

1 Thessalonians 1:1

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Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy greet the Thessalonian church with grace and peace. Paul was chased out of Thessalonica, so he wants to encourage the believers there and exhort them for their continued faithfulness.

This epistle (letter) is written by *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians*. Silvanus is likely another name for Silas, just as Paul is also known as Saul. Both Silas and *Timothy* helped Paul in his initial missionary journey to Thessalonica. As with many of the New Testament epistles, it is thought that Paul is the main author, that he dictated to various scribes such as Timothy, and then signed the letter with his own hand (2 Thessalonians 3:17, Galatians 6:11, Romans 16:22). However, the Thessalonians knew Silas and Timothy from their initial introduction of the Gospel in Thessalonica, and would likely be glad to know that all three had contributed to the letter. It could also be that Paul desires to build credibility for Silas and Timothy for the effectiveness of their future service in Thessalonica.

Paul greets the Thessalonians *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*, referencing the spiritual family they are all part of, the faith that unites them. He extends *Grace and peace* to them, as he often does in his epistles to the churches. *Grace* is a translation of the Greek word “charis” and means “favor.” *Paul* also wishes the Thessalonian believers *peace*, which probably stems from the Jewish affinity for wishing one another “Shalom,” which extends to this day. Shalom is much more than the mere absence of conflict. It includes the idea of wholeness, soundness, health, and prosperity. Paul is wishing them God’s favor, as well as wishing them a holistic and well-grounded prosperity.

During Paul’s second missionary journey, he and Timothy and Silas arrived in Thessalonica after a brief imprisonment in the city of Philippi. Paul went to the local synagogue to share Christ. For three sabbaths, he taught how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, “explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.” (Acts 17:3-4).

Thus the *church of the Thessalonians* was founded, composed of some Jews, but mostly of Greeks who feared God and sought truth. But Paul, Silas, and Timothy were not able to remain in Thessalonica for very long to help establish the church, because many of the Jews there were angry at them for preaching the Gospel. These men roused a mob of riff-raff and started a riot that rocked the entire city; they attacked the home of a man named Jason, one of the new believers, where Paul and company were staying (Acts 17:5).

Ultimately Paul and his companions slipped out of the city during the night and continued their mission in Greece. Antagonism followed Paul throughout Greece, and he was separated from Silas and Timothy for some time. Eventually he ended up in Corinth where he lived in relative

stability, working as a tent-maker and preaching at the synagogue (Acts 18:3). He was reunited with Silas and Timothy there in Corinth, at which point he preached the Gospel to the Corinthians (Acts 18:5-6). There Paul would live for a year and a half, promised by God that he would be safe from the frequent physical harm he had experienced thus far in his ministry (Acts 18:9-10).

It appears that Timothy was able to visit the Thessalonian church to see how it was doing before he reunited with Paul in Corinth, since Paul wrote: “we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:2). Having heard the update from the Thessalonian church, Paul wrote this letter in response to the news brought by Timothy. It is likely that both 1st and 2nd Thessalonians were written from Corinth not long after Paul had departed Thessalonica, and in fairly close sequence to one another.

The theme of both letters to the Thessalonians is for the believers to “live for the end times by living faithfully now.” From Chapter 2 of this epistle, Paul states that he wants the Thessalonians to “walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory,” because his greatest hope was that those who believed in Jesus would endure living faithfully in obedience to Christ right up until Jesus’s return, “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, 19).

As shown in chapters 2 and 3, Paul had great anxiety concerning the state of the Thessalonian believers; he clearly forged a deep affection for them. But he was chased out of town shortly thereafter, and was worried that they would crumble under persecution. Part of the reason for his concern was likely due to the fact that he had only had a brief amount of time to teach and lead them. Paul had cast a vision for the Thessalonians, to focus their lives around living to be found faithful when Christ returned. Would that vision stick? Paul wondered.

Paul’s hope is that a primary reward he will have at Jesus’ appearing, is for his children to be faithful when Jesus returns. This illustrates the perspective on life Paul had chosen: “For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain” (1 Thessalonians 3:5).

There is a reward in enduring faithfully until Jesus returns. Paul did not merely risk life and limb to only convert people to faith in Jesus; his goal was to see that they matured and endured through suffering, and looked eagerly to Jesus’s return.

Biblical Text

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy,

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