

# Introduction to I & II Thessalonians

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**First let me say it is with mixed emotions that I stand up here today...it has been a while since I have done this. So I am equal parts excited, honored and nervous about being up here. This won't be a sermon, really...it's an introduction to the next books that Jon will be preaching on. So this is more or less an information download, established facts about the book's origins and purpose. But hopefully, it will enhance your understanding of the books and set up Jon's study moving forward.**

**It is also exciting to me that we are heading into this new book, this new study, this new journey, really. I hope we have paused to reflect on the journey we just completed and the story of Daniel. As Jon said last week, it wasn't always an easy study to figure out, but there was plenty - PLENTY that we did understand and need to apply and expand and live out. As someone famous said "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me...it's the parts I DO understand." Don't forget where we have been as we look forward to where we are going.**

**In general terms, there are some obvious similarities and some obvious differences to the two books, but they are very much tied to one another and the study will be more edifying because they are being done jointly. We wouldn't get as much out of it if we didn't study them both together. One sets up the second and the second builds up the first.**

**The authorship, time period, setting are all very much similar. Let's start with authorship...there is no serious question that the books were both written primarily by Paul, though he notes Silas and Timothy as co-authors. While they may have contributed to content (they had reported back to Paul in Corinth where he wrote these letters, so they had provided the information that Paul based his writing on) and while they certainly were united with Paul in it's purpose, there is little doubt that**

**this is in Paul's style of writing-albeit not as difficult to understand as some of his other writings. Also, Paul closes the 2nd book by writing it "in his own hand", which lends some personalization to the book.**

**Now, let's take a minute to look at my outline of I and II Thessalonians. I don't know if this is how Jon will outline the book, but it is my swing at it. (outline on screen)**

## **I Thessalonians**

- I. Salutation/Greeting (1:1)**
- II. Paul's Personal thoughts (1:2-3:13)**
  - A. Thanksgiving/affection for this church (1:2-10)**
  - B. Reminders for this church (2:1-16)**
    - 1. Defense of accusations (not for his own sake)**
  - C. Concerns for this church (2:17-3:13)**
- III. Practical Instructions (4:1-5:22)**
  - Purity**
  - Disciplined Living**
  - Death and the Rapture**
  - Holy Living**
  - Church Relationships**
  - Christian Living**
- IV. Benediction/Closing remarks(5:23-28)**

## **II Thessalonians**

- I. Salutation/Greeting (1;1-2)**
- II. Paul's Comfort(1:3-12)**
  - A. By encouragement**
  - B. By exhortation**
- III. Correction for Prophetic Error (2:1-17)**
- IV. Paul's Concern for the Church (3:1-15)**
  - A. Regarding prayers (3:1-5)**
  - B. Regarding Undisciplined Living (3:6-15)**
- V. Closing/benediction (3:16-18)**

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**As is obvious by its title, the book (books) were written to the Thessalonians. More specifically, it is addressed to the Church of the Thessalonians IN GOD the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, they were in Thessalonica just as we are in Oakland, or more accurately the church at Ferndale...quick local history - this area way back in the day was known as the community of Ferndale that stretched from Mt. Nebo where the old church is over to all of King's Run and into Broadford Road and Pysell Crosscut and that is how we got our name... . But what joins us isn't our home town, it's our eternal home. We are IN God. Whatever other title we may hold, first and foremost we are all the church in God! We are in Ferndale (small circle) in God (big circle).**

**The city of Thessalonica was named for the half-sister of Alexander the Great, Thessaloniki. It was founded in about 315 B.C. by her husband King Cassander of Macedonia. In Roman times, Thessalonica was a provincial capital with more than two hundred thousand residents. By comparison, the city of Pittsburgh is about 250,000-300,000. So Thessalonica was a pretty big place back in the day. It was also a very key location in terms of business and trade routes. It was the major port city of the Aegean Sea that fed into the Mediterranean Sea. It was also right along the main road from Rome to Asia- the Ignacian Way and it was very much the terminus of all kinds of trade. It was a "free city" so they were somewhat autonomous from the Roman Empire, governed by a Politarch. (Poli- city, arch-ruler). They would have been considered very close to what we would consider a democracy. This was disputed for many years that Luke was wrong in Acts because it was generally accepted there were no Politarchs in this region or at this time. But recent archeological finds have discovered over 40 references to a Politarch in Thessalonica-don't you just love it when God's truth gets**

**verified by science! There have also been discoveries of much of the old city including a Roman forum, a sports hippodrome, etc.**

**It was a mixed population-mostly Jewish because of the commerce opportunities, but also Samaritan, Gentile, again-verified by archeological finds.**

**As far as the time period, it is generally accepted that Paul wrote I Thessalonians while in Corinth in A.D. 51, which is verified by an inscription in the temple of Apollos at Delphi (near Corinth) -see Acts 18:12-17-and the follow-up II Thessalonians a few months later.**

**History-How and why did Paul end up writing these letters**

**It would be fair to say that, to quote myself, Paul took a rather “circuitous route” to end up in Thessalonica and later in Corinth, where he wrote these books. (Read Acts 16:6-12).**

**6 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<sup>[a]</sup> had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

**11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the<sup>[b]</sup> district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.**

**So Paul, Silas and Timothy originally planned to go into Asia but the Holy Spirit said “no” and went instead to Phrygia and Galatia. Then they intended to go to Bithynia, but again the Holy Spirit did not allow it. We don’t (or at least I don’t) know how or why the Holy Spirit did this exactly but that’s what Scripture says, so that’s what happened. So they**

traveled to Troas and reached the sea and they basically ran out of land. Then Paul had a vision that he should cross the sea into Macedonia, which they did and traveled to Samothrace, Neopolis and then in to Philippi. He was thrown out of Philippi (we don't often stop to consider the opposition Paul ran into at almost every stop. I imagine a lot of people would have ran home had they faced what Paul did-heck, I got chased off of a senior living complex in Mt. Lake). And from there, he traveled to Thessalonica. He preached in the Synagogue for a short while, but that caused quite a stir. The established Jewish leadership saw him as a rabble-rouser and trouble maker because he was appealing to many of the non-Jews who had not gone through their ritual of becoming Jews. He was un-invited to speak in the synagogue any longer, so he started meeting with the people he had drawn from the synagogue and according to Mr. Pawson, right beside of the synagogue. Now I don't know about Paul, but if this was me, I could pretty well see myself sticking out my tongue or thumbing my nose as I passed by the synagogue and the Jewish leadership on the way to church. Paul was probably a bit more mature than me. At any rate, this basically caused a riot and Paul decided in consideration of his new converts, was forced to move on to Berea but he left behind a solid church and also left Timothy and Silas behind to support them. He got run out of Berea as well and moved on to Athens where he was ridiculed and mocked and was not well accepted so he moved on to Corinth and was rightfully feeling pretty discouraged by this point. But Silas and Timothy eventually caught up with him there in Corinth and brought great news from Thessalonica (doesn't God often work that way). So since Paul couldn't leave to return to Thessalonica at that time, he decided instead to write to them and that is the beginning of not only these two books, but of the New Testament.

Remember, there was no New Testament to this point. Believers only had the Old Testament and the teaching and preaching that was occurring, but no document as we know it. It is generally accepted that these two

books were the first books written in the New Testament. Did you know that? If I knew it, I had forgotten it. But we don't think of this book as being the first chronologically because of where it is in the book. And that brings up an interesting point that we debated several weeks ago in Bible Study. Someone had mentioned that Paul's writings seemed to soften as he got older—that maybe his dealing with his audience became more tempered as he went. But this would seem to contradict that notion, because this letter-his first-was very gentle, very endearing, very much like a protective parent.

And then his very next writing-same audience, same time period, same subject matter more or less- has a very different tone...much more pragmatic, much more matter of fact. That tells me that Paul was very much giving his readers very much what they needed to hear in whatever way they needed to hear it at the time. For example...I

Thessalonians uses terms like:

Gentle-a nursing mother caring for her own children

Affectionately desirous of you

Shared not only the gospel but ourselves because you had become dear to us.

Like a father with his children, we exhorted and encouraged

We were torn away in person but not in heart.

Great desire to see you face to face.

What is our hope, our joy, our crown of boasting? Is it not you? You are our glory and joy!

But II Thessalonians is more to the point. More down to the nitty-gritty.

That doesn't mean he loves them less or it less affectionate...he is just more warning them to keep them from stumbling. This moment, this second letter doesn't call for reinforcing how much he cares for them-it calls for things in need of immediate warning. If my grandson were sitting in the middle of an intersection in traffic, it wouldn't be the right time to tell him how much I care for him. It would be to shout a warning

**and see to his protection. In coaching, I had kids I loved. But sometimes they needed a pat on the back and sometimes they needed a kick in the back pocket. My care for them was no different but the situation and circumstances were.**

**I disagree with Pawson on this point-he seems to think that the relationship had soured from one letter to another. That's not what I see.. I see the situation changing. The need for correction always goes up as we grow...the temptations mount, Satan has to pay more attention to us. The meat is harder to swallow than the milk. And don't forget, Paul was very early on in his ministry to them when he got run out of town. There was much left untaught when he left. Remember, he spoke to them as dear children and that's really what they were...very young in the faith, very young in their understanding. Some issues popped up and he wasn't there to deal with them.**

**So the tone of the two letters is quite different. But generally speaking, I see that as necessitated by circumstances. We shall see what Jon thinks in the coming weeks.**

**(Return to outline)**

**So, quickly going back to our outline...and I realize this is a little disjointed but bear with me. I just want to touch on the main themes of each of the outlined sections.**

**1:1-Greeting and salutation we touched on already**

**1:2-10- Paul's affection and thanks for them. Word of their faith has spread throughout the region and what more could Paul, especially given what he had been going through, hope to hear.**

**2:1-17 Reminders for this church. He defends himself and his ministry- not for his own sake, but for the sake of the gospel. Many false accusations had been made against him and this could not stand because it would have hindered God's work there.**

**2:17-3:13- Concerns for the church, Paul's fear that "somehow the tempter had tempted them and our labor would be in vain." His desire was for their love for one another to increase and abound.**

**4:1-5:22-Practical Instructions**

**Purity-not impurity but holiness**

**Disciplined Living-live quietly, mind your own business, work with your hands and be dependent on no one.**

**Death and the Rapture-They had been misled into believing that those who had passed away had missed the 2nd Coming.**

**Holy Living-Live in the light, not in the dark because judgment is coming for those in the dark. Don't get caught up in dabbling in speculation. Be sober-minded, use the armor of protection God has provided.**

**Church Relationships-respect your leaders, know them (have a close relationship with them), hold them in esteem because of their work on our behalf. Do we do that? Do we value what Jon and the elders and the Sunday School teachers and the administrative folks like Mary do? Do they know we value it?**

**Christian Living- a pretty concise list here -rejoice, pray, give thanks, do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecies (the Word), test all things (I would include this in our regard to our leadership-they want what they are saying to be tested-they want accountability, they want it expanded on).**

**5:23-28 Closing/Benediction-Keep yourselves blameless, care for one another, pray for us, share this message.**



## **II Thessalonians**

**1:1-2 Salutation/Greeting-Essentially the same greeting as I Thessalonians**

**1:3-12 Paul's comfort for affliction-by encouragement(vs. 3-4), by exhortation(vs. 5-12).**

**(3-4) We ought always to give thanks for you as is right...we are bound to it, committed to it-your faith is growing, your love is increasing in spite of the afflictions you are facing.**

**(5-12) Paul exhorts them to push on...their suffering is opportunity for God to refine and perfect. And let God deal with those causing the affliction...we can focus on pursuing the things of God, knowing that vengeance is His.**

**Paul's correction for Prophetic error (2:1-17)**

**This goes back to his comments in I Thessalonians and he reiterates that this is not accurate. Errant teaching regarding the 2nd coming had crept into the church and they were distraught that loved ones who had passed away had missed it. He hints that someone had fraudulently introduced this teaching, perhaps even saying it was from Paul. So Paul must again reinforce the correct notion of the second coming and how they must stand fast-remember that God chose you as the first-fruits. He called you through our gospel. He gave us comfort and good hope through grace.**

**Paul's concern for the church (3:1-15)**

**Regarding prayer- Pray for us, deliverance from evil men, pray for the gospel to be preached and spread. In light of our recent discussions, how relevant is this to us...the priority of prayer as the first defense cannot be understated.**

**Regarding undisciplined life-We COMMAND you, keep away from idle men. Imitate us, copy our work ethic. If a man won't work, he shouldn't**

**eat, Some are not busy, but are busybodies. Go about your business quietly and diligently. Do not grow weary in doing good.**

**Benediction- 3:16-17**

**Again, we mentioned that Paul closed this “in his own hand”. This is relevant as far as establishing authority, assuring it is from his hand and puts a stamp on the letter having the same authority with which he came to them in person.**

**So with that, we have exhausted my database of knowledge on these books. I’m sure we haven’t scratched the surface, but I hope we have opened the door a little bit and that between what Jon brings and each of us adds, that this can be one of the most edifying, instructive books we have ever studied. Let’s make that a goal... let’s pray.**