



## 1st THESSALONIANS

### INTRODUCTION:

First Thessalonians (προς θεσσαλονικεις), (abbreviated 1 Thes.), is the 13th book from the New Testament of the Bible. Thessalonica was a seaport city, the capital of Macedonia, located along the Egnatian Way, the most important trade route in the Roman Empire running from Rome to Asia Minor. Thessalonica was the second city in Europe where Paul helped to create an organized Christian community. As a port city, Thessalonians were influenced by different cultures and pagan religions, the small community of believers in Thessalonica also faced many pressures and persecutions. The audience of the letter were primarily gentile converts. We see in Acts 17:1-10, while on his second missionary journey, that the Apostle Paul and his companions established the church in Thessalonica.

### AUTHORSHIP:

It is clear by the introduction Paul wrote 1st Thessalonians: *“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace.”* (1st Thessalonians 1: 1).

In 1st Thessalonians all the main Pauline doctrines are taught — the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1: 10; 4: 14; 5: 10); His Divinity and Sonship of the living God (1: 9, 10); the resurrection of our bodies (4, 15-18), the mediator of Christ (5, 10); the call of the nations to the Kingdom of Christ, which is the Church (2: 12), sanctification by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (4: 8). The plain and direct style, the writer's affectionate concern for his spiritual children, his impatience of Judaizers, the preponderance of personal over doctrinal statements, the frank and honest self-revelation of the writer — all these distinctly Pauline characteristics argue strongly for the authenticity of this letter.



The two Epistles to the Thessalonians are included among the canonical books accepted by the Councils of the Vatican, of Trent, and of Florence, and are among the homologoumena (those sections of the New Testament that have been accepted since the early Christian era as being part of the body of sacred or officially recognized writings) of all early lists of canonical New-Testament Scriptures; for instance, to mention only such early lists as accord with the received canon of Trent, these two Epistles are listed in the Muratorian Fragment (A.D. 195-205), in the canons of St. Athanasius of Alexandria (A.D. 373), of the Third Council of Carthage (A.D. 397), in which Saint Augustine took part, of St. Epiphanius (A.D. 403), of Innocent I (A.D. 405), and of Gelasius (A.D. 492). In fact there can be no reason whatsoever to doubt the canonicity of either letter.



### **WHEN AND WAS IT WRITTEN WHERE (AND CONTEXT):**

The Letters to the Thessalonians are considered by most experts to have been some of the earliest letters written by Paul. Majority opinion is sometime around 52 AD. Some experts stated the Letters were written in Athens, while others state that they were written in Corinth. Paul wrote 2nd Thessalonians was written a few months after the first.

### **OVERVIEW:**

Paul parted from Barnabas (Acts 15:36–41) at the beginning of what is called his second missionary journey, he chose Silvanus (Silas) as his traveling companion. Soon afterwards he took Timothy along with him (Acts 16:1–3). About A.D. 50, he arrived in Greece for the first time. In making converts in Philippi and, soon afterwards, in Thessalonica, he was beset by persecution from Jews and Gentiles alike. Moving on to Berea, he was again harassed by enemies from Thessalonica and hurriedly left for Athens (Acts 17:1–17:15). Silvanus and Timothy remained behind for a while.

Paul soon sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen that community in its trials (1 Thessalonians 3:1–5). Timothy and Silvanus finally returned to Paul when he reached Corinth (Acts 18:1–18), probably in the early summer of A.D. 51. Timothy's return with a report on conditions at Thessalonica, that he had good news: In spite of intense persecution, the Christians in Thessalonica were standing firm in the faith. This served as the occasion for Paul's first letter (1 Thessalonians 3:6–8). It has been stated that Thessalonians “defies strict doctrinal analysis, and is far more personal than doctrinal”. This can also point to being an earlier letter, having being written under two decades of the Resurrection of Christ.

Since Paul had to leave these new converts sooner than he wanted to, at his earliest opportunity, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church.

### **CONTENT OF 1st THESSALONIANS:**

Paul's primary purpose for writing the epistle was to encourage, comfort and strengthen the church and continue to stand firm on its faith. He also answered some of their questions and corrected a few misconceptions about the resurrection and Christ's return.

There is a very personal part, a doctrinal part in the Letter to the Thessalonians. The letter begins with a brief address (1 Thessalonians 1:1) and concludes with a greeting (1 Thessalonians 5:26–28). The body of the letter consists of two major parts. The first (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3:13) is a set of three sections of thanksgiving connected by two defenses dealing, respectively, with the missionaries' previous conduct and their current concerns. Paul's thankful optimism regarding the Thessalonians' spiritual welfare is tempered by his insistence on their recognition of the selfless love shown by the missionaries. In an age of itinerant peddlers of new religions, Paul found it necessary to emphasize not only the content of his gospel but also his manner of presenting it, for both attested to God's grace as freely bestowed and powerfully effected.

The second part of the letter (1 Thessalonians 4:1–5:25) was meant to exhort and urge the community. The great love for which Paul has just prayed (1 Thessalonians 3:12–13) is to be shown practically by living out the norms of conduct that he has communicated to them. Specific “*imperatives*” of Christian life, principles for acting morally, stem from the “*indicative*” of one's relationship to God through Christ by the sending of the Holy Spirit. Thus, moral conduct is the practical, personal expression of one's Christian faith, love, and hope.

On 1 Thessalonians 1:3, we find reference to Faith, love, and hope: this, (along with 1 Thessalonians 5:8), is the earliest mention in Christian literature of the 3 *“theological virtues”*. Paul’s use of: *“We are destined”*: the Greek phraseology and the context suggest Paul’s concern to alert his readers to difficulties he knew they would necessarily face and to enable them to see their present experience in the light of what he warned them would happen in the future. This line of thought is followed in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–15.

Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to remain faithful: *“Finally, brothers, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God—and as you are conducting yourselves—you do so even more”*. (1st Thessalonians 4: 1), and to remain holy and pure in Christ.

On the dead in Christ and the end of times (The Parousia) he writes: *“We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord,\* will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together\* with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord.”* (1st Thessalonians 4: 13-17). 1st Thessalonians contains five (5) chapters.

### **Outline of the 1st Letter to the Thessalonians**

- I. Address (1:1–10)
- II. Previous Relations with the Thessalonians (2:1–3:13)
- III. Specific Exhortations (4:1–5:25)
- IV. Final Greeting (5:26–28)



## **2nd THESSALONIANS:**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Second Thessalonians (προς θεσσαλονικεις), (abbreviated 2nd Thes.), is the 14th book from the New Testament of the Bible. Thessalonica was a seaport city, the capital of Macedonia, located along the Egnatian Way, the most important trade route in the Roman Empire running from Rome to Asia Minor. Thessalonica was the second city in Europe where Paul helped to create an organized Christian community. As a port city, Thessalonians were influenced by different cultures and pagan religions, the small community of believers in Thessalonica also faced many pressures and persecutions. The audience of the letter were primarily gentile converts. We see in Acts 17:1-10, while on his second missionary journey, that the Apostle Paul and his companions established the church in Thessalonica.

### **AUTHORSHIP:**

Paul is also the author of 2nd Thessalonians. This is evidence by the introduction: “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace from God [our] Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2nd Thessalonians 1: 1-2). Authorship is also evident on the closing of the letter: “This greeting is in my own hand, Paul’s. This is the sign in every letter; this is how I write.” (2nd Thessalonians 3: 17). There is also support from early church documents and Church Fathers. All evidence is the same for II Thessalonians as for 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **WHEN AND WAS IT WRITTEN WHERE (AND CONTEXT):**

Paul wrote 2nd Thessalonians a few months after the first. From either Corinth, or from Athens. To stand fast in prayer: *“To this end, we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ.”* (2 Thes. 1:11–12).

The Thessalonians have been shaken by a message purporting to come from Paul himself that the day of the Lord is already present. He warns against this deception in eschatology by citing a scenario of events that must first occur (2 Thes. 2:3–12) before the end will come. The overall point Paul makes is the need to reject such lies as Satan sends; he also reaffirms the Thessalonians in their calling (2 Thes 2:13–14). They are to uphold what Paul himself has taught (2 Thes 2:15). There is a concluding prayer for their strengthening (2 Thes 2:16–17).

He makes it clear not to neglect work. Some in the community thinking the 2nd coming of the Lord imminent, refused to work, minding other's business, and creating strain on other believers. Paul addresses this point: "In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others. Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food. But you, brothers, do not be remiss in doing good." (2 Thes. 2:16–17).

### **Outline of the 2nd Letter to the Thessalonians**

I.) Greetings (2 Thes. 1:1–2)

II.) Faith, Prayer, and holding firm to Christ (2nd Thes. 2:1 & 2)

III.) Request for Prayers and to not neglect work (2nd Thes. 3: 1-16).

IV.) Closing (2 Thes. 3:16d-18)

### **RESOURCES USED AND RECOMMENDED:**

- NAB Bible, at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>
- Agape Bible Study at: [http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape\\_Bible\\_Studies\\_Menu.php](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape_Bible_Studies_Menu.php)
- Pauline Chronology: The Life and Missionary Work of St. Paul of Tarsus. Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J. at: [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline\\_Chronology.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline_Chronology.htm)
- New Testament Letter Structure, from Catholic Resources by Felix Just, S.J. At: [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT\\_Letters.htm#Edited](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm#Edited)
- Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D. At: <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Paul-Thessalonians.htm>
- Brown, Raymond E. An Introduction to the New Testament. New York: Doubleday, 1997. "Epistle (Letter) to the Thessalonians"
- Thessalonians at: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/info/thessalonians-cathen.html>

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