

## 1 Thessalonians

Backstory of Thessalonians	Thessalonians is one of the first letters Paul wrote in the NT. The backstory for it comes from Acts 17. Paul and Silas went into the city to preach the Gospel. A lot of people responded to the Gospel, both Jew and Gentile, and formed the church. Big trouble happened after this, however. Paul's announcement that Jesus was the true Lord of the world brought an accusation within the city: Paul and Silas were guilty of treason against the Roman Empire because they proclaimed another king: Jesus. The persecution they faced became so intense that they had to flee the city. The church remained. And they were persecuted severely because of this.
Purpose for Writing	1 Thessalonians, then, is Paul's attempt to reconnect with the Church of Thessalonica after he got a report from Timothy that, in spite of the opposition and persecution, the church was flourishing. And Paul commends them for it in a way that's unique in the NT. He calls them a "model" and "example." In that sense, 1 Thessalonians is on the other end of Paul's pastoral spectrum. He rebukes the Galatians for "Judaizing" and persecuting others. But commends the Thessalonians for being models in the face of persecution.
Persecution and Hope in Thessalonians	One of the great features of Thessalonians is that the hope of the future return of Christ and persecution in the present leads to growth and spiritual maturity. In other words, God develops maturity by allowing us to go through persecution as we eagerly await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Paul's Miniature Versions of the Apocalypse	1-2 Thessalonians contain some parallels to Apocalyptic Literature in the Bible (Daniel; Revelation, etc.). In 1 Thessalonians, the Day of the Lord is a major theme. In 2 Thessalonians, the coming of the Man of Lawlessness is a major theme (i.e., Anti-Christ). Like Revelation and Daniel, the circumstances for including this material are (a) persecution and (b) the expectation of the coming of the Messiah to do something about it.
Theme	Christians who become motivated by the hope of the ultimate return of Jesus Christ while going through persecution model the character of Jesus. Consequently, they are models to others.
1 Thessalonians in a Word and Phrase	Return // "Christ's return provides water for the thirsty soul today, encouraging growth in maturity by providing hope in the midst of suffering and uncertainty (Chuck Swindoll)
Beautiful Construction	Paul designs the letter with two main movements: A Celebration of their Faithfulness (chs 1-3) and a Challenge to Grow (chs 4-5). These two main movements are surrounded by three prayers: (a) an opening one of thanksgiving (1:2-3); a transitional one for endurance (3:11-13), and a final prayer.
Key Verses	"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit" (5:16-19)

### Introductory Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:2-3)

<sup>2</sup> We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup> We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ

### First Main Movement: Celebration of Faithfulness (chs 1-3)

For their Modeling of the Gospel	<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers and sisters <sup>[b]</sup> loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup> And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup> The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, <sup>9</sup> for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1:4-10)
Paul makes a connection between their "severe suffering" and their "model." That is often the case. It's why not all persecution is a bad thing from God's perspective. It has a purpose: the Gospel goes forth from those mouthpieces that model the life of Jesus, who suffered.	
For the Way They Received the Gospel	<sup>13</sup> And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. <sup>14</sup> For you, brothers, and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews <sup>15</sup> who killed the Lord

	<i>Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone <sup>16</sup> in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last (2:13-16)</i>
Notice that Paul connects how they received the Word with what he thanked them for previously. The Thessalonian Church is the best church in the NT for a reason.	
<b>For Their Inspiration to Paul and Silas</b>	<sup>7</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>8</sup> For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. (3:7-8)

<b>Transitional Prayer of Endurance (3:11-13)</b>	
<i><sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. <sup>13</sup> May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (3:11-13)</i>	

<b>Second Main Movement: Continue in Faithfulness (chs 4-5)</b>	
<b>Be Holy</b>	<i><sup>3</sup> It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control your own body<sup>[a]</sup> in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God (4:3-5)</i>
<b>By Finding Comfort in God's Future Plans</b>	Paul now begins his apocalyptic imagery. But the context will help you understand it. The Thessalonians had people in their church die as martyrs from the persecution that was taking place. Paul's answer to it follows. <i><sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words. (4:13-18)</i>
<b>By Living Expecting that Day</b>	Paul continues the apocalyptic imagery. Be assured that day is coming (a day you should look forward to). So, live like it is going to happen at any moment. <i>Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brothers, and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober (5:1-6)</i>
<b>By Being Faithful Now</b>	<i><sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not treat prophecies with contempt<sup>21</sup> but test them all; hold on to what is good, <sup>22</sup> reject every kind of evil (5:16-22)</i>

<b>Concluding Prayer (5:23-24)</b>	
<i><sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.</i>	

*"And though these are times of great trials. Of famine, darkness, and sword. Still, we are your voice in the desert crying "prepare ye the way of the Lord. Behold he comes. Riding on the clouds. Shining like the sun. At the trumpet call. So, lift your voice. It's the year of Jubilee. For out of Zion's hill salvation comes." – Days of Elijah*