

1 Thessalonians

Introduction, Background and Argument

1. Title

1.1 *Pros Thessalonikeis A - "First to the Thessalonians"*

1.2 Thessalonica (named by Philip of Macedon in honor of his wife, the half-sister of Alexander the Great) around 315BC.

1.3 Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia

1.4 It was located at the northernmost point of the Thermaic Gulf (warm mineral springs) east of the Axios River

1.5 This was along the Via Egnatia between Rome and the eastern provinces

1.6 It was the chief seaport for Macedonia and an important economic center due to heavy traffic

1.7 It was near Mount Olympus, the so-called home of the gods.

1.8 Today the city is known by the shortened name Salonika.

2. Authorship

2.1 Paul

2.1.1 Internal Evidence

2.1.1.1 1 Thess 1:1

2.1.1.2 1 Thess 2:18

2.1.2 External Evidence

2.1.2.1 Marcion's Canon

2.1.2.2 Muratorian Canon

2.1.2.3 Irenaeus

2.1.2.4 Clement of Alexandria

2.1.2.5 Tertullian

3. Occasion

3.1 Paul stopped at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey and, as was his custom, entered the Jewish synagogue for three Sabbaths¹ giving Scriptural evidence that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again and identifying Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 17:2). Some were persuaded, along with a large number of God-fearing Gentiles and a number of leading women. However, the Jews became jealous of Paul's many converts, so they formed a mob that argued before the city politarchs that Paul was teaching there was another king besides Caesar named Jesus. This was a serious charge of treason because the city was a "free city," and if the citizens became convinced there was another king besides Caesar they would lose their status as a free city. When they could not find Paul they dragged a believer named Jason before the politarchs. Jason brokered a deal that ensured dropping the charges if Paul and his companions would leave. During

the night they escaped safely to Berea. In the following weeks the Jews from Thessalonica made their way to Berea and attacked them again. Consequently, Paul left Silas and Timothy at Berea and pressed on to Athens where Silas and Timothy re-joined him later (3:1). From there Paul and Silas decided to send Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the new believers in the face of the persecution they were undoubtedly facing. Meanwhile, Paul probably sent Silas to check on other churches in Macedonia. They all agreed to meet at Corinth (Acts 18:5).

4. Place of Writing

4.1 Corinth

4.2 During Paul's first few months in Corinth he received Timothy's report and immediately sat down with Silas and Timothy to write his first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1).

5. Date

5.1 Determined from the date of Gallio's proconsulship at Corinth.

5.2 Archaeology has discovered an inscription at Delphi mentioning Gallio as proconsul during the 26th acclamation of Emperor Claudius. This was between January 25 and August 1, AD52.²

5.3 Gallio likely took office in the summer of 51 and Paul stood before him not long after.

5.4 A date of AD51 is most likely.

6. Audience

6.1 Some Jewish believers (Acts 17:2-4).

6.2 A large number of God-fearing Gentiles (Acts 17:4) .

6.3 A number of leading Gentile women (Acts 17:4).

6.4 A number of pagan Gentiles who turned from idolatry (1 Thess 1:9), either during Paul's short stay or Timothy's return visit.

6.5 Aristarchus, a believing Jew and co-worker of Paul (Col 4:10-11; Acts 27:2).

7. Purpose of Writing

7.1 Encourage. Paul wrote to encourage the Thessalonians for their work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope in the LORD Jesus Christ despite the persecution they were facing (1 Thess 1).

7.2 Defend. Paul wrote to defend himself against the charges of the Jews. They claimed that he was in the ministry for the money, that their conversion was false, and that he didn't return because he didn't care for them. Paul responded that he had worked to support himself while there, that their conversion was genuine due to the life change and

widespread testimony, that he had tried to return on two occasions, and that while he was with them he was as gentle as a nursing mother and gave exhortations as a good father (1 Thess 2-3).

7.3 Instruct. Paul wrote to deal with practical sanctification issues like leading a quiet life and working for a living. He also wrote to explain practical eschatology issues including what will happen to believers who had already died in relation to the rapture and the day of the LORD that impact daily living.

8. Argument

8.1 When Timothy returned to Corinth and gave the positive report concerning how the Thessalonians were holding up under persecution as new believers, Paul immediately sat down to compose his first letter to them. Together they encouraged them by thanking God and remembering them in their prayers as reflected in the Thessalonians work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope. They affirm that they were genuinely converted upon gospel hearing by the work of the Holy Spirit followed by their imitation of them and the LORD so that they became an example to other believers waiting expectantly for Jesus to return to deliver us from the wrath to come. Paul defends his ministry despite persecution and how this was done to be approved by God and not men, how they had authority but did not exert it, how they were fond of them and worked night and day to support themselves. He also thanked God that they had received the word as the word of God and not the word of men and that they endured sufferings from the locals, expressing their great desire to see them, but being hindered by Satan. In that light they sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage them in the midst of persecution. The report comforted Paul since they were standing firm, but they still hoped to come and see them.

They instruct them how to walk pleasing to God, as they were walking, but should do so all the more. God's will is to avoid sexual immorality and not defraud fellow brothers. They should continue to love one another and to do so all the more, to live a quiet life, to mind their own business, work hard with their own hands, and behave properly toward unbelievers.

They practically instruct them regarding believers who had already died in Jesus. They could be comforted by the fact they are with the LORD and when the LORD comes for us they will be raised first, then those of us who remain will be caught up together with them and so we will always be with the LORD.

As for the day of the LORD, it will come like a thief in the night when the world is saying "peace and safety." As such, we should be alert and sober and not like unbelievers who are asleep. God has not destined us for the wrath of the day of the LORD, but for obtaining deliverance at the rapture so we will live together with Him.

Continue to encourage one another as you are doing. Appreciate those who are your leaders. Live peaceful lives, encourage those in need, do not return evil for evil, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks for everything, do not despise utterances, and may the God of peace sanctify you entirely at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

9. Outline

9.1 Personal (1-3)

9.2 Practical (4-5)

10. Uniquenesses

10.1 One of the few letters that shows Paul's heart.

10.2 Every chapter ends with a reference to the rapture.

10.3 The triplet of faith, hope, and love permeates the letter.

11. Controversial Passages

11.1 1 Thess 1:10 Does the *αναμενω* imply imminence?

11.2 1 Thess 3:13 Are the "holy ones/saints" here angels or believers?

11.3 1 Thess 4:13-18 Rapture or Second Coming?

11.4 1 Thess 5:1-11 Does the day of the Lord begin before or after the rapture?

11.5 1 Thess 5:10 How does this verse relate to the doctrine of the partial rapture?

11.6 1 Thess 5:19-20 To what does quenching the Spirit refer to?

12. Keys to 1 Thessalonians

12.1 Key Word: Rapture

12.2 Key Verse: 1 Thess 4:16-17, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."

12.3 Key Idea: Practical sanctification in light of the rapture.

¹ 1st century Judaism customarily had synagogue meetings on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, so if Paul was there three Sabbaths, he could have spoken at least seven times and as many as eleven times.

² <https://drivethruhistory.com/the-gallio-inscription/>