

## Equipping Hour

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### Thessalonica: The Enduring Church

#### Key Verse: Acts 17:1

“Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.”

#### Overview

The city of Thessalonica was given its name in 315 BC by Cassander, a general of Alexander the Great. Macedonia was conquered by the Romans in 168 BC and Thessalonica became the capital of Macedonia in 148 BC. It eventually became known as ‘the mother of all Macedonia.’ The city backed Antony and Octavian in their successful campaign against Brutus and Cassius and was made a free city in 42 BC. Unlike Philippi, who was heavily influenced by Roman laws and customs, Thessalonica remained largely a Greek city. As a free city, it was granted a large measure of self-government and its people chose their own magistrates known as politarchs (“city authorities”; Acts 17:6).



Thessalonica is one of the few cities that Paul visited that has existed from his day to modern times. The population during Paul’s day was about 200,000 people. It was located at the head of the Thermaic Gulf at the northern part of the Aegean Sea on the east-west trade route called ‘Via Egnatia’. It served as the center of political and commercial activity in Macedonia.

Religiously, the city had a large Jewish population. That Jews maintained a very influential synagogue (Acts 17:1) and had a strong proselytizing influence on a number of Gentiles in the city. There were also a great number of pagan idolaters in the city (1 Thess. 1:9). Many worshipped Dionysus (the god of wine, vegetation, fertility, and festivity) as their patron god in association with their guilds. As the guild associations would meet, their meetings sometimes involved nocturnal drinking parties which Paul addressed in his first letter to the church (1 Thess. 5:4–9).

After their beating, imprisonment, and release in Philippi, Paul and Silas made the 100 mile trip to Thessalonica to preach the gospel. Although Paul went to the synagogue and preached Christ for three Sabbaths, he most likely stayed longer than three weeks. He stayed long enough to work to support himself (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8) and receive two gifts from the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:16). The gospel was receptive among the God-fearing Greeks and some of the leading women. However, many Jews were antagonistic toward the gospel and influenced many in the city to riot against the believers. This forced Paul and Silas to eventually leave Thessalonica and head to Berea (Acts 17:10).

In AD 51, while in Corinth, Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Thessalonica because of his great love for them. About six months later he wrote a second letter. Paul wrote to encourage this church as they endured great persecution from the very start (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:2, 14). Paul gave them many commendations, but he also wrote about some concerns he had for them.

## **Paul's Commendations**

### ***A Hardworking Church***

1. 1 Thessalonians 4:11. What did Paul teach the church to do? \_\_\_\_\_
2. 1 Thessalonians 1:3. What three words does Paul use to describe this church? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - What motivated their work? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What drove their labor? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What encouraged their steadfastness? \_\_\_\_\_
3. 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14. Why did they have to work so hard? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13. What did the leaders in the church do? \_\_\_\_\_

### ***An Exemplary Church***

1. 1 Corinthians 11:1. What does Paul tell the Corinthians to do? \_\_\_\_\_
2. 1 Thessalonians 1:6. What did the Thessalonians do? \_\_\_\_\_
3. 1 Thessalonians 1:7–8. What did the Thessalonians become? \_\_\_\_\_
4. 2 Thessalonians 1:4. What did Paul do while visiting other churches? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### ***A Gospel Spreading Church***

1. 1 Thessalonians 1:8–9. What did Paul commend them for? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. What was the message given? \_\_\_\_\_
2. 2 Thessalonians 3:1. What does Paul ask prayer for? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### ***An Expectant Church***

1. 1 Thessalonians 1:10. What were the believers doing? \_\_\_\_\_
2. 1 Thessalonians 2:19. What did the Paul teach this church? \_\_\_\_\_
3. 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13. What is Paul’s prayer for this church? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. What did Paul teach this church? \_\_\_\_\_
5. 1 Thessalonians 5:23. What is Paul’s prayer for this church? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### ***An Enduring Church***

1. 1 Thessalonians 1:6. How did they receive the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_
2. 1 Thessalonians 2:2. What did Paul encounter when preaching the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_
3. 1 Thessalonians 2:14. Who caused great suffering among the believers in Thessalonica? \_\_\_\_\_
4. 1 Thessalonians 3:6–8. What news did Timothy bring back to Paul? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. 2 Thessalonians 1:4–6. What was the church enduring? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Paul’s Concerns**

#### ***Acceptance of False Teaching***

1. 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2. What did the believers accept from false teachers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### ***Undisciplined Living***

1. 2 Thessalonians 3:6–11. How were some people living in the church? \_\_\_\_\_

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“The Thessalonians refused any spiritual retreat. They stood their ground without compromise. Because they burned their secular bridges behind them, the only way to go was forward.” —Dr. Richard Mayhue

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## **Application**

1. How does this church encourage you to work?
2. How does the example of Thessalonica encourage you when persecution comes?
3. What can you learn personally from the Christians at Thessalonica and apply to your life?