

1 THESSALONIANS: VERSE-BY-VERSE THROUGH PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE

SESSION 1 | INTRODUCTION AND 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1

INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTENT

- There is a danger in pegging a “theme” to Biblical epistles.
 - Biblical epistles are free-flowing, expressing the mind of the author, under the care of the Holy Spirit so that every word is God-breathed.
 - When express our need for a “theme” into an epistle, we succumb to eisegesis.
 - Rather than a theme, we will look at topics and take each sentence and paragraph simply for what it says.
- One of the *topics* that is common in the two letters to the Thessalonians is that of the return of Jesus Christ.
 - Largely, the return is what we would call the *Second Coming*, when Jesus returns as the Christ to establish His kingdom.
 - Those receiving this letter were **called unto his kingdom** (1 Thess. 2:12). From this we can deduce that:
 - The recipients were Jews.
 - The recipients were living in an age in which the Kingdom was being offered.
 - But in addition, we *also* know that:
 - That which is offered on one occasion is not necessarily continually offered, and may not be offered today. Therefore we will take care not to assume that *their offer is our offer*.
 - That Paul had already received the mystery of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is expressed in Acts 13:38-39, prior to his arrival in Thessalonica in Acts 17. Therefore we can expect information that is affected by the revelation of the mystery.
- Our expectation, therefore:
 - As it relates to the message of the kingdom and the message of grace, therefore, we expect to see an overlap in 1 Thessalonians. The recipients know about and have received Paul's grace message, yet they are (at least in part if not the whole) inheritors of the Abrahamic promise as well, and these “saints” or “elect” are, at the time of Paul's writing, still offered the Kingdom.
- Our expectation, therefore:
 - There will be information about the impending return of the Messiah, including the wrath and the Day of the Lord and the establishment of the Kingdom that will “at hand” for the Thessalonians that is *not* at hand for us.
 - There will be information concerning the promises and obligations of recipients that have accepted the promises of the dispensation of the grace of God that are applicable directly to us.
 - We will have to discern whether Paul speaks of *promises under the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants* or whether he speaks of *promises to all given by grace through faith not of works*.

WHEN WAS 1 THESSALONIANS WRITTEN?

- The book is the earliest of Paul's epistles, written about 52-54 AD, from Corinth.
- The book is the *first written* and yet, in our printed Bibles, is the *last of the church epistles* (Romans – 1 & 2 Thessalonians).
- Romans is *first in instruction*, giving the *foundations of life* within this dispensation. The epistles to the Thessalonians give the *conclusion to life* for this dispensation: *to be forever with the Lord*.

WHO ARE THE THESSALONIANS? | ACTS 17:1-10

- Acts 17:1-2 –
 - The first to hear Paul’s message were Jews meeting at the synagogue.
- Acts 17:2 –
 - In giving his message, Paul **reasoned out of the scriptures**.
 - Since 1 Thessalonians was the *first* of Pauline scriptures (and likely the first of New Testament scriptures), the scriptures Paul was using were from the Old Testament, where the message of the dispensation of the grace of God is still a mystery.
- Acts 17:3-4 –
 - As would be suspected, Paul seeks to convince the Jews of the synagogue that **Jesus...is Christ**.
 - Some who heard Paul preach **believed** that Jesus was Christ. Among these were:
 - **Them** – the Jews of the synagogue
 - **A great multitude of devout Greeks**.
 - What were they devout to? – *Judaism!*
 - Why were there Greeks in the synagogue? – *because they were in Greece!*
 - It would be a false conclusion to assume that these were pagan Greeks (to whom we would expect Paul to give the message of the uncircumcised).
 - **Not a few of the chief women**.
- Acts 17:5-10 –
 - Paul and Silas were “ushered out of town.”
 - It would seem that in the house of Jason that *perhaps* the Thessalonian assembly was started.
 - Paul returned to Thessalonica on his way from Athens to Jerusalem, and two from Thessalonica traveled on with him to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). One of these (Aristarchus) was with Paul on the journey to Rome (Acts 27:2).
- Summary lessons:
 - The church at Thessalonica was originally made up of nothing but Jews and Jewish converts.
 - There is absolutely *nothing* that tells us of Gentiles within the church, either in its early days nor later.
 - Note that a converted Gentile is a *former* Gentile. The Scripture speaks of *circumcised* and *uncircumcised*, and once a man is circumcised, that is what he is.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1 | THE SALUTATION OF THE LETTER

- The letter is from **Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus**. All three were Jews.
 - Silas had the “elder statesman” status, having been a leader in Jerusalem, called one of the **chief men among the brethren** in Acts 15:22, and referred to as a prophet in Acts 15:32.
 - Timothy was the young protege of Paul.
- Of minor interest is the fact that Paul’s name is given without his *apostle* title. This only occurs in the letters to the Thessalonians and the neighboring Philippians, and his letter to Philemon.
- Paul’s greeting to the Thessalonian believers is one of **grace and peace**. This standard greeting is indicative of the gospel of grace which has been entrusted to Paul.