

Intro to I THESSALONIANS

The Church at Thessalonica: Shortly after Paul and Barnabas had their sharp disagreement and parted ways, Paul took Silas and sailed out on his second missionary journey. He went into the province of Macedonia, which is now modern day Greece. They went into Lystra, where he met Timothy, and began preaching at Philippi, where Paul had that famous encounter in the Philippian prison. From Philippi, they went on to Thessalonica. Acts 17: 1-9 recounts the journey to Thessalonica and the events that unfolded. The purpose for the writing of this first letter to the church is to calm their fears concerning the return of Christ in light of their loved ones who had passed on.

Chapter 1 / Intro and Thanksgiving

Paul begins his letter to the Thessalonians in much the same way he begins all of his letters—with a word of thanksgiving for the church and an underscoring of the gospel that was central to Paul's teaching. A gospel that came not only with words, but also with the power and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 / Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

He then gives a discourse in chapter two, recalling his first encounter with the church after his leaving Philippi. He recounts for them his love for them and his motive for sharing the gospel with them. "We were gentle among you," he writes, "as a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives, as well..." Paul ends the chapter with an expression of his desire to visit the church again.

Chapter 3 / Timothy's Report

Paul sent his young protégé, Timothy, to the church to strengthen and encourage them in the faith. After staying with them for awhile, Timothy returned and reported back to Paul that the church is standing firm in the faith. Paul closes the chapter with a prayer and an affirmation for the church, as well as a desire for God to make a way for Paul to return to them.

Chapter 4 / Practical Christian Living / The Second Coming of Christ

Chapter 4 is divided into two distinct sections. In the first division, Paul addresses several issues related to how the church should conduct themselves. His first word of instruction has to do with sexual immorality, and an exhortation for the church to control themselves in a way that is honorable and pleasing to the Lord. "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life," Paul writes. The second word of instruction has to do with loving others with a genuine and authentic brotherly love. The final word is a practical word for the believer to be personally responsible for his own actions and attitudes.

The latter part of the chapter is devoted to a teaching on the second coming of Christ. Apparently there were those who thought that they would live to see the return of Christ, and a fear that their loved ones who had passed away would miss out on the event. Referring to them as those who "are asleep," Paul calms their fears by assuring them that not only will they not miss out, they will be included in the event. What has now come to be a significant piece of our end times theology, Paul gives a detailed account of how the events of Christ's return will unfold. At the end of the discourse, he tells the church to "encourage each other with these words."

Chapter 5 / On Times and Dates / Final Words

Following up this teaching in chapter 4, Paul tells the church in chapter 5 to not get hung up on times and dates, and that the coming of the Lord will be like a "thief in the night." On a practical note, Paul encourages them to use the second coming as a motivation to live consecrated, self-controlled lives of faith and love, and to not become "asleep in the light." "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul closes the letter with some final thoughts, which include a practical word to "Be joyful always, pray continually, and to give thanks in all things.

Intro to II THESSALONIANS

Purpose for the second letter to the Thessalonians: In addition to his first letter to the church explaining the events of the second coming of Christ, Paul felt it necessary to follow it up with a second letter addressing the same events. Apparently some had come into the church and taught that the second coming had already taken place. Paul uses the opportunity not only to correct the doctrine, but to encourage the church once again.

Chapter 1 / An Encouragement in the Midst of Suffering

The church had undergone some persecution for their faith, and Paul commends them for their perseverance and their faith in the middle of their trials and persecutions. He also assures them that wrongdoers will receive the consequences for their evil deeds.

Chapter 2 / The Man of Lawlessness

Paul assures them that Christ has not returned and cautions them against being deceived by false reports. He then gives them a word of teaching that will be a “clue,” as to the time of the Lord’s return. “That day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.”

What follows is a description of a man and the events surrounding his rise and fall that are very similar to those described in Revelation 13 concerning “the beast of the sea.” First, let’s talk about how Paul describes the events surrounding his coming into power.

Paul tells that before this “man of lawlessness” is revealed, that there will be a “rebellion,” or a “falling away.” The Greek word used here is the word, “apostasia,” the word we get our word, “apostasy” from. Connecting the dots, Paul says that Christ will not return until the man of lawlessness shows up. The man of lawlessness does not come into the scene until there is a great apostasy, a clear falling away from God among the inhabitants of the earth.

As for the man, himself, Paul gives some clear and direct clues that connect him with the beast of Revelation 13. He is called the “son of destruction,” and will take his place in the very temple of God (vs. 4) and be worshiped and called “god” by the people. His coming and presence will be accompanied by many miracles and false wonders (vs. 9). He will be overthrown by the Lord Jesus, himself, and by the very breath of his mouth (vs. 8).

Paul closes out the chapter with an exhortation for the Thessalonians to stand firm and hold on to the teachings that Paul has passed on to them.

Chapter 3 / Warnings against Idleness

In his final words to the church, Paul exhorts them to stay busy and not give up being expeditious and industrious. In some cases, many who believe that the world is going to end give up and resign themselves to the fact that working just doesn’t matter. Paul adamantly refutes this notion and says, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

His final remarks are for them to instill the same message of personal responsibility to the other members of the church—not as enemies, but as brothers.