relatives opposed them. This persecution forced Paul and his companions to leave Thessalonica. But Paul was concerned about the new believers he had left behind. Were they strong enough in their faith in God? Would they slip back into old patterns of sin and idolatry? Paul sent Timothy to check on the Thessalonians. Encouraged by Timothy's report, Paul sent them this letter.

When we meet with opposition, we can identify with Paul and the believers at Thessalonica. Friends and family members may not understand our faith; old habits may pressure us to return to our old ways. But we can be encouraged by the progress we have already made. God's power is at work within us. We don't have to quit our spiritual journey just because we face opposition.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

GOD IS OUR SOURCE OF HOPE

If we place our trust in Christ to save us from sin, we will live with him forever; we will have eternal life. But we can have hope for more than just life beyond the grave; we can also have hope for what God can bring to our lives in the present. The power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the power of God—the God to whom we have entrusted our lives. With this kind of power available to us, there is always hope for a renewed life!

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS A WAY OF LIFE

Paul challenged the Thessalonians to always live in humble anticipation of Christ's coming, realizing that each day is important. We also need to live one day at a time, recognizing that our spiritual growth will never be complete in this life. We need to live responsibly, depending on God at all times. God is always transforming us. When we become complacent, drift away from continued dependence on God and forsake accountability to others, we endanger whatever spiritual gains we have made.

COMMITMENT THAT OVERCOMES OBSTACLES

We are all flawed human beings with many limitations and problems. Living in this world means that we will always face obstacles to our continued spiritual growth. We must stand firm in our commitment to God, knowing that the Holy Spirit empowers us with his strength. God's power is available to all of us; to make spiritual progress we must commit ourselves to actively obeying God's will.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14

Asleep

What happens to souls that don't go to heaven? Many people today say there is no such place as a literal hell. Those who wish to base this belief on the Bible commonly cite verse 13 and its use of the word "asleep" to argue that souls that are not accepted by God into heaven will remain unconscious for all of eternity. However, context shows that Paul was attempting to comfort readers who were sad about the passing away of their friends and relatives. Instead of being blunt and calling them "dead," Paul used the softer term "asleep." This was a common way of speaking of death in Paul's day, and we sometimes do the same thing when we figuratively say someone "passed away" or was "called home." Besides this important point, the deceased to whom Paul refers were Christians ("fallen asleep through Jesus" in v. 14, *italics ours*), not unbelievers headed for hell. Unbelievers face dire judgment after death, not eternal sleep (Mt. 25:46; Rv. 20:15).

FACTS

How the Bible Came Together

1. Much or all of our OT was accepted as Scripture among Jews in Jesus' day (Lk 24:44); by the end of the first century the consensus was final.
2. NT books were recognized as Scripture because they were: (a) written by an apostle or his associate; (b) widely circulated in the early church; (c) consistent with apostolic teachings and OT Scripture.
3. Many NT books were accepted as Scripture and were in wide circulation very early (Col 4:16; 1Th 5:27; 2Pt 3:15-16).
4. God who brought the canon of Scripture together through the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit at work in God's people.

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:

To commend the believers in Thessalonica for their trust in God, to encourage them to continue trusting him and to reassure them that Christ would return.

AUTHOR:

The apostle Paul.

AUDIENCE:

The believers in Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia.

DATE WRITTEN:

About AD 50–51, during Paul's second missionary journey.

SETTING:

The church in Thessalonica was only two or three years old when Paul wrote this letter. The believers needed to mature spiritually, and they needed some help in understanding the return of Christ.

KEY VERSE:

"You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness" (5:5).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Paul with the believers at Thessalonica and with Timothy.

1 Thessalonians

Are you excited about the return of Jesus? You should be. That imminent event will rock the world. While you're looking for the Savior in the skies, however, 1 Thessalonians explains how you should live, and sometimes even face difficulty, as you wait.

First, patiently wait for God's Son from heaven (1Th 1:10). What if you knew your parents planned on giving you the gift you've always wanted but they wouldn't tell you when? That's kind of like waiting for Jesus—the ultimate gift. We know He will return, but we can't be sure about exactly what time it will happen. So we're to be expectant and excited about the amazing possibility every day!

When we least expect it we'll be "caught up together . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord" (1Th 4:17). What a wild ride! We can only imagine how that reunion with our Creator will cheer our hearts and thrill our minds.

Second, live to please God. Since we can't know the specific time Jesus will come back, can we do anything we want in the meantime? No way. Everything we do, say, and think should bring us closer to Jesus. The same prayer for those in Thessalonica applies to us: "May He make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" (1Th 3:13). We can only have pure hearts by seeking God's forgiveness when we sin—or avoiding evil in the first place. How exactly do we remain blameless for Jesus here and now? By not giving in to temptations. "Stay away from every kind of evil" (1Th 5:22). You should also "seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands . . . so that you may walk properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone" (1Th 4:11-12). In other words, we should provide a good example both to other Christians and to non-believers alike.

Well, after this first letter, the believers in Thessalonica thought that Jesus was coming any minute—literally. Then, as time passed, family members and friends died, and persecution intensified; they began to wonder if they'd made a mistake. Was Jesus really going to come back? So Paul wrote to them a second time. He encouraged them to stand firm. One day Christ will come with powerful angels (2Th 1:7), but in the meantime we ought not be surprised by suffering and persecution, for nothing will take God by surprise. Everything will happen just as He promises.

Paul could be talking directly to you when he says, "We have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do what we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's endurance" (2Th 3:4).

Love and endurance. Pray that you'll grow in both.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

PAUL HAS MANY PLEASANT MEMORIES of the days he spent with the infant Thessalonian church. Their faith, hope, love, and perseverance in the face of persecution are exemplary. Paul's labors as a spiritual parent to the fledgling church have been richly rewarded, and his affection is visible in every line of his letter.

Paul encourages them to excel in their newfound faith, to increase in their love for one another, and to rejoice, pray, and give thanks always. He closes his letter with instruction regarding the return of the Lord, whose advent signifies hope and comfort for believers both living and dead.

Because this is the first of Paul's two canonical letters to the church at Thessalonica, it received the title *Pros Thessalonikeis A*, the "First to the Thessalonians."

WATCH WORDS

- holiness (majesty and moral perfection)—3:13
- coming (presence; visitation of royalty)—3:13 (also 4:15; 5:23)
- sanctification (the process of being set apart or consecrated to God)—4:3
- sleep (die—here; or spiritual carelessness or indifference)—5:10 (also 5:6)
- epistle (written letter)—5:27

1:3 work

(Gr. *ergon*) (Matt. 5:16; John 6:29; Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:10) G2041: This word refers to business, employment, or anything with which one is occupied. Both the labor or toil of work and the product that results from the work are described by this term. It is often used to simply mean "deeds" or the actions that characterize a person's life. The works of a believer are to draw others to faith (Matt. 5:16), yet such works cannot save anyone—salvation is by faith alone through grace (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16). Works of the flesh are contrasted with works of the spirit (Gal. 5:19).

1:9 serve ▶ see Rom. 14:18.

1:10 deliver

(Gr. *rhymnai*) (Matt. 6:13; 27:43; Rom. 7:24; 2 Pet. 2:9) G4506: This verb has a variety of meanings, including "to draw to oneself, rescue, deliver, preserve, and save." It is not the most common word for "save" in the New Testament, and it is used in only 16 verses. It often refers to deliverance from someone or something, and about half of the New Testament occurrences are quotations from the Old Testament. God is our rescuer; both from our sins at salvation (2 Cor. 1:10; Col. 1:13) and for a glorious future (Rom. 11:26). Second Corinthians 1:10 references deliverance for past, present, and future: "[God] delivered [*rhymnai*] us from so great a death, and does deliver [*rhymnai*] us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver [*rhymnai*] us."

2:5 covenant-ness ▶ see Col. 3:5.

2:8 im part ▶ see Rom. 1:17.

2:13 work ▶ see 2 Cor. 4:12.

2:14 initiator ▶ see Eph. 5:1.

2:18 hinder

(Gr. *enkoptō*) (Acts 24:4; Rom. 15:22; Gal. 5:7) G1465: This verb means "hinder, restrain, impede, cut into, or cut off one's way"—particularly describing an obstacle that must be overcome. The root words mean literally "to cut in." Here and in Romans 15:22 it refers to Satan or other forces preventing Paul from traveling where he wished. In Galatians 5:7 it is used figuratively to refer to hindrances in one's spiritual

3:1 endure ▶ see 1 Cor. 13:7.

3:5 endure ▶ see 1 Cor. 13:7.

3:7 affliction ▶ see John 16:33.

3:10 exceedingly ▶ see John 10:10.

3:13 blameless ▶ see Heb. 8:7.

3:13 holiness

(Gr. *hagiosymē*) (Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 7:1) G0042: This word, denoting majesty and moral perfection, is only used three times in the New Testament. In each case it describes a sacredness and set-apart quality to a person's life and conduct. Believers are consecrated to God and should live lives of moral purity and godly character that will cause them not to feel ashamed at the coming of Christ. God has declared us holy through the work of Christ on the Cross, and we are to live that out in our lives.

3:13 coming

(Gr. *parousia*) (1 Thess. 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 2 Pet. 1:16) G3952: The Greek word *parousia* literally means "presence." The word was commonly used in New Testament times to describe the visitation of royalty or of some other important person. Thus the word signals no ordinary "coming." The New Testament writers use the word to describe Christ's second coming, when He will return to earth in His ultimate, glorious visitation as the King over all.

4:2 commandment ▶ see Acts 16:24.

4:3 sanctification

(Gr. *hagiasmos*) (1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Pet. 1:2) G0038: The Greek noun may refer to sanctification as the active work that brings about holiness (2 Thess. 2:13) or to the result of that work, in which case it might be translated "holiness" (Heb. 12:14). Interpreters debate which of these senses is found in particular occurrences in the New Testament. At its root (as that of related words rendered "holy," "sanctify," "consecrate," etc.) is the idea of being set apart or consecrated to God and thus His. This implies separation from moral defilement.

4:14 physician

(Gr. *iatros*) (Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17) G2395: Within the New Testament, this term is used only in the literal sense. Luke—and Luke alone—cites both of the New Testament's physician proverbs: "Physician, heal yourself" and "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Luke 4:23; 5:31). The Gospels record the story of a woman who spent all she had on physicians, enduring their "remedies" in vain (Mark 5:26; Luke 8:43). In the Greco-Roman world, the level of esteem doctors were held in varied widely: some doctors were highly regarded, some were unknown slaves, some were folk-healers, and some were simply quacks.

4:16 read ▶ see Acts 8:28.

4:17 fulfill ▶ see Luke 4:21.

AN INTRODUCTION TO

1 & 2

THESSALONIANS

In his first letter, Paul reminded the Christians in Thessalonica of lessons he taught them when he was there. He taught them that Jesus will come back for them. But before that happens, they may have hard times. Paul's advice to the Christians is good advice for us today. In everything, live to please God. God has special rewards he will give in the future to people who serve him. In his second letter, Paul explained that many events still need to happen before Christ comes back. While believers wait for Christ, they need to keep working and keep on doing good.



>WORD|study

1:1 The city of the Thessalonians, previously a town called Theme (Gr. "hot"), was named after Thessalonike (Gr. "Victory in Thessaly"), the half-sister of Alexander the Great in 315 B.C. Located on the eastern coast of Macedonia, the city boasted a deep harbor and protection from dangerous winds. The climate was ideal for crops; rain was abundant; forests provided timber for construction; and the rivers provided fish. Consequently, Thessalonica was not only the largest but also a very strategic city from which to advance the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. The city's religious climate was diverse and included Judaism, the imperial cult, Greek gods (Cerberus and Dionysus, and Egyptian gods). The resident Jews had established a synagogue there.

WHERE AM I?

The city of Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, a Roman province. It was located east of Rome and west of Philippi on the coast of the Aegean Sea.

1 THESSALONIANS

SHINING THE LIGHT

Paul commended the Thessalonian church, that their faith had become known everywhere and was a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

BODY BUILDERS

This was the first letter from Paul to the church in Thessalonica. After Timothy returned from a trip to visit and encourage the Thessalonians, his good report prompted Paul to write and send this letter to help strengthen and commend them in their faith.

BY THE NUMBERS

5 CHAPTERS
89 VERSES
1,944 WORDS

In the Word

The first three chapters are more of a historical account; the last two are more doctrinal and instructional.

KEY PASSAGE

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (5:16-18).

LIFE LESSONS: Physical death will never separate you from Jesus (4:13-18).

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW 1 THESSALONIANS?

1 THESSALONIANS IN REVIEW

HOT SEAT

1. I am the only one who was not part of writing the letter to the Thessalonians. Which one am I?

- A. Paul
- B. Sosthenes
- C. Silas
- D. Timothy

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

2. In what city were Paul and his companions “treated outrageously”?

“?” CRYPTIC PHRASES

- 3. What was Adelpheos?
 - A. The Greek word referring to a fellow member of God’s family
 - B. A Roman guard who sent his greetings
 - C. A city on the Mediterranean coastline
 - D. A major thoroughfare connecting Rome and Jerusalem

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

4. What does Paul say he doesn’t have to already about because the Thessalonians have written about being taught it?

- A. Their method of electing elders for their church
- B. Their solid grasp of the importance of marriage
- C. Their love toward one another
- D. Their hospitality toward strangers

WHO DUNNIT?

5. Who does Paul say blocked every attempt he and his companions made to go to Thessalonica?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

- 6. What does Paul compare his caring for the Thessalonians to?
 - A. A nursing mother who cares for her children
 - B. A shepherd who cares for his sheep
 - C. A father who only gives good gifts to his children
 - D. A teacher who instructs his students with kindness, respect and love

WHO DUNNIT?

7. Who does Paul say was hostile to everyone and was displeasing to God?

- A. The Roman governor who wanted to gain more control of Thessalonica
- B. The false prophets that were infiltrating the church
- C. The Gentiles in Judea who rejected the gospel
- D. The Jews in Judea who rejected the gospel

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

8. Does Paul ever say that he had been afraid that the Thessalonians might have lost faith?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

9. I am what Paul says he doesn’t want the Thessalonians “uninformed about.” What am I?

HOT SEAT

10. Paul says, “Make it your ambition to (Fill in the blank.)”

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

11. Paul says we should put you on as a breastplate. What are you?

- A. Set out on a pilgrimage each year
- B. Persevere in self-control
- C. Overcome obstacles of the flesh
- D. Lead a quiet life

TIME TRAVELER

12. What does Paul say not to quench?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

13. What does Paul say to quench?

ANSWERS:

- 1. (5) Paul; 2. (4) D; 3. (2) B; 4. (2) C; 5. (1) A; 6. (2) A; 7. (1) B; 8. (1) C; 9. (1) D; 10. (1) A; 11. (1) C; 12. (1) D; 13. (1) B.