

New Testament Survey

The Book of 1 Thessalonians

I. Attestation and Authorship¹

A. External

1. Ignatius may refer to 2:4 in his *Epistle to the Romans* (chapter 2) and to 5:17 in his *Epistle to the Ephesians* (chapter 10).
2. The *Shepherd of Hermas* may allude to 5:13-14 in *Visions* (III.ix.10).
3. Irenaeus refers to 1 Thessalonians by name in *Against Heresies* (V.vi.1).
4. Tertullian quotes it as by “the apostle,” in *On The Resurrection of the Flesh* (chapter 24).
5. Clement of Alexandria is the first to apparently ascribe 1 Thessalonians to Paul in *Instructor* (I.v).

B. Internal

1. The writer calls himself Paul two times (1:1, 2:18).
2. The historical allusions fit closely into Paul’s ministry in Acts 16-18. For example, compare 1 Thessalonians 2:2 with Acts 16:22-23, 1 Thessalonians 3:4 with Acts 17:5, and 1 Thessalonians 2:17 with Acts 18:5.

C. A Brief Biography of Paul

1. Paul was a Roman citizen by birth - Acts 21:39, 2:3.
2. He may have attended the university at Tarsus. At any rate, we know he studied under Gamaliel - Acts 22:3.
3. He advanced far in his understanding and practice of Judaism - Galatians 1:14, Philippians 3:1-6.
4. He became a leader in the Jewish persecution against the church - Acts 7:58, 8:1-3, 9:1.
5. He was saved on the road to Damascus - Acts 9:1-9.
6. He immediately began to preach Christ - Acts 9:20-25.
7. Later, he spent some time in Arabia - Galatians 1:17.
8. He briefly visited Jerusalem - Galatians 1:18, Acts 9:26-29.

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 189-190.

9. Barnabas took him from Tarsus to Antioch in Syria - Acts 11:25-26.
10. When a famine broke out the church in Antioch sent relief to Jerusalem at the hand of Barnabas and Paul - Acts 11:27-30, 12:25.
11. After a time of ministry in Antioch, the Holy Spirit singled out Barnabas and Paul for missionary service - Acts 13:1-3.
12. Paul and Barnabas then went on the first missionary journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor (Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium).
13. After returning to Antioch in Syria, Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to deal with the problem of Gentile Christians and circumcision - Acts 15:1-35.
14. Paul and Barnabas split over John Mark. Paul takes Silas on his second missionary journey which took in Asia Minor, Madeconia, and Greece - Acts 15:36-18:23a.
15. Paul makes a third missionary journey to the same regions - Acts 18:23b-21:26.
16. When Paul returns to Jerusalem, he is arrested and tried before the Sanhedrin - Acts 21:27-23:30.
17. He was sent to Ceasarea Philippi where he was imprisoned for two years - Acts 23:31-26:32.
18. He was then sent to Rome where he was imprisoned another two years - Acts 27-28.
19. Apparently, he was then released for a short time during which he visited Ephesus (1 Timothy), Spain, and possibly the island of Crete (Titus).
20. He was arrested a second time, taken to Rome, and eventually martyred under the reign of Nero - 2 Timothy.

II. Background and Destination

A. Written to the church at Thessalonica - 1 Thessalonians 1:1.²

1. On Paul's second missionary journey he travelled to Thessalonica after leaving Philippi. Apparently Luke was not with him (note the "we" sections of Acts) - Acts 16:39-40.
2. Paul reasoned in the Sabbath at least three times, probably more - Acts 17:2.

² Thiessen, p. 191.

3. When some Jews, devout Greeks, and leading women believed the message Paul preached, the Jews stirred up a mob against Paul. Paul then leaves with Silas for Berea - Acts 17:4-10.
 4. We then note that at least four groups of people formed the church at Thessalonica: Jews, devout Greeks, chief women, and a mass of Gentiles.
- B. The City of Thessalonica.
1. Thessalonica was situated on the Egnatian Way, the great military and economic route between Rome and the eastern parts of the empire.
 2. Thessaolonica was a prominent military and strategic center. It was one of the leading cities of Macedonia.

III. Occasion and Date

- A. Paul writes 1 Thessalonians in response to Timothy's report from Thessalonica.
1. After Paul left Thessalonica, he journeyed to Berea with Silas. After some ministry there, Paul again was threatened and had to leave - Acts 17:11-14.
 2. Timothy joined Paul and Silas at Berea. Timothy and Silas stay at Berea while Paul travels on to Athens alone - Acts 17:14-15.
 3. Paul calls for Timothy and Silas while at Athens, and when they come Paul sends Timothy to Thessalonica to see how things are going (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3), and Silas to Philippi. Later they join Paul in Corinth - Acts 18:5.
 4. It appears that before the return of Timothy and Silas, Paul had to work at tentmaking for a living. After they returned, they must have brought some offering to Paul since he was then able to devote himself to the Word - Acts 18:3-5.
 5. Timothy brings the report back to Paul about events at Thessalonica. Specifically:
 - a. The Church at Thessalonica took seriously Paul's message about the return of Christ to the extent that some behaved disorderly by quitting their jobs (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:8-12), and some grieved over loved ones who had died (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
 - b. The Church was suffering persecution because of their faith (1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10).
 - c. It appeared as though some were misusing their spiritual gifts and others were returning to sexual impurity - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, 5:19-21).
- B. Written approximately A.D.50-51 from Corinth during Paul's second missionary journey.

1. We know Paul was in Corinth during Gallio's Proconsulship which was in A.D. 51-52.
2. The normal meaning of Acts 18:12 is that Paul was in Corinth at least 18 months before being brought before Gallio.

IV. Purpose and Plan³

- A. To commend Thessalonica for their faith under persecution.
- B. To straighten out the problems of the Thessalonian misunderstanding regarding the return of Christ.
- C. To exhort them to live godly lives in light of Christ's second coming.

V. A Basic Outline⁴

- A. Salutation - 1:1-1.
- B. Reminiscence and Commendation
 1. The Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians - 1:2-4.
 2. The Proofs of their Election - 1:5-8.
 3. The Report Concerning the Thessalonians - 1:9-10.
 4. The Character of Paul's Ministry at Thessalonica - 2:1-12.
 5. The Response of the Thessalonians - 2:13-16.
 6. The Apostle's Subsequent Relations with the Thessalonians - 2:17-3:8.
 7. The Apostle's Renewed Thanksgiving and Prayer - 3:9-13.
- C. Exhortation and Doctrine
 1. The Lessons in Christian Morals - 4:1-12.
 2. The Dead in Christ and the Coming of the Lord - 4:13-18.
 3. The Day of the Lord and the Need of Watchfulness - 5:1-11.
 4. The Duties of Church and Private Life - 5:12-22.
 5. The Prayer for Sanctification - 5:23-24.
- D. Conclusion - 5:25-28

VI. Chapters To Remember

³ Thiessen, pp. 194.

⁴ Thiessen, p. 194-195.

1 Thessalonians 2 True Pastoral Care

1 Thessalonians 4 The Rapture

1 Thessalonians 5 The Day of the Lord

VII. Points and Peculiarities

1. 1 Thessalonians presents a clear picture of the Rapture and the Day of the Lord.
2. Each chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a statement regarding the second coming of Christ.

VIII. A Closer Look

A. 1 Thessalonians 1

1. Commendations and Greetings - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

B. 1 Thessalonians 2

1. Paul's Pastoral Model - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16.
2. Paul's Crown of Rejoicing - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20.

C. 1 Thessalonians 3

1. The Trip of Timothy - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-10.
2. Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians - 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

D. 1 Thessalonians 4

1. Appeal for Purity - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.
2. Appeal for Diligence in Business - 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12.
3. The Rapture of the Church - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

E. 1 Thessalonians 5

1. The Day of the Lord - 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.
2. Exhortations to Godliness - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24.