

Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Thessalonica was originally an ancient town named Thermai, meaning “Hot Springs”. In 315 B.C. Cassander, the Macedonian King named the city after his wife, who was also a half-sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.

Paul first visited Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40 through 18:23). Acts 17 records the account of his ministry there.

Acts 17:2, “...for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures...” It is possible that Paul was only in Thessalonica for three weeks but it is more likely he stayed there longer. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 Paul speaks of working while he was in Thessalonica. In Philippians 4:15-16 Paul mentions that the Philippians sent him at least two monetary gifts while he was in Thessalonica.

Acts 17:10-13 – Even after Paul left Thessalonica for Berea the Jews of Thessalonica followed him and stirred up the crowds against him. Clearly the gospel of grace struck a nerve with the Jewish leadership in Thessalonica.

Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (3:1-3) and his report of the conditions and state of the church there is what led Paul to write his letters to the Thessalonians. This is either the first or second letter that Paul wrote (some view Galatians to be first).

Purpose

- 1 – To encourage the believers in Thessalonica.
- 2 – To correct false information about himself.
- 3 – To give instruction that would contribute to their spiritual growth.

Key Theme – The second coming of Christ for the church.

The coming of Christ is mentioned in every chapter of the book (1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:13-18, 5:23).

Hope in light of Christ’s coming is a key element. Note 1:3, 2:19, 4:13, 5:8.

The Greek word *parousia* translated *coming* is used six times to refer to the second coming of Christ in 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

Based on the above here is a possible outline:

- Chapter 1 – The coming of Christ inspires hope.
- Chapter 2 – The coming of Christ provides motivation.
- Chapter 3 – The coming of Christ promotes purity.
- Chapter 4 – The coming of Christ brings comfort.
- Chapter 5 – the coming of Christ leads to action.

A similar way of viewing the book would be:

The coming of Christ gives:

- Hope that inspires – chapter 1
- Hope that motivates – chapter 2
- Hope that purifies – chapter 3

Hope that comforts – chapter 4

Hope that works – chapter 5

Paul intended the letter to produce results in their lives! Note his closing words:

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also bring it to pass.”

5:23-24