

# 1 Thessalonians

**Authorship:** Apostle Paul. “Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you” (1 Thessalonians 1:1).

**Date:** AD 50-51 most likely from Corinth.

**Key Passage:** “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” (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

**Purpose:** Its purpose was to empower the believers at Thessalonica to live boldly and triumphantly in the very midst of suffering and rejection.

**Background & Historical Situation:** Thessalonica was a major city in the Roman Empire. It was actually the capital of Macedonia. It was thoroughly Hellenistic, thoroughly secular, and thoroughly sophisticated. Rome was proud of Thessalonica and considered it its model city. It was known for its art and its beauty. All the things that Rome wanted to have in its cities were found in Thessalonica. Unlike Corinth, Thessalonica had a good reputation and it was a place where prominent Roman citizens (the who’s who of the Roman Empire) would reside with pride. When Rome sent out tourist they would send them to Thessalonica. It was a powerful, wealthy and influential city. Therefore, influential people would travel to do business in Thessalonica and many decide to make the city “home.” According to the Acts 17:1-10 account the church in Thessalonica was founded by Paul and his traveling companions (Silas/Silvanus and Timothy). It appears that the Jews were a minority in the Synagogue when the church was planted and there were many “God Fearers” and even women who believed Paul’s the message. A “God Fearer” is a technical term meaning a Gentile convert to Judaism. They practiced the Jewish religion but did not participate in circumcision and this was a significant feature because it shows that not only were there few Jews in Thessalonica but even the converts to Judaism were considered as liberal or compromised Jews. Well, this caused some of the Jewish synagogue leaders to take to the streets to try and kill the large number of women and “God Fearers.” Luke calls these angry Jewish synagogue leaders, “ruffians.” A man named Jason takes Paul and his companions home and tries to protect them from the riot in the streets. The officials came to Jason’s house but Paul and his companions escaped (possibly through a tunnel). Within a short time Paul had developed a close relationship with the new believer’s but because of the hostility of the Jewish synagogue leaders he could not stay with them in their time of trouble. A short time after leaving Thessalonica Paul learns of the intense trouble that the church was facing and he responds by addressing three prominent themes. Faithfulness, is the first theme dominates the first three chapters. The new believers were tempted to give up due to the outside pressures. Paul recalls their faith, affirms their faith and then calls them to remain faithful. It is significant that the bulk of the letter (first three chapters) is given to remaining faithful to Jesus and obedient in their service and witness. The second theme has to do with life after death. Paul addresses some real life questions, “What is going to us if we remained faithful and obedient event to the point of death? If we die will we miss the glory of the Second Coming of Christ?” What they really wanted to know was what happens after death. Is death the great separator? Will we ever see our loved one’s again? Paul gives comfort by telling the believers that is not so important where their loved one’s are but who they are with? They are with secure with Christ. Paul gives the believers in Thessalonica a reason for their hope. Their hope of the Second Coming had the purpose of empowering them to live for Christ in the present. The third theme is this “Living Hope.” In many ways this theme is the capstone of the first letter to the believers at Thessalonica. How do you live out a life of hope in Jesus? This hope calls for a special kind of living. Paul describes this kind of living and how they should embody this hope in their daily living.

- Outline:**
- I. The Greeting (1:1)
  - II. Personal Reminiscences (1:2-10)
  - III. The Nature of the Apostolic Ministry (2:1-12)
  - IV. The Reception of the Gospel (2:13-16)
  - V. Paul’s Concern for the Thessalonians (2:17-3:13)
  - VI. Exhortation to Christian Living (4:1-12)
  - VII. Problems Related to Christ’s Coming (4:13-5:18)
  - VIII. The Internal Life of the Church (5:12-24)

**Sources:**

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).