An Overview Of The Book Of 1 Thessalonians

The City Of Thessalonica:

Thessalonica exists today as the city of Thessaloniki. Originally the name of the city was Therma, or Therme. This Greek name meant "Hot Bath" or "Hot Springs". The city was so named because of the hot salt-springs located about four miles from the site of the present Thessaloniki. The city's name was changed by Cassander. He was the king of Macedonia and one of the successors of Alexander the Great. He rebuilt and repopulated the city in 315 B.C. and renamed it Thessalonica after his wife Thessalonike, a sister of Alexander the Great.

The city became the great naval station of the Macedonians. It was surrendered to the Romans after the battle of Pydna in 168 B.C. The Romans made it the capital of the second of the four districts of Macedonia. When the four districts were made into one province under the jurisdiction of a proconsul, it became the residence of the proconsul. In the first Roman civil war in 49 B.C. the city became the headquarters of Pompey and the Roman senate. The city aligned itself with Octavius, who became Caesar Augustus, against Sextus Pompeius from 42 to 39 B.C. The city was rewarded by being declared a free city. At the time of Paul in the first century Thessalonica was the capital of the whole region between the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. The magistrates, or city rulers, were called by Luke in Acts 17:8 politrarchs. Luke's use of the title politrarchs is evidence of his minute accuracy, for on the arch of the Vardar Gate is found this very designation for the seven city magistrates.

Thessalonica was on the main Roman highway known as the Egnatian Way, or Via Egnatia. It connected Rome in the west to its imperial territories to the east and north of the Aegean Sea. The Romans constructed the Egnatian Way for the military purpose of moving their legions quickly from one part of their empire to another. The highway passed through Thessalonica. Huge arched gates towered over the road on the west and east ends of the city. The city's location in the heart of the empire made Thessalonica the chief Roman military station that commanded this strategic point of the highway.

The military value of Thessalonica to the Romans was further enhanced by the city's location at the northeast corner of the Thermaic Gulf. Possessing a fine harbor, the city became a strategic Roman naval station. From this naval station, as well as from those in Corinth in southern Greece and Ephesus on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea, the Roman navy was able to control the Aegean Sea, which was an all-important travel and trade route between east and west.

Possessing its excellent harbor and being located on the Egnatian Way, Thessalonica shared the traffic of trade from the east to the west with Corinth. The city was a major sea trade port of the Roman Empire and a commercial center of great importance. Rather than risk the dangers of sailing through the storms and rough seas around the southern coast of Greece, most cargoes being shipped by boat from east to west were brought either to Corinth in southern Greece or to Thessalonica to the north. At Corinth the smaller vessels with their cargoes were rolled overland across the isthmus and relaunched to continue their journey across the Adriatic Sea to Italy and Rome. The cargoes of the larger ships were unloaded, transported overland across the isthmus, and reloaded onto waiting ships that carried them across the Adriatic Sea to Italy. The cargoes that were shipped to Thessalonica were unloaded at the docks, put into wagons, and transported to Rome over the Egnatian Way.

Being the capital city of the area and a major military station and commercial center, Thessalonica was host or home to many different people from all regions of the Roman Empire--Roman officials, sailors, shippers and merchants, travelers and visitors, Gentiles in great numbers as well as Jews. Thessalonica was the type of city Paul sought to conduct a prolonged ministry of preaching the gospel.

The Church Of Thessalonica:

The Spirit led Paul to establish the church in Thessalonica in late A.D. 50 to early A.D 51. This date is based on an incident that occurred during Paul's ministry in Corinth, where Paul worked for more than a year and a half after leaving Thessalonica. While in Corinth Paul was persecuted by the Jews. They brought him before Gallio, the Roman Proconsul of Achaia, which was the southern province of Greece. Corinth was the capital of Achaia and the residence of the proconsul. Gallio served as the Roman proconsul in A.D. 51-52. This establishes the date of Paul's ministry in Corinth and in Thessalonica where Paul worked for a short time before going to Corinth.

Paul established the church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey, which has been dated as A.D. 50 to late March 53. Acts 16:6-10 informs us the Spirit had expressly forbidden Paul on his second missionary journey to preach the Word in the northern Roman provinces of Asia Minor and Bithynia in what is now the country of Turkey. Rather, the Spirit led Paul to Troas, the ancient city of Troy, on the west coast of Asia Minor across the Aegean Sea from Macedonia, which is in northern Greece. There in Troas the Lord gave Paul a vision of a man beckoning him to come to Macedonia. Understanding that the Lord wanted him and his co-workers to preach the gospel there, Paul together with Silas, Timothy, and Luke sailed west to Macedonia and set their feet for the first time on European soil at the port city of Neapolis. From there they traveled by foot to the strategic city of Philippi. After leaving Philippi, Paul traveled over the Egnatian Way through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica, a distance of about one hundred miles (see Acts 17:1).

After arriving in Thessalonica with Silas, Paul, as was his custom in Galatia, went first to the Jewish synagogue to begin his mission work. He taught and reasoned with the Jews from the Old Testament Scriptures on three consecutive Sabbath days. From the Scriptures Paul explained that the promised Messiah (Christ) had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Paul told those in the synagogue that the promised Messiah was Jesus. The Spirit blessed Paul and Silas' teaching of the gospel. After those three weeks some of the Jews were persuaded to believe Jesus was the Christ, as well as a great multitude of Greek converts to Judaism (proselytes) and a number of the leading women of social prominence in the city of Thessalonica. Thus, in the short span of those three weeks a sufficiently large congregation of believers was gathered and established. The church consisted of a few Jews and mostly Gentiles.

As in the city of Philippi, however, persecution quickly arose in Thessalonica. The great majority of the Jews became quite jealous of the gospel and of Paul's success. Those Jews went to the marketplace in Thessalonica, where they enlisted idle, evil men, who were looking for trouble. Having enlisted their aid, the Jews quickly gathered a mob that started rioting. They ignited the city into an uproar (see Acts 17:5). They seized a Christian man named Jason and some additional believers of the church that met at Jason's house. They dragged these Christians before the ruling magistrates of the city, whom Luke called politrarchs. With Thessalonica being the Roman capital of the province and the residence of the Roman proconsul, as well as a Roman military station, the Jewish led mob charged that the Christians were acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar by saying there was another king named Jesus (see Acts 17:7). It seems that news of Jewish and civil persecutions of Paul and his co-workers in the eastern cities of Galatia had reached the ears of the Jews and people of Thessalonica, for the Jewish led mob made the accusation that the men who had upset the world in other places had come there to Thessalonica (see Acts 17:6). Since the mob accused Jason and the other Christians of acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, it is also plausible that the Jews and people of Thessalonica had heard of the charges leveled against Paul and Silas in the Roman colony of Philippi, which was a mere one hundred miles away on the Egnatian Way. In Philippi Paul and Silas were charged with throwing the city into confusion and advocating customs that were unlawful for Roman citizens to accept and practice (see Acts 16:20, 21).

The Christians in the church of Thessalonica immediately sent Paul and Silas that night to Berea. There the Spirit again blessed their preaching and teaching. Many Jews were brought to faith, as well as a number of prominent Greek women and men. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard of Paul's success in Berea, they traveled to Berea and instigated a persecution of the Christians there (see Acts 17:10-14).

The Writer Of The First Letter To The Thessalonians:

Paul is the author of 1 Thessalonians. Paul, Silvanus (the Roman name of Silas), and Timothy are all named in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. Silas and Timothy did not author the letter, however. Silas and Timothy are mentioned because the Christians in Thessalonica knew these co-workers of Paul personally, as they knew Paul himself. Silas had assisted Paul in establishing the church in Thessalonica. Timothy had gone to Thessalonica as Paul's agent to encourage the Thessalonian Christians (see 1 Thessalonians 3:1,2). The personal pronouns "we", "us", and "our" in the letter indicate that Silas and Timothy were in perfect agreement with what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. First Thessalonians 2:18, as well as 3:5 and 4:27, clearly show that Paul himself was the actual writer of the letter. In these verses Paul referred to himself with the personal pronoun "I".

For more information about Paul and his ministry, see An Overview Of The Book Of Acts at the beginning of the Book of Acts.

The Recipients Of The First Letter To The Thessalonians:

"To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ," (1 Thessalonians 1:1).

Date Of The First Letter To The Thessalonians:

The letter was written late in the fall of A.D. 51.

The Occasion For The Writing Of The First Letter To The Thessalonians:

When Paul left Thessalonica, he traveled first to Berea, then to Athens, and from there to Corinth, where he remained for more than one and a half years. In Corinth the church in Thessalonica remained on Paul's mind and in his prayers. The persecution that had begun there during his short visit persisted and was intense. Paul was concerned about the Christians of Thessalonica standing firm in the gospel of Christ under the persecution they were suffering. According to 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 18, having been separated from the Thessalonians but a short time, Paul strongly desired to return there a number of times. Satan, however, in some manner had prevented him from doing so. Unable to go to Thessalonica himself, Paul sent Timothy to strengthen and to encourage the Thessalonians. When Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth, Timothy brought Paul an exhilarating report of the Thessalonians' faith, love, and hope (see 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3). Relief and joy prompted Paul to write his first letter to the Thessalonians. He wrote to tell them how thankful he was for their remaining faithful to the gospel and to further encourage them in their faith. Being relatively new Christians, he also wrote to supply what was lacking in their faith (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

The Place Where The Second Letter To The Thessalonians Was Written:

Corinth

Purpose Of The First Letter To The Thessalonians:

1. To express to the Thessalonians Paul's thankfulness to God for their faith, love, and hope (see 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3).

2. To strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith in the face of persecution (see 1 Thessalonians 3:2).

3. To complete what was lacking in the faith of the new Christians in Thessalonica (see 1 Thessalonians 3:10).

Theme:

Paul thanks God that the Thessalonians believed the Word of God that they heard, and he seeks to strengthen and complete what is lacking in their faith.

1 Thessalonians

Part 1: Greeting 1 Thessalonians 1:1

1 ¶ Paul and Silvanus[1] and Timothy;
¶ To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ:
¶ Grace to you and peace.

[1] Silvanus is the Roman name of Paul's co-worker Silas

Part 2: Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith
1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

¶ 2We are always giving thinks to God for all of you, while making mention *of you* in our prayers, constantly
3 remembering your work done by faith[2] and labor motivated by love[3] and perseverance stimulated by hope[4] in[5] our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,
4 knowing, brothers loved by God, your election,
5 because our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much certain confidence, just as you know what sort of *men* we became among you for your sake.
6 And as for you, you became imitators of us and of the Lord, by having received the word in much tribulation with the joy from[6] the Holy Spirit,
7 with the result that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.
9 For they themselves are reporting about us what sort of reception[7] we had with you, and how you turned to God from the idols to be serving the living and true God,
10 and are waiting for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus who saves us from the wrath that is coming.

Part 3: Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

2¶ For you yourselves know, brothers, that our stay with you[8] had not been without effect;
2 on the contrary, although we had previously suffered and had been spitefully mistreated in Philippi,[9] as you know, we had the courage in our God to speak the gospel of God to you amid severe opposition.[10]
3 For our persuasive instruction *comes* neither from error nor from impurity nor with deceit,
4 no, rather just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we are speaking, not as striving to please people but God who scrutinizes our hearts.
5 To be sure, not once did we come with a word of flattery, as you know, nor with an excuse for greed – God is witness,
6 nor seeking praise from people – not from you and not from others.
7 Although we are able to be asserting authority[11] as apostles of Christ, on the contrary we were gentle among you, as a mother[12] cherishes with tender love her own children,
8 in the same way having tender affections for you, we continued to be well pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but even our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.
9 Surely you remember, brothers, our work and hard and difficult labor, *that* while working night and day in order to not be a burden to anyone of you, we preached the gospel of God to you.
10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how holy and upright and blameless we were among you who believe,
11 just as you know how *we treated* each one of you as a father *treats* his own children,
12 urging and encouraging you and testifying to you to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

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[2] Lit. work of faith
[3] Lit. labor of love
[4] Lit. perseverance of hope
[5] Lit. of
[6] Lit. of
[7] Lit. entrance
[8] Lit. our entrance to you
[9] See Acts 16:19-24
[10] See Acts 17:1-9
[11] Lit. being able to be in weight, in other words in authority
[12] Lit. nurse, perhaps a nursing mother?

Part 4: Paul Reflects on Past Events 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

¶ 13 And for this reason also we are constantly giving thanks to God, for when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you received it not as the word of men but just as it actually is – the word of God, which indeed is at work in you who believe.
14 For indeed you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also suffered the same things at the hands of your own countrymen as they themselves *suffered* at the hands of the Jews,
15 who also killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and who persecuted us severely. They are not pleasing to God, and are hostile to all people,
16 *and* are trying to prevent us from speaking to the Gentiles in order that they may be saved, with the result that they always fill up the full measure of their sins. Moreover, wrath has come upon them fully.
¶ 17 But we, brothers, when we were separated from you[13] for a short time (in person not in mind[14]) with much longing we were especially eager to see you personally.[15]
18 Therefore we wished to come to you – to be sure, I, Paul, several times – but Satan hindered us.
19 For who is our hope or joy or crown in which we can boast in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not indeed you?
20 Yes, you are our glory and joy!

Part 5: Paul Is Encouraged by Timothy's Report 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

3 ¶ For this reason when we could stand it no longer, we considered *it* good to remain behind in Athens alone,
2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and to encourage you concerning your faith
3 so that no one is troubled by these tribulations. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.
4 For indeed when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are destined to being oppressed, just as it has also happened as[16] you know.
5 For this reason when even I could no longer stand it, I sent *another messenger* so that I might come to know about your faith, lest in some way the tempter tempted you and our labor turned out to be for nothing.[17]
¶ 6 But just now Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us good news about your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us,[18] longing to see us just as we also *long to see* you.
7 For this reason, brothers, at the time of all our distress and tribulation we were comforted over you because of your faith,
8 so that now we begin living *again*! if indeed you keep standing firm in the Lord.
9 For what thanksgiving can we give to God for you in return for[19] all the joy with which we are rejoicing in the presence of our God because of you,
10 while praying night and day as earnestly as possible to see you personally[20] and to make complete what is lacking in your faith?[21]
¶ 11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you;
12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all *people*, just as we also *abound in love* for you,

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[13] Lit. were orphaned from you
[14] Lit. in heart
[15] Lit. to see your face
[16] Lit. and
[17] Lit. came to be for something empty, or, in vain
[18] Lit. and that you always have good remembrance of us
[19] Lit. to repay, to return
[20] Lit. to see your face
[21] Lit. the deficiencies of your faith

13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness in the presence of our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.[22][23]

Part 6: Paul's Exhortations to Make the Thessalonians' Faith Complete 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:22

A. Abound Even More in a God-Pleasing Life Thessalonians 4:1-12

4 ¶ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that just as you favorably received from us how it is necessary for you to conduct yourselves[24] and to be pleasing to God, as you indeed are conducting yourselves, that you continue to abound *in doing so* more and more.
2 For you know what instructions we gave you by reminding you of[25] the Lord Jesus.
3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification – that you continue to abstain from illicit sexual intercourse,
4 *and* each one of you know to acquire his own vessel[26] in holiness and honor,
5 not in passionate lust[27] just as the pagans indeed *do*, who do not know God;
6 that *each one of you* do not transgress and cheat his brother in this[28] matter, because the Lord is an avenger with regard to all of these things, just as we also told you beforehand and solemnly testified.
7 For God did not call us for impurity but in sanctification.
8 For that very reason the one who rejects *this* does not reject man but the God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
¶ 9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need *for us* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;
10 for you also practice this toward all the brothers in all Macedonia. And we encourage you, brothers, to abound *in doing so* more and more,
11 and continue to have as your ambition to be leading a quiet life and minding your own business and working with your own hands, just as we commanded you,
12 so that you are conducting yourselves properly toward those outside *of the church* and do not need anything.

B. Do Not Grieve Over Believers Who Died; Comfort One Another in Their Resurrection 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¶ 13 Now we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who fall sleep, in order that you may not grieve just as the rest who have no hope.
14 For if we believe that Jesus died and arose, in the same way also God will through the agency of this[29] Jesus bring with him those who fall asleep.
15 For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are living, who remain up to the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who fall asleep.
16 For the Lord himself in connection with a shouted command, with a voice of an archangel and with a trumpet call of God, will come down from heaven, and so the dead in Christ will arise first,
17 afterwards we who are living, who are remaining, at that time will be carried off with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and in this manner we will always be with the Lord.
18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

C. The Lord's Judgment Comes Suddenly, So Be Self-Controlled 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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[22] Or, holy ones
[23] Some early manuscripts add the word "Amen."
[24] Lit. to walk
[25] Lit. by means of
[26] Vessel was a term for the human body; here it refers to a man's wife
[27] Lit. passion of lust
[28] .Lit. the
[29] Lit. the

5 ¶ Now concerning the times and the periods of time, brothers, you have no need *for us* to write you,
2 for you yourselves know very well[30] that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night.
3 When people[31] say, "Peace and safety," then sudden destruction comes upon them, just as birth pains on a pregnant woman, and they shall absolutely not escape.
4 But you, brothers, you are not in darkness so that that day should overtake you like a thief.
5 For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are neither of *the* night nor of *the* darkness.
6.So consequently let us not sleep like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled.
7 For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.
8 But because we are of the day, let us be self-controlled, having put on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet, the hope of salvation;
9 for God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,
10 who died in our behalf so whether we are awake or sleeping, we will live together with him.
11 For this reason keep encouraging one another and building up one another, just as you are also doing.

D. Promote a Healthy Congregational Life 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

¶ 12 Now we ask you, brothers, to know those who are working hard among you and presiding over you in the Lord and admonishing you,
13 and continue to respect them most highly in love because of their work. Always live in peace with one another.
14 And we urge you, brothers, keep admonishing the disorderly, [32] encouraging the cowardly, caring for the weak, being patient with everyone.
15 See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, rather always strive for what is good[33] for one another and for everyone else.[34]
16 Always rejoice,
17 pray continually,
18 keep giving thanks in everything, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
19 Keep from stifling the Spirit.
20 Resist rejecting prophetic utterances with contempt.
21 Always scrutinize everything; keep holding on to what is morally good.[35]
22 Always abstain from every kind of evil.

Part 7: Paul's Conclusion 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

¶ 23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely in every respect, and may your entire spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
24 The one who calls you is faithful, who will also do *this*.
¶ 25 Brothers, keep praying for us.
¶ 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.
27 I solemnly plead with you by the Lord to have this[36] letter read to all the brothers.
¶ 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.[37]

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[30] Lit. accurately, or exactly
[31] Lit. they
[32] 2 Thess.3:6-13 clarifies the disorderliness was idleness and laziness
[33] Lit. for the good thing
[34] Lit. for all
[35] Lit. hold on to the morally good
[36] Lit. the
[37] The word "all" is added because the preceding pronoun "you" is plural in the Greek.