

## *I Thessalonians*

### *Background*



**Constable** > Thessalonica was originally an ancient town named Thermai, meaning "Hot Springs." The town gave its name to the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean Sea, on the shore of which it stood. In time it became an important city because of its strategic location. Cassander, the Macedonian king, founded the more modern city in 315 B.C., and named it for his wife, who was a half-sister of Alexander the Great. Today, Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece.





**Vincent** > Thessalonica was situated on the Thermaic Gulf, a fine harbor, affording anchorage for large ships directly in front of the city. The situation commanded the trade of the Macedonian waters ... It was the chief station on the Via Egnatia, the great Roman road which ran from Dyrrhachium through Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace to Byzantium.



**Vincent** > In Paul's day it was a free city, the capital of the whole province and the most populous of its towns. Its extensive trade with all parts of the world accounts in part for the rapid spread of the news of the success of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

**Utley** > Thessalonica, with a population of about 200,000, was truly a cosmopolitan city. It was a resort and health center because of the hot springs. It was a commercial center because of its seaport, fertile plains and the proximity of the Ignatian Way.

**MacArthur** > The city was wise (or fortunate) enough to back Antony and Octavian in their successful campaign against Brutus and Cassius. As a reward, it was made a free city in 42 B.C. As such, although it was the seat of the Roman governor, the city was not occupied by Roman troops. It remained largely a Greek city, unlike Philippi, which was heavily influenced by Roman laws and customs. As a free city, Thessalonica also enjoyed freedom from certain taxes. But most important, the city was granted a large measure of self-government; its people chose their own magistrates, known as politarchs ("city authorities"; Acts 17:6). Though skeptics once questioned Luke's use of that term, numerous inscriptions have verified its accuracy.



This inscription, dated to the second century A.D., lists six Politarchs ("Rulers of the Citizens") among other officials.

**Vincent** > According to the narrative in Acts, he secured some converts from among the Jews, but more from the pious Greeks or Proselytes, and many prominent women.

**Acts 17:1-4** > <sup>1</sup>Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>And according to Paul's custom, he visited them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, explaining and **giving evidence** that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." <sup>4</sup>And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a significant number of the leading women.

**Wiersbe** > *Reasoned* > means “to discourse using questions and answers.” Perhaps “dialogue” would be a good synonym.

**Wiersbe** > *Giving evidence* > literally means “to lay beside.” Paul put the Scriptures before them in an orderly manner, showing them how they harmonized.

**Three Sabbaths** > (Constable) They had just been released from prison in Philippi, and had made their way southward to Thessalonica. For at least three Sabbath days, Paul reasoned in the synagogue with those present, and many believed the gospel (Acts 17:2, 4). However, he probably ministered elsewhere in Thessalonica for a longer time than just three weeks, in view of what he wrote that he had done there and what had happened since he left (cf. Acts 17:4; **1 Thess. 1:8**; 2:9; **2 Thess. 3:8**; **Phil. 4:15-16**).

**1 Thess. 1:8** <sup>8</sup> *For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place the news of your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to say anything.*

**2 Thess. 3:8** <sup>8</sup> *nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you;*

**Phil. 4:15-16** <sup>15</sup> *You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone; <sup>16</sup>for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account.*

**Constable** > When the unbelieving Jews heard of the conversion of the proselytes, whom the missionaries were discipling, they stirred up a gang of roughnecks, who attacked the house of Jason (**Acts 17:5**). Paul and his friends had been staying with him. Unable to find the missionaries, the mob dragged Jason before the magistrates, who commanded him to keep the peace (**Acts 17:6-9**).

**Acts 17:5-9** <sup>5</sup> *But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and they attacked the house of Jason and were seeking to bring them out to the people. <sup>6</sup>When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; <sup>7</sup>and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” <sup>8</sup>They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. <sup>9</sup>And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.*

**Constable** > Paul and his party began their evangelistic work in Berea in the synagogue, as was their custom. However, when many Jews there believed, the Thessalonian Jews came down to Berea—and stirred up more trouble (**Acts 17:10-13**)! At this point the Berean Christians sent Paul away to Athens, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea (**Acts 17:14**).

**Acts 17:10-14** > <sup>10</sup> *The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.* <sup>11</sup> *Now these people were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.* <sup>12</sup> *Therefore, many of them believed, along with a significant number of prominent Greek women and men.* <sup>13</sup> *But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.* <sup>14</sup> *Then immediately the brothers sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.* <sup>15</sup> *Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.*

**Constable** > Then, having been sent for by Paul, Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Athens, but he soon sent Silas back to Philippi and or Berea (Timothy was still in Thessalonica) (1 Thess. 3:1-2; **Acts 17:14** ... see the passage above). Later, both men returned to Paul while he was practicing his trade in Corinth (**Acts 18:3, 5**; **1 Thess. 3:6**), with a gift from the Christians in those Macedonian towns (2 Cor. 11:8-9; cf. Phil. 4:15-16). It seems clear that Paul wrote this epistle shortly after he arrived in Corinth (1:7-9; 2:17; 3:1, 6; Acts 18:5, 11), about A.D. 51.

**Acts 18:5** > <sup>5</sup> *But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*

**1 Thess. 3:6** > <sup>6</sup> *But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,*

### Chapter 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup>**Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy**, to the **church** of the Thessalonians **in** God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace to you and peace.**

**A B Simpson** > The one theme that runs throughout the two letters like a sort of golden thread and appears in every chapter in connection with some important and practical doctrine, is the blessed hope of the Lord's coming.

**Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy** > Look at this trio! We could spend multiple pages discussing the history of each individual. Each was tested multiple times and came out approved.

### MacArthur

- Silas, probably a Hellenistic Jew, was a prominent member of the Jerusalem church who first accompanied Paul on the apostle's second missionary journey (Acts 15:40) and later was a scribe for Peter (cf. 1 Peter 5:12).
- Timothy was a native of Lystra (Acts 16:1–3), a city in Asia Minor. He was Paul's son in the faith (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:22; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2:1) and protégé. He toured with Paul on the second and third missionary journeys and remained near the apostle during Paul's first incarceration in Rome (cf. Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philem. 1). Later Timothy served the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) and was himself imprisoned (Heb. 13:23). At the end of Paul's life, when Timothy was in Ephesus, he wrote the two inspired letters to him.

**Church** > (Helps Word Studies) *ekklesia* > *ek*, "out from and to" and *kaléō*, "to call" > to call out

**Precept Austin** > *ekklesia* was the familiar, nonreligious Greek political term for an assembly of citizens "called out" from their homes to assemble and transact public business (used this way by Luke in **Acts 19:39**) <sup>39</sup> *But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly*

**In** > (MacArthur) Significantly, in this profound statement in verse 1, Paul used the preposition *in* just once. Modifying the phrase God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ with a single preposition emphasizes the equality of essence between Father and Son.

**Grace to you and peace** > (Precept Austin) The common greeting among the Greeks was *chairein* ("rejoice, greetings") while the Hebrew greeting was *shalom* ("peace, prosperity, wellbeing"). Christianity took these everyday words of greeting and transformed them into vehicles able to convey the distinctive truths of the gospel.

<sup>2</sup> *We always **give thanks to God** for all of you, **making mention of you** in our prayers;*

**Walvoord** > Verses 2-10 are one long sentence in Greek, with "give thanks" as the main verb.

**Give thanks** > (Precept Austin) from *eú* = well, + *charízomai* = to grant, give) means to show oneself grateful, be thankful or give thanks. (\* end of lesson)

**Precept Austin** > Later in this letter Paul calls his readers and us to <sup>16</sup>*Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Th 5:16-18)*

Remember who Paul is talking to and their present situation. Remember also what Paul had personally experienced just prior to his coming to Thessaloniki. These are not throw-away words ... glib phrases ... both the writer and the recipient personally knew what persecution was all about.

**To God** > (Precept Austin) to "the" (the definite article here indicates specificity) God, the one true God already identified in the salutation,

**Making mention of you** > (Uteley) This is (Greek grammar) indicating a purposeful decision by Paul to continue to pray.

<sup>3</sup> *constantly* keeping in mind your *work of faith* and *labor of love* and *perseverance of hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

**Constantly** > (Precept Austin) from *a* = negative + *dialeipô* = *leave off, cease, leave an interval whether of space or time*) means uninterruptedly, without omission, without ceasing and was a word used to describe that which was done continuously.

**Work of faith ... labor of love ... perseverance of hope** > (Heibert) Here, for the first time, chronologically, in Paul's writings we have this famous triad: faith, love, hope. But Paul's stress is not on these virtues alone, but rather upon what they produce.

**Uteley** > Each of these three phrases is in a grammatical construction that asserts that the *work is produced by faith*, the *labor is produced by love*, and the *steadfastness is produced by hope*. The focus is on active, faithful believers.

**MacArthur** > This trio of Christian virtues was a favorite of Paul's (cf. **1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 5:8**).

**1 Cor. 13:13** > <sup>13</sup> *But now faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

**Col. 1:4-5** > <sup>4</sup> *since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope reserved for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel*

**1 Thess. 5:8** > <sup>8</sup> *But since we are of the day, let's be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.*

**Precept Austin**

**I Thessalonians 1:3**

Work of faith  
Labor of love  
Perseverance of hope

**I Thessalonians 1:9-10**

They turned to God from idols  
To serve a living and true God  
To wait for His Son from heaven

**Precept Austin** > It has well been said that **faith** is not believing in spite of evidence—that’s superstition—but obeying in spite of circumstances and consequences. (See the Faith Chapter > Hebrews 11!)

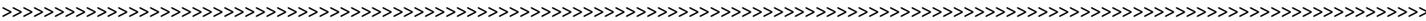
**Ephesians 2:8-10** (Look at the relationship of *faith* and *works* > <sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

**Calvin** > Faith alone saves, but faith that saves is not alone

**Labor** > (Helps Word Studies) properly, a strike (blow) that is so hard, it seriously weakens or debilitates; (figuratively) *deep fatigue, extreme weariness (wearisome toil)*.

**Stedman** > The first sign of love at work is a changed attitude. Instead of wearisome complaining about their afflictions, the Thessalonians found "joy given by the Holy Spirit" (verse 6 ... next week)

**Wuest Translation** > *remembering unceasingly your work produced and characterized by the faith which is yours, and your toil motivated and characterized by your divine and self-sacrificial love, and your patient endurance under trials which finds its source in your hope which rests in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God, even the Father*



- \* Two additional comments on “*give thanks*” in verse 2 ... both from Vincent
  1. According to Paul's habit, a thanksgiving follows the salutation ... The thanksgiving is omitted only in Galatians.
  2. The Greek word translated as *give thanks* is *eucharisteó* from which we get *eucharist*. Vincent comments > As a designation of the Lord's Supper (Eucharist) it is not found in the N.T. Perhaps the earliest instance of its use in that sense is in Ignatius. (Born in 1491)