

Investigating the Word of God

First Thessalonians



The Roman Agora in Thessalonica

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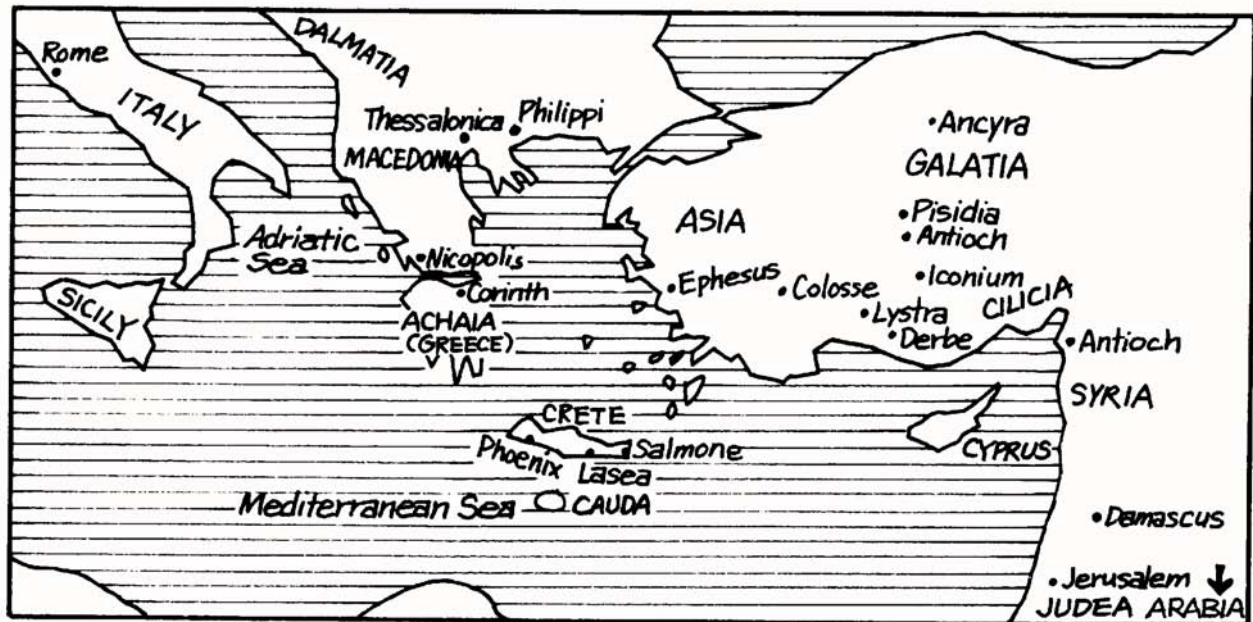
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An Introduction to First Thessalonians

The City of Thessalonica

The city of Thessalonica was a large seaport of the Roman province of Macedonia. It was located on the slope of a hill at the northeast end of the Thermaic Gulf which is now called the Gulf of Salonika. In olden times it had various names such as Emathia and Halia. It also appears in ancient history as Therma because of the hot springs which were found near it.



It was founded in 315 B.C. by Cassander who named it after his wife, the stepsister of Alexander the Great.

When the Roman Empire organized Macedonia into a province in 146 B.C., they made Thessalonica its capital. During the Roman period, it grew to be the second largest city of that area next only to Philippi which was located about 100 miles to the northeast.

The city was designated by the Romans as a “free city.” That meant that it had its own government. It was ruled by officials known as politarchs (Acts 17:6).

Thessalonica had a commercially strategic location. Located at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, it was able to serve as a seaport for the rich agricultural plains of Macedonia. It was also the largest city on the Via Egnatia (The Egnatian Way), the main highway between Rome and the region north of the Aegean Sea. The amount of business it did with peoples from the Orient almost rivaled that done by the cities of Corinth and Ephesus. Because of its commercial importance, a good number of Jews were attracted to live there since there was an active synagogue in the city.

The city still stands today. It is known as “Salonika” and has a population of over 200,000 people.

The Church in Thessalonica

On his second preaching journey he made from the city of Antioch, the apostle Paul traveled by land to Troas. Along the way, he visited the churches he had established on his first journey.

While at Troas, Paul received the “Macedonian call” (Acts 16:9). He, in answer to that call, took Silas, Timothy and Luke and crossed the Aegean Sea to the continent of Europe. He stopped at Philippi where he established a church (Acts 16:10-40). He stayed a very short time in Philippi. When he departed, he left Luke there to teach the church.

Paul then traveled westward along the Via Egnatia, the road which stretched across Macedonia from Philippi to the Adriatic Sea. He made short stops at Amphipolis and Apollonia and then journeyed to Thessalonica.

The Jews in Thessalonica gave Paul the opportunity to speak in the synagogue for three Sabbath days. He “reasoned with them from the Scriptures” showing that Jesus came in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and promises (Acts 17:2-3). While some of the Jews believed, there was a greater number of devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women who came to believe (Acts 17:4). The Jews became jealous and gathered some wicked men from the market place and formed a mob. They attacked the house of Jason and took some of the brethren before the city officials and accused them of harboring men who were “acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus” (Acts 17:5-8). In response to this attack, Paul and Silas left by night and went to Berea (Acts 17:9-10).

Up to the time Paul wrote this letter, the church at Thessalonica had been very faithful and active. Their “work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” is pointed out in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. They had set an example for all believers in Macedonia and Achaia, particularly in the fact that from them “the word of the Lord had sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place” and that their “faith toward God had gone forth” (1:8).

They had suffered severe persecution from the Jews because the Jews resented their acceptance of Paul’s message and the obvious change in their way of life caused by it. Paul was anxious to know of their state so he sent Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica to get information about them (3:1-5; 2:17). He brought back news that the love the Thessalonians had for Paul continued and that they were standing fast in the faith (2:14; 3:4-6; 4:9-10).

The Author of the Book

The apostle Paul is without doubt the author of this book. He names himself twice (1:1; 2:18). His associates at the time of writing were Silas and Timothy, the very men who had assisted him in preaching the gospel at Thessalonica (1:1; Acts 17:1-9).

The Date of the Book

Written most likely from the city of Corinth, the date of writing was somewhere around 50 or 51 A.D. Some scholars believe that this was the first book written by the apostle Paul. Even if it were not, it was still one of the earliest he wrote.

Why This Book Was Written

The major purpose of this book seems to have been twofold. First, Paul wanted to encourage and comfort these new converts in living as Christians. Also, they seem to have misunderstood his teaching on the second coming of Christ and feared that those who had died had missed it. He wanted to straighten out this misunderstanding.

The Theme of the Book

The major theme of this book is the second coming of Jesus Christ. As Paul exhorted them to faithfulness in the face of persecution and godliness in life and character, the underlying thought in all he wrote was Christ's second coming. Every chapter in this book concludes with a reference to this hope.

First Thessalonians Chapter One

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 8

“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.”

Key People

Paul

Silvanus

Timothy

Key Places

Macedonia

Achaia

Key Words

Election

Assurance

Affliction

Examples

Sounded

Wrath

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. Who was with Paul when he wrote this epistle?
2. When Paul mentioned the Thessalonians in his prayers, what did he remember about them?
3. According to verse four, what did Paul know about the Thessalonians?
4. In what manner had the gospel come to the Thessalonians?
5. How did the Thessalonians receive the word of God?
6. To whom were the Thessalonians an example?
7. Of what were the Thessalonians an example?
8. To what extent was the faith of the Thessalonians known?
9. Before they became Christians, what was the Thessalonians' religion?
10. For what were the Thessalonians waiting?

Matching

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Prayers | A. What the Thessalonians had sounded forth. |
| ___ 2. The gospel | B. What the Thessalonians were waiting for. |
| ___ 3. The word of the Lord | C. Prayers. |
| ___ 4. Us and the Lord | D. The gospel. |
| ___ 5. His Son from heaven | E. The word of the Lord. |

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. Paul remembered the Thessalonians' work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope. |
| T | F | 2. The gospel had come to the Thessalonians in word only. |
| T | F | 3. The Thessalonians had received the word in much affliction. |
| T | F | 4. The Thessalonians were only examples to the believers in Macedonia. |
| T | F | 5. The Thessalonians had turned from the living and true God to serve idols. |

Discussion Question

How could the Thessalonians have joy in their conversion to the Lord even though they had received the word in much affliction?

First Thessalonians Chapter Two

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 13

“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe..”

Key Places

Philippi

Judea

Key Words

Spitefully

Exhortation

Flattering

Covetousness

Cherishes

Imitators

Endeavored

Hindered

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. In what had Paul’s coming to the Thessalonians not been?
2. How had Paul been treated at the city of Philippi?
3. How had Paul preached the gospel at Thessalonica?
4. From what had Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians not come?
5. With what had Paul been entrusted?
6. When Paul spoke, whom was he trying to please?
7. What, besides the gospel, had Paul imparted to the Thessalonians?
8. According to verse ten, how had Paul behaved while he was at Thessalonica?
9. According to verses 11 and 12, why had Paul treated the Thessalonians as a father treat?
10. What did the Thessalonians recognize the word which they had received from Paul to be?
11. Of whom had the Thessalonians become imitators? Why?
12. What had the Judeans done to stop the preaching of the gospel?
13. What had Paul endeavored to do in regards to the Thessalonians?
14. What had hindered Paul from visiting the Thessalonians?
15. What was Paul’s “glory and joy?”

True - False

- T F 1. Paul’s visit to Thessalonica had been in vain.
- T F 2. Paul had been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.
- T F 3. Paul used flattering words while he was in Thessalonica in order to cover his covetousness.
- T F 4. Paul likened himself while among the Thessalonians to a nursing mother who cherishes her children.
- T F 5. Paul behaved himself blamelessly while he had been in Thessalonica.

Discussion Question

How can a person walk worthy of the Lord?

First Thessalonians Chapter Three

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 7

“Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.”

Key People

Timothy

Key Places

Athens

Key Words

Endure

Establish

Tribulation

Distress

Render

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. Where did Paul remain alone?
2. Whom did Paul send to the Thessalonians?
3. Why did Paul send one of his fellow-workers to the Thessalonians?
4. What did Paul foretell when he was with the Thessalonians?
5. According to verse five, what did Paul fear about the Thessalonians?
6. According to verses six and seven, what caused Paul to be comforted?
7. For what did Paul pray night and day?
8. What did Paul want both the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, to do for him?
9. What did Paul want the Lord to do for the Thessalonians?
10. What did Paul desire in regards to the hearts of the Thessalonians?

Matching

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Paul | A. Coming with all His saints. |
| _____ 2. Timothy | B. Made Paul’s work vain. |
| _____ 3. The tempter | C. The one to whom Paul rendered thanks. |
| _____ 4. The Lord Jesus Christ | D. Alone in Athens. |
| _____ 5. God | E. Brought love and good news of your faith and love. |

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | 1. Timothy was sent to discourage the Thessalonians. |
| T | F | 2. The Thessalonians had no desire to see Paul. |
| T | F | 3. The Thessalonians were to stand fast in the faith. |
| T | F | 4. Paul wanted to perfect what was lacking in the faith of the Thessalonians. |
| T | F | 5. Paul wanted a map so it would direct his way to the Thessalonians. |

Discussion Question

Who is the tempter? What are some ways he tempts Christians to be unfaithful?

First Thessalonians Chapter Four

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 14

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

Key Places

Macedonia

Key Words

Sanctification

Defraud

Avenger

Aspire

Precede

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. What did Paul urge and exhort the Thessalonians to do?
2. What was the source of Paul’s commandments to the Thessalonians?
3. From what did the will of God want the Thessalonians to abstain?
4. To what are Christians not called? To what are they called?
5. What had the Thessalonians been taught by God concerning brotherly love?
6. What did Paul urge the Thessalonians to do in regard to brotherly love?
7. In verse 11, what three things did Paul command the Thessalonians to do?
8. What two things would the Thessalonians accomplish by doing the three things commanded in verse 11?
9. What is meant by the phrase “fallen asleep” as it is used in verse 13?
10. According to verse 14, what will happen to “those who sleep in Jesus?”
11. Will those who are alive when Jesus comes again precede those who are asleep?
12. With what will the Lord descend from heaven when He comes again?
13. Who will rise first when the Lord comes again?
14. Where will those who are alive meet the Lord when He comes again?
15. Where will Christians always be after the Lord’s return?

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | 1. No one should take advantage of his brother or defraud him. |
| T | F | 2. A person rejects God when he rejects God’s word. |
| T | F | 3. We are taught by God to love one another. |
| T | F | 4. Christians are to mind their own business. |
| T | F | 5. The teaching of this chapter was intended to make the Thessalonians uncomfortable. |

Discussion Question

Discuss some ways in which brotherly love is displayed by Christians.

First Thessalonians Chapter Five

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 2

“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”

Key Words

Times and seasons

Thief in the night

Sons of light

Sons of the day

Edify

Unruly

Quench

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. About what did Paul not need to write to the Thessalonians?
2. How will “the day of the Lord” come?
3. According to verse six, instead of giving themselves to “sleep,” what should Christians be doing?
4. According to verse eight, what are Christians to put on?
5. Who were the Thessalonians to recognize? Why?
6. Who, in verse 14, did Paul exhort the Thessalonians to warn?
7. Instead of rendering evil for evil, what are Christians to do?
8. What are Christians to test? To what are Christians to hold fast?
9. From what are Christians to abstain?
10. How were the Christians at Thessalonica to greet one another?

Matching

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ 1. Pray | A. What is good. |
| _____ 2. Do not quench | B. All things. |
| _____ 3. Test | C. Without ceasing. |
| _____ 4. Abstain from | D. The Spirit. |
| _____ 5. Hold fast to | E. Every form of evil. |

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | 1. Brethren are in darkness. |
| T | F | 2. God appointed us to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ. |
| T | F | 3. Jesus Christ died for us. |
| T | F | 4. Brethren are not to edify one another. |
| T | F | 5. This epistle was to be read by all the unholy brethren. |

Discussion Question

Why do you think God does not want us to render evil for evil?

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