**The Book of 1 Thessalonians**

Introduction

**Author:** The apostle Paul. The qualifications for an apostle are:

**Date:** This wonderful epistle is almost at the end of Paul’s epistles as far as their arrangement in the New Testament is concerned. However, it was actually the first epistle that Paul wrote. It was written by Paul in 52 or 53 AD.

**Geographical Setting:**

1 Thessalonica was located fifty miles west of Philippi and about one hundred miles north of Athens. It was Cicero who said, “Thessalonica is in the bosom of the empire.” Refer to Figure 1.

It was right in the center or the heart of the empire and was the chief city of Macedonia.

The city was first named Therma because of the hot springs in that area. In 316 A.D. Cassander, one of the four generals who divided up the empire of Alexander the Great, took Macedonia and made Thessalonica his home base. He renamed the city in memory of his wife, Thessalonike, who was a half sister of Alexander. The city is still in existence and is now known as Salonika.

The church in Thessalonica, established on Paul’s second missionary journey, was a model church. Paul mentions this in the first chapter; “So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess. 1:7). This church was a testimony to the whole area that we would call Greece today.

Paul also speaks of this church as being an example to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:1–5.

You will recall that Paul and Barnabas separated prior to the second missionary journey. Paul took Silas with him, and along the route he picked up Timothy and Dr. Luke. He revisited the churches in Galatia and then attempted to make a wider circle in the densely populated area of Asia Minor, known as Turkey today.

I think he intended to carry on his missionary work there, because in his third missionary journey he did make Ephesus his headquarters and did what was probably his greatest missionary work.

But on his second missionary journey, the Spirit of God put up a roadblock and would not let him go south. He attempted to go up into Bithynia, but again the Spirit of God prevented him.

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He couldn’t go north, and he couldn’t go south. So he moved to the west and came to Troas to await orders. He had the vision of the man of Macedonia, so he crossed over to Philippi.

He found that the man of Macedonia was instead a woman by the name of Lydia, a seller of purple—she probably ran a department store there. Paul led her to the Lord along with others of the city. Thus, a church was established at Philippi.

Then Paul went to Thessalonica, and we are told in chapter 17 of Acts that he was there for three Sabbaths. So Paul was there a little less than a month, but in that period of time he did a Herculean task of mission work. Paul was an effective missionary—he led multitudes to Christ there. And in that brief time he not only organized a local church, but he also taught them the great doctrines of the Christian faith.

Now Paul had to leave Thessalonica post-haste due to great opposition to the gospel. He was run out of town and went down to Berea. The enemy pursued him to Berea, and again Paul was forced to leave. Paul left Silas and Timothy at Berea, but he went on to Athens. After some time at Athens, he went on to Corinth. Apparently it was at Corinth that Timothy and Silas came to him and brought him word concerning the Thessalonians (see 1 Thess. 3:6). Timothy also brought some questions to Paul, problems troubling the believers in Thessalonica. Paul wrote this first epistle in response to their questions, to instruct them further and give them needed comfort.

Although Paul had been in Thessalonica less than a month, he had touched on many of the great doctrines of the church, including the second coming of Christ. It is interesting that Paul did not consider this subject to be above the heads of the new converts. Yet there are churches today that have been in existence for more than one hundred years whose members have but a vague understanding of the rapture of the church and the coming of Christ to establish His Kingdom here on earth. The Thessalonian church was not even a month old, and Paul was teaching them these great doctrines!

The apostle obviously had emphasized the second coming of Christ for believers and had taught that the return of Christ was imminent; for during the period of time since Paul had left, some of the saints who had come to know and believe in Christ Jesus had died, and this had naturally raised the question in the minds of the Thessalonians as to whether these saints would be in the Rapture or not. Paul presents the second coming of Christ in relationship to believers as a comfort, and this forms the theme of the epistle. This emphasis is in sharp contrast to Christ’s catastrophic and cataclysmic coming in glory to establish His Kingdom by putting down all unrighteousness, as seen in Revelation 19:11–16.

**Historical Setting:**

Thessalonica was a Roman colony. Rome had a somewhat different policy with their captured people from what many other nations have had. For example, it seems that we try to Americanize all the people throughout the world, as if that would be the ideal.

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2Thessalonica was a Roman colony. Rome had a somewhat different policy with their captured people from what many other nations have had. For example, it seems that we try to Americanize all the people throughout the world, as if that would be the ideal.

Rome was much wiser than that. She did not attempt to directly change the culture, the habits, the customs, or the language of the people whom she conquered. Instead, she would set up colonies which were arranged geographically in strategic spots throughout the empire.

A city which was a Roman colony would gradually adopt Roman laws and customs and ways. In the local department stores you would see the latest things they were wearing in Rome itself. Thus these colonies were very much like a little Rome. Thessalonica was such a Roman colony, and it was an important city in the life of the Roman Empire.

![Figure 1. Geographical Setting for the Letter to the Church at Thessalonica.](image-url)

**Purpose.**

3 The epistle has a threefold purpose:

1. To confirm young converts in the elementary truth of the gospel.
2. To condition them to go on unto holy living.
3. To comfort them regarding the return of Christ.

Paul’s message offered a marked contrast to the paganism and heathenism which were present in Thessalonica.

A heathen inscription in Thessalonica read: “After death no reviving, after the grave no meeting again.”

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**Authenticity:**

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians…….. 1Thes 1:1

**Key Verses:**


**Key Words/Phrases:** ‘Faith, hope, love’  
‘Labor of love’  
‘Patience of hope’  
“…….you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

**Major Theme:** Christian living in light of the fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ and His Return.

**Key Teachings:**

In 1 Thessalonians the emphasis is upon the rapture of believers, the coming of Christ to take His church out of the world. There are a lot of people today who want to argue prophecy, and there is a great deal of curiosity about it. But the fact that the coming of Christ is a purifying hope should lead to sanctification in our lives.

John tells us, “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). This hope should have a purifying effect in our lives.

People are not interested in how enthusiastic and excited you get over the truth of Christ’s Return for His Church—the Christian’s ‘Blessed Hope’. They want to know how you are living. Does this hope get right down to where you are living, and does it make a difference your life? Does it truly give you peace, joy, hope and loving attitude towards all people?

In 2 Thessalonians the emphasis shifts to the coming of Christ to the earth to establish His Kingdom. There is a great deal of difference in our being caught up to meet the Lord in the air and His coming down to the earth to establish His Kingdom. I think there is a lot of upside down theology today. We will see that there is a distinction between our being caught up and His coming down.
OUTLINES OF 1ST THESALONIANS

I. The Christian’s Attitude toward the Return of Christ, Chapter 1 to serve ... to

  wait ... vv. 9–10

II. The Christian’s Reward at the Return of Christ, Chapter 2

III. The Christian’s Life and the Return of Christ, Chapters 3:1–4:12

IV. The Christian’s Death and the Return of Christ, Chapter 4:13–18

V. The Christian’s Actions in View of the Return of Christ, Chapter 5 Note twenty–
two specific commands to Christians, beginning at v. 11

I. Coming of Christ Is an Inspiring Hope, Chapter 1

  A. Introduction, Chapter 1:1–4
  B. Gospel Received in Much Assurance and Much Affliction, Chapter 1:5–7
  C. Gospel Results: Turned from Idols to God; Wait for Coming of Christ, Chapter 1:8–10

II. Coming of Christ Is a Working Hope, Chapter 2

  A. Motive and Method of a True Witness for Christ, Chapter 2:1–6
  B. Mother Side of the Apostle’s Ministry (Comfort), Chapter 2:7–9
  C. Father Side of the Apostle’s Ministry (Charge), Chapter 2:10–13
  D. Brother Side of the Apostle’s Ministry (Challenge), Chapter 2:14–16
  E. Reward of a True Witness for Christ, Chapter 2:17–20

III. Coming of Christ Is a Purifying Hope, Chapters 3:1–4:12 Sanctification

  A. Timothy Brings Good Report of Thessalonians, Chapter 3:1–8
  B. Paul Urges Thessalonians to Continue to Grow in Faith, Chapter 3:9–13
  C. How Believers Are to Walk, Chapter 4:1–12

IV. Coming of Christ Is a Comforting Hope, Chapter 4:13–18 What death means to a

  Christian; what the Rapture means to the church

V. Coming of Christ Is a Rousing Hope, Chapter 5 Leads to action; dead believers are

  asleep in Jesus; living believers are awake for Jesus

  A. Call to Be Awake and Alert in View of Christ’s Coming, Chapter 5:1–10
  B. Commandments for Christians, Chapter 5:11–28

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I. Paul's Personal Reflections on the Thessalonians
   1:1-3:13
      A. Paul's Praise of Their Growth 1:1-10
      B. Paul's Founding of the Church 2:1-16
      C. Timothy's Strengthening of the Church 2:17-3:13
         1. Satan Hinders Paul 2:17-20
         2. Timothy's Visit 3:1-5
         3. Timothy's Encouraging Report 3:6-10

II. Paul's Instructions to the Thessalonians 4:1-5:28
      A. Directions for Growth 4:1-12
      B. Revelation Concerning the Dead in Christ 4:13-18
      C. Description of the Day of the Lord 5:1-11
      D. Instruction for Holy Living 5:12-22
      E. Conclusion 5:23-28

I. Salutation (1:1)
II. The exemplary church (1:1-10)
   A. Gratitude for the Thessalonians 1:2-4
   B. Operation of the gospel among them 1:5-10

III. The exemplary minister (2:1-20)
   A. Paul's ministry at Thessalonica 2:1-12
   B. The Thessalonians' response 2:13-16
   C. The apostle's subsequent relations with the Thessalonians 2:17-20

IV. The exemplary brother (3:1-13)
   A. Apostolic concern and their welfare 3:1-8
   B. The apostolic intercession 3:9-13

V. Exemplary walk (4:1-18)
   A. The walk described 4:1-12
   B. The coming of Christ, the dynamic of a holy walk 4:13-18
VI. Exemplary watchfulness and the Day of the Lord (5:1-24)
   A. The Day of the Lord and the need for watchfulness 5:1-11
   B. Duties of church and private life 5:12-22
   C. Prayer for sanctification 5:23-24

VII. Conclusion (5:25-28)

Bibliography

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