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## Intro To First Thessalonians

The letter to the Thessalonians is an incredible encouragement to the church in what it can be if each person is in love with Jesus and catches the vision.

Evangelized by the apostle Paul and his companions, they turned from their idols to the living and true God, shocking those around them by both their lives and proclamation.

We want to begin our study of first Thessalonians with an introduction and overview of the epistle to enable us to better understand it's purpose in view of it's content and the historical setting in which it was written.

1. The first epistle to the Thessalonians is the first of two letters sent to the church by Paul.
2. The first letter to the Thessalonians contains only five chapters, containing 89 verses, which is full of spiritual truth and doctrine, contrary to what some declare, as chapter one reveals.
  - a. The doctrine of God, the Son & 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.
- j. The doctrine of the coming of Christ for His saints, resurrection and deliverance from God's wrath to come. vs. 10
  - 1) This is the central and dominant theme of the epistle, the Lord's return for His church!
  - 2) Each of the five chapters ends with the blessed hope of His coming. 1Thess. 1:10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:17-18; 5:23
3. The thing to keep in mind as we study this church is that it was an infant church established in merely three weeks. Acts 17:2

### I. The City.

- 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 Axius River, modern day Turkey.
    - a. It was famous for it's harbor in the Gulf of Therma, being the largest and most prosperous.
    - b. In Paul's days, it was the most important cities of the Roman province of Macedonia.

- c. It had been one of the chief cities of Macedonia from Hellenistic times down to our days.
  - 2. On the western horizon the height of Mount Olympus could be seen, the fabled home of the Greek gods.
  - 3. Thessalonica was 100 miles from Philippi and 50 miles from Athens.
  - 4. Xerxes the Persian had a naval base there when he invaded Europe.
- 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. Due to the cities location and port it became wealthy.

- b. The city’s importance was also in it’s geographical setting, it straddled the Via Egnatia, the great Roman road that stretched 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 it’s 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, it had no garrison, could hold assembly and appoint it’s own magistrates.

- b. These magistrates were called “politarchs”, meaning rulers of the city, there were about five or six, which 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.
- 2 They were for the most part native Greeks.
3. Some Romans and Orientals were present.
4. A large Jewish colony was present due to it’s attractive commerce.
5. The number of Gentile who had become dissatisfied with their pagan religions became God-fearers and attended the synagogue.
6. Today it has million people, largest next to Athens.

*This was the city of Thessalonica!*

**II. The Church.**

- A. The intent of Paul to see how the brethren were doing, as the result of the first missionary journey, led to the second

missionary journey, that establish the church of Thessalonica. Acts 15:36

1. A strong contention between Paul and Barnabas caused them to divide up and Paul took Silas a Barnabas took John Mark. Acts 15:39-40
2. Paul went to Derbe a Lystra, took Timothy as a disciple a delivered the decree written for the gentiles at Jerusalem. Acts 16:1-5
3. Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to prea in Asia and Bythinia. Acts 16:6-10
4. Paul receives a vision of a man from Macedonia to come and help them. Acts 16:9
5. Paul immediately went with Silas and Timothy and perhaps even Luke joined them here, notice 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 one-hundred miles and arrived at Thessalonica, which

was the second city to receive the gospel in Macedonia.

\* Paul knowing the importance of the city as well as 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. 3

b. The word “demonstrating” means to set alongside.

c. In other words, Paul was opening up the Scriptures completely, so as to place Christ along side and 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 of been one of these men. Acts 20:4; 27:2; Col. 4:10-11

b) But the Jews who were not persuaded moved with envy and 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 that these men were those who had turned the world upside down. vs. 5-6

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

\* About the same time Claudius had expelled the Jews from Home. Act 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 and came a stirred up the people. Acts 17:13-15

\* Paul requested that 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, ?
2. The objections are many.
  - a. Paul and the others worked with their own hands.
  - b. Paul left a thriving church.
  - c. The number of Gentiles seems to be too large for a short time.
  - d. Paul had received two gifts from Philippi. Phil. 4:13

### III. The Occasion and Purpose of the epistle.

- A. Paul was concerned about the young converts. 1Thess. 3:1-5
  1. Paul, Silas and Timothy were so concerned about the Thessalonians that they did not consider themselves and sent Timothy from Athens. vs. 1
  2. Paul and Silas wanted Timothy to go, in order to establish and encourage them in their faith. vs. 2
    - \* By this time most believe it was about three months since Paul had left!
  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. Act 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. Paul provides us with the whole picture.
    1. Acts tells us Paul waited for them at Athen, but doesn't record their arrival. Act 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. 1Thes 3:6-9; Act 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.** 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. 1:6-9
  - 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 and even heard by the apostles of their evangelism. vs. 8
  - d.** They had told of the godly example of Paul and 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 the Lord from, 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. 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 but in fact they spoke truth boldly, cared for them gently and labor with their own hands. 2:3-12
  - 1)** Paul had receive twice a gift from the Philippians. 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. 2:17-18
- e.** That they were not men of character, when in fact they were. 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 that God called them to a holy life, whoever rejects it, rejects 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 coming of Christ and Paul tells them that Christ will bring them with Him, when He comes. vs. 13-14
  - b. The authority is by the word of the Lord and 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. 1Thess. 5:12-13
  - b. He wanted them to both to 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. The closing benediction. vs. 23-28

#### IV. 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. Gaillo 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) Most likely Paul wrote first Thessalonians in the year 50 A. D.

- b. Paul was accused and brought before Gallio at Corinth, for he is mentioned by name. Act 18:12
  - c. Timothy had arrived earlier at Corinth to report their 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 from which it was written differs.
- a. 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. It was as effective as at Pentecost.
  - b. It was as effective as at Samaria.
  - c. It 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 of been sent. 1Thess. 3:5-6
- 8. The "Parousia" is prominent. 1Thess. 4:15-17  
\* Scroggie declared, "More than any other of Paul's, is characterized by simplicity, gentleness and affection".

- C.** 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 18(3 A.D.
  - 4. Clement of Alexandria, second century.
  - 5. Tertallon 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.

## **V. The epistle.**

- A.** Simple Outline.



1. His coming in relationship to salvation  
Chapter 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.  
Chapter 2  
\* Focusing on the slander against the apostles, being out for themselves, in their past visit. vs. 5, 6, 8, 9
  3. His coming in relationship to persevering love. Chapter 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. Chapter 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. Chapter 5  
\* Focusing on the deliverance of the wrath to come, honoring leaders and being responsible, for present and future. vs. 9, 12-13, 14, 23
- B.** The simple division.
1. Personal and historical. 1Thess. 1-3
  3. Practical and instructional. 1Thess 4-5

- C.** 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. 1:4
  2. The key phrases.
    - a. The word of the Lord. 1Thess. 1:13
    - b. Rath to come. 1Thess. 1:10; 5:9
    - c. The word of God. 1Thess. 2:13
    - d. Day of the Lord. 1Thess. 5:2
  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
- D.** The place of Thessaloinians in the epistles.
1. 1.& 2 Thessalonians- Eschatological (coming of Christ.)
  2. Col. 1Cor., 2Cor., Rom.- Soteriological (cross of Christ)
  3. Col., Phile., Eph., Phil.- Christological (character of Christ)

4. 1Tim., Titus., 2Tim. Ecclesiological (church of Christ)
- a. The first four epistles belong together, emphasizing “Christ and the cross”.
    - \* These ‘faith’ looks back to the cross and is strengthened.
  - b. The middle three belong together, emphasizing “Christ and the Church”.
    - \* These “love” looks up to the heavenly Bridegroom and is deepened.
  - c. The final two belong together, emphasizing “Christ and His coming”.
    - 1) These “hope” looks on to the consummation and is brightened.
    - 2) Now abides faith, hope and love, these three! **Baxter**
5. In first Thessalonians, we have Christ coming for His saints to meet Him in the air. 1Thess. 4:18-17
6. In second Thessalonians, we have Christ returning with His saints to the earth. 1Thess. 1:10

## VI. The detailed outline.

- I. His coming in relationship to salvation Chapter 1
- II. His coming in relationship to service. Chapter 2

- III. His coming in relationship to persevering love. Chapter 3
- IV. His coming in relationship to sanctification and resurrection Chapter 4
- V. His coming in relationship to indignation and illumination Chapter 5

## Conclusion

These Thessalonians were held up as an example to the world for their witness, yet Paul only spent three weeks there.

- The church has been used as the model church for its zeal and maturity, opposed to mediocrity but certainly not perfect.
- But not only in their Christian living, Paul uses them as the epitome of giving in spite of great trials of affliction and deep poverty. 2Cor. 8:1-6
- Many of them became Paul’s traveling partners.
  - Aristarchus. Acts 19:29, 20:4., 27:2
  - Secundus. Acts 20.4
  - Demas. 2Tim. 4:10
  - Gaius? Acts 19:29

**Work of faith. vs. 3---You turned to God from idols. vs. 9, 10**

**And labour of love. vs. 3--To serve the living and true God. vs. 9-10**

**and patience of hope, vs. 3---And to wait for His Son from heaven. vs. 9-10**