

The Thessalonian Epistles

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Thessalonian
Epistles**

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Lesson 1.

Founding of the Church

Acts 17:1-15

Introduction

1. These events were a part of Paul's second evangelistic tour.
2. After founding the church in Philippi, Paul and Silas were asked by city authorities to leave in order to avoid further unrest in the city. It was approximately 100 miles to Thessalonica.
3. What might explain his decision to preach in Thessalonica after passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia?

A. FOUNDING THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA (Acts 17:1-9)

1. Name the men who came to Thessalonica.
2. How many Sabbaths did Paul preach in the synagogue? Is there anything to indicate that he did not stay longer in Thessalonica?*
3. What words in verse 2 describe his teaching?
4. What did he attempt to prove from the scriptures (vs. 3a)?
5. What conclusion did he draw (vs. 3b)?
6. What three classes of people believed and how many of each? a.
b.
c.
7. Who stirred up the mob against Paul?
8. Why did they attack the house of Jason?
9. What did they accuse Paul and his companions of doing (vs. 6)
10. How were they accused of acting against Caesar?

11. What did the rulers require of Jason? What would this mean? (This will explain some things in I Thessalonians.)
12. Where did the brethren send Paul and Silas?
13. Who would this leave to strengthen the church in Thessalonica?

B. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

1. How did the Jews in Berea show their mobility?
2. What three groups believed and how many of each? a.
b.
c.
Compare this with Thessalonica
3. Who stirred up trouble in Berea?
4. Where was Paul sent?
5. Who remained in Berea?
6. What instructions did Paul send back to them?
7. Assuming that Timothy did join him in Athens, where did Paul apparently send him (see I Thessalonians 3:1-2)?
8. Who did this leave with Paul in Athens? (I Thess. 3:1-2)?
9. Where did Timothy and Silas finally join Paul? (Acts 18:1-5)
10. Where did they come from? What cities were in that province?

Conclusions:

1. Timothy's report of the situation in Thessalonica apparently prompted this first letter to the church in Thessalonica.
2. The letter was written from Corinth.
3. Paul was apparently in Corinth in 51 and 52 A.D. This letter was written in one of those years.

*In considering the length of Paul's stay in Thessalonica, one should consider the possible implications of Philippians 4:15-16 and II Thessalonians 3:7-9.

Lesson 2.

Progress of the Church

I Thessalonians 1

Introduction

1. How many weeks was Paul allowed to preach in the synagogue in Thessalonica?
2. Why did he have to leave Thessalonica?

A. GREETING (VS.1)

1. Who joined with Paul in writing this letter?
2. What connection had these men had with the church in Thessalonica?
3. How did Paul designate the church to which he wrote?
4. How would the greetings “grace” and “peace” be especially fitting to such a church as this?

B. PAUL’S CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH (vss. 2-5)

1. Were they included in Paul’s prayers specifically or only generally, as one might pray for “all of Thy people the world over?”
2. What had been the result of their
 - Faith?
 - Love?
 - Hope?
 - Compare these three fruits and show how they compare.
3. What did God do for them (vs. 4)
 - Through what did God do this? (See II Thess. 2:13)?
 - So how did God know that they were elected or chosen of God?
 - Was there anything they had to do to make certain they remained the “elect” or “chosen” of God? (II Peter 1:10)

4. With what three things did Paul and his companions preach the word of the gospel?
5. In what were these things seen besides their words?

C. SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE CHURCH (VSS. 6-12)

1. The Thessalonians had received the word
 - In
 - With
 - Whom were they following in this?
2. What were Macedonia and Achaia?
Locate these on a map. Name two cities in each:
 - Macedonia
 - Achaia
3. What two things had gone forth from Thessalonica into these places?
4. What had most of the Thessalonians formerly served?
5. Whom did they serve after the gospel came to them?
6. Did the fact that they were so recently converted hinder their teaching others?
7. For what were they waiting?
8. Do Christians need to fear the coming of the Lord? Why?
9. What subject is mentioned in the last verse or two of each chapter of I Thessalonians (within the last six of chapter 5)?
10. Why would this subject be so important for the Thessalonians?

Thought Questions:

1. What would we expect today of a church left by its teacher only a few weeks after its founding?
2. Do you think the sounding out of the word through all Macedonia and Achaia was accomplished by sending out “full-time preachers” into all those areas with church support?

Lesson 3. Paul's Defense I Thessalonians 2:1-16

Introduction

1. Christians in Thessalonica were being harassed by their former companions in the Jewish synagogues and the idolatrous temple fellowships. A favorite scheme of the persecutors was to try to discredit Paul who had brought them the gospel.
2. From Paul's letter it seems clear that he had been accused of the following:
 - Being deceived himself.
 - Using trickery and deception to snare his converts.
 - Being motivated by selfishness and greed.
 - Leaving his converts when persecution arose.These last three were characteristics of many philosophers who roamed the Graeco-Roman world of Paul's day.
3. Paul's defense is to remind the Thessalonian Christians of his "entering in unto them". This description of Paul's methods and motives is a model for all preachers and teachers.

A. PAUL'S "ENTERING IN"

1. Name at least three shameful things that happened to Paul in Philippi just before he came to Thessalonica?
2. What was gained by mentioning his Philippian experiences to the Thessalonians?
3. What three things does Paul deny were part of his exhortation to them (vs. 3)?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. Was Paul approved by a church to be entrusted with the gospel? Who approved him? Whom was he seeking to please?
5. What three things did Paul do among the Thessalonians (vss. 5-6)?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
6. What position did Paul occupy which could have given him an excuse for making demands on them?
7. Whom does Paul use as an example of the kind of gentleness he had shown?

8. What two things did Paul impart to them?
9. What proof did Paul give in verse 9 that he had not preached to them in order to get support?
10. Give three characteristics of Paul's behavior among them and define each?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
11. What three things did Paul do to move the Thessalonians spiritually?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
12. What "charge" or advice would you expect a father to give to his own children?
13. What was Paul trying to get the Thessalonians to do in reference to God (vs.12)?

B. THE THESSALONIAN'S RESPONSE

1. How did they receive the word that was preached? (This being true, did it matter whether Paul was a saint or a scoundrel, well or poor motivated?)
2. How would this reception of the gospel account for their faithfulness even when the preachers who brought the gospel had to leave prematurely?
3. How were churches in Judea designated?
4. How did the experience of the Thessalonian church parallel that of those churches?
5. What six accusations does Paul make against the Jews
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
6. What does he say was come upon them?

Lesson 4 & 5 Paul's Concern for the Church I Thess. 2:17-3:13

Introduction

1. Unbelievers in Thessalonica apparently tried to shake the faith of the new Christians by two methods:
 - a. Discrediting Paul (see lesson 4). They charged among other things, that he did not care for his converts, but abandoned them when persecution arose.
 - b. The persecution itself was urged as evidence that their new religion was false. Instead of making their lives better it had brought them great suffering.
2. The text studied in this lesson deals with these attacks.

A. PAUL'S DESIRE TO RETURN (I Thess. 2:17-20)

1. When Paul physically departed, what remained with the Thessalonians?
2. What did he desire to do shortly after his departure?
3. What are some ways that Satan possibly hindered his return?
 - Acts 17:9
 - Acts 17:13-14
4. Successful athletes often placed their crowns joyfully at the feet of their king if he were present. What crown did Paul hope to lay at the feet of his coming King?
5. What were the Thessalonian Christians to Paul (vs. 20)?

B. PAUL'S ALTERNATIVE TO RETURNING (I THESS. 3:1-5)

1. What was Paul's desire when he first arrived in Athens (see Acts 17:15)?
2. Assuming that Timothy joined him, what did Paul do (vss 3:1-2)?
3. What three purposes did Paul have for sending Timothy to Thessalonica? a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. What warning had Paul given the Thessalonians concerning persecution? Whose example had he followed in this (John 16:33, et al.)? What lesson is there for us as we try to make converts?

5. Does suffering for our faith prove anything about whether God is pleased with us or not?

C. TIMOTHY'S REPORT (I Thess. 3:6-10)

1. What good news did Timothy bring when he reported back to Paul?
2. What effect did this report have on Paul?
3. "This is living!" people sometimes say. What was necessary for Paul to feel that he was "really living"? What kinds of things make you feel that you are really living? Read Amos 6:3-6. Is it possible that many of us as Christians have a distorted view of "the good life"?
4. For what blessing did Paul feel inadequate to express his gratitude?
5. How often did Paul pray for the Thessalonians?
6. The faith of the Thessalonians was widely recognized, yet Paul desired to see them so as to perfect what was lacking. This tells us that even strong faith can be improved. What were some possible improvements that Paul could make?

D. PAUL'S PRAYER (I Thess. 3:11-13)

1. What did Paul wish God and the Lord Jesus to do?
2. In what did Paul wish them to increase and abound?
3. How did Paul want them to be found at the coming of the Lord?
4. Whom will the Lord bring with him?

Thought Question: Do you think Paul expected to recognize the Thessalonians at the coming of the Lord?

Lesson 6. Special Exhortations I Thessalonians 4:1-12

Introduction

1. Refer again to the introduction describing the immorality and idleness common in Greek society.
2. In the light of this, the instructions of this chapter are clearly needed.
3. When did this instruction begin (I Thess. 4:1-2)?

A. SANCTIFICATION

1. What is the meaning of sanctification? Who sanctifies (Leviticus 20:8)? Therefore, what must we do (Leviticus 20:7)?
2. Had God sanctified the Thessalonians (II Thess. 2:13)? Was there sanctification complete (I Thess. 5:23)? What were they to do to fulfill God's will for their sanctification?
 - Vs.3
 - Vs. 4
 - Vs. 6
3. List at least three other New Testament prohibitions of fornication.
4. Scholars differ on the identity of the "vessel" in verse 4. Give the meaning of verses 4-5 if the word refers to:
 - One's wife (see I Peter 3:7)
 - One's body.
 - Sexual appetites are given to us as servants; when they become masters they are out of place and service to such masters interferes with the service of God.
5. Does the fact that two adults "consent" mean that no one is hurt by immorality? Suppose the woman's husband, father or brother never knows or doesn't care, does this free the one who commits adultery with her from guilt? To whom must he give account? Does the world around us consider this fact?
6. What was the common attitude toward fornication in Thessalonica? What is the common attitude toward fornication in the U.S. today? To what has God called

us? What does this mean? If we have accepted His call, what conduct becomes reasonable and logical for us?

7. Was this teaching Paul's personal opinion as a "woman hater"? Who is rejected when this teaching is rejected?

B. BROTHERLY LOVE

1. What was common in relations among citizens of the Graeco-Roman world (Romans 1:29-31)?
2. Did the Thessalonians need to be instructed in brotherly love? Why? Why had their neighbors failed to learn this lesson (Romans 1:28)?
3. How far had the love of the Thessalonians already extended? What did Paul encourage them to do? What does II Corinthians 8:1-5 indicate regarding their love beyond Macedonia?

C. QUIET INDUSTRIOUSNESS

1. What three things are the Thessalonians encouraged to do? (vs. 11)
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. Was this a new instruction growing out of some report brought by Timothy?
3. What were two reasons for doing what Paul commanded them to do?
 - a.
 - b.
4. Is this teaching needed now?

Lesson 7. The Second Coming I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Introduction

1. In addition to the good things about the Thessalonians reported by Timothy, he must also have reported an excessive grief among them in the death of their brethren in Christ.
2. They apparently felt that those who died would miss out on some of the benefits which the living would enjoy at Christ's second coming. Paul's writing is to comfort them.

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE SECOND COMING (4:13-18)

1. What words does Paul use to refer to the dead? Whom did he follow in this? Does this mean that the dead are unconscious?
2. Did Paul forbid all sorrow? What did he forbid?

The stoics expressed grave doubts with respect to man's future state. Conditional survival was the best they could offer, but even this was temporary. At length the soul is swallowed up in the fiery substance, which is identical with deity. The Epicureans adopted a position, which amounted to this: "The punishments of Tartus are not to be feared, for the soul, being material, will share the fate of the body. As long as we are alive, death does not exist for us, and when death appears, we no longer exist." – William Hendriksen

3. On what fact does Paul base his teaching of future resurrection? How does this follow?
4. Will the living have any advantage over the dead at Christ's coming? Note: The word "prevent" in the King James Version has changed meaning since 1611.
5. What word in verse 16 proves that the coming of Jesus will be "personal"?
6. From verses 16 and 17 list events as they will occur:
7. According to I Corinthians 15:50-52, what will happen to the living Christians before they join the risen Saints?

8. Where will the saints meet the Lord?
9. According to the premillennial doctrine of the “rapture” those “caught up” to meet the Lord will remain for 7 years (some say 3 ½) and will then return to earth with Him for a thousand year reign on earth. Does that fit these verses?
10. Do these verses discuss the wicked dead? According to John 5:28-29, when will they be raised?

B. TIME OF THE SECOND COMING (5:1-3)

1. What did the Thessalonians already know about the time of His coming? How would they have known this?
2. What features of His coming are suggested in verse 3?

C. PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND COMING (5:4-11)

1. What two activities of the night make it possible for a thief to surprise his victims in the night?
2. Do Christians practice these things? As “children of the day”, what two things characterize us?
3. What is the Christian’s breastplate?
4. What is his helmet?
5. To what are we not appointed? To what are we appointed? Do these verse indicate that what we do will determine whether we receive that to which we are appointed? How could we fail to obtain it?
6. Is the sleeping of verse 10 the same as that of verse 6? Explain.

Lesson 8. Closing Admonitions & Benedictions I Thessalonians 5:12-28

A. DUTIES TO BRETHREN (5:12-15)

1. Who are referred to in verses 12 and 13 (cf. I Timothy 5:17)?
2. What three functions do they perform according to verse 12?
3. What two duties do brethren have toward these men?
4. On what basis are they to be honored?
5. What quality should be sought in all relations with brethren?
6. Define the three types of individuals referred to in verse 15 and state what is to be done for each.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
7. What is to be our attitude toward all?
8. Suggest some ways in which we may be tempted to repay evil for evil?
9. What must we do toward all men?

B. SELF-IMPROVEMENT (5:16-22)

1. What problem might the Thessalonians have in obeying verse 16?
2. What two exercises are suggested to help them to rejoice?
3. How does one “pray without ceasing”?
4. What fruit does the Spirit produce if we allowed full expression (see Galatians 5:22-23)? How could we quench the Spirit?
5. How could the Thessalonians despise prophesying? How could we be guilty of this?

6. What are verses 21 and 22 advising us to do? Do they mean that we should experiment with every kind of conduct?

C. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS (5:23-24)

1. How much of the Christian is to be sanctified?
2. Seek definitions for:
 - Spirit
 - Soul
 - Body
3. Upon whom must we depend for this sanctification and blamelessness?

D. CLOSING ADMONITIONS (5:25-27)

1. In what three ways does Paul demonstrate his faith in prayer in the text of this lesson (vss. 12-28)?
2. What kind of kiss was encouraged?

Note: The kiss was a customary greeting among ancient people just as it is today in many cultures. The scripture here does not command it, but regulates it. The need of such regulation is easy to see. Some writers of the early church state that men sat on one side and women on the other and the holy kiss was brethren with brethren and sisters with sisters.

3. To whom was the letter to be read?

Thought Question: At how many different services would this have to be done to accomplish this goal in this congregation? In what part of the service (opening or closing) would it have to be done?

Additional Question: Does this fit the Roman Catholic contention that the scriptures pertain mainly to the "clergy" and that the "laity" are not responsible for interpretation?

4. What did Paul wish to be with them?

NOTE: The notes at the end of the books in the King James Version are not inspired and are not to be considered authoritative in any way. The one on this book is obviously incorrect.

Lesson 9. Additional Encouragement

II Thessalonians 1

Introduction

1. The second epistle was evidently written very soon after the first. The same conditions prevailed in Thessalonica and these men who were together in the greeting of the first letter were still together in Corinth when the second was sent. Paul stayed only 1 ½ years in Corinth.
2. Each chapter in the first epistle closes with reference to the second coming. The Thessalonians apparently concluded from this and other sources that the event was near. This may have contributed to their increasing problem of idleness. Paul wrote to assure them that there were some other events to take place before the second coming and to rebuke their idleness.
3. Persecution was still raging in Thessalonica. Doubtless a second purpose was to give them further encouragement to be faithful.

A. THANSGIVING FOR THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH (vss. 1-4)

1. Who joined Paul in writing this second letter?
2. What two qualities of the Thessalonians had Paul been concerned about in his prayers for them according to I Thessalonians 3:10-12?
3. Had his prayers been answered? In what ways?
4. Among whom did Paul glory about the Thessalonians? What two things did he report about them?

B. STRENGTH IN PERSECUTION (vss. 5-10)

1. For what were the Thessalonians suffering?
2. What would God in righteous judgment render to:
 - Those who afflicted (troubled) the Thessalonians?
 - Those who were afflicted (troubled)?
3. When will these judgments and rewards be administered?

4. What three things are stated concerning the revelation of the Lord Jesus in vs. 7?
 - From
 - In
 - For
5. What facts about the second coming does verse 8 add to what was foretold in I Thessalonians 4?
6. Upon what two classes will the Lord render vengeance (retribution)?
7. How can one “obey the gospel”?
8. What three facts are revealed about the punishment of the last day?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
9. The same Greek word translated “destruction” here is used elsewhere. What does it mean in:
 - I Timothy 6:9
 - I Corinthians 5:5
 - Does it suggest annihilation in those verses?
10. In a positive way, what two things will be accomplished by His coming (vs. 10)?

C. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS (vs.. 11-12)

1. How often did Paul pray for the Thessalonians?
2. Was Paul's prayer that their persecution might end?
3. List five things Paul did pray for.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Lesson10.

Apostasy Predicted

II Thessalonians 2:1-12

A. MISCONCEPTIONS CORRECTED (vss. 1-3)

1. What did these misconceptions concern (vs. 1)?
2. What were two possible sources of the misconceptions (vs. 2)?
3. What did they seem to be expecting?
4. What two things were to happen before the “day of Christ”?

B. THE APOSTACE DESCRIBED (vss. 4-9)

1. Where would this “man of sin” sit?
2. What three actions was he to take in relation to God (vs. 4)?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. In what form was the iniquity when Paul wrote (vs. 7)?
4. Why was it (he) not revealed when Paul wrote?
5. How long was this wicked lawless one to continue to influence men?

NOTE: Whatever or whoever is referred to in these verses must be something or someone already existing in embryo in Paul’s day and continuing until the Lord’s second coming.

6. Who was to be the source of power for this one who was coming?
7. What kind of signs and wonders were to be performed?

C. THOSE TO BE DECEIVED (vss. 10-12)

1. Those who would be deceived would be:
 - those who:
 - who do not love:
 - who do not believe:
 - but have pleasure in:
2. God sends a strong delusion upon such people that they might be:
3. Who determines whether one will be among the deceived or not? How?
4. Does God intend for anyone to be saved by mere chance?
5. What are some ways in which God may send this “strong delusion”?

ASSIGNMENT:

- Look in as many commentaries as you have available to see some opinions regarding the identity of the “man of sin.”

- See how many comparisons can be made between this “man of sin” and Jesus Himself.

Lesson 11. God's Chosen II Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Introduction

1. In the previous lesson it was seen that God would send a strong delusion that a certain class of people might be condemned.
2. Lest the Thessalonians be further troubled, Paul wrote to assure them that they were not among that number who would be deceived.

A. IDENTIFYING THOSE CHOSEN (2:13-14)

1. I Corinthians 1:18 and 24 divide mankind into two groups. From those verses tell the characteristics of:

“Them that perish”

“Us who are being saved”

2. II Thessalonians 2:10-14 makes the same division. From these verses tell the characteristics of:

“them that perish”

- no love of:
- believed not:
- pleasure in:

“chosen for salvation”

- sanctified by:
- and believe in:
- called by:

3. Which of the things on the right above are God's part? Which ones are our part?
4. Verse 13 says God sanctifies by the _____. John 17 says by _____. Explain.
5. Romans 8:28 shows that those who are called are those who_____.
6. What were the Thessalonians called to obtain?

B. EXHORTATION AND PRAYER FOR THOSE CHOSEN (2:15-17)

1. On what ground does Paul base his admonition to "stand fast"?
2. From what two sources did the traditions come which they were to hold fast? Does this apply to us today? Explain.
3. What two things did Paul desire for the Thessalonians?
4. To whom did he look to accomplish these things?

C. MORE EMPHASIS ON PRAYER (3:1-5)

1. Paul wished the Thessalonians to pray for him. What were the first two things he desired for them to pray for him?
2. What did he ask for himself?
3. Who were the men in Corinth who were a threat to Paul (Acts 18:12-17)?
4. Into what did he pray that their hearts might be delivered?
 - a.
 - b.
5. In what must we endure?

Lesson 9. Warning Against Idleness II Thessalonians 3:6-17

Introduction

Idleness and gossip were common features of Greek and Roman society. The expectation of Christ's immediate coming may have been the influence which perpetuated this weakness among the Christians in Thessalonica. Apparently they are too excited to work, or felt that there was no need to work.

A. THE WARNING (vs.s. 6-15)

1. What two faults are stated in verse 11?

2. What is implied at the end of verse 12 about their source of food?

3. With what words is their conduct described in verse 6?

4. What example had Paul and his companions given them?

5. Did Paul have authority to do otherwise?

6. What two reasons are given for the policy adopted in Thessalonica?

7. What command had Paul given even when he was with them?

8. What two commands does Paul give in verse 12?

9. Whose authority does Paul claim?

10. Thought question: What is the "good" which brethren might be weary in doing?

11. What action does Paul require against those who will not heed his instruction in this epistle?

12. Who is to take action?

13. What is the purpose of the action?

14. Does this mean a complete "shunning" of the individual?

15. What is to be the purpose of any contact made?
16. Is this the same action called for in I Corinthians 5:14-13? Suggest any similarities or differences.

B. CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. What does Paul wish the Lord to provide for the Thessalonians?
2. Why would this be especially meaningful to the Thessalonians?
3. Why did Paul write the closing salutation in his own hand?
4. What is intimated in II Thessalonians 2:2 which would make this precaution important?
5. In the following epistles, what verses probably form this personally written postscript?
 - I Corinthians
 - Galatians
 - Philippians
 - Colossians
 - I Thessalonians

Lesson 13. Review with Emphasis on Prayer

A. PRAYER IN THE THESSALONIANS EPISTLES

1. How many times did Paul state that he prayed for the Thessalonians? Give references.

2. List the things Paul prayed for regarding the Thessalonians.

3. How many times did Paul admonish the readers to pray? Give references.

4. For what did he instruct them to pray.

B. COMPARE THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA WITH THIS CONGREGATION

1. Compare the circumstances in the community.
 - Dissimilarities:

 - Similarities:

2. Strong points of the church in Thessalonica
 - a. Which we share with them:

