



A Study in 1 Thessalonians

Introduction: Historical Context

1. Who wrote it (author)?
 - a. **1 Thess 1:1** Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.
2. To whom was it written (audience)?
 - a. Thessalonica in 1st century
 - i. Political context (Thessalonica and the Roman province of Macedonia)
 - ii. Economic context (trade/industry, [roman] patron-client relationships)
 - iii. Religious context
 - polytheism
 - patron gods (guilds, civic, imperial – *do ut des*, “I give that you might give”)
 - superstition (astrology, demons, etc.)
 - *pax romana*, *pax deorum*, *pietas*, and the Gospel of Augustus
 - Rome (patron and god; cf. 1 Thess 4.16)
 - Judaism



b. “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

Acts 16:6-10 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 17:1-15 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” ⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹ And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

¹⁰ The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

3. When was it written (date)?

- a. while Paul was in Corinth (cf. Acts 18.1-18), when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia (AD 50-51)

4. Why was it written (occasion)?

- a. to defend his [Paul’s] apostleship (2.1-12), strengthen and encourage the saints (cf. 3.2), and give thanks to God (1.2; 2.13; 5.12)

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, 17-3:8 For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory ... ¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and

with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, again and again-- but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

3:1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. ⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you-- ⁷ for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

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

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

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

1. To the church¹ of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"
2. Grace to you and peace (God's grace to you, which results in *shalom*)

¹ *ekklēsia* = the congregation of assembly of Israel in LXX: **Deuteronomy 4:9-10** Take heed to thyself, and keep thy heart diligently: forget not any of the things, which thine eyes have seen, and let them not depart from thine heart all the days of thy life; and thou shalt teach thy sons and thy sons' sons, ¹⁰ *even the things that happened in the day in which ye stood before the Lord our God in Choreb in the day of the assembly (ekklēsia)*; for the Lord said to me, Gather (*ekklēsiāzō*) the people to me, and let them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days which they live upon the earth, and they shall teach their sons. Cf. **Acts 7:37-38** This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' ³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation (*ekklēsia*) in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

1. We give thanks to God always for all of you
 - a. constantly mentioning you in our prayers
 - b. remembering before our God and Father
 - i. your work of faith
 - ii. labor of love (3.6, 12; 4.9; 5.13)
 - iii. steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1.3b; cf. 5.8)
 - c. for we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you² (1.4)
 - i. because our gospel came to you
 1. not only in word,
 2. but also in power and
 3. in the Holy Spirit and
 4. with full conviction³
 - d. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake (1.5; cf. 2.1-12)

² *Contra pagan approach to religion: do ut des* ("I give so that you might give"; cf. **1 John 4:10-11** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.)

Concerning love and election: **2 Timothy 1:8-12a** Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹² which is why I suffer as I do. **Ephesians 1:3-6** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. **Colossians 3:12** Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

³ **Romans 15:18-19** For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience-- by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God-- so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ. **1 Corinthians 2:3-5** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord⁴ (1.6a; cf. 2.13-14)
 - a. for you received the word in much affliction (*thlipsis* = tribulation)
 - b. with the joy of the Holy Spirit⁵ (1.6b)
 - i. so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia (1.7)
2. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything⁶ (1.8)
3. For they themselves report concerning us
 - a. the kind of reception we had among you (cf. 2.1-12)
 - b. how you turned
 - i. to God from idols⁷

⁴ **1 Corinthians 4:16** I urge you, then, be imitators of me. **Ephesians 5:1** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **Hebrews 13:7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

⁵ Concerning affliction (tribulation) and joy in the Holy Spirit: **2 Corinthians 8:1-2** We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. **Colossians 1:24** Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. **Philippians 2:17** Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. **Romans 12:12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (cf. Rom 5 and 8). **1 Peter 4:13-14** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (cf. Rom 5.3-5; 8.23).

⁶ I.e., Paul and his associates didn't have to evangelize, because of the Thessalonians' testimony.

⁷ **Deuteronomy 32:15-18** "But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. ¹⁶ They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. ¹⁷ They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. ¹⁸ You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth." (Cf. Exodus 17.1-7) **1 Corinthians 10:19-21** What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. (See also Ps 115, 135.)

- ii. to serve the living and true God⁸ (1.9; cf. 2.13-16)
- iii. to wait for his Son from heaven,⁹ whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come¹⁰ (1.10)

God's love and election (v.4) is the source of the Thessalonians' faith, love, and hope (v.3) and is manifest by the way in which the Gospel came to them (v.5), their reception (v.6), conversion (v.9b-10), and witness (vv.7-9a), all of which is brought to mind when Paul prays and results in thanksgiving (vv.2-3a).

⁸ **Jeremiah 10:10, 14** But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation ... ¹⁴ Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them.

⁹ **Ephesians 1:20** that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places; **Philippians 3:20** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

¹⁰ **Colossians 3:5-6** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming.