

New Testament Survey—1 Thessalonians

What would you say to some Christian friends of yours if you heard that they were experiencing great persecution because of knowing and living for Christ? What if those friends lived in another city and because of the hostility, you yourself could not travel to personally encourage those young believers? What if these believers were the *only* believers in the entire city of 200,000 where they lived? What would you say if you wrote a letter to them?

That's the essence of the scenario behind the letter of 1 Thessalonians. The apostle Paul wrote this epistle to encourage some folks he had led to Christ who soon experienced intense persecution. There's much we can learn from this very personal and practical letter.

To do: Scan 1 Thessalonians...

1. Mark all the verses that contain a reference to the second coming of Christ
2. Count the appearances of the word "brethren" (17 times in KJV)

- **Who wrote the book?**

--Paul

The City of Thessalonica:

--a large seaport city, an important communication and trade center

--population of 200,000, the largest city in Macedonia, and the capital of the province (about 100 miles from Philippi)

--the city still stands today, called Salonika (200,000 people)

The Establishment of the Church: (see Acts 17:1-9)

--Paul's second missionary journey

Q: Where did Paul go first in Thes? Vv 1-2 To the Jewish synagogue

Q: What was his strategy for evangelism there? Vv 2-3 Reasoned from the Scriptures

Q: How long did he stay in Thes? V 2 Three sabbaths

Q: What kind of results did Paul see? V 4 Some Jews, and large number of Greeks

Q: Then what happened in v 5? Jealous Jews stirred up a crowd

Q: What did Paul do in v 10? Left for Berea under the cover of night

There's the setting. Paul had to leave behind some brand-new Christians (remember, his practice was to stay longer and disciple young believers) in a hostile environment.

How did the church do? That's what Paul wanted to know. So he sent Timothy to them (3:1-2), to encourage and strengthen them. Paul went to Corinth, and Silas and Timothy joined him there (Acts 18:5). Tim brought a glorious report that the Thessalonians loved Paul, wanted to see him again, and more importantly, were standing firm in the faith in spite of persecution (3:6-9).

Full of joy, Paul penned 1 Thes. Yes, Paul had to leave, but he didn't forget his Thes brothers. That's where 1 Thessalonians fits in.

- **When was the book written?**

--A.D. 51

Support for this date is the inscription discovered at Delphi, Greece, that dates Gallio's proconsulship to A.D. 51-52, and thus places Paul at Corinth at the same time (see Acts 18:12; NIVsb).

Note: Except for Galatians (the date of which is debated), 1 Thes is Paul's earliest canonical letter.

- **Why was the book written?**

1. To encourage and commend the new believers in their trials (ch 1)
2. To straighten out confusion about the second coming of Christ

Note: Every chapter of 1 Thes ends with a reference to the second coming

3. To instruct them about godly living (ch 4)

- **What is the outline of the book?**

(from Gromacki, 280)

- I. The Nature of the Church (ch. 1)
- II. Paul's Relationship to the Church (chs. 2-3)
- III. The Problem of the Church (chs. 4-5)
  - A. Sexual purity (4:1-8)
  - B. Social conduct (4:9-12)
  - C. State of the Christian dead (4:13-18)
  - D. Times and seasons (5:1-11)
  - E. Church officers (5:12-13)

## F. Church responsibilities (5:14-22)

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

1 Thessalonians was written to encourage and help a young church in the face of persecution.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *1 Thessalonians teaches us much about the subject of eschatology.*

Key texts... 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23-24

Note: For Paul eschatology was basic truth taught to new Christians. For us, it's often viewed as optional, if you don't have time to study something else. We're concerned in the "here and now."

Discuss: Why was it so necessary for Paul to instruct these believers about eschatology? What can we learn from his model?

2. *1 Thessalonians emphasizes the importance of sexual purity.*

Read 4:1-8

Discuss: What does it say to us that Paul talked so openly about sexual purity in this letter? Should sex education be a part of the church?

3. *1 Thessalonians shows us that the church need not be hindered by opposition.*

Read 1:4-6

Note: How does Paul sum up what a true Christian is, in 1:9? A person who turns to God, and who turns away from idols. Is it possible to turn to God without turning from idols? Is a person who does not turn a genuine Christian? (what if he's prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, etc?)

Discuss: What lessons can we learn about evangelism/disciple-making from 1 Thes?