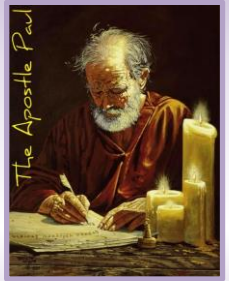


# THESSALONIANS

## *There Is Hope!*



### Lesson 01: Introduction

#### PREVIEW

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and a thriving commercial center with a population of about **200,000**. The church of Thessalonica was founded by Paul and Silas on Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 17) in the spring of **AD 50**. While Paul communicated much truth to the group of young believers at Thessalonica regarding eschatology, these epistles also cover many additional doctrinal and practical problems.

#### AUTHOR PROFILE: PAUL

The Apostle Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia (*near the Lebanese border in modern-day southern Turkey*). Paul was a free Roman citizen (Acts 22:28) and a prominent Jewish religious leader, a highly educated Pharisee (Philippians 3:4-6), studied under Gamaliel at Jerusalem (Acts 5:33-34; Acts 22:3).

Paul started out as one of Christianity's most ardent enemies, yet was personally selected by Jesus to become the gospel's most zealous messenger. Paul traveled tirelessly through the ancient world, taking the message of hope (*the gospel of salvation*) to the Gentiles. When Saul (*Hebrew name*), also named Paul (*Gentile or Roman name - meaning "little"*), encountered the resurrected Christ on the Damascus Road, in **AD 35** (Acts 9), he converted to Christianity.

Paul made three long missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire, planting churches, preaching the gospel, and giving strength and encouragement to early Christians. Of the **27** books in the New Testament, Paul is credited as the author of **13** of them.

Paul was imprisoned by Emperor Nero (**AD 67**) in Rome (2 Timothy 4), where he was executed the next year.

#### CITY PROFILE: THESSALONICA

Thessalonica was founded in 325 BC – on or near the ancient city of Therma - by Cassander, who was one of Alexander the Great's generals. Cassander named the city after his wife Thessaloniki, who was Alexander's step-sister.

The city of Thessalonica is situated on the Thermaic Gulf and is an important port in Macedonia. The modern city of Salonica or Thessaloniki is Greece's second-largest city (located in present day Balkans).

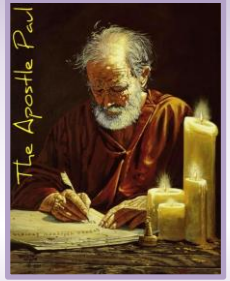
In the 1st century Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and a thriving commercial center with a population of about 200,000. It was also strategically situated on the Via Egnatia or Egnatian Way - a major-stone highway that was an extension of the Appian Way in Italy and connected Rome to the East.

Marc Antony and Octavius (*the future Augustus*) were here after their victory at Philippi. In gratitude for their cooperation in the struggle against Cassius and Brutus, Thessalonica was made a free city like Athens; no Roman soldiers were stationed in it and the government was in the hands of a people's assembly, from whom the magistrates were chosen. Kingdom preaching would make them fearful of losing their privileges of free status.



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### Lesson 01: Introduction

#### PURPOSE AND THEME: 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians with three key purposes,

(1) to express his thanks to God for the believers in Thessalonica (1:2; 2:13; 3:9), (2) to explain why he had not yet visited them again (2:17-18) and (3) to correct the doctrinal (3:10; 4:13; 5:1-11) and practical (4:1-12; 5:12-18) problems they faced.

Although Paul was in Thessalonica only a short time, he touched on many of the great doctrines of the church. Among them was the second coming of Christ. This important theme was not above the heads of the new converts, according to the great apostle - nor should it be for us today.

The particular phase in the second coming of Christ which he emphasized was Christ's coming for believers - the Rapture. The second coming of Christ in relationship to believers is a comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Note the rapture is also referred to as the Blessed Hope! (Titus 2:11-13).

<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,<sup>12</sup> teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,<sup>13</sup> looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, -- Titus 2:11-13 ... NKJV

In light of Jesus Christ's coming, (1) we are to be alert and sober (5:6), (2) we are to abstain from every form of evil (5:22), and (3) we are to pray to God to sanctify us entirely and make us blameless at the coming of Jesus the Christ (5:23).

#### PURPOSE AND THEME: 2 THESSALONIANS

While still in the city of Corinth, shortly after his writing 1 Thessalonians, Paul received news regarding the condition of the church at Thessalonica. With Silas and Timothy at his side, Paul wrote the second letter to the church probably about 2-3 months after the first letter was written.

The background of both Thessalonian epistles indicates that the church was going through a terrible time of persecution and hardship. In the midst of these trials, the Thessalonian believers began to wonder if they were already in the day of the Lord.

Paul penned this letter to correct this error. Paul's answer, in a word, was that this predicted time of trouble which begins the day of the Lord was still future. The persecutions they were undergoing were the normal persecutions that may be experienced by all Christians throughout the church age.

The primary purpose for this epistle was to correct a wrong understanding concerning the day of the Lord. Some false teachers had produced spurious information to the effect that Paul had said the day of the Lord was present (2:1). Since the church at Thessalonica was undergoing severe persecution, this appeared to be a logical conclusion (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; 3:3).

The second purpose was to comfort and encourage the Thessalonian believers to remain steadfast under persecution (1:4-12).

A third purpose was to correct disorderliness in the church. Some believed they could leave their jobs because the coming of the Lord was so near (3:6-16).

Each chapter ends with a prayer. Chapter 1 ends with a prayer for power (1:11-12), chapter 2 with a prayer for comfort and strength (2:16-17), and chapter 3 with a prayer for peace (3:16-17).