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*Saint Mark's Church  
Sunday School*

## **The 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> epistles of Thessalonians (Intro. & Themes)**

**Code: 12/ NT / 7**

### **1. General Aims of the unit**

To gain a better understanding of the "word of God" and live according to its instructions

### **2. Special aims of the lesson**

- To have an overview of the establishment of the church of Thessalonica, the founder of the church and the timing of the epistle (Acts 17:1-9)
- To explore the main theme of the first epistle "the holy life of the believers leads to eternal life," and the suffering and persecution they accepted for the Lord's sake
- To concentrate on the persecution they suffered for the sake of their Christianity and holy life. Relate the persecution of this church to the persecution now for the Christian in Egypt and the suffering of any of the teens who would like to live a holy life in Australia. And also refer to the glory a waiting us in His next coming.
- Start to explore the next coming (the next lesson is on the next coming of Jesus Christ)

### **3.Outcomes**

**By the end of this lesson the teens are able to:**

- be a part in a discussion about the establishment of the church, the main persecution that occurred to the Apostle and his attitude towards it.
- compare between the persecution of the Thessalonians (as recorded in the epistle) and the persecution of the Copts in Egypt.
- discuss the attack of the devil against the teens when they decided to be pure.
- List the behavior of the Christian who are waiting His next coming.

**4. Verses:** 1Thess. 1:3 , 10 ; 2:12, 14 , 19-20 ;3:3, 13 ; 4:3, 7; 4:16-18 ; 5:6-11

### **5. References:**

1. Orthodox Bible or any commentary on the epistle to the Thessalonians
2. The 2 epistles of St. Paul to Thessalonians Rev. Fr. Tadros Malaty
3. The attached notes

**The 1<sup>st</sup>. Epistle to Thessalonians**

**Author :** The Author is St. Paul as mentioned in the introduction of the epistle (ch. 1:1). Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy were co-workers with St. Paul in establishing the church at Thessalonica on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mission (Acts 17:1-9).

**Date:** The epistle was written from Corinth in 50-51 AD, about 6 months after the establishment of the church in Thessalonica and about 20yrs after the crucifixion of our Lord.

Paul had to leave Thessalonica and he went to the city of Beroea. From there, he went to the city of Athens (Acts 17). From Athens, he went to Corinth (Acts 18:1). Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia and were with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-5). Then Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see what was happening with that church (1 Thessalonians 3:5). He wrote this first letter soon after Timothy had come back to join Paul and Silas in Corinth (1 Thessalonians 3:6).

It is probably the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle of St. Paul, and perhaps the 1<sup>st</sup> written book of the New Testament.

**Background Information:**

1. Thessalonica was the most prominent city in the Roman province of Macedonia, and served as a naval and commercial centre.
2. The church there was formed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mission of St. Paul in the summer of 50AD (Acts 15:36 - 18:22). The believers were mainly Gentiles (1:9). The time St. Paul spent there to establish this church is debatable, but most probably a few months.
3. While St. Paul was in Athens, he grew concerned about how the new church was handling persecution by fellow citizens, stirred up by the Jews (1:6 , 2:14, Acts17:5-9). He was prevented from visiting the city (2:17, 18) so he sent Timothy to encourage the believers and to return with a report. Timothy came back to Corinth with news about the church at Thessalonica. He told Paul and Silas that the church was strong but that there was much persecution. Some people were saying bad things about Paul and his friends. These people claimed that Paul's intentions were false. The Christians had many questions and were in need of more teaching. So the purposes of the letter included:
  - The church is strong in evangelism and endurance of persecution (1:8)
  - However some have difficulty maintaining chastity in a place where sexual purity is seen as a laughable novelty (4:3-8).
  - The believers are doing well in Christian love and charity, but they are in need to do more (4:9 – 10, 5:15).
  - Their hope in Christ's imminent return has degenerated into irresponsibility. Some neglect the duties of daily life and work (4:11).

Others are grieving over those who have died before Christ's coming (4:13). Many are too curious, engaging in calculations and date setting for the next coming (5:1-3)

- There is some tension and insubordination regarding church leaders (2:10 – 12, 5:12-13)
- Some are sceptical about spiritual gifts (5:19-21)
- Some accused St. Paul with , cowardice (2:2,17,18), seeking popularity (2:4,5), greed (2:5,9), self - exaggeration (2:6), hard hearted pride (2:7-8), and self indulgent laziness (2:9-10).

**Major Theme:** A holy life leads to eternal life.

1. continue to be examples to others (1:7)
2. walk worthy of God's calling (2:12 )
3. stand fast in faith (3: 8)
4. maintain moral purity (4:3 )
5. encouragement to be holy (5:23)
6. comfort concerning the second coming of Christ (4:13-5:11)

### **The plan of the letter**

#### **Chapter 1**

Greetings from Paul, Silas and Timothy 1:1

Thanks and prayer to God 1:2-4

How the Thessalonians accepted the good news about Jesus 1:5-10

#### **Chapter 2**

How Paul and his friends came to Thessalonica 2:1-4

Their attitude to the people at Thessalonica 2:5-8

How they lived among them 2:9-12

Thanks to God for the \*response of the people at Thessalonica 2:13-16

Desire to visit them again 2:17-20

#### **Chapter 3**

Why Paul and Silas sent Timothy 3:1-5

Joy at the news that Timothy brought 3:6-10

Prayer for the Christians at Thessalonica 3:11-13

#### **Chapter 4**

How you ought to live 4:1-8

How you should love each other 4:9-12

About those who have died 4:13-18

#### **Chapter 5**

When the \*Lord will come 5:1-11

Respect those who lead you and work for your benefit 5:12-13

Various Christian duties 5:14-22

Prayer for the Christians at Thessalonica 5:23-24

Greeting and blessing 5:25-28

### **Things to think about:**

1. What was the role of St. Paul the preacher (servant) among his children in Thessalonica?
2. How did the Christians in Thessalonica accept the faith?
3. Is having tribulations expected for all believers? Comment.
4. What are the main areas in their lives that need to be tuned up to match their call?
5. Give details about the second coming from this epistle, Matthew 24, 2Peter 3 and Revelation 14.

## **The 2<sup>nd</sup>. Epistle to Thessalonians**

**Author** : Same as Thessalonians 1

**Date** : The epistle was written from Corinth after about 6 months after the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle ~ 52- 53 AD

### **Background Information:**

1. St. Paul didn't visit Thessalonica again, but he compensated this by sending his 2 epistles.
2. He received a report after some months from the first letter confirming their steadfast in faith regardless of the persecution and suffering.
3. They misunderstood his words in the first epistle about the second coming to the extent that some abandoned their jobs and lived off the charity of the church.

### **Major Theme:**

This epistle is a response to the misunderstanding of the Thessalonians to the first epistle. It can be broken up as follows:

Ch.1 - St Paul illustrates the persecution of the church and the reward of the faithful and that they should trust in the Lord Jesus. Because God has a purpose in allowing them to suffer and he will reward them (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). Paul writes to give them strength and to encourage them.

Ch. 2 - He adjusts their understanding of the next coming of Christ and the signs preceding it. Because they have some strange ideas about the return of Christ. Some said that the Lord had already come. But this is not right (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). There are things that must happen before he comes (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12).

Ch.3 - Instructions for the life prepared for the next coming as some of the Thessalonians Christians were lazy. They had given up their work. It could be that they expected the \*Lord to come very soon. They depended on their friends to keep them and feed them. Paul had mentioned this subject in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Now he tells them what they should do to those who refuse to work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13).

### **The plan of the letter**

#### **Chapter 1**

Greetings from Paul, Silas and Timothy 1:1-2

Thanking God for the Thessalonians 1:3-4

The judgement of God and \*salvation of Christians 1:5-10

Prayer for the Thessalonians 1:11-12

#### **Chapter 2**

The \*Lord has not come yet 2:1-2

The wicked man must come first 2:3-12

Thanks to God for the Thessalonians 2:13-15

Prayer for them 2:16-17

#### **Chapter 3**

A request for prayer 3:1-2

Confidence in God for them 3:3-5

About those who are lazy 3:6-13

Paul warns them to obey 3:14-15

A prayer for \*peace 3:16

Signature and final prayer 3:17-18