

INTRODUCTION AND 1 THESS. 1:1 – 2:16

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Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

I. Some Dates From Paul's Life

A. Conversion (Acts 9:1-7)	33/34
B. Tarsus (Cilicia) (Acts 9:30)	36/37 – 43/45
C. Antioch (Syria) (Acts 11:25-26)	43/45
D. 1st missionary journey (Acts 13 - 14)	47/48
E. Galatians written	48/49
F. Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)	49
G. 2d missionary journey (Acts 15:36 - 18:22)	49-51

II. Some Details of Second Missionary Journey

A. After the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49, Paul suggested that he and Barnabas revisit the churches they had planted during their missionary journey. They disagreed over taking John called Mark (Paul did not want to because he had deserted them early in the first journey), so Barnabas took John/Mark and sailed to Cyprus; Paul took Silas and headed out on foot (Acts 15:36-41).

B. When they visited Lystra, they were joined by a young Christian named Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). They went from town to town strengthening the churches (Acts 16:4-5), and then, with some guidance by the Spirit, went to Troas. In response to a vision Paul had, they sailed from Troas into Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).

C. In Philippi, Paul and Silas are illegally flogged and thrown in prison (Acts 16:16-40).

D. From Philippi Paul, Silas, and Timothy go to Thessalonica and plant the church to which this letter is written. After starting that the church, they are forced to flee to Berea when the Jews start a riot (Acts 17:1-10).

1. It is unclear precisely how long they spent in Thessalonica. Acts 17:2 says Paul reasoned in the synagogue on three Sabbath days, but that may simply refer to the time he spent specifically among the Jews, after which he preached to the Gentiles.

2. The fact Paul worked at his trade while in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:7-9) and received aid from the Philippians (Phil. 4:16; perhaps more than once) suggest to some that the stay must have been longer than three weeks.

3. At most, Paul was in Thessalonica for a matter of months. Luke certainly does not portray his stay there as lengthy, and we know from an ancient inscription that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia from July 51 to July 52. Paul's 18-month stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11) was ended not long after (effect of "some time" in Acts 18:18) he appeared before Gallio. He probably arrived in Corinth in early 50, came before Gallio in the late summer of 51, and left for Antioch in fall of 51. For Paul to be in Corinth in early 50 does not leave too many months for him to be in Thessalonica.

E. Paul's experience in Berea is similar to his experience in Thessalonica, so the brothers sent him off to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea (Acts 17:11-15).

F. Silas and Timothy join Paul in Athens (Acts 17:15-16), and then Timothy is sent back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-2). Silas goes to some undisclosed place in Macedonia and then he and Timothy rejoin Paul (perhaps Silas arrived first) who has since moved to Corinth (Acts 18:5). Paul's condition when he arrives in Corinth is reflected in 1 Cor. 2:3, "I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling."

III. The City

A. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. It was also a free city, meaning that the local inhabitants had their own government and rights of citizenship.

B. It was also an important center of communication and trade, being situated on the Via Egnatia, the Roman highway to the east.

IV. The Letter

A. The news Timothy brought about the church in Thessalonica is what prompted 1 Thessalonians. Thus, it was written from Corinth in A.D. 50.

B. The Thessalonian church was very young, and Paul and his companions had not had much time to ground them in the faith before being chased out.

1 Thess. 1:1 – 2:16

I. Prescript (1:1) - Formally it is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy, but Paul appears to be the main author (2:18, 3:5, 5:27).

II. Thanksgiving for Thessalonians (1:2-10)

A. Paul, Silas, and Timothy tell the Thessalonians that when they mention them in their prayers they always gives thanks for them because they recall their work of faith, labor of love, and perseverance of hope in Jesus Christ.

1. The missionaries are thankful because the Thessalonians showed signs of genuine faith, love, and hope. These qualities were expressed in their actions and in

their perseverance in the face of persecution. It is a wonderful thing to see people to whom you've preached giving themselves over to the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The missionaries tell them they thank God for them in order to encourage them. They want them to know that they are doing well in the faith, that they are pleasing not only the missionaries but God.

B. Paul, Silas, and Timothy tell them they pray knowing their election, knowing that the gospel did not come to them in word alone but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much certainty.

1. The missionaries know the Thessalonians are elect or chosen by God because they responded to the gospel. Those "in Christ" are God's elect; God has predestined them to receive great blessings.

a. I do not believe God predetermined that some individuals would believe (and thus would receive eternal life) and others would not (and thus would receive eternal damnation). He wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9-10; Jn. 3:17) but grants them the freedom to accept or reject his gracious offer of salvation.

b. Christ is God's chosen one, God's elect, so all who are in him participate in that election. For example, if a person dies and his will states that Boy Scout Troop 101 is to be taken to Disney World on the first anniversary of his death, he has chosen the troop and all who are part of it on that date receive the blessing. Of course, God knows the future so he foreknows which individuals will be in Christ, but that status is based on their choice (which God in his sovereignty grants them) not on a divine mandate.

c. Romans 11 shows there was an *elect* Israel, a subset of physical Israel consisting of those physical descendants of Abraham who had faith in God. The election is of *Israel* and individuals are elect only in identification and union with the group. Branches are grafted into the elect group and broken off the elect group, depending on faith. See also, Col. 1:2 with Col. 3:12 and 2 Pet. 1:1 with 2 Pet. 1:10.

d. For a more detailed study of election, see Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Springfield, MO: Westcott Publishers, 1970); William G. MacDonald, "The Biblical Doctrine of Election" in Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1989) 207-229; Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 78-90; Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002); Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002) 388-399; and Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

2. The missionaries' knowing the Thessalonians' election is equated to or explained by their knowing that the gospel came to the Thessalonians not only in words but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much certainty. They did not just hear the

gospel; they were grabbed by it. The word hit with power (perhaps including miraculous works), the Spirit was evident, and their conviction was obvious, all of which attested to the fact they were genuine converts and thus part of the elect.

C. Just as the missionaries knew the Thessalonians' election, so the Thessalonians knew the type of men Paul and his companions had been during their visit. This is important because some in Thessalonica apparently were mischaracterizing the visit (see, 2:1-12).

D. The missionaries praise them for receiving the gospel with joy despite being persecuted for their faith. In so doing, they were imitating the missionaries and the Lord.

1. Both the missionaries and the Lord Jesus joyfully endured suffering for the sake of the truth (Acts 16:22-25; Heb. 12:2). God's work is so magnificent that any suffering pales in comparison to the joy of contributing to it or being a beneficiary of it.

2. Hardship is the normal lot of Christians. For instance, in Acts 14:22 Paul and Barnabas tell the churches of South Galatia, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," and in Jn. 16:33 Jesus told his disciples, "In this world you will have trouble."

3. Note that the joy they maintained in the face of persecution was given by the Holy Spirit. Not all signs of the Spirit's presence are miraculous. The deep conviction of the surpassing value of God's work in Christ is brought by the Spirit, and this conviction, plus inner strengthening by the Spirit, produces joy in adverse circumstances. In Gal. 5:22 joy is listed as a fruit of the Spirit.

E. As a result of their becoming imitators of the missionaries and of the Lord, they themselves became *worthy* of being an example for other believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Others should do as they had done.

F. They became an example *in fact* when, through the Thessalonians' spreading of the news, believers in other towns heard of their conversion and faithfulness and were influenced by it.

1. The spreading of their faith would have been facilitated by their location on the Via Egnatia highway.

2. Those already believing when they heard (e.g., Philippi) were thereby encouraged to remain faithful in the face of persecution.

3. Those not yet believing when they heard were thereby encouraged to accept Paul's message when he arrived (perhaps Athens or Corinth). They were already curious about the gospel. The focus in vv. 9-10 on the Thessalonians' conversion implies this may have been Paul's emphasis.

4. Note the description of their conversion: They turned to the living and true God from idols; to wait for his Son from heaven; whom he raised from the dead; Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

III. Defense of Visit (2:1-12)

A. The Thessalonians knew that the missionaries' visit to them had not been worthless, had not been without positive effect, as some apparently were suggesting. On the contrary, despite what Paul and Silas had previously suffered, they had the courage to preach the gospel to the Thessalonians in the face of much opposition, and this had a great effect. (2:1-2)

1. The spreading of the gospel is fiercely opposed.

a. Look at today: It is mocked in Hollywood; characterized as dangerous, corrupt, and anti-intellectual by the media; driven out of whatever the government touches (which is ever increasing); and treated with violence by homosexual and abortion activists.

b. The reason for this opposition is that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-controlling powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

2. Despite this opposition, they refused to be silenced. With great courage they offered the Thessalonians God's gift of life. These men weren't wimps who retreated from hardship, who gave way to the fears of some "inner child." Courage is a virtue, not something to be denigrated as a facade.

B. They had courage to speak in the face of such opposition, and thus had an impact among the Thessalonians, because they were doing it to please God. (2:3-4)

1. In the missionaries' absence, some of their opponents apparently were suggesting that the real motive behind their visit to Thessalonica was to get something for themselves. There have always been religious hucksters, and that is how they were being portrayed.

2. Paul points to the courage they showed in the face of opposition as proof that they were not acting in self interest. If they had been trying to "sell them a bill of goods," had been acting out of false motives, they would not have endured such opposition.

3. Their courage was rooted in the fact they preach the gospel on behalf of the living God. They were driven by their desire to faithfully serve him, a mission that dwarfed all danger and opposition.

C. The Thessalonians (and God himself!) knew that at no time did the missionaries use flattery or any pretext for greed, nor were they seeking any type of emotional payoff in the form of human praise or glorification. (2:5-6)

1. True preaching is a noble thing. It is not about getting but giving. Paul was a scholar, a man of great learning. He could have had, in the world's eyes, a much more prestigious career, but he chose to serve God.

2. One of the tragedies of today is how ministry has come to be seen. It is perceived as a way to get rather than to give.

D. Rather than being a (financial) burden on the Thessalonians, which they rightfully could have been as apostles of Christ, the missionaries were gentle with them, as a nurse comforting her own children. (2:7)

1. The right of support for those who preach the gospel was established by Jesus when he sent out the 12 in Matthew 10 and the 70 in Luke 10. In Lk. 10:7 he said, "Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid" (NRSV). See also, Mat. 10:10. That is why Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:14 that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."

2. But having the right to support does not mean it must be exercised. In the case of the Thessalonians, they went the extra mile to ease the situation of these infant Christians. They chose to relieve them of any obligation of support to help establish them in the gospel. This gentle handling of their situation made the charge of self interest doubly absurd.

E. They so loved the Thessalonians that they were pleased to share not only the gospel but themselves, to put themselves at the Thessalonians' disposal. If anybody was being taken advantage of, it was Paul, Silas, and Timothy! (2:8)

F. The Thessalonians knew very well that the missionaries had not been freeloaders. While preaching they had "labored and toiled night and day" to provide for their own needs. If they were trying to beat somebody out of something, they had a strange way of going about it! (2:9)

G. The Thessalonians (and God!) witnessed the integrity with which the missionaries conducted themselves. (2:10-12)

1. They acted devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly toward the Thessalonians. They were what they claimed to be, namely emissaries of God, and everything they did was consistent with that.

2. Their interest was not self aggrandizement but to help the Thessalonians live lives worthy of God who calls them. It was toward that end they spent their time, exhorting and encouraging the Thessalonians, not trying to get something for themselves.

IV. Further Thanksgiving for Thessalonians (2:13-16)

A. They constantly give thanks to God that the Thessalonians accepted the gospel as the word of God that it is. (2:13)

1. The gospel – the Son of God coming to earth in human form, dying for humanity's sins, and being resurrected – is a divine revelation; it is not something created by human imagination or deduced by human logic.

a. This means it is unadulterated truth. We can accept it or reject it, but we cannot alter it.

b. When feminist Annie Laurie Gaylor says, "Let's forget about the mythical Jesus and look for encouragement, solace, and inspiration from real women . . ." (*The Humanist*, Jul./Aug. 1988, p. 37), she's simply saying, "Let's ignore the truth."

2. They are thankful they accepted the gospel as the word of God, rather than as something men made up, because in doing so they gave it the trust it deserves. The Thessalonians were not tentative and reserved in their acceptance; they wholeheartedly embraced the message as God's truth.

B. Evidence of their accepting the gospel as God's word was the fact they suffered for their faith the same way the churches in Judea had suffered, i.e., were persecuted by their countrymen. (2:14)

1. Persecution is a natural concomitant of the Christian faith. See, 1 Thess. 3:3-4; Jn. 15:18-19, 17:14; 2 Tim. 3:12. By bringing the message of truth, the word of God, Christians expose human rebellion and false religion, so those engaged in those things hate them.

2. The zeal that endures persecution is rooted in the conviction that the gospel is "bigger" than this life, that it is God's plan for the salvation of mankind.

C. Comment on the persecuting activity of the Jews (2:15-16)

1. They killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets (e.g., Acts 7:52). He means, of course, that they instigated his crucifixion by the Romans. In the only other place where Paul specifies the agents of Jesus' death, they are "the rulers of this age" (1 Cor. 2:8).

2. They drove the missionaries out (probably referring to Thessalonica and Berea).

3. They displease God (by opposing his work in Christ).

4. They are opposed to all people in the sense they prevent the missionaries from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. The clear implication is that unless the Gentiles are spoken to they will not be saved. This is consistent with Rom. 10:13-15.

5. They thus continually are filling up the measure of their sins. God has been amazingly patient with them, but his anger (the cup of his wrath) has now reached the limit.

a. Perhaps Paul is speaking of God's judgment on the Jews carried out through the Romans. This culminated, of course, in the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, a destruction Jesus had prophesied (see, e.g., Mat. 23:37 - 24:2).

b. Trouble had broken out for the Jews in a number of places in the Empire and was about to get worse. See F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980) 341 ff.; F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 49.

(1) In A.D. 49 Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2), and many Jews were killed during a riot involving Roman soldiers in the Temple courts at Passover.

(2) The rule of Cumanus, the Roman procurator in Palestine from A.D. 48-52, was punctuated by other clashes between his soldiers and the Jews.

(3) Things only got worse under Felix, procurator from A.D. 52-59. He ruthlessly stamped out any type of insurgent activity. In doing so, Josephus says he crucified an "incalculable" number of people.

(4) The Jewish Revolt against Rome went from A.D. 66-70. Masada fell in A.D. 73.

6. Paul is not anti-Jewish (e.g., Rom. 9:1-5). He is a Jew and loves his people dearly. He is speaking of hard-hearted Jews who refuse to accept and who actively oppose God's purpose in Christ.