



THESSALONIANS

◆ Wednesday February 11, 2009

A Study of Paul's Letters to a New and Growing Church with a Hopeful Future

Spring Semester Bible Study
2nd and 4th Wednesdays

Fast Facts about 1 and 2 Thessalonians

In the genre of biblical literature, the New Testament is comprised of 27 books:

- a) 4 Gospels,
- b) 21 Epistles (or letters),
- c) 1 Historical book (Acts),
- d) 1 Prophetic Book (Revelation)

The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians are known as **Epistles (or letters)**. These letters are often specifically addressed to a person, a church, or a region of believers, and are written by Apostles or their close associates. The most prolific letter writer was the Apostle Paul, who often used a scribe (or amanuenses) to “write down” the letter he dictated (cf. Romans 16:22).

Author, Date, and Recipients of 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Author -- The **Apostle Paul** is regarded as the author of these two letters, and there is very little dispute among scholars over this.

Date -- A.D. 49-51 This early date makes the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians some of the very first New Testament writings ever written (even before the Gospels), and they may have been written only after the books of James (A.D. 40-45) and Galatians (A.D. 49).

Recipients -- The Church in Thessalonica (modern day Greece). Named “Thessaloniki” today.

Thessalonica was the capital city of the Greco-Roman region of Macedonia.

Harbor City – Aegean Sea, and also was on the *Via Egnatia*, the main Roman highway to the East. A Naval base.

Population – 100,000 – 200,000

Government – locally ruled by city authorities known as “politarchs”

Religion – Greco-Roman idols and gods (1 Thess. 1:9); Egyptian cults, Judaism



The Church of Thessalonica

Established early by the Apostle Paul (along with Silas “Silvanus” and Timothy) on his **2nd missionary journey** (A.D. 49-52; Acts 15:39-18:22), this church came into existence as a result of the evangelistic efforts within the local synagogues. Luke accounts for us the church’s beginning in Acts 17.

ACTS 17:1-9

- NOTES:
- A) Three weeks of preaching on the Sabbath
 - B) Paul evangelized “from the Scriptures,” (v.2), explaining the Gospel
 - C) Converts included a few Jews, many Greeks, and some elite women
 - D) Impact of ministry on Synagogue (losses caused jealousy and rioting)
 - E) Mob attacks Paul’s host (Jason) and other Christians
 - F) Mob drags them before the authorities - charges them with treason against Caesar.
 - G) This forced Paul, Silas, and Timothy to leave the city under cover of night and they moved on to Berea.
 - H) This left the newly established church without leaders and needed teaching

Special notes: Look at the hostility of some Jews towards Paul and the Gospel (17:13). The church in Thessalonica suffered under much persecution for their conversion.

THE STORY GOES ON – Paul moved on by himself from Berea to Athens. Timothy then met up again with Paul in Athens who sent him back to the church in Thessalonica “to strengthen and encourage” them in their newfound faith (1 Thess. 3:2). Paul then moved on to Corinth where he awaited news from Timothy about how the church was doing in Thessalonica.

Timothy then returns to Paul in Corinth and reports back to Paul the good news that the church has survived and is off to a good start even though it is suffering. Some new believers had died and this caused the church some concern as to whether those who died would miss out on the 2nd Coming (see 1 Thess. 4:13-14).

Further there were issues/concerns of:

(in 1 Thessalonians)

- a) sexual immorality
- b) a concern as to why Paul had not returned to personally visit them yet
- c) some laziness among certain members who demanded the wealthier Christians to supply their needs out of “Christian love.”
- d) a wonder as to why God would permit their suffering to last as long as it was and if they were still in God standing with God.

Generally though, the report on the church was **overwhelmingly positive** and Paul wrote this to answer their questions, to encourage them, to express his thanks for them, to teach them (things that they had not yet been taught), and to remind them that they are indeed elected by God to salvation.

Outline of 1 Thessalonians (this page taken from the ESV Study Bible)

- I. Opening (1:1)
- II. Thanksgiving and Encouragement (1:2-3:13)
 - A. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians faith, love, and hope (1:2-3)
 - B. Paul’s confidence in the election of the Thessalonians (1:4-2:16)
 - C. Paul’s defense of the missionaries during their absence (2:17-3:10)
 - D. A Pastoral prayer for the Thessalonians (3:11-13)
- III. Instruction and Exhortation (4:1-5:28)
 - A. On pleasing God (4:1-12)
 - B. On the Second Coming of Christ (4:13-5:11)
 - C. On community conduct (5:12-22)
 - D. Prayer, assurance, and conclusion (5:23-28)

Key Themes in 1 Thessalonians

1. The wrath of God comes on those who reject the gospel.	2:16 ; 5:3
2. Jesus' death and resurrection are the basis for the Christian's hope.	4:14 ; 5:10
3. Christians are destined not for wrath but for salvation at Jesus' coming.	1:10 ; 5:4 , 9
4. Christians who die will participate fully in the second coming.	4:14-17 ; 5:10
5. Those who respond to the gospel have been elected by God in prehistory and called by God, and they continue to be called by God throughout their earthly lives.	1:4 ; 2:12 ; 4:7 ; 5:9 , 24
6. Christians should live lives of comprehensive holiness.	3:13 ; 4:3-8 ; 5:23
7. Christians must never shirk their responsibility to work.	4:9-12 ; 5:14
8. The authenticity of the gospel is confirmed by the integrity of its preachers.	1:5 ; 2:1-12
9. Joy, especially in suffering, is a mark of the Christian.	1:6 ; 5:16
10. Christians experience the realities of the prophesied new covenant.	4:8-9
11. Faith, hope, and love are essential and universal traits of the Christian.	1:2-3 ; 5:8

The Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians

1:3	“hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”
1:10	“to wait for his Son from heaven”
2:19	“before our Lord Jesus at his coming”
3:13	“at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints”
4:15	“the coming of the Lord”
4:16	“the Lord himself will descend from heaven”
5:2	“the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”
5:3	“as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman”
5:23	“at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Chapter 1

v. 1 - **Silas** – companion on the 2nd missionary journey (from Judea), joined Paul after he and Barnabas went their separate ways.

Timothy – young convert from Lystra (read Acts 16:1-4). Eventually become pastor of the church in Ephesus and whom Paul would later write the books of 1&2 Timothy to.

v. 2-3 What are the three marks of a genuine Christian that Paul lists here?

- A) *FAITH* see 1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 1:4,5;
B) *LOVE* 1 Thess. 5:8
C) *HOPE*

What did faith cause them to do? —————→ v. 9-10
What does love motivate them to do? —————→ *Turn to God and away from idols*
What does hope make them patient for? —————→ *Serve the Living and True God*
The Return of Christ

Salvation produces *fruit!*

v. 4-9 What are the evidences that convince Paul that they are elected by God for salvation?

- A) They responded to the Gospel and received it with deep conviction (v.4-5)
B) They chose to follow and imitate their spiritual leaders (v.6)
C) They were willing to suffer for their faith (v.6)
D) They set an example and encouraged other churches (v.7)
E) They repented from idolatry and committed themselves to service (v.9)

v. 10 What are they waiting for? *The Second Coming*

What will He deliver them from? Cf. 1 Thess. 5:9

The Wrath of God that is to come.

Three aspects to this: 1) *Present day wrath on unbelievers sin (Rom. 1:18-32)*
2) *The future Tribulation (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 16)*
3) *The Punishment of Hell (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15)*

*Though there are differing interpretations of this, I believe that theologically, since the wrath of God for the sin of a believer in Christ was quenched by Jesus' death on the cross, the believer therefore will not be subject to the wrath of God either on this earth or in the age to come. And therefore, I hold to a pretribulational view of the rapture of God. We will study the biblical teaching on the rapture in the weeks to come.

- Dr. Eric J. Bargerhuff