

### NAME

The book receives its name from the addressees. For a discussion of Thessalonica see below under Recipient. It is designated First Thessalonians to distinguish it from Paul's second epistle to the church at Thessalonica.

### AUTHOR

ESV - Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Paul is widely regarded as the author of 1 Thessalonians, as evidenced by how compatible the vocabulary, style, and theology are with his other letters. The mention of Silas ("Silvanus") and Timothy as co-senders (1:1) may indicate Paul's care to present the missionaries as a united band in order to offset any Thessalonians' disappointment that Paul had not come to visit them again but had sent Timothy instead (see 2:17,18; 3:1,2,6,11).

Laney:

The Pauline authorship of First Thessalonians is attested both by internal and external evidence. First, the epistle presents itself as being from Paul (1:1). Second, the companions mentioned were known to have been with Paul on his second missionary journey (1:1; 3:2,6; Acts 15:40; 16:1-3,19; 17:4,10,14; 18:5). Third, the form, vocabulary, and theological thought are clearly Pauline. Finally, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Marcion, and Irenaeus all testify to the authenticity of First Thessalonians.

Pauline authorship was challenged by F.C. Baur and later by the Dutch School that denied the Pauline authorship of all his epistles. The chief objection was that the epistle lacked doctrinal emphasis.

### DATE

Most scholars date 1 Thessalonians circa 49-51 A.D. Paul wrote the epistle from Corinth near the end of his second missionary journey. Paul and his companions had established the church in Thessalonica but were forced to leave by opponents of the gospel. Later Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church there, and Timothy's report led Paul to write this letter.

The Delphi Inscription (a letter from the emperor Claudius to the city of Delphi) dates Gallio's proconsulship of Achaia to 51-52 A.D., and Acts 18:12-17 mentions Gallio, toward the end of Paul's Corinthian stay.

Only a small minority of scholars, who do not regard Acts as historically dependable, place it in the early 40's A.D.

### THEME

Halley (page 44): *"The Lord's Second Coming"*

Mitchell: *"The Blessed Hope Is A Blissful Hope"*

Key Words (Nelson's): Holiness in Light of Christ's Return - Throughout this letter is an unmistakable emphasis upon steadfastness in the Lord and a continuing growth in faith and love in view of the return of Christ.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

*“and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12,13)

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of and archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 1 Thessalonians 4 - Chapter 4 includes the central passage of the epistle on the coming of the Lord when the dead in Christ shall rise first, and those who remain are caught up together with them in the clouds.

ESV - Introduction to 1 Thessalonians:

The most prominent theme in 1 Thessalonians is the second coming of Jesus. It is mentioned in every chapter of the book (1:10; 2:19,20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11,23,24). At Jesus' future coming, the dead in Christ will rise and will be caught up along with the living to meet the Lord in the air (4:15-17). Unbelievers will be subject to His wrath, but Christians will be delivered from this, inheriting salvation instead (1:10; 5:2-4,9-10). Those who are destined to participate as saints (literally “holy ones”) in the second coming must be holy and blameless (3:11-4:8; 5:23), and God, who is faithful, will produce holiness in the lives of those whom He calls (5:24).

Several purposes are expressed by Paul:

1. The epistle was intended to commend the believers for their steadfastness in the face of conflicts (2:14) and to encourage them to go on in the faith (4:1).
2. The letter was designed to defend Paul's conduct and motives against those who were slandering him (2:1,1).
3. The epistle was intended to correct certain errors and misunderstandings in the church which had been reported to Paul by Timothy.
4. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers to clarify: 1) the Christian's standard of morality (4:1-8); 2) the events of the Lord's return (4:13-18); and 3) Christ's return (5:1-22).

Outline:

- I. Introduction 1:1
- II. The Christian Attitude Towards Christ's Return 1:2-10
  - A. Specific Regular Prayer (of Paul) 1:2
  - B. Strong Spiritual Action 1:3  
Work of faith, constructive enterprise
  - C. Signs of Election 1:4-10
    1. Election 1:4

2. Paul knew they were elect for three reasons: 1:5-10
  - 1) Because of the manner the gospel came 1:5 - with power (work of the Holy Spirit)
  - 2) Because of the manner in which they received the gospel 1:6 - joyfully
  - 3) Because of the subsequent evidence of life 1:7-10 - i.e. turned to God from idols

III. The Christian's Reward at the Return of Christ 2:1-20

IV. The Christian's Sanctification and the Coming of Christ 3:1-13

V. Practical Exhortations in View of the Lord's Return 4:1-12

- A. With Reference to the Lord 4:1,2 - walk pleasing to God
- B. With Reference to Self 4:3-5 - personal purity / holy living
- C. With Reference to Saints 4:6-10 - love one another
- D. With Reference to Sinners 4:11,12 - walk honorably

VI. The Christian's Death and the Return of Christ 4:13-18

VII. The Christian's Actions in View of the Lord's Return 5:1-11

- A. Change of Subject 5:1a - switch to Day of the Lord
- B. Chronology of the Day of the Lord 5:1b,2a
- C. Certainty of the Coming of the Day of the Lord As a Thief 5:2b
- D. Confidence of the Unsaved - A Deadly Delusion 5:3
- E. Character of Christians as Sons of Light Forbids Any Connection with the Day of the Lord 5:4,5
- F. Conduct in Conformity with Their Character - Sons of Light - Day 5:6-11

VIII. Paul's Exhortations in View of the Lord's Return 5:12-24

Duty & discipline

IX. Conclusion 5:25-28

Appeal for prayer support, affectionate greeting to all, adjuration to read, apostolic benediction

## **RECIPIENTS**

Thessalonica was named in 315 B.C. by Cassander for his wife, the half-sister of Alexander the Great. Due to its location the city has been called "the key to the whole of Macedonia."

ESV - Introduction to 1 Thessalonians:

Thessalonica was the proud capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and had a population of over 100,000 (some estimates put it at 200,000). Its natural harbor and placement on the busy east-west Egnatian Way as well as key north-south trade routes meant that it was a flourishing center of trade and philosophy. It was a free city and was governed by local officials called

“politarchs” (cf. Acts 17:6,8). Religiously, the city was committed to the Greco-Roman pantheon and the imperial cult; Egyptian cults were also prominent. There was a sizable population of Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5).

Paul, Timothy, and Silas preached in the Thessalonian synagogue over three Sabbaths, and a number of Jews and God fearing Gentile believed (Acts 17:4). First Thessalonians 1:9,10 suggests that Paul subsequently spent some weeks ministering fruitfully to pagan Gentiles. However, rioters instigated by Jewish opponents dragged Jason (Paul’s host) and some other Christians before the politarchs and charged them with sedition against Caesar (Acts 17:5-8), forcing the missionaries to leave Thessalonica prematurely (Acts 17:9,10). Paul was concerned for the new Christians, and therefore a few months later he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1,3,5, see also Acts 17:15). Catching up with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5), Timothy updated him on the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 3:6).

Timothy reported that generally the church community was doing well. However, not everything at Thessalonica was rosy. Some members of the church had died (4:13), and because they were not fully informed about what would happen to deceased Christians at Christ’s return (3:10; 4:13), some apparently thought that those who had died would miss out on the second coming, and they plunged into hopeless grieving for them (4:13).

In addition, Timothy related to Paul a Thessalonian question about the timing of the day of the Lord (5:1,2). A number of scholars believe that the query reflected restless impatience or a false sense of security, but this view is countered by Paul’s repeated assurances in 5:4,5,9, along with the lack of threat or warning in 5:1-11. Paul reassures the Thessalonians that they are destined not for wrath but for salvation on the day of the Lord. Some think that the Thessalonians were concerned that they would be unprepared for Jesus’ return, but 4:3-8 suggests that they were not concerned enough about holy living. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that these new Christians were questioning their own final salvation in view of recent unexpected deaths (4:13). They may even have wondered whether the deaths were an expression of divine disapproval.

Whatever the specifics, clearly the Thessalonians needed reassurance about those who had died (4:13-18) and about their own destiny at the second coming (5:1-11).

The Thessalonians seem to have been vulnerable in other ways too. They had not expected the initial persecution to continue unabated for so long (3:3,4; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7). Moreover, they missed Paul, apparently disappointed that he himself had not yet returned to see them (3:6-10).

Yet another problem in Thessalonica demanded Paul’s attention: some Christians were bringing the church into disrepute by depending on wealthier Christians to provide for them rather than earning their own living (4:10b-12; 5:14; cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). It is possible that this problem was a result of the Thessalonians’ erroneous thinking about the future. However, it may simply be that some church members were selfishly and lazily exploiting the charity of the wealthier members to avoid having to work.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO CANON**

1. 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 is a significant and practical passage regarding the doctrine of election. In reading this passage it is important for us to be Biblical not Theological (i.e. don’t read more into this than what is actually being said here). Election reminds us that salvation is God’s choice not ours. Election is God’s act of choosing those who will be saved as members of the body of Christ. Election must be understood in light of the fact that God is loving, sovereign, and just (Romans 9:11-11:5; Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 1:2)

2. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a significant and practical teaching concerning the Second Coming. Verse 17 is the key passage in Scripture concerning the doctrine of the Rapture (ἄρπαγησομεθα 1 person plural future passive < ἄρπαζω = to seize, catch up, snatch away, carry off by force [4:17])
3. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 is a key passage in Scripture concerning the doctrine of the immanency of Christ's return - the Body of Christ rise first (i.e. NOW!!!! - prior to tribulation?) When? 1) Pre-Tribulation (Harrison); 2) Mid-Tribulation; 3) Post-Tribulation (Ladd, Gundry); 4) Partial Rapture Theory

### **RESOURCES**

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Robert H. Gundry, Ph.D., *A Survey Of The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1970

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

*Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts*, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS - [especially those of Dr. J. Carl Laney]), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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