

The background of the slide is a photograph of a coastal town, likely Thessalonika, with a prominent white domed building (the White Tower) on the left. The town is built on a hillside overlooking a body of water, with mountains in the background. The sky is overcast and grey.

WEEK I

I THESSALONIANS BACKGROUND/THEME OVERVIEW

DAY 1 - MONDAY

Paul's Missional Background

Today's reading gives us background on Paul's Missionary journey in order for us to gain context for our study of the letter of 1 Thessalonians.

I Acts 15:40-41, 16:1-40

REFLECTION: In these passages, we see Paul's efforts being led by the Spirit. Can you see the ways the Spirit is leading you and putting people in your path for you to be able to share Jesus with them? How can you be an encouragement to those you come in contact with this week?

FAITHFUL ENCOURAGER

Acts 16 gives us some insight into the time frame when Paul visited Thessalonica during His second missionary journey. This journey took him through many cities, and he encountered much persecution and many trials. Throughout the trials, Paul continued to faithfully preach the gospel even though he was often run out of town or even put into prison at times. Paul's faithful efforts produced incredible results as the Spirit worked through him to plant churches and establish communities that would continue bringing the message to those across the region.

During this period, Paul traveled all over the region and recruited other followers such as Silas to go with him on this journey. The Holy Spirit led these men to go where the kingdom could be advanced. On this journey, they visited cities such as Derbe, Lystra, and Philippi and had many personal encounters with people along the way, sharing about Jesus and changing their lives forever.

Today's reading leads up to the part of the journey when Paul and Silas first traveled to Thessalonica. Paul was a passionate, encouraging teacher and leader who truly loved those in the churches he established and wanted to continue to be an encouragement to them even after he could no longer physically be present with them. We see his heart come out in these letters written to the churches.

DAY 2 - TUESDAY

Thessalonica Background/Context

Today's reading from the book of Acts gives us the background story of Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians and how this church was first established.

I Acts 17:1-9

REFLECTION: Why is the history of Thessalonians important towards getting a deeper understanding of who God is and what He is calling us to through our study of this letter?

"The epistles to the Thessalonians are all too little studied today, It may be true that they lack the theological profundity of Romans and the exciting controversy of Galatians; but nevertheless their place in Scripture is an important one. No other writing of the great apostle (Paul) provides a greater insight into his missionary methods and message." - Leon Morris 1 and 2 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians is an epistle rarely used for daily study and reflective bible reading, but as stated above, it is a powerfully important book of the bible. 1 Thessalonians is a book of encouragement from three mission giants (Paul, Silas, and Timothy). It is a book of correction, a book of eschatology (the study of the end times), and, most notably, a book that reminds us what it looks like to faithfully follow Jesus in our daily lives as we wait for His glorious return. Our reading of 1 Thessalonians becomes more impactful when we understand Thessalonica's background and history to see what the new Christians of this city were living through.

In the first century, Thessalonica was the capital of and largest city in Macedonia. It was a significant province of power and trade for the Roman empire. Thessalonica was founded by Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's army officers, and named after Alexander's half-sister. This prominent city held a strategic position for the Roman empire. Thessalonica had a natural harbor that the Roman military took advantage of and because of this it had a large trade economy. This led to Thessalonica becoming a free city in 42 B.C. Being a free city came with the privilege of being led by politarchs (five to six men who ruled as the city officials for Thessalonica).

Like many cities and provinces in this day, Thessalonica had many diverse religions, including the worship of Caesar, who was viewed as divine. There was also a heavy Jewish population with a prominent synagogue. Paul, Silas, and Timothy came to Thessalonica after being run out of Philippi (Acts 16:9-40). While in Thessalonica, the three stayed at the home of a man named Jason. For three weeks, Paul preached the gospel of Jesus at the synagogue. Paul, Silas, and Timothy worked and served the people of Thessalonica.

Paul's ministry within Roman cities often caused anger among the pagans and persecution of the Jewish people. A mob took Jason to the politarchs for rebuke for housing the three missionaries (Acts 17:1-7). Upon his release, Jason went to Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and the three left quickly in the night. (Acts 17:8-9). After this, the three missionaries went to Berea. Paul then went to Athens, where Silas and Timothy later joined him.

Paul hadn't forgotten the Thessalonians though. He sent Timothy to check in on how the church in Thessalonica was doing since they left unexpectedly. Timothy met Paul in Corinth some time later and reported to Paul what he had seen there. Based on Timothy's report, Paul began to write to the Thessalonians. We can read in Paul's words the excitement and joy he feels for their continued faith in Jesus. Paul explains why they left so abruptly and shares his fears that they might think they were just grifters or cons because of their abrupt departure. He also addresses their confusion and anticipation of Jesus' quick return, and, finally, encourages them to continue to live in faith with Jesus and community with one another.

DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

Structure

■ 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

REFLECTION: Put yourself in the shoes of the church receiving this letter. What do you think those receiving it felt after hearing these prayers? What do you take away as a follower of Christ as you read these prayers?

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LETTER

Today's reading covers the three prayers that Paul scattered throughout this letter to the Thessalonians. It's important to remember that this was written as a letter to the church at Thessalonica and was intended to be read aloud to the church. So as we read the letter, it's important to see the layout of the letter. The book opens with a prayer of thanksgiving followed by a celebration of the Thessalonians' faithfulness to Jesus. Paul knows this faithfulness has been challenging in their culture, so next is a transition prayer for endurance to stay faithful, followed by a challenge for them to continue growing in their faith. Paul ends the letter with a prayer of hope to encourage the believers there.

- Opening Thanksgiving Prayer - 1:1-5
- 1 Thessalonians 1-3 - A Celebration of their Faithfulness to Jesus
- Transition Prayer for Endurance - 3:11-13
- 1 Thessalonians 4-5 - A Challenge to Keep Growing as Followers
- Final Prayer of Hope - 5:23-28

During Paul's absence from the Thessalonian church, questions and doubt began to creep into their hearts. Questions like: "Did Paul really have genuine love and concern for us?" "Had Paul moved on to other churches and forgotten about us?" In his letter, Paul expresses his longing to be with them. As he conveys his hindered attempts to visit them, we see true evidence here that he loves these people and this church. The church was also beginning to doubt if their effort was in vain. Since Jesus was "coming soon" they questioned, "Why do we need to work hard at anything?" Paul addresses this in this letter as well, as we will see. 1 Thessalonians serves as Paul's attempt to answer the question, "What should we do as Christians while we are waiting for Jesus' return?"

Why do you think Paul structured his letter this way?

For a deeper dive into this structure, we highly recommend watching the BibleProject Overview of 1 Thessalonians at graceintheword.cc/1ThessaloniansOverview

DAY 4 - THURSDAY

Theme

I 1 Thessalonians 2:4-8, 3:3-4, 3:13, 4:1

REFLECTION: What theme interests you the most out of the three themes that are present in 1 Thessalonians? Why?

THE THEMES OF 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul's ministry centered on two aspects: the communication of the Word of God and the sharing of his life (1Th 2:8). Paul's motives were to please God (1Th 2:4; 4:1) and to express his concern for the Thessalonians' welfare (1Th 2:8).

Faithfulness during **PERSECUTION**

The Thessalonian church was founded in the midst of persecution. Paul encouraged the believers there to stand firm and not be shaken by these afflictions because Christians are "going to experience affliction" (1Th 3:3-4).

SANCTIFICATION

The process of sanctification begins once a person believes in Christ and receives forgiveness of sins. Paul's prayer for the believers at Thessalonica was that God would make their hearts "blameless in holiness" before God (1Th 3:13). Salvation is the beginning of sanctification.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Jesus's return is mentioned in every chapter of 1 Thessalonians.

Taken from He Reads Truth 1 & 2 Thessalonians Reading Plan

DAY 5 - FRIDAY

I Acts 17:3, Acts 18: 4-6, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 1 Corinthians 4:20
1 Thessalonians 1:5, John 14:15-19, 26-28

REFLECTION: Paul speaks often of the power of the Holy Spirit's work in God's people. The Spirit can give us strength and help us endure when times get hard. Do you see the Holy Spirit as a helper? Can you think of times that the Spirit's work within you has strengthened you to endure?

HELP WHILE WE WAIT

Have you ever been through a tough season, one where you wondered how much more you could bear? Have you ever felt alone in your calling? Have you ever worked at something you believed you were supposed to do, but were met with more opposition than welcome? Have you ever gotten so tired you wondered if you could press on? When the apostle Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, I have to believe he knew that feeling. He had given his recent years to proclaiming a simple, but polarizing, message: "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah" (Acts 17:3).

The Holy Spirit was working through Paul, but the road to spreading the gospel was tough. When Paul arrived in Corinth during his second missionary journey, he was beat up, weary, and ready for some encouraging news. Up to that point, he had been driven out of nearly every town he'd visited. It is a miracle of the Holy Spirit that the opposition he faced had not worn him down to nothing. But it wasn't all opposition. He had seen a few churches take hold along the way. One of those churches was in the port city of Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are like so many of his other letters: filled with theological clarification and instruction for how to live the Christian life. But it doesn't take long to see that these letters are also a little different from the others, filled with words of affection for these believers who have been a tremendous encouragement to Paul.

The legacy of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians is evidence of the Spirit's work in the world. Were it not for missions like the one that took Paul to Thessalonica, we would not have the gospel today. And were it not for the Holy Spirit's work, those missions would have failed to build anything lasting. So, when you're struggling, wondering if you can go on, remember this: the Holy Spirit is at work in the world still. How can we know this? Because Jesus promised He would send the Spirit as our helper in this life (John 14:15-31). When your faith is in Jesus, the Messiah, you are never alone.

In the face of impossible odds and unbearable weariness, God is at work. May the Lord encourage your heart as you read these letters and the story surrounding them.

By Russ Ramsey - *He Reads Truth 1 & 2 Thessalonians Reading Plan*

DAY 6 - SATURDAY

Reflection Day

■ Acts 17:1-9

REFLECTION QUESTIONS & NOTES:

- What are you most excited about in doing this study of 1 Thessalonians for the next seven weeks? Why?
- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- Why do you think it's important to know this background information and literary context for this study of 1 Thessalonians?
- How can you begin to internalize what you read and learn through this study for the next seven weeks?



DAY 7 - SUNDAY

Rest Day

*Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading that you missed.
Use the extra space on this page to journal, write down questions, thoughts, or ideas.*