

Outline of 1 Thessalonians

We hope this outline of 1 Thessalonians will assist you as you study God's holy Word.

Thessalonica was, during the time of Paul, one of the two most important commercial centers in Greece (Corinth was the other.) Thessalonica is located on the Gulf of Alonika, which is on the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea. It has a great harbor. The Egnatian Way, an important road linking the major cities of Macedonia, Rome in the West, and its conquered territories in the East, passed through the city. It was a three day journey southwest of Philippi. During the time of Paul, the city had around 200,000 inhabitants.

The city was founded in 315 B.C. by Cassander, a general of Alexander the Great who was married to Alexander's sister, Thessalonica. The Macedonian navy was stationed there during Rome's war with Persia. In 146 B.C., it became the capital of all of Macedonia. Like Philippi, it enjoyed its status as a free city.

After the time of Paul, the city gained fame as the "orthodox city" because it acted as a bulwark guarding Christianity and civilization against the attacks of the barbarians. It also played a significant role in the barbarians' conversion to Christianity. The city was finally captured by the Saracens in 904 A.D. Again, in 1185, the Normans captured the city. Finally, in 1430, the Sultan Amurath II captured the city and the city remained in Turk control until 1912. There was a disastrous fire on August 17, 1917 that destroyed much of the city. Today, it remains the second largest city of Greece and one of the principal seaports of southeast Europe. There continues to be a number of churches in the city.

Paul first visited the city on his second missionary journey in 50 A.D. He had been thrown in prison in Philippi and asked to leave the city. He left, passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia. There was a synagogue of the Jews in Thessalonica and that is where Paul headed (Acts 17:2). For three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that Christ had to suffer and rise again and that Jesus is the Christ. Some Jews were persuaded but most were not. A great number of devout Greeks together with some leading women joined with Paul. It was here in this city that Paul was accused of turning the world upside down. Paul obtained support during his stay in Thessalonica twice from the Philippians (Philippians 4:16). However, the Jews obtained the assistance of some base men and succeeded in driving Paul out of the city. These same Jews later stirred up the crowds in Berea, and succeeded in driving Paul to Athens. Paul left Silas and Timothy in Berea.

Upon arriving in Athens, Paul sent for Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:14). They arrived in Athens but then Paul, in his concern for the Thessalonians, sent Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Timothy returned with great news of the Thessalonian Christians. Paul probably was in Corinth by this time. Paul then wrote 1 Thessalonians and expressed his joy over them and encouraged them to continue in the faith. Outside of Galatians, it was the first of Paul's epistles that we have preserved.

Again, the main subject of the book is Jesus Christ, who is mentioned 36 times in 89 verses. God is mentioned 35 times, with specific references to the Father five times. The Holy Spirit is mentioned four times. The word "parousia" (coming), in reference to Christ's return, is mentioned four times, tying Matthew for the most of any New Testament book. Actually, the return of Christ is mentioned in every chapter, with one of the most familiar passages on the subject in this book (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23).

The book gives us good insight into the emotional attachment Paul made with people. He speaks about how gentle he was with them, affectionately longing for them, and how he was willing to give up his own life for them (2:8). He speaks of a great desire to see them (2:17). He speaks how he sent Timothy because he could no longer endure not knowing about them (3:1). He could live because they stood firm in the Lord (3:8).

The shortest verse in the Bible is contained in this book (5:16). While in the English John 11:35 (“Jesus wept”) is the shortest in the English Bible (nine letters versus 13 letters in “rejoice always”), in the Greek John 11:35 contains three words with 16 letters while this verse contains two words with 14 letters.

The triunity of humans is taught in 5:23.

The book is a basic book of rejoicing and thanksgiving, six times mentioning joy or rejoicing and three times mentioning thanksgiving. The Thessalonians lifted Paul’s spirits.

Date: 50 A.D.

Structure:

This book divides into two main thoughts: Paul’s relationship with them (1-3) and Paul’s exhortations to them (4-5).

I. Introduction 1:1

II. Paul’s Relationship with them 1:2-3:13

A. His thanks 1:2-10

1. For their spirituality 1:2-4
2. For their example 1:5-8
3. For their testimony 1:9-10

B. His conduct among them 2:1-12

1. To speak the gospel 2:1-4
2. Without flattery 2:5
3. Without man’s glory 2:6
4. Gently 2:7
5. Affectionately 2:8
6. With hard work 2:9
7. Blamelessly 2:10
8. Encouraging a worthy walk 2:11-12

C. Their receipt of the truth 2:13-16

1. The word of God 2:13
2. With suffering 2:14-16

D. His desire to see them 2:17-20

E. His sending of Timothy 3:1-10

1. The motivation 3:1-5
2. The comfort 3:6-10

F. The Benediction 3:11-13

III. Paul’s Exhortation to them 4-5

- A. Abound more and more in the Christ's commands 4:1-2
 - B. Abstain from sexual immorality 4:3-8
 - C. Increase your love 4:9-10
 - D. Aspire to quietness 4:11-12
 - E. Be comforted with Christ's return 4:13-18
 - F. Don't be concerned about the Day of the Lord 5:1-11
 - G. Esteem your leaders highly in love 5:12-13
 - H. Warn the disorderly 5:14
 - I. Console the fainthearted 5:14
 - J. Uphold the weak 5:14
 - K. Be patient with all 5:14
 - L. Always pursue good for all 5:15
 - M. Rejoice always 5:16
 - N. Pray without ceasing 5:17
 - O. Give thanks in everything 5:18
 - P. Don't quench the Spirit 5:19
 - Q. Don't despise prophecies 5:20
 - R. Test everything 5:21
 - S. Hold to what is good 5:21
 - T. Abstain from every form of evil 5:22
 - U. The Benediction 5:23-28
 - 1. God will sanctify 5:23
 - 2. God is faithful 5:24
 - 3. Pray for us 5:25
 - 4. Greet one another 5:26
 - 5. Read the epistle 5:27
 - 6. Grace be with you 5:28
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Key Idea: Christ is coming

Key Passage: 2:13-18

Key Lesson: Be blameless in holiness