

## I. Thessalonians

**Author:** Paul the Apostle

**Date:** Written around 50 - 51 AD. I. Thessalonians or Galatians are generally believed to be the first letters written that are included in the NT. I lean towards I. Thessalonians as being the earliest book.

**Original Recipients:** This was written primarily to Gentile Christians, although there were certainly Jewish converts among them according to Acts. The people were living in areas that are now part of modern Greece.

**Type of Literature:** Historical Narrative and Personal Letter.

**Content:** As a very early letter, Paul's focus is on the gospel, faith and pleasing God. He also intends to encourage the church during a time of persecution and he gives them certain details concerning the return of Jesus that can be found in none of his other letters.

**Background:** Thessalonica was named after a step sister of Alexander the Great about 315 BC. It was and still is a large coastal city in the area of modern Greece. **It is currently the second largest city in Greece with over 1 million residents.** Paul visited there on his second missionary journey and preached in its synagogue for 3 weeks until he was forced out.

**Acts 17:1** When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a Jewish synagogue. **2** As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, **3** explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. **4** Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. **5** But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. **6** But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, **7** and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." **8** When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. **9** Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. **10** As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. **11** Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. **12** As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek

women and many Greek men. 13 But when **the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.** 14 The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15 Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup>

## **Chapter 1 Paul opens with a long greeting. (10 verses)**

### **1) Apostolic introduction.**

v. 1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

### **2) We thank God for you and pray for you.**

v. 2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 3 We remember before our God and Father **your work** produced by **love**, **your labor** prompted by **love**, and **your endurance** inspired by **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **3) You are dearly loved by God.**

v. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because **our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power**, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

### **4) Paul gave us an example like Jesus did.**

v. 6 **You became imitators of us and of the Lord**, for you welcomed the message in the midst of **severe suffering** with the **joy given by the Holy Spirit**.

### **5) Your church became a model for others.**

v. 7 And so **you became a model to all the believers** in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—**your faith in God has become known everywhere**. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.

### **6) Paul makes his first reference to the return of Jesus.**

v. 9b. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and **to wait for his Son from heaven**, whom he raised from the dead—**Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath**.

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture is quoted from the NIV unless clearly marked with standard abbreviations.

## **Chapter 2 Paul defends his ministry efforts towards them. (20 verses)**

### **1) Apostolic exhortation about persecution.**

v. 1 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. 2 **We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi**, as you know, but with the help of our God **we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.**

### **2) We aren't calling to make mankind happy, but we must satisfy the Lord.**

v. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. **We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.**

### **3) Paul never use flattery to gain influence.**

v. 5 **You know we never used flattery**, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—**God is our witness.** 6 **We were not looking for praise from people**, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.

### **4) Paul has great love for the Church.**

v. 7 Instead, we were like young children among you. **Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you.** Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only **the gospel of God** but our lives as well. 9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

### **5) God witnessed Paul's righteous behavior, along with the church.**

v. 10 **You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.** 11 For you know that **we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God**, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 13 **And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God**, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

### **6) More on persecution and those who persecute Christians.**

v. 14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: **You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets** and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

7) **Satan somehow blocked Paul's way.**

v. 17 But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing **we made every effort to see you. 18 For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way.**

8) **Paul's boast in the Lord was about their existence as Christians.**

v. 19 For **what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20** Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

**Chapter 3 Persecution and the return of Jesus. (13 verses)**

1) **Paul sent Timothy in his place to strengthen the church.**

v. 1 So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. 2 **We sent Timothy**, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, **to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials.** For you know quite well that we are destined for them.

2) **Persecution had soon come, just as he expected.**

v. 4 In fact, when we were with you, **we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.** And it turned out that way, as you well know. 5 For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, **I sent to find out about your faith.** I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

3) **Timothy gave a good report about them to Paul.**

v. 6 But **Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love.** He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.

4) **Paul was happy and encouraged with Timothy's report.**

v. 7 **Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith.** 8 For now we really live, since **you are standing firm in the Lord.** 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?

5) **He was praying that he could return to visit them soon.**

v. 10 **Night and day we pray** most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. 11 **Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.**

**6) May we be found ready and waiting when Jesus returns.**

v.12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. **13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.**

**Chapter 4 Exhortations concerning personal conduct. (18 verses)**

**1) Keep growing and maturing in the Lord.**

v. 1 As for other matters, brothers and sisters, **we instructed you how to live in order to please God**, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

**2) We are called to live holy in the Lord.**

v. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. **3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified:** that you should **avoid sexual immorality**; 4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. **The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins**, as we told you and warned you before. 7 **For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.**

**Note: This letter was written after the Acts 15 Apostolic Council.**

**Acts 15:28** It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to **abstain** from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and **from sexual immorality**. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

**3) Don't reject God's instructions because you are actually rejecting God.**

v. 8 Therefore, **anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God**, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

**4) Christians should love others, mind their own affairs and work responsibly.**

v. 9 Now **about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.** 10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, 11 and to **make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you**, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

**5) This next passage is clearly about the dead in Christ at the Second Coming.**

v. 13 Brothers and sisters, **we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death**, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so **we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him**. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that **we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep**. 16 For **the Lord himself will come down from heaven**, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and **\_ will rise first**. 17 After that, **we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**. And so **we will be with the Lord forever**. 18 **Therefore encourage one another with these words**.

**A. Don't grieve for the dead in Christ like people grieve for the lost dead.**

v. 13 Brothers and sisters, **we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death**, so that you **do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope**. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so **we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him**.

**B. The dead in Christ will be bodily resurrected at His 2nd coming.**

v. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that **we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord**, will **certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep**. 16 For **the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first**.

**Notice that v. 14 says God will bring the dead back with Jesus and v. 16 says that the dead in Christ will rise.**

v. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so **we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him**.

v. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and **the dead in Christ will rise first**.

**My understanding is that the first quote in v. 14 is referring to the fact that the redeemed spirits of all Christians go immediately to Jesus at our deaths, then return with Jesus at His second coming. The second quote in v. 16 is speaking of the resurrection of the physical bodies of all previously deceased believers.**

- C. The entire Bride of Christ will go up to meet Jesus when He returns.**  
v. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

**Note: Jewish marriage customs say that the bride goes out to meet the groom.**

- D. On the basis of all that has been said, we should rejoice.**  
v. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**A few of my concerns about the so-called “Rapture.”**

- The word “*Rapture*” is not found in Bible.
- This is not a traditional doctrine from church history held by the majority of Protestant, Orthodox or Catholic Christians.
- 1830 Scotland, Margret McDonald (age 15) vision about pretrib Rapture.
- Her Presbyterian Pastor was Edward Irvine.
- 1830 Irvine attended Powerscourt Bible Prophecy meeting in Ireland. This meeting was also attended by John Nelson Darby of the Church of Ireland.
- 1830s “Rapture” was popularized extensively by John Nelson Darby, who later became a Plymouth Brethren Pastor and leading Dispensationalist.
- 1909 *Rapture* was picked up and promoted in the United States through the wide circulation in the early 20th century of C. I. Scofield’s Reference Bible.
- Primarily this is a doctrine believed and promulgated by US evangelicals.
- 1971 Late Great Planet Earth (up to 35 million copies)
- 1995 Left Behind Series, books and movies (over 80 million books)
- Globally, most Christians do not subscribe to *rapture* theology, nor use *rapture* as a specific theological term. They see the one and only 2nd Coming of Jesus described in 1 Thes 4. Major biblical texts for Jesus’ 2nd coming can be found in Matt 24-25, Luke 21, 1 Thes 4-5, and 2 Peter 3.

## **Chapter 5 The return of Jesus and what we should expect. (28 verses)**

### **1) The Day of the Lord will be unexpected when it comes.**

v. 1 Now, brothers and sisters, **about times and dates** we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of **the Lord will come like a thief in the night.** 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But **you**, brothers and sisters, **are not in darkness** so that **this day should surprise you like a thief.**

**Note: There is a Jewish marriage custom involving the “stealing” of the bride.**

**2) We must all be vigilant and ready for the return of Jesus.**

v. 5 **You are all children of the light and children of the day.** We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but **let us be awake and sober.** 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But **since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.** 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**3) Jesus died for us so that we can be together with Him continuously, forever.**

v. 10 **He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.** 11 **Therefore encourage one another** and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

**4) Know and honor the people who lead you spiritually.**

v. 12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to **acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you.** 13 **Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.** Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, **warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**

**5) This is how you should live until Jesus returns.**

v. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. 16 Rejoice always, 17 **pray continually,** 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**6) Don't quench the fire of the Holy Spirit.**

v. 19 **Do not quench the Spirit.** 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but **test them all; hold on to what is good,** 22 reject every kind of evil.

**Story: Wade Taylor at Elim Bible Institute.**

**7) Do what's right and God will sanctify your spirit, soul and body.**

v. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, **sanctify you through and through.** May your whole **spirit, soul and body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

**8) Apostolic Blessing.**

v. 25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us. 26 Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. 27 **I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.** 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.