

1 THESSALONIANS

1. AUTHORSHIP--Paul is the author of this epistle. The writings of many early church fathers (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria) affirm Paul's claim to be the author of this epistle. Indeed, early external testimony is virtually unanimous in affirming that Paul is the author. The internal evidence (writing style and subject matter) for Pauline authorship is also strong, and historical allusions in the book harmonize well with what we know about Paul's life as recorded in Acts. The author identifies himself as Paul (1:1; 2:18), but he does not use the title of "apostle." This is because at Thessalonica his apostleship was accepted, and there was no need to defend it. His companions include Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy (1:1), who accompanied him during his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22). Many biblical scholars consider 1 Thessalonians to be the first of Paul's New Testament epistles; some date Galatians earlier.

2. THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA
 - a. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, and was located on a major highway (the *Via Egnatia*) which connected Rome with the East. Apparently it included a substantial number of Jews since it had a synagogue (Acts 17:1).

 - b. Paul visited this city on his second missionary journey after leaving Philippi (Acts 17:1ff). Paul's mission was immediately successful as a number of Jews and Greeks accepted his message (Acts 17:4).

 - c. Paul's success stirred other Jews of the city to a jealous rage; they violently attacked the house of Jason (Acts 17:5) where Paul was staying. Jason and some fellow Christians were dragged before the magistrates as disturbers of the peace. Because of this hostility, Paul was forced to leave the city (Acts 17:9-10).

 - d. According to Acts 17:2, Paul spent three Sabbaths preaching in the synagogue at Thessalonica. Luke's narrative seems to imply that the riot that forced Paul to leave occurred immediately following his ministry in the synagogue, and Acts 17:10 indicates that the Christians sent Paul away right after the riot. However, some believe that there is a longer time gap between Paul's synagogue ministry and his subsequent departure from the city. The exact chronology of this period is open to debate.

3. DATE AND PLACE

- a. After leaving Thessalonica, Paul went to Berea, where he again met with opposition from Thessalonian Jews and was forced to leave again (Acts 17:13-14). He came to Athens and then moved on to Corinth. While at Athens, Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to ascertain the condition of the church. After Timothy's return to Paul at Corinth, he wrote 1 Thessalonians.
- b. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth during his second missionary journey (AD 50-52).

4. PURPOSE--The specific news received through Timothy both prompted the letter and dictated its contents. The whole letter is quite practical, containing a message directly geared to the problems of this church. The purposes for this epistle include the following:

- a. Paul expresses his general satisfaction over the progress of the Thessalonian church (1:1-10).
- b. Paul answers charges which have been brought against him, apparently by his Jewish opponents (chapter 2).
- c. He gives exhortations toward further progress and perseverance (chapter 3).
- d. He seeks to correct certain misunderstandings about future events (chapters 4 and 5).

5. A MAJOR ISSUE OF ESCHATOLOGY BETWEEN PRETRIBULATIONISTS AND POSTTRIBULATIONISTS--what is the relationship of 4:13-18 and 5:1-11, and the shift at 5:1? 5:1-3 clearly speaks of the Lord's return in judgment. Do chapters 4 and 5 describe the same event or two different events?

- a. Several comments should be made:
 - i. Both 4:13-18 and 5:1-11 have the same purpose. These sections are intended to provide comfort and encouragement to his readers (4:18; 5:11).

- ii. Paul seems to be describing two separate events. For the believer the rapture will be a time of blessing and thus Paul uses the word Parousia, whereas for the unbeliever what follows (chapter 5) will be a time of judgment and hence Paul shifts his terminology to “the Day of the Lord.”
- iii. Paul seems to give the chronological relationship between these events of blessing and judgment. The events of 5:1-11 follow the events of 4:13-18. In Paul’s presentation of future events he uses a variety of designations to describe God’s final intervention through Christ:
 - 1) “day of the Lord”--2 Thess. 2:2
 - 2) “day of Christ”--Phil. 1:10
 - 3) “day of Jesus Christ”--Phil. 1:6
 - 4) “day of the Lord Jesus”--2 Cor. 1:14
 - 5) “day of our Lord Jesus Christ”--1 Cor. 1:8
 - 6) “this day”--1 Thess. 5:4
 - 7) “the day”--2 Thess. 1:10
- iv. In examining these passages, interpreters should recognize that the time of the Rapture with respect to the Tribulation, though implied (pretribulationally), is nowhere plainly stated. Therefore, one should hold their position as to the time (not the truth!) of the rapture with grace and humility. It should not be a test of Christian fellowship.

6. Value of the Thessalonian epistles:

- a. They present insight into the heart of the Apostle Paul.
- b. These epistles indicate how Paul worked with and helped young converts.
- c. First and Second Thessalonians picture a local church in its most rudimentary New Testament form.
- d. They contain vital teachings concerning last things.