

#14. THE THESSALONIAN CORRESPONDENCE

1. Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians were written from Corinth and were sent to assure the young, persecuted congregation of The Lord's Return. As they waited patiently for that day, the apostle hoped they would be strengthened in faith and motivated toward holy living. First Thessalonians is one of Paul's earliest letters.

2. **Author and date** - Paul wrote both letters (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:17), authoring the first in late 51AD and the second letter in the late winter or spring of 52AD.
 - Paul was clearly concerned about the welfare of this very young church. The congregation had been formed less than three years earlier, and was experiencing considerable persecution from enemies of the Cross. The text indicates Paul was uncertain even to the point of questioning their continued survival since the departure of the apostolic team. Timothy's report of their flourishing condition brought delight to Paul.

 - Paul was accompanied by Silas and Timothy when they established the Thessalonian church on the Second Missionary Journey (Acts 17:1-9).

3. **Paul's emphasis** is clearly on bringing peace and assurance to the Thessalonians that Christ's Return would occur in the future. There was confusion based on forged letters and intentional misrepresentation that led the young Believers to fear they had somehow missed the glorious event. Paul's letter contains reminders of what he had taught when he was with them.

4. **Key Chapter**
 - Chapters 4 and 5 of the first letter bring comfort, clarity, and certainty concerning the matter of the Lord's Return. 2 Thessalonians 2 provides insight about the timing of Christ's Return, the manifestation of the Man of Sin, and the Great Falling Away that would somehow be associated with that eschatological series of events.

5. **Key Verse**
 - **1 Thessalonians 4:14 NIV** "We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him."

- **2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 NIV** “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, Brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report, or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of The Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the Man of Lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s Temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”

6. Key People

- **Paul, Silas and Timothy** - This trio was the founding apostolic team in Thessalonica. Paul emerges as the lead apostle, however, and the content of the letters is clearly Pauline.

7. Key Place -

- **Thessalonica** - Thessalonica was located at the intersection of two major roads connecting the city of Rome to the area around the Aegean Sea. Thessalonica’s location and use as a port made it a prominent city in the Roman Empire. In 42BC, after the battle at Philippi, Thessalonica was made a free city. Today the modern city of Thessaloniki is the second most important city of Greece and home to over a million inhabitants.

8. Key Themes

- **Persecution** - using himself as a model, Paul explained that persecution is part of the normal Christian life. Our strength in such difficult times is from the Holy Spirit.
- **Christ’s Return** - this wonderful promise is a major part of Christian doctrine and should be treasured by every Believer. Misinformation received by the Thessalonian church had robbed the congregation of hope. Paul re-taught some of the basic eschatology, reminding them of what he had said when he was with them earlier.
- **Hope** - Paul went to great lengths to ground them in solid doctrine because our entire hope for the future hinges on the return of Christ and the Resurrection of the dead. Paul would say later that if Christ is not raised from the dead, then we are still lost in our sins and have no hope (1 Corinthians 15:19).
- **Holy Living** - The young Christians are encouraged to live holy lives as they wait for the appearance of Jesus from Heaven!

- **Antichrist** - both Jesus and John would have much to say about this individual. Paul referred to him as *The Man of Lawlessness*.
- **The Great Rebellion** - also known as *The Great Falling Away*, Paul indicates the Return of The Lord will be preceded by the revelation of Antichrist and a general time of apostasy, probably within the church itself. Some teach this great apostasy is a description of the world's rejection of Christ, but I feel the context may point closer to those who have made religious profession on some level. In this regard, the unconverted could not *fall away* because they were never in our number (1 John 2:18, 19).

9. The Contents of 1 and 2 Thessalonians

- **First Thessalonians**
 - Greetings to the Church (1:1)
 - Paul's Personal Reminiscences (1:2-3:13)
 - Thanksgiving for the Church (1:2-10)
 - Reminders (2:1-16)
 - Paul's Concerns (2:17-3:13)
 - Five Words of Advice from Paul (4:1- 5:22)
 - Maintain Moral Integrity (4:1-8)
 - Live Disciplined Lives (4:9-12)
 - Live with Christ's Return in View (4:13-5:11)
 - Honorable Church Relationships (5:12-15)
 - Live Solid Christian Lives (5:16-22)
 - Paul's Blessing and Farewell (5:23-28)
- **Second Thessalonians**
 - Paul's Greeting to the Church (1:1, 2)

- Words of Comfort (1:3-12)
- Words of Doctrinal Correction (2:1-17)
- Words of Practical Correction (3:1-15)
- Paul's Farewell (3:16-18)

Worth noting about Thessalonians

- Paul doesn't simply deal with matters of eschatological timing, he points out that the Return of Christ will also permanently solve the problem of evil in the world. Satan will be destroyed, and everything will be set right.
- Satan also sends persecution in order to snuff out new spiritual life. Jesus, in His Matthew 13 parable about the seeds, the soils, and the sower, said that some seed is lost because the troubles of persecution cause new life to wilt. Paul encouraged them to remain strong, trusting in the indwelling Holy Spirit to give victory.

When reading Thessalonians:

- Remember the converts were young and only a few were from a Jewish background. A few others were followers of Roman gods, but the great majority were described as *pagans*.
- The Thessalonian correspondence, along with Galatians, may be the earliest extant Christian literature in existence.
- The uncertainty and confusion concerning the Lord's Return had led many to abandon their responsibility. Paul issued sharp rebukes for those who had fallen into that trap (*If you don't work, you don't eat!*).