

# Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

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## Where is it in the Bible?

First Thessalonians is the thirteenth book in the New Testament and is found between Colossians and 2 Thessalonians.

## Who wrote it?

The first verse of the letter identifies the authors as Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy. Paul's involvement in writing this epistle is undisputed; in fact, he is generally considered to have been the main author.

## When was it written?

Most scholars feel that this letter was written in the early 50s, perhaps in 51. If this is true, it would make 1 Thessalonians not only the oldest of the surviving letters written by Paul, but also the oldest book in the New Testament.

## What is it about?

Paul wrote this letter to commend and encourage the faith of the Thessalonians and to strengthen the good relationship he had with them. More specifically, it seems that they were troubled by questions about Jesus' second coming and about what happened to Christians who died. There are several references to these matters in the letter, and Paul addressed them specifically in 4:13-5:11.

## How is it structured?

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. Remembrance and Thanksgiving (1:2-3:13)
  - a. The Faith of the Thessalonians (1:2-10)
  - b. Paul's Work in Thessalonica (2:1-16)
  - c. Timothy's Visit (2:17-3:13)
- III. Instructions for Living a Holy Life (4:1-12)
- IV. The Coming of the Lord (4:13-5:11)
- V. Instructions for Living in the Christian Community (5:12-22)
- VI. Final Blessings and Closing (5:23-28)

## What are some things to look for?

- **Pastoral Tone:** This letter does not include the discussions of complex theological ideas or urgent admonitions that are found in other Pauline letters. It is very pastoral in tone and emphasizes the love and concern that Paul, Silas, and Timothy have for the Thessalonians. Paul offers encouragement to these Christians as they face the challenge of living in a Greco-Roman city.
- **Quotations from Scripture:** This is something to note rather than look for since, unusually for a letter written by Paul, there are no quotations from the Old Testament.
- **Work:** In 4:11-12, Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to work and not depend on anyone. Paul and his companions have set an example of doing this (2:9). There has been some discussion about why Paul advised this. Some have suggested that the Thessalonians were just lazy. Many others have suggested that this problem was connected to the expectation that Jesus was returning soon and took the idea of “waiting” a bit too literally.