

# A Study of 1 Thessalonians



## Introduction

The 1st century city of Thessalonica was the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey in AD 49. At the time of the planting of the church the population of the city is estimated to have been about 200,000.

Thessalonica was located on the Via Egnatia (or Egnatian Way) which was a Roman road covering a distance of 1,100km between the western shore of Greece and Byzantium (modern day Istanbul) to the east. Paul traveled this road between Philippi and Thessalonica.

Most of this road and other archeological sites cannot be excavated because Thessalonica is a thriving city today; the second largest in modern Greece.



Map from [www.bible-history.com](http://www.bible-history.com)

The first century city was a prosperous major trading centre located on the Thermaic Gulf to the west of a three fingered peninsula known as the Chalcidice. Thessalonica had all the moral problems of any port city, but its strategic location made Thessalonica a key location for evangelism.

During the second missionary journey Paul and his companions traveled into Macedonia because they were led there by God. In Acts 16:6 the missionaries were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia. Then the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go into Bithynia. Finally a vision appeared to Paul in the night where a man of Macedonia spoke to him and urged him "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Paul concluded that God had called them to preach in Macedonia.<sup>1</sup> Associated with Paul were Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

**Acts 17:1-10** records the preaching of the gospel in Thessalonica and the subsequent exit from the city, by Paul and Silas, under threat of violence. The first Christians in Thessalonica were subjected to great persecution. Paul could not safely stay in there and could not return due to safety issues. This meant the church did not get the necessary grounding in the faith; thus the need for the Thessalonian correspondence.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 16:6-10.

Paul and Silas sent Timothy on at least three trips to Thessalonica. The first is recorded in Acts 19:22. Here Timothy made his way into the city and met with the church. He was able to communicate the situation of the church to Paul who wrote to them concerning their questions and problems. 1 Thessalonians was probably Paul's earliest letter, written in AD 50.

Timothy, subsequently made two more trips to Thessalonica to carry in the letters we know as First and Second Thessalonians.

**1. Read Acts 17:1-10 answer the following questions:**

- a. Where did Paul go after arriving in Thessalonica?**
- b. How long did Paul reason with the Jews? *(This is not necessarily the entire length of time Paul was in Thessalonica, but the amount of time he taught in the synagogues.)***
- c. What was the content of Paul's message to the Jews?**
- d. What two groups besides Jews were persuaded by Paul's message?**
- e. What did the jealous Jews do to Paul and Silas? *(Paul calls him Silvanus, another spelling for Silas, in his letters.)***
- f. Who was Jason?**
- g. What charge was laid against Paul and his companions?**

**2. If God called these missionaries to preach in Macedonia why did they meet such violent opposition?**

These missionaries followed a practice of seeking out strategic centers to begin preaching. Apparently they understood that the gospel could radiate out to the surrounding areas from these cities.

**Opening Words: 1:1-5**

1 Thessalonians begins in a very common way for Paul with a brief introduction of himself and his associates. It was Silas and Timothy who had brought the news from the church which prompted this letter. Paul acknowledges their position as a part of the church in Thessalonica which placed them "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace were common greetings for first century Christians.

Paul shows comfort and concern as he thanks God for these Christians and shares that he prays constantly for them. The word translated as *thanks* as well as the words *constantly* and *mentioning* in the original language show this to be an ongoing action. Paul regularly, constantly, and always remembers all the Thessalonian Christians in his prayers.

**3. What comfort would it bring to know that a Christian brother (especially a leader and mentor) is praying for you on a regular ongoing basis?**

**4. What three areas does Paul express thanksgiving for Thessalonian Christians in verse 3?**

In verse 3, the Greek tense of the word translated as *remembering* again indicates this is a continual and ongoing part of his life of prayer for the Thessalonian brothers.

Paul is constantly thankful for the active faith of the Thessalonians, characterised by their work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their steadfastness or endurance inspired by hope.

**5. Define faith, love, and hope as they are used in verse 3 and explain why they are so important to the Christian.**

Paul recognised these Christians as:

1. Brothers -- They shared a relationship as brothers because they had the same father.
2. Loved by God -- God loved these persecuted Christians
3. Chosen -- Christians are a chosen people. They are chosen by God as they accept and obey Him.

Verses 4 and 5 convey the fact that when the gospel was first preached in Thessalonica that it came in a very powerful, exciting, and visible manner. To be “chosen” in the New Testament is to be a Christian. God made the choice to send his Son to provide the possibility of salvation. Those who choose to obey Him are “chosen.” Everyone has the opportunity to be a part of the “chosen” or “elect.”

**6. What proved to Paul that these Christians had been chosen?**

The message Paul preached was one of power. The power was not in the speaker, but in the Gospel message. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to convict men of sin and lead to their conversion as they obey.

The power of which this verse speaks probably refers to miracles that were done by Paul in Thessalonica, though none are specifically mentioned in Scripture. Power, the Holy Spirit, and conviction show that this was not an ordinary message, nor was it the eloquence of the speaker that led the Thessalonian Christians to their conversion.

**7. What is the meaning of the word “gospel” in verse 5?**

**8. What is the meaning of the word “conviction” as it is used in verse 5?**

Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians how he and his companions had lived among them for their benefit. He does not explain his actions further here because the Thessalonians could reflect upon what they had seen firsthand; however he does expand on the content of his lifestyle among them in 2:1-12.

**9. What influence does the lifestyle of a preacher (or any Christian) have upon those he is trying to reach with the gospel?**