

## Outline

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### *Outline of Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians*

#### **I. Chapter 1**

- A. Salutation (1:1)
- B. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonian community (1:2–10)
  - 1. Giving thanks for God's work of salvation and spiritual enablement for serving each other within the community.
  - 2. God's sovereign work of salvation as demonstrated in the power of the gospel.
  - 3. Living out and proclaiming the gospel as a mark of being a true follower of Yeshua.
  - 4. Sanctification: the proof of true saving faith.
  - 5. Anticipating the coming of Yeshua: mark of true saving faith.

#### **II. Chapter 2**

- A. The success of Paul's mission to Thessalonica (2:1–9)
  - 1. They proclaimed the gospel even in the face of strong opposition.
  - 2. The truth of the gospel message proclaimed:
    - a. does not come from error, impurity, or deceit.
    - b. is approved by God, not for pleasing people but to honor Him.
    - c. not with flattering speech, or greed, or glory from men, or asserting one's own authority.
    - d. not for self-gain to become wealthy, but laboring in teaching the gospel while at the same time working to supply his own needs.
- B. Paul and his co-laborers showed forth the truth of the gospel in their manner of living. (2:10-11)
  - 1. The message of the gospel is both in word and in one's own life as witness of spiritual redemption.
  - 2. Exhortations & encouragement as a father would teach his children.
- C. The mark of genuine saving faith and its opposite (2:12–16)
  - 1. Living in a manner that pleases God.
  - 2. Receiving the word of God as divinely given and that which molds the believer's life to honor Him.
  - 3. Ability and strength to persevere even in times of persecution.
  - 4. Persecution at the hands of the unbelieving Jewish population.
    - a. they killed the Lord Yeshua

- b. they killed the prophets.
  - c. they persecuted us by driving us out of Thessalonica.
  - d. they were not pleasing God but hostile to all people.
  - e. they tried to keep us from giving the gospel to the Gentiles.
  - f. unless they repent, they will experience the wrath of God
- D. The desire of Paul & his co-laborers to visit the Thessalonica community again. (2:17–19)
- 1. They were forced to leave but remain with them “in their heart.”
  - 2. They have been “hindered” by the enemy in attempts to return to Thessalonica.
  - 3. The believers in Thessalonica are the hope, joy, and crown to Paul and his co-laborers, for they will give glory to God at the coming of Yeshua.

### III. Chapter 3

- A. The sending of Timothy while Paul remains in Athens (3:1–5)
- 1. Paul had wanted to come but remained in Athens.
  - 2. He sent Timothy to encourage and strengthen the believers in Thessalonica.
  - 3. Paul was concerned to know the reality of the faith of those who had received the Gospel.
- B. Timothy’s reporting regarding the strong faith of the believers in Thessalonica (3:6–10)
- 1. Their faith remains strong & they appreciate Paul and his co-workers.
  - 2. Paul and co-workers are encouraged and comforted to receive the good news, which brings rejoicing to God.
  - 3. The good report increases Paul’s desire to be with them again.
- C. Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving and requests (3:11–13)
- 1. That they would abound in love for each other & for all people.
  - 2. That they would grow and mature in their faith, awaiting the coming of Yeshua to take to Himself all His holy ones.

### IV. Chapter 4

- A. Instructions & teaching for maturing in the faith (4:1–8)
- 1. To live in ways that always please God.
  - 2. To strive for greater sanctification, to please God and abstain from worldly things and perspectives.
  - 3. Abstain from sexual immorality.
  - 4. Learn to control oneself to further sanctification and honor.
  - 5. Maintain unity within the believing community.
  - 6. God’s calling: sanctification, to reject this is to reject Him.

- B. Instruction Regarding “Love of the Brethren” (4:9–12)
  - 1. The message is clear from God Himself.
  - 2. They were doing well in loving one another, but Paul encourages them to strive for even greater love.
    - a. to lead a quiet life, mind your own business, and work to maintain a living so as not to be in need.
    - b. behave properly to those outside of the believing community.
- C. The sure return of Yeshua (4:13–18)
  - 1. Believers who have died are safe in God’s hands, and there is no need to grieve as having not hope.
  - 2. When Yeshua returns, He will bring with Him those who are His and have died in this life.
  - 3. When Yeshua returns, those living believers will meet Him in the air to join those who have preceded them.
  - 4. This truth offers comfort regarding believers who have had believing family members and friends pass away.

## V. Chapter 5

- A. The coming of the Lord (5:1–11)
  - 1. Yeshua will return like a “thief in the night.”
  - 2. His coming will be sudden, like a woman’s “labor pains” and it will be too late for those who have rejected Him.
  - 3. For believers in Yeshua, there is no need to fear but should be ready at all times for Yeshua’s return.
  - 4. Therefore encourage one another in this truth.
- B. Instructions to strengthen the bonds of the believing community (5:12–22)
  - 1. Instructions to appreciate community leaders/overseers.
  - 2. Instructions for helping the weak, admonishing those who are disobedient to the faith.
  - 3. Help the weak, the fainthearted, be patient with all.
  - 4. Do not repay evil with evil.
- C. Admonitions for all believers
  - 1. Rejoice, pray, give thanks, do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophetic utterances.
  - 2. Examine everything, hold to what is good, reject all evil.
- D. The Epistle’s Closing
  - 1. Prayer for blessing as the return of Yeshua is anticipated.
  - 2. God is faithful and will do all He has promised.
  - 3. Admonition to love one another.
  - 4. The epistle is to be read to all.
  - 5. Prayer for God’s grace upon the Thessalonian community.

# Introduction

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonian community is understood by many scholars to be the earliest of the Pauline Epistles. It seems appropriate, then, that the five chapters which make up this first epistle to the Thessalonian community reveal so much of Paul's own thinking and heart-desire regarding the gospel, centered in the saving work and glory of Yeshua the Messiah.

Indeed, it was the heart-felt desire of Paul, along with his companions, to proclaim the gospel of Yeshua to people everywhere. We read in Acts 16:6-7 that Paul had been directed by divine intervention from going south into the province of Asia and north into Bithynia.

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Yeshua did not permit them; (Acts 16:6-7)

So Paul arrived at Troas most likely in late March or early April of A.D. 49. From Troas, which was the western most city of Asia Minor, he was led via a divine vision to cross the Aegean Sea into Macedonia and to proclaim the glorious message of the gospel there for the first time.

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;" (Acts 16:9-11)

Here we see the Lord directing Paul and his companions in one of the foundational events in history as regards the on-going fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, that in the Seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 22:18). It was through God directing Paul and his companions in this way, to cross the Aegean Sea into Macedonia and to take the gospel there for the first time. As a result, the gospel moved to the west and the evangelization of Europe began.

Their missionary journey took them first to the city of Philippi (Acts 16:12–40) where they remained about two months. Then, leaving Luke (and possibly Timothy) behind, Paul and Silas left Philippi due to political pressure from the city officials and traveled westward toward Thessalonica, a major center of commerce and power, founded by the Macedonian general Cassander in 315 B.C. and named after the step-sister of Alexander the Great.

The city of Thessalonica was of good size, and perhaps only a third smaller than Salonika/Thessaloniki, its present-day counterpart, which has a 2022 population of 813,793. It had a good natural harbor, and as a result, was a center for commerce in the whole region. Traffic to and from the rich agricultural plains in the interior fed through this port. As a result, the city attracted many Jewish merchants of the diaspora and thus resulted in a well-established synagogue within the city.

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Yeshua whom I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah." (Acts 17:1–3)

Some, on the basis of Luke's report in this text from Acts, presume that Paul remained in the city of Thessalonica for only three weeks. However, it seems likely that Paul continued his work in the city after being expelled from the synagogue. This seems clear from the fact that he had established gainful employment in the city (1Thess 2:9; 2Thess 3:8), which would have required a more lengthy stay than a mere three weeks. Moreover, when he left Thessalonica, a thriving community of believers remained which included many Gentiles who had turned away from their heathen idolatry (1Thess 1:9). Establishing such a believing community would surely have taken longer than three weeks.<sup>1</sup>

We see, then, that the Lord had directed Paul and his companions to Thessalonica, for in proclaiming the gospel message there, they were able to reach a great many more people who not only populated the large city but also those who were traveling merchants who could there-

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1 See Thomas, Robert L. *1 Thessalonians in The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11, (Zondervan, 1978), p. 230.

fore carry the truth of the gospel, which they had received, throughout the entire empire.

As in Paul's other epistles, we see in the letters written to the Thessalonian community the unfolding fulfillment of God's promise to bless all the nations of the earth through the proclamation of the gospel, the very means by which God would draw to Himself all those who were given to Yeshua.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn 6:37–39)

# Chapter One

## *commentary*

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**1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the *ekklesia* of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Yeshua Messiah: Grace to you and peace.**

Paul begins all of his letters with his name (Παῦλος, *Paulos*) and in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon he also includes “Timothy.” Here, as well as in 2 Thessalonians, both Timothy and Silvanus are added. Since Timothy is added in the opening of six of the Pauline epistles would indicate that he regularly worked with Paul in these locations to help organize the group and to encourage them in the truths of the Scriptures. However, there is no indication that Timothy is to be considered a “co-author” of the epistles in which he is named. His working together with Paul, however, is important and surely the communities in which both Paul and Timothy ministered would have had a high regard for both of them. Thus to add his name in the opening of the letter makes it clear that the letter has originated from the same ones who ministered to them in such significant ways.

The name Silvanus is the Latinized form of “Silas,” which in turn was the Aramaic form (*šāîlâ*) of the Hebrew name “Saul.”<sup>1</sup> This is the same Silas who, with Judas Barsabbas, was sent by the *ekklesia* in Jerusalem to Antioch (cf. Acts 15:22, 32). According to Acts he was a leader in the Jerusalem *ekklesia* and a prophet, and after returning to Jerusalem (Acts 15:33), was selected by Paul to accompany him on the mission tour through Asia Minor to Macedonia (Acts 15:40–16:40). Silvanus (Silas) proved himself to be a stalwart believer and working together with Paul, which is proven by the fact that he endured cruel beatings, imprisonment, and pursuit by an angry mob (Acts 16:23–25; 17:5). He was known for his absolute reliability and his faithfulness in risking his life in the service of the Messiah Yeshua (Acts 15:25–27).

In this epistle as well as in 2Thessalonians and Philippians, Paul does not identify himself as an “apostle” as he does in all of the rest of his biblical epistles. There is no obvious reason why he leaves this title off, but it is clear that in all of his epistles he writes as one who had been commissioned by the Lord and thus with true authority to

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1 Malherbe, Abraham J., *The Anchor Bible: 1Thess*, v. 23b (Doubleday, 2000), p. 98.

guide the believing communities in the inspired truths and spiritual guidance he presented in his letters.

...to the *ekklesia* of the *Thessalonians* – Here I use the English transliteration of the Greek *ἐκκλησία* because “church” (as this Greek word is most often translated in our English Bibles) is simply too broad of a term in my mind. “Church” encompasses the whole realm of modern religions while the word *ekklesia*, when used as the Apostles intended, emphasizes those who have come together to form a true community based upon their mutual faith in Yeshua. Surely there are many “churches” that would qualify to have this definition, but there are many that do not. The *ekklesia* which Yeshua promised to build (Matt 16:18) is that which honors Him and teaches that only repentance toward God and faith in Yeshua brings true and eternal salvation.

... in *God the Father and the Lord Yeshua Messiah* - Here Paul makes clear that the admonitions and teaching he has included in this first letter to the Thessalonian *ekklesia* is fully in line with, and revealed by, God Himself. The use of the dual phrases “God the Father” and “the Lord Yeshua Messiah” are used (with minor differences) in 1Thess., 1Tim., 2Tim., and Titus.

That the preposition “in” (ἐν, *en*) is found only once and the divine names, “God the Father” and “Lord Yeshua Messiah” are coupled together with the word “and” (καί, *kai*) may indicate grammatically an emphasis upon the utter unity of the Father and the Son, Yeshua. Indeed, in the following verses (1:3-5), the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are named, emphasizing the glorious mystery of the one true God Who reveals Himself as “Father, Son, and Spirit.” Here, once again, we are called upon to exercise true saving faith in affirming what the Bible teaches, namely that there is one and only one God Who exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That it is beyond our finite ability to fully explain the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, leaves us to recognize that we know this to be true on the basis of faith.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Heb 11:1)

When the author of Hebrew makes this statement, he uses “things not seen” (πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων) to mean “things beyond our ability fully to understand.” But true saving faith is not of lesser value than empirical proof! Indeed, there are many things, even in our modern scientific world, that we know to be true but yet have no clear explanation to explain them.

...*grace to you and peace* – This phrase is used by Paul in the majority of his epistles but its familiarity should not in any way diminish the wonderful truth that this phrase carries, namely, that true and lasting peace can only be realized and experienced by those who have been born again by His grace. And what is “grace” (χάρις, *charis*)? It is the gift of God by which the payment for sin, made by Yeshua’s death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, is applied to the believer. This is entirely a gift of God and never could be “earned” or “merited.” As Paul teaches us:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:8-9)<sup>1</sup>

The peace that mankind so much longs for and seeks to find by his own power and ingenuity, is a passing vapor. It is “in Yeshua” that true peace, even in the midst of life’s troubles, can be experienced and savored.

**2–3 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Yeshua Messiah in the presence of our God and Father,**

Paul regularly begins his epistles by thanking God for his readers. The only exception is his Epistle to the Galatians, and it may have been that the tone of the letter was more corrective than his other letters, and thus he has the troubles being caused in Galatians in mind and wanted to bring his issues forward before giving any commendations.

That he uses the plural “We give thanks” would thus include both Timothy and Silvanus, and would therefore emphasize that the *ekklesia* in Thessalonica was doing well in maintaining their unity and service

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1 The Greek of Eph 2:8 also makes this clear. In Koine Greek, a demonstrative (“that”) must agree in number and gender with the noun it modifies. In Greek, both “grace” and “faith” are feminine nouns, but the demonstrative “that” is in the neuter. The grammatical rule is that in such a case where two nouns are paired with the word “and,” if the demonstrative applies to both of them, then it is put in the neuter. Thus “that not of yourselves” means neither the grace nor the faith is something produced by the sinner himself. Both God’s grace and the faith to receive it are given by God.

to each other and thus to the Lord.

Three participles follow, enumerating and identifying the basis for their thanksgiving. First is “We give thanks to God always for you all” (Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περι πάντων ὑμῶν). Then secondly, “making mention of you in our prayers” (μνησθῆναι ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς ὑμῶν). Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy undoubtedly had daily times of prayer together and included in such prayer times were words of blessing and thanksgiving for the believing community in Thessalonica. We may ascertain from this that Paul recognized the unity and godly behavior of the people as ongoing proof that their confession of faith in Yeshua was authentic.

The third participle is “constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in the Lord Yeshua Messiah” (μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Here, the consistency of the Thessalonian community in caring for each other, bearing each other’s burdens, and together standing as a valiant witness of God’s grace in Yeshua, surely encouraged Paul and his helpers. For such characteristics were living proof of God’s grace in the gospel. Moreover, His power is demonstrated by His blessing their own labors in helping to form and ground the Thessalonian community in the truth of Yeshua and His eternal work of securing salvation for all who are saved by His grace.

Note that the “hope in the Lord Yeshua Messiah” is coupled with the final phrase of the verse, “in the presence of our God and Father...” Here we see emphasized the ongoing, continual work of our Lord Yeshua as the Intercessor for all who are His. For it is through Yeshua that our prayers of thanksgiving, requests, praise, etc. are brought to the Father as we are led by the Holy Spirit in our prayers. As the writer of Hebrews teaches us:

Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25)

Note also Rom 8:34.

who is the one who condemns? Messiah Yeshua is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

**4–5 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.**

*...knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you* – Now Paul states the final cause for their thanksgiving regarding the believing community in Thessalonica, and it is that their steadfast, enduring lives of faith as a community verify beyond doubt that their faith was saving faith and that therefore they evidence the fact that they had been chosen by God as those whom He would save eternally. While the biblical doctrine of God’s having chosen those whom He would save is often debated in the wider “Christian church,” there is no debate that this truth is well taught in the Scriptures.

Note how Paul teaches this in his Epistle to the Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3–6)

*... for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit* – What Paul is stating in our text is that those who are “beloved by God” in the sense of “elective love,” are living proof that He has chosen them for Himself. This is what Yeshua meant when He stated:

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (Jn 6:37)

*...with full conviction* – What is more, those who are chosen by God unto eternal salvation are prepared by the work of the Ruach HaKodesh, the Holy Spirit, to receive the message of the Gospel resulting in eternal salvation. This act of “receiving the message of the Gospel” is real and necessary. For God is a relational God and His divine election and sovereign choice worked out by His sovereign hand in no way negates the necessity of the chosen individual to exercise the gift of faith and to fulfill the longing in their heart put there by God Himself.

... *just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.* – While there were plenty of “traveling philosophers” in the ancient world, traveling to “sell their ideas and wares,” Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy proved themselves to be genuinely concerned for the people of Thessalonica by not seeking from them any kind of “payment” or selling their wares. Rather, they sought to help them understand the truth of the gospel and did so in a way that proved to the people that they had no ulterior motives. By their desire to honor the Messiah Whom they served, they sought Him to supply their needs, even by providing employment.