

## General Comments 1 Thessalonians

Paul's original visit to Thessalonica is documented in Acts 17:1-10, and suggests the ecclesia there is composed primarily of Gentiles. There were initially a few Jews among them, but those few might have fallen out, given the heat of the local opposition. After they leave, Paul sends Timothy back to visit them (cf. 3:5-6), and he then returns to give Paul a status report. This letter indicates the ecclesia there has done exceptionally well, despite considerable persecution, and Paul praises their faithfulness, encouraging them to continue in the face of adversity.

The opening salutation from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (v. 1) places the writing of this letter likely when they were at Corinth (cf. Acts 18:5), suggesting these letters were some of Paul's earliest. Paul says in 2:17 they have been apart "for a short time", again suggesting an early date for the letter. We can see why Paul was so eager to write to them, as they were subjected to the same kind of persecution he himself was subjected to while there.

Note Paul doesn't address any of the members by name as he does in other letters, probably to protect them from persecution. Or, possibly, there has been turnover within the ecclesia, so he doesn't know who is there and who isn't.

These letters frequently receive attention because of the eschatological content in 1 Thess. 5:1-11 and 2 Thess. 2:1-12 related to the Day of the Lord. However, in both cases, Paul is pushing these matters into the background, instead praising them for their faithfulness and good works, and encouraging them to continue in them. Clearly, Paul is more interested in their present spiritual life, than in getting them worked up about the Day of the Lord. He addresses the question, then tells them not worry about it.

Outside of the letters to Thessalonica, there is relatively little eschatological content in Paul's letters. Barring John's Revelation, there are only passing references in the rest of the New Testament, excepting Matt. 24, which is a lengthy discussion.

Additional Pauline references:

Rom. 13:11  
Rom. 16:20  
1 Cor. 10:11  
2 Tim. 3:1

Hebr. 1:2  
Hebr. 9:26  
Hebr. 10:25

Non-pauline references:

Matt. 24  
Acts 1:11  
Acts 17:31  
James 5:3  
1 Pet. 4:7  
2 Pet. 3:3

Overall, in the New Testament context, the Day of the Lord gets reinterpreted into the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Predictions associated with the Day of the Lord and the restoration of the physical kingdom of David are united into a single narrative. There is a long history of sensationalizing these events and predicting the date, which is precisely the opposite of what Jesus says to do in Matt. 24.

### **Comments on 1 Thessalonians 1**

The division between chapters 1 and 2 is artificial. They should be taken together as a single literary unit, owing to the repeated themes through the text of these two chapters.

The subject of 1:2-10 is repeated in 2:13-16 with subtle deliberate differences. The text of 2:1-8 and 2:9-12 also repeat, using the image of a nursing mother and attentive father, both of whom act without the slightest hint of corruption, being honorable in the care of their children. See below for a poetical arrangement highlighting the repetition.

The text of 2:17-20 would then be best taken together with 3:1-10.

There are changes in the IV/JST for [this chapter](#), but they do not significantly change the meaning of the text. The changes are rearrangements of the KJV text for clarity.

Of modern translations, I prefer the [Good News Translation](#) on this letter.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

v1 Opening salutation. Paul blesses them with grace and peace, telling them they are part of the Lord's and His Father's group of saints called out from the world.

These three were together during Acts 17:1-14 and Acts 18:5-11, suggesting the letter was written during this time, likely the latter, while they were at Corinth.

<sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; <sup>3</sup> Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; <sup>4</sup> Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. <sup>5</sup> For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;

v2-5d Paul and his companions pray always for them, giving thanks for them (v. 2). They remember in their prayers to God their Father how the ecclesia at Thessalonica is putting their faith into practice, how their love for God made them work so hard, and how their hope in Christ is so strong and firm, despite the persecution (v. 3). Paul then tells them that he knows that they are God's chosen people (v. 4). The good news of Christ was brought to them by Paul's preaching, but it was also manifested to them in the power of the Holy Spirit, with strength of conviction.

v5 Their humility in accepting the Gospel as it was preached to them resulted in them experiencing the confirming strength of the Holy Spirit.

as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. <sup>7</sup> So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. <sup>9</sup> For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and

v5e-9a Seeing the example of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (v. 5e), the ecclesia there imitated them in following the Lord. Even though they were persecuted, they will filled with the joy the Holy Spirit brings (v. 6). The result is they became an example to all of the believers in the surrounding area (v. 7). Not only did the Gospel go out to all of the surrounding area because of them, the news of their exceptional faith has spread

everywhere. So much so that there is nothing left for Paul to say (v. 8). Everyone talks about how they accepted Paul when they visited them (v. 9a).

v8 "so that we need not to speak any thing", Paul is speaking hyperbolically. Of course Paul and the other missionaries still need to go out and preach the Gospel. But, he is telling the ecclesia there that they exceptionally good example has made it very easy for them to go out and preach.

**how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; <sup>10</sup> And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.**

v9b-10 Upon hearing the Gospel, they abandoned the Greek gods and accept the True God (v. 9b) and his Son, who was raised from the dead, and who will deliver us from the coming Day of Judgement (v. 10).

This is in contrast to the Jewish response Paul experienced (cf. Acts 17:5-13) and the ecclesia there is presently experiencing (cf. 2:15-16).

v9b This statement indicates the ecclesia there is composed of predominantly Gentiles, agreeing with the account of Acts 17:1-10, as they've abandoned their idols in favor of the Gospel.

v10 Paul highlights a major doctrinal difference between Greek religion and the Gospel, resurrection of the dead and deliverance from Judgement.

Note the Judgement here is still in the future, where the Judgement referenced in 2:16 is in the present.

## Poetical Arrangement of 1 Thessalonians 1-2

A - <sup>1:2</sup> **We give thanks to God** (Gr: *eucharisteo theos*) **always for you all**, making mention of you in our prayers; <sup>3</sup> Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;  
<sup>4</sup> Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. <sup>5</sup> For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

B - <sup>6</sup> And **ye became followers** (Gr: *ginomai mimetes*) of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. <sup>7</sup> So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. <sup>9</sup> For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and

C - how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; <sup>10</sup> And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the **wrath to come** (Gr: *orge erchomai*).

D - <sup>2:1</sup> For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: <sup>2</sup> But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. <sup>3</sup> For our exhortation was

not of deceit,  
nor of uncleanness,  
nor in guile:

<sup>4</sup> But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. <sup>5</sup> For

neither at any time used we flattering words,  
as ye know,  
nor a cloke of covetousness;  
God is witness:

<sup>6</sup> Nor of men sought we glory,  
neither of you,  
nor yet of others,

when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we were gentle among you, **even as a nurse**

**cherisheth her children:** <sup>8</sup> So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

D - <sup>9</sup> For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. <sup>10</sup> Ye are witnesses, and God also,

how holily and  
justly and  
unblameably

we behaved ourselves among you that believe: <sup>11</sup> As ye know how

we exhorted and  
comforted and  
charged every one of you,

**as a father doth his children,** <sup>12</sup> That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

A - <sup>13</sup> **For this cause also thank we God** (Gr: *eucharisteeo theos*) **without ceasing,** because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

B - <sup>14</sup> **For ye, brethren, became followers** (Gr: *ginomai mimetes*) of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen,

C - even as they have of the Jews: <sup>15</sup> Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

<sup>16</sup> Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the **wrath is come** (Gr: *orge phthano*) **upon** them to the uttermost.

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