

## **Introduction to 1 Thessalonians**

### **NIV Study Bible**

#### **BACKGROUND OF THE THESSALONIAN LETTERS**

It is helpful to trace the locations of Paul and his companions that relate to the Thessalonian correspondence. The travels were as follows:

1. Paul and Silas fled from Thessalonica to Berea. Since Timothy is not mentioned (see Ac 17:10 and note), it is possible that he stayed in Thessalonica or went back to Philippi and then rejoined Paul and Silas in Berea (Ac 17:14).
2. Paul fled to Athens from Berean persecution, leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea (see Ac 17:14).
3. Paul sent word back, instructing Silas and Timothy to come to him in Athens (see Ac 17:15; see also note on 1Th 3:1–2).
4. Timothy rejoined Paul at Athens and was sent back to Thessalonica (see 3:1–5). Since Silas is not mentioned, it has been conjectured that he went back to Philippi when Timothy went to Thessalonica (see note on 3:1–2).
5. Paul moved on to Corinth (see Ac 18:1).
6. Silas and Timothy came to Paul in Corinth (see 3:6; Ac 18:5).
7. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians and sent it to the church.
8. About six months later (a.d. 51/52) he sent 2 Thessalonians in response to further information about the church there.

#### **AUTHOR, DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING**

Both external and internal evidence (see 1:1; 2:18) support the view that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians (from Corinth; see note on 3:1–2). Early church writers are agreed on the matter, with testimonies beginning as early as a.d. 140 (Marcion). Paul's known characteristics are apparent in the letter (3:1–2, 8–11 compared with Ac 15:36; 2Co 11:28). Historical allusions in the book fit Paul's life as recounted in Acts and in his own letters (2:14–16 compared with Ac 17:5–10; 3:6 compared with Ac 17:16). In the face of such evidence, few have ever rejected authorship by Paul.

It is generally dated c. a.d. 51 (see chart, p. 2261). Weighty support for this date was found in an inscription discovered at Delphi, Greece (see map No. 13 at the end of this study Bible), that dates Gallio's proconsulship to c. 51–52 and thus places Paul at Corinth at the same time (see Ac 18:12–17 and note on 18:12; see also chart, p. 1673). Except for the possibility of an early date for Galatians (48–49?), 1 Thessalonians is Paul's earliest canonical letter.

#### **THESSALONICA: THE CITY AND THE CHURCH**

Thessalonica was a bustling seaport city at the head of the Thermaic Gulf (see map, p. 2280). It was an important communication and trade center, located at the junction of the great Egnatian Way and the road leading north to the Danube. It was the largest city in Macedonia and was also the capital of its province.

The background of the Thessalonian church is found in Ac 17:1–9. Since Paul began his ministry there in the Jewish synagogue, it is reasonable to assume that the new church included some

Jews. However, 1:9–10; Ac 17:4 seem to indicate that the church was largely Gentile in membership.

### **PURPOSE**

Paul had left Thessalonica abruptly (see Ac 17:5–10) after a rather brief stay. Recent converts from paganism (1:9) were thus left with little external support in the midst of persecution. Paul's purpose in writing this letter was to encourage the new converts in their trials (3:3–5), to give instruction concerning godly living (4:1–12) and to give assurance concerning the future of believers who die before Christ returns (4:13–18; see Theme below; see also notes on 4:13,15).

### **THEME**

Although the thrust of the letter is varied (see Purpose), the subject of eschatology (doctrine of last things) seems to be predominant in both Thessalonian letters. Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ, with ch. 4 giving it major consideration (1:9–10; 2:19–20; 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:23–24). Thus, the second coming seems to permeate the letter and may be viewed in some sense as its theme. The two letters are often designated as the eschatological letters of Paul.

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### **OUTLINE**

- The Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians (ch. 1)
  - The Grounds for the Thanksgiving (1:1–4)
  - The Genuineness of the Grounds (1:5–10)
- The Defense of the Apostolic Actions and Absence (chs. 2–3)
  - The Defense of the Apostolic Actions (2:1–16)
  - The Defense of the Apostolic Absence (2:17–3:10)
  - The Prayer (3:11–13)
- The Exhortations to the Thessalonians (4:1–5:22)
  - Primarily concerning Personal Life (4:1–12)
  - Concerning the Coming of Christ (4:13–5:11)
  - Primarily concerning Church Life (5:12–22)
- The Concluding Prayer, Greetings and Benediction (5:23–28)

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