

8/17/25

Intro To First Thessalonians

We want to start our study of First Thessalonians with an introduction of the epistle to better understand the letter in view of the content to the people and the historical setting it was written.

First Thessalonians is an incredible encouragement to believers, revealing what it can be if each person is in love with Jesus and looking for His coming for His church.

The Thessalonians were evangelized by the apostle Paul and his companions, resulting in turning from their idols to the living and true God, shocking those around them by their transformed lives by the gospel.

The infant Thessalonians were held up as an example to the world for their witness, yet Paul only spent three weeks there establishing the church. Acts 17:2

1. For their joy in the midst of sufferings, preaching the gospel to all. 1Thess. 1:6-8

* The church has been used as the model church for its zeal and maturity, opposed to mediocrity, but certainly not perfect or sinless!

2. Not only in their Christian living, but Paul used them as the epitome of giving, despite of great trials of affliction and deep poverty. 2Cor. 8:1-6

3. Many of them became Paul's traveling partners.

- a. Aristarchus. Acts 19:29; 20:4, 27:2
- b. Secundus. Acts 20.4
- c. Gaius? Acts 19:29
- d. Demas possibly. 2Tim. 4:10

I. The city of Thessalonica.

A. The location of the city.

1. The city was a large and very prosperous sea-port situated on the northmost point of the Thermaic Gulf, a short distance from the mouth of the Axios River, modern day Turkey.
 - a. Thessalonica was 100 miles from Philippi and 50 miles from Athens.
 - b. The city was famous for its harbor in the Gulf of Therma, being the largest and most prosperous.
 - c. The city was the most important city of the Roman province of Macedonia in the days of Paul.
 - d. The city had been one of the chief cities of Macedonia from Hellenistic times.
 - e. Xerxes the Persian had a naval base there when he invaded Europe.
2. The religions of the city were one with the culture and life of the city.
 - a. Dionusius, Sarapis, and Cabirus were some of their gods.
 - b. The cult of Cabirus was a martyred hero and on occasion returned to life to aid his

followers, being worshipped by confessing sins and baptismal rites, immersed symbolically in the blood of the martyred god.

- c. Cabirus worship had the approval of the social elite, the wealthiest member of society was responsible for running the city and united to the cult, identifying all citizens. (Wannamaker:12)
- d. The imperial cult of Caesar existed as early as 29-28 B.C. , evident by the coins of Caesar designated as god and on the reverse a head of Augustus appeared with the cities legend.
- e. So any attack on the cult was an attack on the community and a threat to the Roman imperial power, dangerous with potential loss of life.
- f. On the western horizon the height of Mount Olympus could be seen, the fabled home of the Greek gods.

B. The name of the city.

- 1. The original town was called Therma, meaning “Hot Springs” from its natural springs in the vicinity
- 2 In 315 B.C. the location came to prominence as Casander, the son-in-law of Philip of Macedon, one of the four generals of Alexander the Great rebuilt the city and named it after his wife, the daughter of

Philip Alexander and half sister of Alexander the Great and named it Thessalonica.

- 3. The shorten form “Salonika” it still in use today, the Turks call is “Salonichi”.

C. The prominence of the city.

- 1. The city was prominent for it’s seat of commerce.
 - a. This was due to the city’s location having the best natural harbor in the Aegean Sea and through its port became wealthy, being the chief port city of Macedonia.
 - b. The city’s importance was also in it’s geographical setting, straddling the Via Egnatia, the great Roman road, stretching to Asia Minor and the East.
 - c. Therefore trade poured in from both sides, enhancing it’s power.
- 2. The city had a political status.
 - a. In 168 B.C. after the battle of Pydna, when Rome divided the conquered Kingdom of Macedonia into four republics, Thessalonica was made the capital of the second division.
 - b. Then in 146 B.C. the territory of Macedonia was organized into one single province, Thessalonica became the residence of the Roman governor and capital of the entire province.

- c. In the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, Thessalonica took the senatorial side and formed one of Pompey's chief bases in 40-48 B.C.
 - d. In its final struggles of the Roman Republic, in 42 B.C., it stood on the side of Anthony and Octavian.
3. The Emperor Augustus rewarded the city by making it a free city.
- a. A free city governed itself internally, had no garrison, excluded from military occupation, could hold assembly, appoint its own magistrate, had certain tax concessions and minted its own coins.
 - b. These magistrates were called "politarchs", meaning rulers of the city, there were about five or six, Luke used to describe the rulers of the city. Acts 17:8
 - c. The city earned the description "the mother of all Macedon".
- D.** The population of the city.
- 1. The city of Thessalonica had a population of 200,000, for the most part native Greeks.
 - 2. Some Romans and Orientals were present.
 - 4. A large Jewish colony was present due to its attractive commerce.
 - 5. The number of Gentile had become dissatisfied with their pagan religions became God-fearers, attending the synagogue.

- 6. According to the 2021 census the population in the metropolitan area was 1,006,112, Athen had 3.6 million.

This was the city of Thessalonica!

II. The church at Thessalonica.

- A. The intent of Paul to see how the brethren were doing after the first missionary journey led to the second missionary journey, which establish the church of Thessalonica. Acts 15:36
 - 1. A strong contention between Paul and Barnabas caused them to separate, Paul took Silas and Barnabas took John Mark. Acts 15:39-40
 - 2. Paul went to Derbe and Lystra, took Timothy as a disciple and delivered the decree written for the gentiles from Jerusalem. Acts 16:1-5
 - 3. Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia and Bythinia. Acts 16:6-8
 - 4. Paul then receives a vision of a man from Macedonia to come and help them. Acts 16:9
 - 5. Paul immediately went with Silas and Timothy, maybe even Luke joined them, indicated by the word "we". Acts 16:10-16
 - 6. They left Troas, went through some cities and arrive at Philippi where Paul met Lydia,

bringing the gospel to Europe for the first time.

7. Lydia accepted the Lord, a demon possessed girl was delivered and Paul and Silas were thrown in prison and beat. Acts 16:14-34
8. Paul and Silas left Philippi along the Ignatian Way traveling 100 miles and arrived at Thessalonica, being the second city to receive the gospel in Macedonia.
 - * Paul knowing the importance of the city and the size wanted to preach the gospel!

B. The arrival of Paul at Thessalonica.

- 1 Paul went to the synagogue as his custom was and reasoned with them out of the scriptures. Acts 17:1-3
 - a. The word “explaining”, means to open up thoroughly. vs. 3a
 - b. The word “demonstrating” means to set alongside. vs. 3a
 - c. Paul was opening up the Scriptures completely, so as to place Christ alongside to reveal Him as Messiah.
2. The response to Paul’s preaching is recorded: Acts 17:4-9
 - a. Some believed, a great multitude of devout Greeks and a few leading women a great multitude, “God fearers”, dissatisfied with pagan morality. vs. 4

* Aristarchus appears to have been one of these men. Acts 20:4; 27:2; Col. 4:10-11

- b. But the Jews not persuaded moved with envy, took evil men from the marketplace and gathered a mob, started a riot seeking to bring them out to the people, finding Jason and others they declared the men were those who had turned the world upside down. vs. 5-6
 - * This is confirmed in the letter. 1Thess. 2:14-16
- c. They accused Jason of harboring the men, who were acting contrary to the decree of Caesar, saying there is another king-Jesus, troubling the crowd and the rulers, finally releasing them. vs. 7-9
 - * At the same time Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. Acts 18:2
- d. They sent Paul and Silas by night to Berea, about fifty miles, Paul preached many believed, prominent women and men. Acts 17:10-12
 - * The Berean principal to follow always. Acts 17:11
- e. Paul was escorted to Athens, a 300 hundred miles journey overland, when Jews from Thessalonica heard he was preaching the gospel at Berea they came a stirred up the people. Acts 17:13-15

- * Paul requested Silas and Timothy be told to join him at Athens. vs. 15

C. The duration of the stay.

1. The Scriptures tell us that Paul was there for three weeks. Acts 17:2
 - * “Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”
2. There are some objections to the brief time, but Luke is very clear in the book of Acts about the time of their stay.
 - a. That Paul and the others worked with their own hands. 1Thess. 2:9
 - b. That Paul left a thriving church.
 - c. That the number of Gentiles seems to be to large for a short time.
 - d. That Paul had received two gifts from Philippi. Phil. 4:15-16

This was the church at Thessalonica!

III. The occasion and purpose of the epistle.

- A. The apostle Paul was concerned about the young converts. 1Thess. 3:1-5
 1. Paul, Silas and Timothy were so concerned about the Thessalonians they did not consider themselves and sent Timothy from Athens. vs. 1

2. Paul and Silas wanted Timothy to establish and encourage them in their faith. vs. 2
 - * Most believe it was about three months since Paul had left, but it is not sure!
 3. Paul wanted to tell the Thessalonians, not to be shaken by their afflictions, because Christians were appointed to them. vs. 3
 - * Paul told this to the new converts of the first missionary journey. Acts 14:22
 4. Paul was only reminding them of what he had already told them, that they would suffer tribulations, even as it had happened. vs. 4
 5. Paul reiterates the difficulty he had in not knowing the state of their faith, lest the tempter had tempted them and their labor had been in vain. vs. 5
- B. The apostle Paul provides us with the whole picture.**
1. Acts tells us Paul waited for them at Athens, but doesn't record their arrival. Acts 17:16
 2. Paul tells the Thessalonians that he had tried to return two times. 1Thess. 2:17-18
 3. Paul then told them that when Timothy had returned with good news at Corinth, Paul rejoiced. 1Thess. 3:6-10; Acts 18:5
 - a. That they always had good remembrance of them and wanted to see them, even as they of the Thessalonians. vs. 6

- b. That they had been comforted in all their affliction and distress by hearing of the state of their faith. vs. 7
- c. That they lived now knowing they stood fast in the Lord. vs. 8
- d. That they were ever thankful and rejoicing for their sakes before God. vs. 9
- e. That they were praying exceedingly to see their face again and perfect that which was lacking in their faith. vs. 10
- * Paul five years later returned to Macedonia. Acts 19:21; 20:1-2; 1Cor 18:5; 2Cor 1:15-2:13

C. The apostle Paul wanted to instruct and exhort them on many needed areas.

1. Paul wanted to confirm their faith and commend them as examples of the believer. 1Thess. 1:6-10
 - a. They had received the word in much affliction, with joy in the Holy Spirit. vs. 6
 - b. They became an example to all who believed in Macedonia. vs. 7
 - c. They had preached to others and their reputation was known, the apostles even heard about their evangelism. vs. 8
 - d. They had told of the godly example of Paul as well as the others and how they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. vs. 9

- e. They were telling all that they were waiting for God's Son from heaven, who had been raised and delivered them from the wrath to come. vs. 10
2. Paul wanted to clear up some false accusations, regarding himself and his motives. 1Thess. 1:5; 2:1-2; 3-12, 17; 3:8
 - a. That they were mere hucksters, when in fact they were holy in conduct. 1Thess. 1:5
 - b. That they were trouble makers and cowards, afraid to suffer themselves and that is why they fled, but they had suffered in Philippi. 1Thess. 2:1-2
 - c. That they were interested in what they could get financially, when in fact they spoke truth boldly, cared for them gently and labor with their own hands. 1Thess. 2:3-12
 - 1) Paul had received a gift from the Philippians twice. Phil. 4:16
 - 2) It is one of the most affectionate letters of Paul!
 - d. That they did not want to come back, when in fact they attempted twice. 1Thess. 2:17-18
 - e. That they were not men of character, when in fact they were. 1Thess. 3:8
 3. Paul wanted to comfort them in their suffering. 1Thess. 2:14; 3:3-5

- a. They were not alone in their sufferings. 1Thess. 2:14
- b. They were the object of the world's hate. 1Thess. 3:3-5
- 4. Paul wanted to remind them of the walk of holiness. 1Thess. 4:1-8
 - a. They should grow in pleasing God. vs. 1-2
 - b. They should live sexually moral lives. vs. 3-5
 - c. They should not take advantage of each other. vs. 6
 - d. They should know God called them to a holy life, whoever rejects it, rejected God. vs. 7-8
- 5. Paul wanted them to know that their loved ones who had died were with Christ and that when Christ returned for the church they would meet them in the air. 1Thess. 4:13-18
 - a. They were concerned about their love one in relation to the rapture and Paul told them Christ will bring them with Him, when He comes. vs. 13-14
 - b. The authority is by the word of the Lord and that the dead are first in order of the resurrection. vs. 15-16
 - c. Then those alive will be snatched up, therefore they were to comfort each other with these words. vs. 17-18

- 6. Paul wanted the believers to know the Lord comes as a thief and we should be watching. 1Thess. 5:1-11
 - a. They knew it would be sudden and those left would not escape destruction. vs. 1-3
 - b. The believer is a child of light and is to be prepared. vs. 4-8
 - c. The comfort of the believer is that he is not appointed to wrath but salvation. vs. 9-11
 - * The Kingdom is present and yet to come!
- 7. Paul wanted to exhort them on various issues. 1Thess. 5:12-22
 - a. He wanted them to recognize and honor those in leadership. vs. 12-13
 - b. He wanted them to both reproof and comfort all with patience. vs. 14
 - c. He wanted them to not be vengeful, but do good. vs. 15
 - d. He gives a series of short commands. vs. 16-22
- 8. Paul expressed his closing benediction. 1Thess. 5:23-28

This was the occasion and purpose of the epistle to Thessalonica!

IV. The date and authenticity.

- A. The date of the letter.

1. The date the letter was written is believed to of been between 51-53 A.D.?
 - a. Gaillio took office in spring of 51-52 A.D.
 - 1) There are those who insist on July of 51 A.D.
 - 2) There are others who say 52 A.D.
 - 3) Either 51 or 52 A.D. would be acceptable for First Thessalonians.
 - b. Paul was accused and brought before Gallio at Corinth and mentioned by name. Act 18:12
 - c. Timothy had arrived earlier at Corinth to report the Thessalonians condition.
 - d. Paul had come to Corinth in weakness and fear and was afraid, so much so that the Lord appeared to him and told him not to fear, for He had many souls in that city and he remained for one year and six months. 1Cor. 2:2-3; Act 18:9-11
2. The place it was written from differs.
 - a. But most scholars believe it was written from Corinth.
 - b. Both epistles are thought to be the earliest of Paul's letters, some believe Galatians may be earlier, but no other.
3. The epistle was written about twenty years after the resurrection.
 - a. The gospel was as effective as at Pentecost.

- b. The gospel was as effective as at Samaria.
 - c. The gospel was the same gospel.
- B.** The internal evidence is abundant.
1. The names of Paul, Silas and Timothy appear. 1Thess. 1:1
 2. The pagan culture is declared. 1Thess. 1:9
 3. The experience at Philippi is recorded. 1Thess. 2:17
 4. Paul's care, integrity and affection. 1Thess. 2:3-4, 5, 7, 8-9
 5. Their persecution is declared. 1Thess. 2:14
 6. The sudden departure is stated. 1Thess. 2:17, 3:1
 7. Timothy is said to have been sent. 1Thess. 3:5-6
 8. The "Parousia" is prominent. 1Thess. 4:15-17
 - * Scroggie declared, "More than any other of Paul's epistles, it is characterized by simplicity, gentleness and affection".
- C.** The external evidence is equally abundant.
1. Marcion the heretic accepted as authentic.
 2. The Muratorian fragments list it, middle 2nd Century.
 3. Irenius quoted it 183 A.D.
 4. Clement of Alexandria, second century.
 5. Tertullian quoted in the second century

6. The letter is contained in most ancient versions, the Syriac in the east and the old Latin or W. Africa.

This is the date and authenticity of First Thessalonians!

V. The particulars of the epistle.

- A. The First epistle to the Thessalonians is the first of two letters sent to the church by Paul.
 1. The first letter contains only five chapters.
 - a. It contains 89 verses.
 - b. It is full of spiritual truth and doctrine, contrary to what some declare.
 2. The first chapter is a good example.
 - a. The doctrine of God, the Son and grace. vs. 1
 - b. The doctrine prayer. vs. 2
 - c. The doctrine of faith, love a hope. vs. 3
 - d. The doctrine of election. vs. 4
 - e. The doctrine of the gospel, Holy Spirit and the Trinity vs. 1, 3, 8, 5
 - f. The doctrine of suffering. vs. 6
 - g. The doctrine of examples of behavior. vs. 7
 - h. The doctrine of personal evangelism. vs. 8
 - i. The doctrine of repentance and regeneration. vs. 9

- j. The doctrine of the coming of Christ for His saints, resurrection and deliverance from God's wrath to come. vs. 10
3. The doctrine of the Lord's return for His church is the central and dominant theme of the epistle!
 - * Each of the five chapters ends with the blessed hope of His coming, the rapture!
 - a. "and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." 1Thess. 1:10
 - b. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." 1Thess. 2:19-20
 - c. "so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." 1Thess. 3:13
 - d. "Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." 1Thess. 4:17-18
 - e. "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.” 1Thess. 5:23

B. The simple outline.

1. His coming in relationship to salvation.
1Thess. 1
* Focusing on the salvation of the Thessalonians by the power of the gospel being examples, in the past. vs. 5-7
2. His coming in relationship to service.
1Thess. 2
* Focusing on the slander against the apostles that they were out for themselves, in the past visit. vs. 5, 6, 8, 9
3. His coming in relationship to persevering love. 1Thess. 3
* Focusing on the apostle’s concern for the maturing process in Christ, in the present and future. vs. 2, 10
4. His coming in relationship to sanctification and resurrection. 1Thess. 4
* Focusing on their conduct of life and comfort of the dead, for the present and future. vs. 3, 13
5. His coming in relationship to indignation and illumination. 1Thess. 5
* Focusing on the deliverance of the wrath to come, honoring leaders and being responsible, for the present and future. vs. 9, 12-13, 14, 23

C. The simple division.

1. Personal and historical. 1Thess. 1-3
3. Practical and instructional. 1Thess. 4-5

D. The key words, phrases and verses.

1. The key words.
 - a. Election. 1Thess. 1:4
 - b. Gospel. 1Thess. 1:5; 2:2, 4, 8, 9; 3:2
 - c. Sanctification. 1Thess. 4:3, 4, 7
 - d. Love. 1Thess. 1:3, 4; 3:6, 12; 5:8, 13
 - e. Brethren. 14x’s. 1Thess. 1:4
2. The key phrases.
 - a. The word of the Lord. 1Thess. 1:13
 - b. The wrath to come. 1Thess. 1:10, 5:9
 - c. The word of God. 1Thess. 2:13
 - d. Day of the Lord. 1Thess. 5:2
 - e. Work of faith. vs. 3
* “You turned to God from idols.” vs. 9, 10
 - f. “Labor of love.” vs. 3
* “To serve the living and true God.” vs. 9-10
 - g. Patience of hope. vs. 3
* “And to wait for His Son from heaven.” vs. 9-10
3. The key verses.
 - a. 1Thess. 1:9-10
 - b. 1Thess. 2:7
 - c. 1Thess. 2:13
 - d. 1Thess. 2:18
 - e. 1Thess. 3:8

- f. 1Thess. 4:3
- g. 1Thess. 4:15-17
- h. 1Thess. 5:2-3
- i. 1Thess. 5:9

E. The genre of Thessalonian among the epistles.

1. First and Second Thessalonians are Eschatological, dealing with the Coming of Christ.
 - a. This “hope”, looks on to the consummation and is brightened.
 - b. Now abides faith, hope and love, these three! **Baxter**
2. Galatians, First-Second Corinthians and Romans are Soteriological, dealing with salvation through the cross of Christ.
 - * These “faith” looks back to the cross and is strengthened.
3. Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians are Christological, dealing with the character of Christ.
 - * He is the pre-eminent head of the church sufficient for all things.
4. First Timothy, Titus, Second Timothy are called Ecclesiological, dealing with the church of Christ.
 - * He is the enabler and director, our “love” looks up to the heavenly Bridegroom and is deepened.

5. In First Thessalonians, we have Christ coming for His saints to meet Him in the air at the rapture. 1Thess. 4:18-17
6. In Second Thessalonians, we have Christ returning with His saints to the earth to destroy the armies of the world and set up the kingdom Age. 1Thess. 1:10

These are the particulars of the epistle of First Thessalonians!