

1 Thessalonians: Introduction

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Hello, I'm Wayne Dalrymple. I'm going to be teaching on 1 Thessalonians. I want to begin by doing a brief introduction to the letter. The church in Thessalonica had been established on Paul's second missionary journey. We read about that in Acts chapter 17, verses one through nine.

So, I want to begin by looking at a little bit of the background to the city and the church of Thessalonica. The city was established in 560 BC, by the Macedonian King, Cassander, and it was named for his wife. And it is located in modern day Northern Greece. Greece was divided into basically two regions. It was Macedonia in the north, and Achaia in the south. And so, Thessalonica was a major city in Macedonia. In fact, it was the capital of Macedonia. The Romans conquered the city in 168 BC. And that's when they eventually then made it the capital of that province.

The city was located on the famous Ignatian Road, or Ignatian way. And so it was a major trade center and travel destination, and people would travel through there going to all kinds of places.

Paul worked there for just a short time, as we are told in Acts chapter 17. He had gone there because he had received the Macedonian call that we read about in Acts chapter 16, verses 8 through 10. He first, he and those who were with him, went to Philippi. And then after they encountered the riots there and were imprisoned, and then escaped and went away, then they came eventually to Thessalonica. And so, in Acts chapter 17, in verses one through nine, we read about the establishment of the church there. Paul probably was there between A.D. 50 and A.D. 51. So, pretty early on.

And we know that their stay was pretty short, lasting just a few months. In fact, we're told in Acts 17, in verse two, it says, "Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures." Now, some people say that he just stayed there for that very short time. But it's likely that he stayed there for at least a few more weeks, maybe a couple of months after that preaching and teaching to the Gentiles. Because we know that many of the Christians in Thessalonica were Gentiles. And so, but even though, even so, Paul's ministry was very short there in Thessalonica. He did have some success, we read about in Acts 17, verses four through six. As well Paul mentions that in 1 Thessalonians chapter one, verses eight and nine. But then after the Jews caused him trouble, Paul and Silas were sent to Berea according to Acts 17, verse 10. And the Thessalonian Jews even followed Paul and Silas to Berea, and made trouble for him there. Then eventually, Paul and his companions ended up in Athens and then later on in Corinth. And so, Paul most likely wrote this letter from Corinth.

Now, we know that Paul is the author of this letter to the Thessalonians. In chapter 1, verse one, he calls himself the author, as well as in chapter 2, verse 18. The language that's used in the letter is very similar to other letters that are also accepted as being from Paul. Also, we have the mention of Silas and Timothy at the beginning of the letter, which is consistent with the idea that Paul would be there and would have written this letter.

There's also some external evidence to support the fact that Paul is the author. Some very early church writers make statements that are very similar. They seem to echo Paul's words. For example, Clement of Rome, from A.D. 95, as well as Ignatius of Antioch, A.D. 110. 1 Thessalonians is also

included in both Marcion's Canon and the Muratorian Canon, both dated in the second century. Irenaeus, from A.D. 180, quoted it by name in his "Against Heresies." And so we have very good authority that Paul did write this letter to the Thessalonians.

Why did he write this letter? Well, as has already been stated, since Paul and his companions had established the church fairly early in his ministry (about A.D. 50 or 51). And then they were only there for a few months, at the most. There were some subjects that the Thessalonians misunderstood. Paul did not have the opportunity to teach them perhaps in as much detail as he would like, and cover everything that he wanted to cover with them. And so, there were some misunderstandings. And so, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to correct some of these misunderstandings, especially concerning the second coming of Jesus. And so, Paul deals a lot with that, especially in the last part of the letter. Paul wrote this probably, as I said, from Corinth, and it would have been after he left Berea, and then he went to Athens. And he sent Timothy back to see how the Thessalonians were doing, according to chapter 3, verses 1 through 7, of this letter. Timothy then rejoined Paul, at his next stop in Corinth, where he gave Paul a mostly good report, but then told him about the misunderstandings that the Thessalonians had.

And so, Paul's time in Corinth can be dated with a lot of certainty. In fact, we see the mention in Acts chapter 18 about Galio. And Galileo's term is dated because we know about an inscription called the "Delphi Inscription" that was found in 1909. And that his term, Galio's term, began in A.D. 52. And so Paul was there some point before that. So it's likely that Paul wrote this letter sometime, perhaps late 51.

What was the purpose? Or, what were the purposes of the letter? Well, Paul wrote this letter to console them in the face of persecution. They faced a lot of persecution, even after Paul and his companions left. Because of the persecution that Paul had faced, the Jews that drove them out. When they left, no doubt, they turned their attention to the Christians who were still there in the city. And so they faced a lot of persecution. And so Paul wrote this to encourage them to remain strong.

Also, he wrote to rejoice with them in their victory over adversity. They had indeed remained strong, according to Timothy's report. Chapter 3, verses 6 through 10, talks about that. Paul also wrote to them to encourage them to be morally pure, chapter 4, verses 1 through 8.

And then, as I've mentioned, he wrote to correct their misunderstanding about the Second Coming. Chapter 4, verse 13, through chapter 5, verse 11, especially deals with that.

And so we have the letter that Paul wrote to 1 Thessalonians. He would also write 2 Thessalonians not very long after. But, here, we have this first letter. And so we will then begin with looking at the text in just a moment.