

1 Thessalonians

Original Historical Setting

Author: Paul

Written: ~51 A.D.

Audience: Christians living in Thessalonica

Occasion: Paul had dispatched Timothy to the Thessalonians to check on their spiritual state. After strengthening and encouraging them, Timothy caught up with Paul in Corinth. He let Paul know that the church was withstanding some persecution and was also somewhat confused as to the timing of the return of Christ. Paul wrote to encourage and to clarify regarding their confusion.

Timeline:

~35 AD – Paul’s conversion

~50 AD – Jerusalem Council

~50-53 AD – Paul second missionary journey

~51 AD – Church at Thessalonica established

~58 AD – Romans arrest Paul in Jerusalem

World Events that occur simultaneously

~50 AD – China and Rome conduct trade via 4,000-mile-long Silk Road

~51 AD – Isthmian Games held at Corinth

~51 AD – Birth of the Emperor Domitian in Rome

~52 AD – Thomas said to have begun mission work in India

Key text(s)

3:12-13 – May your love abound to one another

4:16 – The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout

4:17 – Those who remain alive will be caught up

5:2 – The Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night

5:9 – God did not appoint us to wrath

Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

Genre/Literary style

An epistle (letter) written in (Koine) Greek

Features and Structure:

This epistle is not organized by doctrinal material followed by practical advice like many of Paul’s letters. Instead Paul moves back and forth between the two. However, only practical material follows the transitional word “therefore” at **5:6**.

Ch 1– The Christian’s Attitude toward the Return of Christ

Ch 2– The Christian’s Reward at the Return of Christ

Ch 3– The Christian’s Life and the Return of Christ

Ch 4– The Christian’s Death and the Return of Christ

Ch 5– The Christian’s Actions in view of the Return of Christ

What to look for

- The questions most on the mind of the new converts in Thessalonica apparently had to do with the Second Coming of Jesus. Even though Paul covers several topics in this short letter, every chapter ends with a reference to the return of Jesus.
- Paul doesn’t use quote from the Old Testament in 1st Thessalonians suggesting that most of the believers there were non-Jews.

Interesting facts

- Paul apparently wrote 1st Thessalonians while he was in Corinth. Acts 18 says that Corinthian Jews brought Paul up on charges before Gallio, the governor of the southern Greece province of Achaia and that Gallio threw the case out of court. An inscription found at Delphi, a worship center in the region, confirms that Gallio was governor of Achaia from about AD 51-53 corresponding to the time that Paul was in Corinth and writing the book of 1st Thessalonians.
- Thessalonica was first named Therma because of hot springs in that area. In 316 BC Cassander (who succeeded Alexander the Great) named it in memory of his wife, Thessalonike, a half sister of Alexander.