



# The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians

## *Introduction*

### I. THE AUTHORSHIP OF THESSALONIANS

#### A. The Proof of Pauline Authorship

##### 1. Paul's salutation

###### a. The common thought

- (1) Paul's salutation was evidence of all his writings (2 Thessalonians 3:17).
- (2) A salutation, by definition, is thought to be the greeting at the beginning of a letter (see Scofield's Bible Outlines).
- (3) Paul's salutations always included his name, at the beginning
- (4) Epistles not opening with Paul's name was not written by him.

###### b. The truth

- (1) Paul did not personally pen most of his epistles (see Romans 16:22; compare with Galatians 6:11; and see postscripts of first and second Corinthians).
- (2) This allowed a letter to be written to the Thessalonians that falsely claimed to be written by Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).
- (3) Avoiding this problem, Paul hand-wrote the salutation (2 Thessalonians 3:17-18; 1 Corinthians 16:21-24; Colossians 4:18).
- (4) However, Paul's salutation was not at the beginning of his epistles, but at the end. It was like us signing a letter that has been typed for us by someone else. The final signature gives authenticity to the entire letter. This is proven by the fact that all references in the epistles of Paul to the words *salute*, *saluteth* or *salutation* occur in the last chapter of each epistle.
  - a) Salute (i.e., Romans 16:5, 7, 9-16, 21-22)
  - b) Saluteth (i.e., Romans 16:23)
  - c) Salutation (i.e., 1 Corinthians 16:21)
- (5) Paul's salutation always included a blessing of **grace** (see Romans 16:24; 1 Corinthians 16:23; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 6:24; Philippians 4:23; Colossians 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18; 1 Timothy 6:21; 2 Timothy 4:22; Titus 3:15; Philemon 25; Hebrews 13:25).

##### 2. Paul's name

- a. Even though Paul's name was not part of his salutation, its inclusion in the epistle was of great import.
- b. Paul was initially introduced as one of the men present at the authoring of the epistle (1 Thessalonians 1:1).
- c. Later in the epistle, Paul was specifically identified as the human author (1 Thessalonians 2:18).



## B. The Timing of its Writing

1. Paul's epistles contain hints revealing the timing and location of authorship.
  - a. One means by which this information is gleaned involves the *postscripts* (found after the last verse in Paul's epistles).
  - b. Each *postscript* provides pertinent information, such as the location from where the epistle was sent. This noteworthy external information, along with the epistle's actual contents, helps to understand the general circumstances prevalent at the time of the writing of the epistles.
2. A basic timeline of events involving the apostle Paul provides perspective.
  - a. The apostle Paul's conversion in Acts chapter 9 occurred just a few years following the Lord's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.
  - b. Approximately a decade after Christ's ascension into Heaven, Paul commenced upon his first of three missionary journeys (Acts 13:4).
  - c. Nearly a decade later, the apostle Paul took his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40). During this second missionary journey, Paul wrote the two epistles to the *Thessalonians* (Acts 17:15-34), both epistles to the *Corinthians* (either Acts 16 or Acts 18), and the epistle to the *Romans* (Acts 18:1-18).
  - d. With this internal biblical proof, we can identify these epistles, as well as Paul's epistle to Galatia sent from Italy, as his Missionary Epistles.

## C. The Conditions of the Time

1. The first 100 years following Christ's birth was a century of transition.
  - a. Its dawning concluded 400 years of silence from God and promptly introduced to the world the incarnate Word of God.
  - b. Unfortunately, for God's people, the Jews had become far too accustomed to the four centuries of heavenly silence and consequently rejected the incarnate Word of God (John 1:14, 10).
2. This period witnessed a monumental spiritual struggle.
  - a. This struggle involved the transitioning from an extensive emphasis upon God's Law to prominence placed upon God's grace.
  - b. One would think the Jews would have accepted and welcomed God's message of grace, but most agonized over the thought of relinquishing their traditions and trusting Christ as Saviour.
  - c. They failed to realize that the primary purpose of the Law was to serve as a schoolmaster preparing and pointing them to the Lord as the justifier of all those who repent of their sin (Galatians 3:23-25).
  - d. The Jews not only rejected the incarnate Word, but unashamedly scoffed at God's grace. The Gentiles, however, joyfully received both (Acts 28:23-29).
3. This period saw the desperation of the Jews.
  - a. God used the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy (Romans 11:11).
  - b. While some Jews readily welcomed the wall of partition being broken down between Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Ephesians 2:14-18), others aggressively attempted to thwart this transition.



- (1) In Thessalonica (see Acts chapter 17)
  - a) Unbelieving Jews disapproved of the message and stooped to extreme lows in order to persecute, persuade, and deceive.
  - b) The hostility became so pervasive that Paul and Silas were shipped to Berea in the dark of night (Acts 17:10).
  - c) The hearts of the Bereans proved to be more fertile soil for the seed of God's word; however, the Jews in Thessalonica sent forth some vocal unbelievers to stir up the Bereans, causing Paul to be yet again sent away (Acts 17:13-14).
- (2) In Corinth
  - a) Corinth also consisted of a formidable Jewish population.
  - b) The book of Acts points to one possible reason for this Jewish enclave: the Jews were forced to depart from Rome (Acts 18:2) and many may have found refuge in Corinth.
  - c) A segment of Jews believed the gospel preaching; however, others chose to make insurrection against Paul.
  - d) Paul also offered another identifier of the strong Jewish influence in Corinth when he wrote to them concerning "our fathers" (1 Corinthians 10:1).

#### D. The Reason for the Emphasis on Prophecy

1. As to the Corinthians, it was crucial for them to know the prophetic plan *applicable to the Jews* had not been **superseded** but would be **preceded** by a prophetic plan unknown to previous generations.
2. Thessalonica needed these truths for different reasons.
  - a. The Jews in Thessalonica violently reacted to God's message of grace.
  - b. On one account, we read of a letter written as though from Paul suggesting that the believers were missing the Day of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:2).
  - c. The prime suspects for the forgery or forgeries written in his name pointed directly at the Jewish population who attempted to withstand Paul.
  - d. In turn, the Lord led Paul to springboard from these falsehoods to establish and distinguish the entirety of God's prophetic plan both for the Church (Gentiles and Jews who are in Christ) and the Jews of the future.
    - (1) In these two Thessalonian letters, Paul referenced both the catching away of the Church and the Second Advent.
    - (2) In these epistles, Paul transitioned from one event to the other, at times with no forewarning. This is especially evident in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and 2 Thessalonians chapters 1 and 2.
  - e. To drive home these truths, every chapter ends with something concerning the Lord's coming (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).



## II. THE RECIPIENTS OF THESSALONIANS

### A. Paul's Time with Them (Acts 17:1-10)

1. Paul went into the synagogue for three sabbath days and reasoned with the Jews out of the scriptures (Acts 17:1-2).
2. Paul opened and alleged two great truths (Acts 17:3).
  - a. The gospel of Christ
    - (1) That Christ must needs have suffered.
    - (2) That Christ was risen again from the dead.
  - b. The Messiahship of Christ
    - (1) This Jesus whom Paul preached unto them
    - (2) Was Christ
      - a) Prior to the crucifixion, men did not put their faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross for salvation.
      - b) However, the object of man's faith seems to have been the belief in Jesus as the One who reigns over the kingdom.
      - c) In regard to this reign, the Bible signifies the Lord's authority in the kingdom using three titles.
        - i) Anointed (Psalm 2:2)
        - ii) Christ (Acts 4:26)
        - iii) Messiah or Messias (John 1:41; John 4:25)
      - d) Accepting the Saviour's role as the Christ unveils the desired confession of those living during Christ's earthly ministry.
        - i) Consider Peter's confession
          - (a) The confession is clearest when given from the mouth of Simon Peter.
          - (b) When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought Him to be, Simon Peter answered "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).
          - (c) This confession so stirred the heart of Christ that He responded "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).
        - ii) Consider the woman at the well's confession
          - (a) The Lord's dealings with the woman meandered back and forth until the woman said, "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things" (John 4:25).
          - (b) When she stated this, Christ identified Himself saying, "I that speak unto thee am he" (John 4:26).
          - (c) This confession on the part of the Saviour so moved the woman that she "left her waterpot" (John 4:28) and went to the men of the city saying to the men, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29).



- iii) Consider other confessions
  - (a) Even at the announcement of His birth, the Saviour was introduced as “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).
  - (b) Eight days after the Saviour was born, He was taken to the temple where Simeon served. To Simeon, it had been “revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:25-26).
  - (c) When the Lord’s ministry began some thirty years later, Andrew, one of the disciples, went to his brother Simon and said, “We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:41).
  - (d) Furthermore, surveying John chapter 7 shows that this was a point of conversation among the masses during Christ’s ministry (John 7:26, 27, 31, 41, 42).
  - (e) In fact, at the end of John’s gospel, he included a statement of purpose for what he wrote and that purpose was “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).
- 3. Some in the synagogue believed (Acts 17:4).
  - a. Of the devout Greeks a great multitude
  - b. Of the chief women not a few
- 4. Many of the Jews believed not (Acts 17:5-9).
  - a. They took lewd fellows and set the city on an uproar (Acts 17:5).
  - b. They assaulted the house of Jason (Acts 17:5-9).
- 5. Paul and Silas were sent away in the night (Acts 17:10).

## B. Paul’s Statements Concerning Them

- 1. Their reception of the word
  - a. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).
  - b. They received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost (1 Thessalonians 1:6), suffering of their own countrymen (1 Thessalonians 2:14).
  - c. They received the word of God as it is in truth, the word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13).
- 2. Their faithfulness since receiving the word
  - a. They demonstrated a work of faith, a labour of love, and patience of hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3).
  - b. They were ensamples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thessalonians 1:7), but also in every place their faith was spread abroad (1 Thessalonians 1:8).



3. The concern for their steadfastness
  - a. That no man would be moved by the afflictions (1 Thessalonians 3:3).
  - b. Paul sent to know their faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted them (1 Thessalonians 3:5).

### III. THE BREAKDOWN OF THESSALONIANS

#### A. The Basic Statistics

1. Chapters = Five
2. Verses = Eighty-nine
  - a. Ten in chapter 1
  - b. Twenty in chapter 2
  - c. Thirteen in chapter 3
  - d. Eighteen in chapter 4
  - e. Twenty-eight in chapter 5
3. Sentences
  - a. Three asking sentences
  - b. Sixty-three telling sentences
4. Words = 1,837
  - a. God—38 times
  - b. Lord—25 times
  - c. Jesus—17 times
  - d. Christ—14 times
  - e. Day—6 times, Night—6 times
  - f. Faith—8 times
  - g. Love—6 times
  - h. Hope—4 times

#### B. The Position of the Book

1. Order
  - a. Fifty-second book in the Bible
  - b. Thirteenth book in the New Testament
2. Location
  - a. First Thessalonians is the eighth of Paul's fourteen epistles.
  - b. Although the epistles are not necessarily grouped accordingly, Paul's letters to Thessalonica were among his Missionary Epistles.

#### C. The Outline of the Book

1. The background of the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20)
2. The concern for the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 3:1-13)
3. The walk of the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 4:1-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-28)