

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

Introduction:

First Thessalonians reveals the basic fundamentals for the model Christian life. All of these fundamentals stem from the sincere faith in the inspiration and preservation of the words of Scriptures (Psalm 12:6-7; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). The fundamentals are the major beliefs for doctrine and living principles. Good athletes master the fundamentals of their sport, but great athletes seek to master every aspect of their sport (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). True Bible believers believe the fundamentals and every word of the Scriptures (Matthew 4:4; Acts 20:27; 24:14).

The Church of Thessalonica was founded on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 17:1). The converts received the gospel of Jesus Christ with much assurance of salvation and they followed Paul and the Lord in witnessing about their faith in Christ. They looked forward to the return of the Lord Jesus while they suffered for the Lord. Paul exhorted them to live an holy life until the Rapture and he closed the book with some final exhortations about the ideal goal at the judgment Seat of Christ.

Statistics: 5 Chapters, 89 verses, and 1,857 words

Key Verses: 1:2, 5; 2:6-7, 12; 3:13; 4:3, 11, 13-18; 5:2-6, 9, 17-19

Author:

Few have ever disputed the external and internal evidence which show Paul to be the author of the epistle. He identifies himself and his familiar companions in the opening verse. All the circumstances mentioned in the letter fit the account of Paul's experiences in Acts 17-18.

The few critics who object to Pauline authorship on the basis of the doctrinal diversity reflected by the eschatological section forget that Paul was capable of addressing many theological topics. His eschatological discussion in (4:13-5:11) forms the crucial foundation for the Christian's understanding of future events.

Date and Place of Writing:

A comparison of the events described in (3:1-7) and the sequence of events in Acts 17 leading up to (Acts 18:1-5) show that the letter to the Thessalonians was written in Corinth, as indicated by the account in Acts.

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Using Gallio's proconsul ship of Achaia as a historical reference (Acts 18:12), the date can be fixed at about A.D. 51. The letter was written soon after Paul's arrival in Corinth, as indicated by the account in Acts.

Destination:

Thessalonica was situated on the Thermaic Gulf in the province of Macedonia. It was known as a chief shipping, military, and governmental center. The city prospered in its position on the Egnatian Way, the main road connecting Rome with the east, and was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.

The Romans ruled the city loosely, designating it a "free city," which meant it could govern itself. In New Testament times, the population numbered about 200,000 which consisted of a majority of Greeks, along with Romans, Orientals, and Jews.

After his "Macedonian call" (Acts 16:9) on his second missionary journey, Paul went into Macedonia from Troas. He stopped first at Philippi, but a riot there led to a brief imprisonment and an early departure for Thessalonica (Cf. Acts 16-18). He found the synagogue there and taught in it for three weeks with the result that a number of Jews and Gentile proselytes were converted.

Though Acts says he taught in the synagogue three weeks, it is probable his overall ministry in Thessalonica lasted several months since he had settled into work there (2:9) and had received a couple offerings from the Philippians while there (Philippians 4:16). The unbelieving Jews eventually stirred up trouble and seized Jason and some other believers in an attempt to reach Paul. This led the Christians to send Paul and Silas away secretly to Berea. The church in Thessalonica was made up of some Jews, but mostly Gentiles who had formerly worshipped idols (1:9; 2:14-16).

Occasion:

The troublemaking Jews followed Paul from Thessalonica to Berea, which forced Paul on to Athens while Timothy and Silas remained in Berea. Later, Timothy and Silas joined Paul in Athens, but Paul was so concerned for the church in Thessalonica that he sent Timothy there to check on their progress and welfare (3:1-2).

Paul continued on to Corinth where Timothy and Silas (who had perhaps been sent to Philippi) joined him (Acts 18:5). Timothy's good report on the church was the immediate occasion for Paul's desire to right (3:6).

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His report evidently exposed some areas Paul needed to address in a letter. Besides a hearty commendation for their progress. Paul refutes some charges brought against him by opponents there.

He also exhorts them in several areas of Christian responsibility and instructs them on an issue related to the second coming of the Lord. (Parousia) (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Purpose of Writing:

Paul first wrote to commend and encourage the faith and love of the Thessalonians in the face of persecution (1:2-10; 3:4-10; 4:9-10).

Second, he wrote to vindicate himself of false charges brought against him. The Jews had charged that Paul's interest in the Thessalonians was one of financial gain, probably because they observed the arrival of the gifts from Philippi (Philippians 4:16). Paul defends his motives by reminding the Thessalonians that while with them he was open, honest, and worked so as not to be a financial burden (2:1-12).

He also refuted the charge that his failure to visit again revealed deceitful motives and cowardice. Paul explains that he wanted to visit, but was hindered by Satan at least twice, so he sent Timothy to check on them instead (2:17-3:10).

The third purpose was apparently a response to some developing problems reported by Timothy. Paul wrote to admonish the believers in some practical areas, such as moral purity (4:1-8), industriousness (4:9-12) and respect for their leaders (5:12-14).

Finally, Paul wrote to dispel ignorance about the coming of the Lord and its affect on those who had died in Christ (4:13-5:11).

Argument:

The personal nature of the letter does not obscure Paul's purposes for writing. His intentions are clearly seen as he moves from one subject to another. The epistle is basically divided into two sections:

- Section one: discusses personal matters (1:2-3:13)
- Section two: discusses practical matters (4:1-5:22).

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The Apostle's affection is evident throughout. In addressing his personal relations to the church at Thessalonica (1:2-3:13). Paul begins with thanksgiving for their spiritual progress (1:2-10). He recalls their faith, love, and hope and is assured of their election by God.

Already, the faith of the church has become well known in many regions as the Word of God has been spread by them. Clearly, whatever problems Paul proceeds to address have not severely hampered the church at this point.

Paul next discusses the relations he had with the Thessalonians while he was present with them (2:1-16). His presentation makes it certain he was defending himself against unfair accusations about his motives. In explaining the nature of his ministry among them (2:1-12), he reminds that he preached to them in the face of conflict (2:1-2).

As far as manner of ministry (2:3-12), they should know that he was open, truthful and honest with them (2:3-5). Furthermore, he affectionately shared not only the gospel, but his own life with them (2:6-8). As far as finances, he reminds them that he labored "night and day" to provide for himself and to not be a burden (2:9). In sum, they could judge for themselves how his behavior was blameless and how as a father he had admonished them (2:10-12).

Paul closes this section with thanksgiving for their reception of the gospel (2:13-16) and a reminder that the Jews have consistently been the enemies of the gospel from Judea to Thessalonica, implying their accusations are expected.

Paul next explains his relations to them in his absence (2:17-3:13). His failure to return to Thessalonica was used by the Jews to argue that Paul was not genuine in his dealings with his converts there and thus was avoiding them. The opponents imply his concern for the Thessalonians was not as great as for his cowardly self.

Paul's answer is to explain his desire to be with them and the satanic obstruction that prohibited him (2:17-20). This is the reason he sent Timothy to them (3:1-5). He wanted them to be established in the faith and remain steadfast in the face of their afflictions by the Jews. His genuine affection for them is also seen by his comfort and joy at Timothy's good report of their faith and love (3:6-10).

Paul assures them that he continues to pray for the opportunity to visit them (3:10) and demonstrates this with a written prayer for the same and for their love and holiness (3:11-13). The sincere affection Paul has for the Thessalonian believers has poured convincingly from his pen in vindication of his motives towards them.

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The prayer of (3:11-13) and the tone of his opening words in this second section show Paul has decidedly vindicated himself and is now turning to some practical instructions for the Church (4:1-5:22).

His first instructions exhort them to holy living (4:1-12). The immoral influence of the Gentile city had become of concern to Paul. He appeals from their past obedience to continue to please God by abstaining from sexual immorality (4:1-8). Also, he exhorts them to love and industry (4:9-12), as there were evidently unruly and slothful tendencies in some which prompt further charges from the Jews.

Paul next addresses two questions related to the Lord's return. The first concerned the fate of those who died in Christ (4:13-18). Due to ignorance, some were overly sorrowful at the death of Christian loved ones whom they thought would miss the resurrection at Christ's return, and consequently, the millennium.

Paul explains that Christ will come with the souls of these departed ones and raise their bodies even before the living are "caught up" to be with the Lord in the air. This should be a comfort to those who feared a disadvantage for their loved ones at Christ's return.

It is most arguable that Paul spoke of the rapture of the church before the Tribulation, an event he had so emphasized as imminent that the Thessalonians were unprepared in their thinking about dead loved ones.

Having addressed their ignorance concerning the end time, Paul now reminds them of things they should know and exhorts them concerning the "day of the Lord" (5:1-11). Perhaps the Thessalonians thought their deceased loved ones would somehow endure the Tribulation period, but Paul reminds them that believers are not like those who are overtaken in the judgment of the day of the Lord.

He argues that Christians are not like those in "darkness" (5:5), but are destined for deliverance from God's wrath (5:9). This is the basis for his exhortation to diligence in the Christian life. Also, Christians can be comforted because, alive or deceased, they are not destined for God's tribulation wrath.

Paul's final exhortations concern various duties in the church's life (5:12-22). He urges them to honor their spiritual leaders and to "be at peace among yourselves" (5:12-13). This may suggest some contention existed toward the church leaders.

His other exhortations concern faulty members, personal practice, and the practice of the church when assembled. His closing remarks (5:23-28) include a prayer for their sanctification, a request for prayer, exhortations about perception of his letter and its bearers, and his benediction.

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This letter is a reassurance of Paul's love and truthfulness towards the Thessalonians. He gently but firmly vindicates his motives, and encourages, exhorts, and instructs them in their faith that they might grow in their relationship to God and Paul himself.

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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. The Words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. What is the reference for this passage? _____

2. What are the two basic divisions of Thessalonians?

A. _____

B. _____

3. For our _____ came not unto you in word only, but also in _____, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

4. That ye would walk _____ of God, who hath called you unto his _____ and glory.

5. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from _____

6. For I would not have you to be _____ brethren, concerning them which are _____, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no _____.

7. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the _____ so cometh as a thief in the night.

8. _____ without ceasing.

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

Introduction:

Second Thessalonians continues to reveal the fundamentals of the sound faith that the Apostle Paul began in the first letter. The second epistle focuses upon the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. The Second Coming is clearly divided into two parts as the coming of the Son of man.

The first part is private or within the family and the second part is public for all to see (Revelation 1:7; 6:15-17). The glorious coming of Jesus Christ will be revealed to the entire world (Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:1). The Rapture or translation will be the mysterious departure of born-again believers before the Tribulation like Enoch disappeared prior to the flood ((Hebrews 12:5).

Born again believers in the Lord Jesus will be caught up before Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), but some of the trouble of the Tribulation may begin before the Rapture. The spirit of the final days before the Rapture will be dominated by the apostacy of Alexandria, (Revelation 3:14-22).

This apostacy will be associated with worldly philosophy of Alexandria, the false sciences of Darwinism and textual criticism, and the evil traditions of Romanism (Mark 7:13; Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; James 3:15-18; 1 John 4:1-6). The goal of this paganism will be international fascism or socialism under the control of the church at Rome and Muslims (Revelation 17:1-5).

Statistics: 3 Chapters, 47 Verses, and 1,042 words

The Author:

Paul identifies himself as the author of this epistle in (1:1) and (3:17). The testimony of the early church fathers is earlier and stronger for Paul than in the case of 1 Thessalonians. The vocabulary, style, and theology of the epistle also bear Paul's imprint.

When compared to the first epistle, it is evident both are from the same author. They contain similar prayers (2:16-17; 3:16 and 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 5:23), thanksgiving (1:3 and 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3) and transitions (3:1 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1).

A few higher critics have objected that the eschatology of 2:1-12 could not be Paul's because it contradicts 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. But not only was this theology accepted very early as Paul's, it can easily be shown to address a different phase of Christ's coming.

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In the former epistle, Christ comes in the air, in the latter, it is to earth; the former is reason for comfort in the church, the latter speaks of judgment on the world. Therefore, no good reason exists to reject Pauline authorship.

The Date and Place:

Only a few months seem to pass since the writing of 1 Thessalonians. There is still persecution in Thessalonica (1:4), and the problem of idleness has developed far enough for stronger words (3:6-15; Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

From (1:1) it is probable that Paul is still in Corinth with Timothy and Silas since there is no indication in Scripture that the three were together any time after Corinth (Cf. Acts 18:5). Thus, the letter was written about A.D. 51 from Corinth/

The Destination:

From the similarity in circumstances and the continuity of subject matter with 1 Thessalonians (see preceding and the following discussions), it is clear the second letter had the same readers as the first, that is, the church at Thessalonica.

Key Words:

Persecutions, afflict, afflicted, afflictions, suffering, prayers (1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:5, 16) faith, faithful, believe, believed, love, beloved, brethren, brother, gospel, testimony, the truth.

The Occasion:

It is not known how Paul received the additional information about the situation in Thessalonica that caused him to pen the letter. Perhaps it came by the messenger who delivered the first letter. In any case, Paul was given good news and bad news.

The good news concerned the growing faith of the church in the face of persecution. This brought Paul's commendations (1:3-4).

The bad news reported that false teaching about the Lord's return was upsetting people. Some were saying the Lord's return had already happened (2:2). As a consequence, some people were refusing to work in belief the end had come (3:6-15; C.f. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). Paul wrote in response to the news of these problems and also took the occasion to commend the church.

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Purpose:

The major purpose for Paul's letter was to correct three related problems in the Thessalonian church. The first was a misunderstanding about the day of the Lord, which some claimed had already come (2:1-2).

Perhaps the claim was made because the church was undergoing persecution. Paul argues that two key events must precede the day of the Lord: the final apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin (2:3-12).

The second related purpose was to correct disorderliness in the church which was most likely caused by the conclusion that work was unnecessary if it really was the time of the Lord's coming. Paul gives instructions about dealing with idle Christians (3:6-16).

The third purpose was simply to commend and encourage the Thessalonians in their steadfast faith amid the Jewish persecution (1:3-4).

Argument:

The letter proceeds simply and deliberately to address one purpose after another. Chapter 1 is the encouragement for their faith; chapter 2 the explanation of the day of the Lord; and chapter 3 the exhortation concerning those who are idle.

Paul wants to encourage the Thessalonians in their afflictions at the hands of the Jews (1:3-12). They have endured this trouble from the time he was among them (Acts 17:1-10). He is exceedingly thankful for their faith and good testimony in spite of their persecutions (1:3-4).

Paul then encourages them with the assurance that Christ will return in judgment on His enemies (1:5-10). The revelation of God's judgment at Christ's coming will render justice for the persecutors and those who are persecuted (1:6-8). Unbelievers will receive a severe penalty of fiery vengeance and destruction (1:8-9), while believers will share in Christ's glory (1:10).

On this basis, Paul prays for God's power to sustain them so that their testimony may continue to glorify Christ (1:11-12).

Paul's shift in subjects is marked by the words "Now we beseech you" (2:1). His next purpose is to explain the timing of the day of the Lord (2:1-17). He reminds them about the coming of Christ previously explained in 1 Thessalonians (4:13-5:11) and calms their

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fears that they have somehow missed their deliverance from God's wrath in the day of the Lord (2:1-2).

Two preliminary events are necessary before God's day of wrath. First, there must come "the falling away", or the apostasy of the church. Second, the man of sin must be revealed (2:3). Paul goes into detail about the man of sin so as to make his identity unmistakable (2:4-12). He will exalt himself against God (2:4-5) and be revealed only after "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time." (2:6-8).

This must be a reference to the powerful Holy Spirit Who indwells the church and is removed at the rapture of the church (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The man of sin will be characterized further by satanic power and deception (2:9-12). The description of the man of sin is thorough enough that the Thessalonians will have no false conclusions about his appearing.

Based on this correct understanding of the timing of the day of the Lord, Paul is now able to comfort the church (2:13-17). He thanks God for them, because from the beginning God chose them to experience "salvation", or deliverance, and to obtain glory, not wrath (2:13-14). Therefore, they should stand fast in this truth as they have been taught (2:15). Paul closes this section with a prayer for their comfort and continuation in good works (2:16-17).

Paul's third purpose has to do with the Thessalonians' Christian duty (3:1-15). The section begins with a request for their prayers for the free spread of the gospel and deliverance from the wicked men who oppose him in Corinth (Cf. Acts 18:6,12).

He then expresses his confidence in their obedience and progress in the Christian life (3:3-5). Perhaps the expression of confidence was meant to prepare them for the strong instructions regarding the disorderly (3:6-15). These may have been affected by the false teaching that the Lord's coming was upon them so that they refused to work.

Their idleness was causing problems in the church. To correct the situation, Paul commands the church to withdraw from every disorderly brother (3:6).

He then reminds them of his own example; how he worked for his food while with them (3:7-9). His command is the same now as then: If anyone does not work, he shall not eat (3:10-12).

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To those who will obey, Paul concludes with an exhortation to persist in doing good and to lovingly discipline the disorderly offenders (3:13-15). His final prayer is a request for peace in their situation; appropriate in view of their problems (3:16).

This brief but pointed letter confirms the enthusiasm Paul had for the church in Thessalonica. His concern finds expression in encouraging words and correcting words concerning doctrine and behavior. Paul's tone appears confident that they will resolve both conflicts and continue with a good testimony of faith in Christ.

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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Alas! For that _____ is great, so that none is like it: is even the time of _____; but he shall be saved out of it.

2. Give the reference to question one? _____

3. The major purpose for Paul's letter was to correct two related problems in the Thessalonian church. Give the two purposes:

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

4. Paul's shift in subjects in chapter two is marked by what words? _____

5. Two preliminary events are necessary before God's great day of wrath. Name them:

A. _____

B. _____