

William Barclay observes that “loyal service and the patient waiting were the necessary preludes to the glory of heaven.”

- **Jesus** had faced the terrors of death so we would not face the **terrors of the coming judgment**. And facing the Judge of the universe with our sins showing will be a terror beyond anything known on earth.

1 Thessalonians Chapter 1

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The Translation:

We have chosen the *New Living Translation* for this study. It is a thought-for-thought translation made by 90 translators.

Resources:

We have consulted and quoted from **William Barclay** (*Daily Study Bible*), **Albert Barnes** (*Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible*), **John Calvin** (*Calvin's Commentary on the Bible*) and **Wilbur Fields** (*Thinking Through Thessalonians*).

Paul was on a church-planting trip. The first church founded in Europe by Paul and his team was Philippi. Leaving Luke to nurture the new church, Paul, Silas and Timothy walked southwest 100 miles on the famed *Egnatian Way*, coming to Thessalonica, then a city of about 200,000 people. It was named after the half-sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica was and still is (now called Salonika) a part of northern Greece.

The population included Greeks, Romans and Jews. There were enough Jews to have a synagogue and Paul addressed them three times about Jesus, the Messiah.

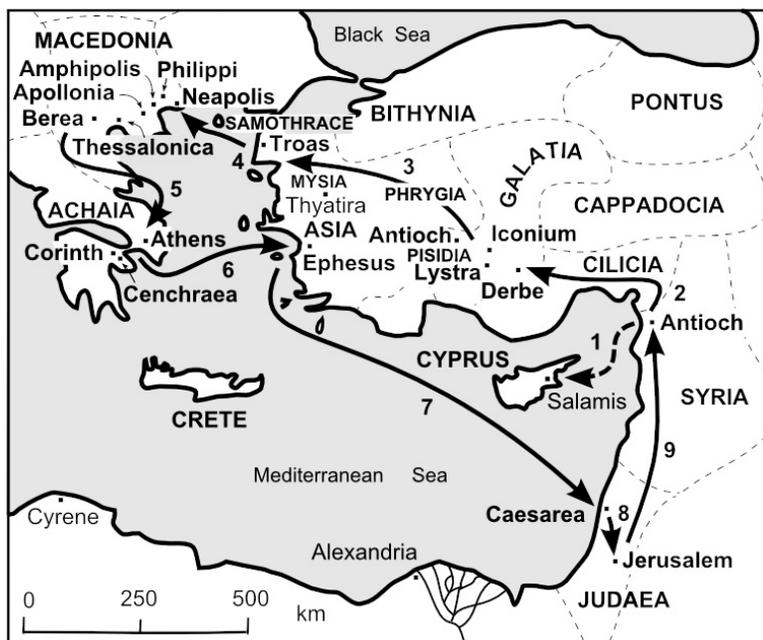
Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was Paul's custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, "This Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah." Acts 17:1-3 NLT

Paul may have been in town longer than just the three weeks. In 2 Thessalonians 3:8 he speaks of working at his trade night and day while in Philippians 4:16 he commends the Philippian church for sending financial aid to him in Thessalonica more than once. Both of these clues point to being there more than just three weeks.

The jealous Jews from the synagogue formed a mob and the outcome was that Paul and his companions left town, but not before they formed a church from those who believe. Paul made his way to Corinth and stayed there 18 months. During this time, he wrote back to the new believers at Thessalonica. The first letter bears testimony to the splendid Christian character of these new converts.

We call this letter 1 Thessalonians. It is the first and oldest epistle of Paul. It may seem strange that the first epistle written by Paul should be placed near the end of the collection of Paul's letters as they are arranged in the New Testament.

Thessalonica and Corinth can be seen on the map.



Planting churches in major cities was a pattern used frequently. One driving force in outreach was the **example** of these new believers at Thessalonica. They set a pattern or **example** for those who came later.

THEY HAVE A WONDERFUL OUTREACH

(8) And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, (9) for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God.

- **Wilbur Fields** says, “Here was a preacher’s dream come true. His converts had picked up the work where he had to leave it, and had spread abroad the word of the Lord so effectively that he had no need to say anything more in that area.” Contrast that with a current church service where listeners may not recall the subject of the sermon. These saints at Thessalonica listened so they could repeat. They could retell how they had left idols (in the case of pagan Gentiles) to serve God.
- **The living and true God** is a reminder that the Gentile component of the church had been idolaters who served dumb idols that had to be fed. Now they are serving the God that really exists and does things. He created the universe.

(10) And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven — Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the One who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

- Beyond serving God in this life, they were **looking forward** to the return of the resurrected **Jesus**. Take note that Paul did not say *when* Jesus would return.

say. Their mouths are full of lustful words, and their hearts seek only after money.

You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings love songs with a beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument. They hear what you say, but they don't act on it! Ezekiel 33:30-32 NLT

The Lord checks to see if there has been action.

- **With Power.** Paul may have healed or spoken in foreign languages. The text does not say what the power was but Romans 15:19 gives us a clue:

They were convinced by the power of miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum.

We conclude that Luke did not record every miracle from Paul's hand.

- **With the Holy Spirit giving assurance** that Paul was speaking the truth.

PAUL COMMENDS THE BELIEVERS

(6) So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord.

- **Suffering** may be our price for serving God. It was for Jesus, for Paul and for these new brethren. But this suffering is accompanied by joy and the joy wins.

(7) As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece — throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.

- Paul planted a church in the major city of Thessalonica and the story of Jesus spread to smaller towns as well as affecting churches that were established by other means.

PAUL'S THANKS FOR THE SAINTS

(1 Thessalonians 1:1 NLT) This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give you grace and peace.

- Unlike other letters, **Paul** does not affirm his apostleship, but includes his co-workers in his opening sentence. **John Calvin** observes: “. . . that he simply makes use of his own name without any title of honor, is an evidence that those to whom he writes voluntarily acknowledged him to be such as he was.”
- **Silas** is a shortened form of Silvanus. He had recently blended his voice with Paul's in a midnight duet in the jailhouse at Philippi.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Acts 16:25.
- The letter is being written to the church (assembly) that belongs to **God the Father** and the **Lord Jesus Christ**. In using the designation **Christ**, we see a Jewish component in the church. Converted pagans had not been looking for a Messiah or **Christ**. **William Barclay** observes that the God in whom the Church lives is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, therefore, the Church does not shiver in the icy fear of a God who is a tyrant but basks in the sunshine of a God who is love.
- **Grace** was a common Gentile greeting while **peace** was (and still is) a common Jewish greeting.

(2) We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly.

- That they existed as a church was God's doings and Paul acknowledges this in **prayer**. He **prayed** for their faithfulness every day. This is the way Paul “stayed in touch.” **Pray** is the way each of us can have input in other places.

(3) As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul was getting information about them from somewhere and he loved what he heard and commended them for their reputation. They weren't perfect, but they were making progress toward the likeness of **Christ**.
- They were **faithful**. They kept at projects. Someone has said that the sign of true consecration is when a man can find glory in drudgery. They were **loving** in the way they did their **deeds**. They had **hope** for the future because of the resurrection of Jesus. They did more than talk, they acted.
- Paul will have some corrections to offer later in this book, but he begins with a strong commendation. This is a lesson for us when we hope to change another person's viewpoint and conduct. **Barclay** observes of Paul: "... it was never his aim to discourage but always to uplift. In every man there is something fine, and often the best way to rid him of the lower things is to praise the higher things. The best way to eradicate his faults is to praise his virtues so that they will flower all the more; every man reacts better to encouragement than he does to rebuke."

GOD LOVES THEM

(4) We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be His own people.

- Being **loved** by God is remarkable. King Solomon was **loved** by God:

God loved him and made him king over all Israel.
Nehemiah 13:26

Jesus was **loved** by the Father:

And a voice from heaven said, "This is My dearly loved Son, who brings Me great joy."

Matthew 3:17.

Now Paul has said that God **loves** these saints, too.

- Israel in the Old Testament was **chosen** by God for His own.

Because He loved your ancestors, He chose to bless their descendants, and He personally brought you out of Egypt with a great display of power. Deuteronomy 4:37
- Likewise, these Jewish and Gentile believers at Thessalonica were **chosen** by God to be **His own people**.

(5) For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you.

- Paul had brought the **Good News** in three ways:
 - **With words.** The message from God always takes the form of words. They may be spoken through a spokesperson at first, then written for all to read. It is possible to become a listener of words without taking action. Hear Ezekiel:

Son of man, your people talk about you in their houses and whisper about you at the doors. They say to each other, 'Come on, let's go hear the prophet tell us what the LORD is saying!'

So My people come pretending to be sincere and sit before you. They listen to your words, but they have no intention of doing what you