

Introduction to First Thessalonians

Key Verse:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Key Truth:

Jesus Christ is coming soon. Living in light of His sudden return means stewardship of our time, fidelity to His word, and an attitude of constant expectancy.

We begin now to read one of the earliest and most encouraging letters in the New Testament—Paul’s First Epistle (i.e., letter) to the Thessalonians. These letters are among the earliest of Paul’s writings, composed less than twenty years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That alone should capture our attention. The doctrines we encounter here—salvation by grace, sanctification, endurance in suffering, and the return of Jesus Christ—were not later theological developments. They were foundational truths taught to brand-new believers from the very beginning.

What is especially striking is that Paul taught these truths during a stay of only about three weeks. Yet in that brief time, he laid such a solid foundation that he could later write to them about matters many believers today struggle to grasp. This tells us something important: Paul expected new Christians to grow quickly, deeply, and biblically.

Before we open the letter itself, we must set it in its historical context. Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica is recorded in Acts chapter 17. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, a strategic city located along the Via Egnatia—the main Roman highway connecting Rome with the eastern provinces. Paul consistently targeted such cities because the gospel could spread outward from them like ripples in water.

Paul preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, reasoning from the Scriptures that the Christ had to suffer and rise again, and that Jesus is that Christ. Many believed, most of them Gentiles. But as was often the case, opposition arose. A riot followed, Paul and Silas were forced to leave, and the young church was left facing persecution almost immediately.

It was from Corinth, during Paul’s second missionary journey, that he wrote this letter. Timothy had returned from Thessalonica with encouraging news—these believers were standing firm—but also with concerns that required pastoral correction, especially regarding the return of Christ.

The Greeting: A Church Rooted in God

Paul opens the letter simply:

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Notice Paul does not assert his apostolic authority here. There is no need. His relationship with this church is warm, affectionate, and secure.

He describes the church as being “*in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.*” This is not about physical location but spiritual position. These believers are united to God through Christ. Their identity, security, and life flow from that union.

Grace always precedes peace. Peace with God is impossible without first receiving His grace. And both come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ—placed side by side, equal in authority and essence.