

Before we start... we need to know background information for Thessalonians.

1. Who wrote the book? When did he write it? Genre- letter

2. Who was the audience... the first readers/listeners of this book?

What do we know about them?

Read Acts 16:1-18:22. Then focus on Acts 17:1-10 to find out what happened in this city.

How long had Paul been with them?

3. What was the setting...place the people lived, their political situation, their social status (important back then).

4. What was the purpose of this book?

5. Looking at the key themes: what are three that stand out to you?

## Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

### Author, Date, and Recipients

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Thessalonica. He probably wrote in A.D. 49–51 from Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18). (Paul was converted in 33/34 and martyred in Rome 64–67)

### Theme

The main theme is Jesus' second coming. When he returns, the dead who have believed in Christ will rise and will join the living to meet the Lord in the air (4:15–17). Unbelievers will experience God's wrath, while believers will inherit salvation (1:10; 5:2–4, 9–10). In preparation for that great day, Christians are called to be holy and blameless (3:11–4:8; 5:23). God, who is faithful, will produce in them the holiness he requires (5:24).

### Purpose

Paul has received a report from Timothy about the Thessalonian church. Paul writes to them to restore their hope, which has been tested by unexpected deaths in the church. He reassures them that both the dead and the living believers will be safe at the second coming (4:13–5:11). In addition, Paul wants (1) to stress the authenticity of himself, Silas, and Timothy as preachers of the gospel (1:5; 2:1–12; 2:17–3:10); (2) to teach them that persecution is normal for Christians (3:3–4); and (3) to challenge them to take responsibility for earning their own living (4:9–12).

### Key Themes

- I God's wrath comes on those who reject the gospel (2:16; 5:3).
- II Jesus' death and resurrection are the basis for the Christian's hope (4:14; 5:10).
- III Christians are destined not for wrath but for salvation when Christ returns (1:10; 5:4, 9).
- IV Christians who die will participate fully in the second coming (4:14–17; 5:10).
- V Those who respond to the gospel have been elected and called by God. They continue to be called by God throughout their lives (1:4; 2:12; 4:7; 5:9, 24).
- VI Christians should live lives of complete holiness (3:13; 4:3–8; 5:23).
- VII Christians must never ignore their responsibility to work (4:9–12; 5:14).
- VIII The truth of the gospel is confirmed by the integrity of its preachers (1:5; 2:1–12).
- IX Joy, especially in suffering, is a mark of the Christian (1:6; 5:16).
- X Christians experience the realities of the new covenant (4:8–9).
- XI Faith, hope, and love are essential traits of the Christian (1:2–3; 5:8).

### Outline

- I Opening (1:1)
- II Thanksgiving and Encouragement (1:2–3:13)
- III Instruction and Exhortation (4:1–5:28)

### The Setting of 1 Thessalonians

c. A.D. 49–51

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth near the end of his second missionary journey. Paul and his companions had established the church in Thessalonica but were forced to leave by opponents of the gospel. Later, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church there, and Timothy's report led Paul to write this letter. Thessalonica enjoyed privileged status as the capital of Macedonia and was located on a natural harbor along the busy east-west Egnatian Way.

## Background and Setting John MacArthur

Thessalonica (modern Salonica) lies near the ancient site of Therna on the Thermaic Gulf at the northern reaches of the Aegean Sea. This city became the capital of Macedonia (ca. 168 B.C.) and enjoyed the status of a "free city" which was ruled by its own citizenry (Acts 17:6) under the Roman Empire. Because it was located on the main east-west highway, Via Egnatia, Thessalonica served as the hub of political and commercial activity in Macedonia, and became known as "the mother of all Macedonia." The population in Paul's day reached 200,000 people.

Paul had originally traveled 100 mi. from Philippi via Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (A.D. 50; Acts 16:1–18:22). As his custom was upon arrival, he sought out the synagogue in which to teach the local Jews the gospel (Acts 17:1, 2). On that occasion, he dialogued with them from the OT concerning Christ's death and resurrection in order to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the promised Messiah (Acts 17:2, 3). Some Jews believed and soon after, Hellenistic proselytes and some wealthy women of the community also were converted (Acts 17:4). Mentioned among these new believers were Jason (Acts 17:5), Gaius (Acts 19:29), Aristarchus (Acts 20:4), and Secundus (Acts 20:4).

Because of their effective ministry, the Jews had Paul's team evicted from the city (Acts 17:5–9), so they went south to evangelize Berea (Acts 17:10). There Paul had a similar experience to Thessalonica with conversions followed by hostility, so the believers sent Paul away. He headed for Athens, while Silvanus and Timothy remained in Berea (Acts 17:11–14). They rejoined Paul in Athens (cf. Acts 17:15, 16 with 3:1), from which Timothy was later dispatched back to Thessalonica (3:2). Apparently, Silas afterwards traveled from Athens to Philippi while Paul journeyed on alone to Corinth (Acts 18:1). It was after Timothy and Silvanus rejoined Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5), that he wrote 1 Thessalonians in response to Timothy's good report of the church.

Paul undoubtedly had multiple reasons for writing, all coming out of his supreme concern for the flock from which he had been separated. Some of Paul's purposes clearly included: 1) encouraging the church (1:2–10); 2) answering false allegations (2:1–12); 3) comforting the persecuted flock (2:13–16); 4) expressing his joy in their faith (2:17–3:13); 5) reminding them of the importance of moral purity (4:1–8); 6) condemning the sluggard lifestyle (4:9–12); 7) correcting a wrong understanding of prophetic events (4:13–5:11); 8) defusing tensions within the flock (5:12–15); and 9) exhorting the flock in the basics of Christian living (5:16–22).

