

## 52 – 1 Thessalonians: He is Coming Again, Be Ready

- Thessalonica was a **Roman colony, and a busy seaport located 50 miles west of Philippi** and about one hundred miles north of Athens. Its estimated population at this time was about 200,000. Cicero said, *"Thessalonica is in the bosom of the empire."* It was right in the center or the heart of the empire and was the chief city of Macedonia. The city was first named Therma because of the hot springs in that area. In 316 A.D. Cassander, one of the four generals who divided up the empire of Alexander the Great, took Macedonia and made Thessalonica his home base. He renamed the city in memory of his wife, Thessalonike, who was a half sister of Alexander. The city is still in existence and is known as Salonika.
- The paganism of the Greek world allowed **all sorts of immorality here**. This city was situated in a crossroads of major Roman empire travel and was subject to international cultures and influences, including rampant immorality. Paul speaks to this in his encouragement for this church to continue living holy lives, in the midst of unholiness.
- Paul established the church here on his second missionary journey**. It was a model church, an example to others (1:7, 2 Cor 8:1-5). He had to leave this area quickly because of persecution. The people in Thessalonica had questions, brought to Paul by Timothy, so he writes this letter to answer those. He was there long enough, however, to teach them all the principles of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom, including the rapture of the church.
- This letter has a **number of purposes**, including to commend these believers for their faithfulness, to affirm the basics of the Gospel message, to refute false charges from local enemies, to encourage them to continue in holy living, and to comfort them about the "soon" return of Jesus. Paul sent Timothy to them to encourage them. It is thought that these two letters to this church were among the first written by Paul, probably around 50-54 AD.



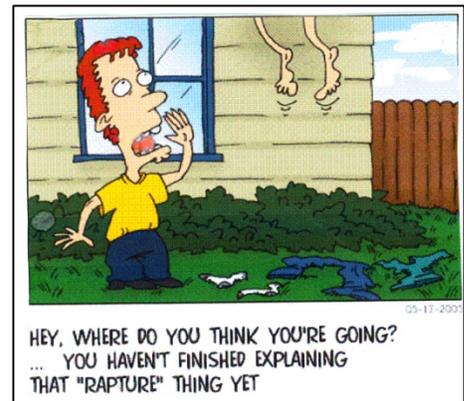
### Highlights

Ch 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greetings, 1:1; Commendation, 1:2-10 (their belief, lives, spreading of the word, example to other believers)</li> </ul>
Ch 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul's behavior with them, 2:1-12 (describes their message and their gentle behavior with them, probably to counter some false accusations about his motives with them)</li> <li>Thankful for their conversion, about their persecution and those persecuting them, 2:13-16</li> <li>Paul's longing to see them, 2:17-20 (has been hindered by Satan, his hope is in seeing them standing with the Lord at His coming)</li> </ul>
Ch 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timothy sent to encourage. 3:1-5 (they were suffering persecution, Paul wanted to follow-up with them, make sure they were not turning from the faith in the trials)</li> <li>Timothy brings good news to Paul about them, 3:6-10 (Paul encouraged, thankful about what he hears)</li> <li>A short prayer for them, 3:11-12 (that Paul can come soon, and that they will be "rooted in love" and kept blameless and holy by God)</li> </ul>
Ch 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouragement to continue living holy lives, 4:1-8 (not sexual immorality, God has called us to holiness)</li> <li>Increase in their love, lead quiet lives, 4:9-12 (live proper lives for those outside to see)</li> <li>Answers to questions about those who have "fallen asleep" in the faith, 4:13-18 (comfort each other with the knowledge that Jesus will return for all of us, and those who have died will meet us in the air with Him, we will be caught up ["raptured"] together)</li> </ul>
Ch 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No need to write about times and seasons, Day of the Lord, 5:1-11 (they already know He comes as a thief in the night, we are not unaware of these things, we are in the light so watch and soberly wait, we are not appointed to wrath, but to salvation, whether "awake or asleep" we are together in Him)</li> <li>How to continue living, 5:12-28 (reads like a quick list of Christian do's and don'ts)</li> </ul>

- The church at Thessalonica was considered a **model of Christian behavior**. They lived in the middle of the depth of depravity and immorality, yet continued to live holy lives. They continue to serve as a model for us today. The conditions haven't changed much. We are still charged to live holy lives, no matter what surrounds us. There are many around the world in terrible persecution, and even for those who have not experienced the threat to our lives that others have, persecution of believers is on the increase. Can we be steadfast as the Thessalonians were?
- Paul warned these new believers that **they would experience persecution in their new faith**. He himself found this when he was there and had to leave early.

- The **return of Jesus for His church is the hope and comfort of all believers**, then and now. This is what we are to comfort each other with. Our eyes are continually upon Him, waiting for Him to come, and watching for His return.
- The early church believed in something called the **"imminent return"** which meant that Jesus could come any time. Obviously there are scriptures that must be fulfilled before His "second coming" but the rapture can occur anytime. This was, and still is, to be a comfort to believers.
- Verses **4:13-5:11 are considered some of the most important prophetic passages in Scripture**. They teach the imminent and soon return of Jesus for His church. This does not mean "soon" in our understanding, but it is the next thing on God's agenda for His plan. Jesus will come to remove the church. Paul did not know when this would happen, nor do we. Whenever it is, we are to be watchful and wait for it. It will happen in God's perfect timing. This is the meaning of "imminent."

- This passage is **clearly about the "rapture" of the church**. Don't be misled by those who say the Bible does not contain the word or teaching of the "rapture." If you look at a Latin version it certainly does. The word "rapture" comes from the Latin "rapturo." But the original scriptures were written in Greek. The 17<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter 4 indicates: *"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."* The Greek word for "caught up" (or snatched) is "harpazo" which is the word used in Latin, rapturo. Whether we call it the rapture, the catching up, the great snatch, the *harpazo*, or whatever we wish to refer it as, it is still the same event – the bringing home of the church. The question that is relevant and of great debate is not *whether* there will be a rapture, but *when it will occur*. It can take place at any moment. Notice also that it says we will meet Him *in the air*. He is not touching down on earth...yet. This is most likely not the glorious appearing (the second coming).



- Paul is actually **addressing a different question, not the rapture**. He discusses what happens to those who have died before this time. The Thessalonians had apparently misunderstood some of the early teaching that they would be protected from death before the return of Jesus. Or, as some suspect (and addressed in the second letter to this church), a letter was circulated that indicated the rapture had already occurred, and they were still here! That would raise some questions.

▪ The last part of this letter is a **nutshell version of Christian living**. Paul exhorts these people to do (or not do) several things. It reads as a list:

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| ▪ Comfort each other and build each other up        | ▪ Uphold the weak                             | ▪ Don't quench the Holy Spirit   |
| ▪ Recognize those who teach you and appreciate them | ▪ Be patient with everyone                    | ▪ Don't despise prophecy   |
| ▪ Be at peace with each other                       | ▪ Don't repay evil with evil                  | ▪ Test everything ( <i>hold it up against the Word</i> ), and hold onto what is good |
| ▪ Warn those who misbehave                          | ▪ Pursue what is good for you, and for others | ▪ Abstain from any kind of evil  |
| ▪ Comfort those who are weary                       | ▪ Rejoice always                              |  |
|   | ▪ Pray without ceasing                        |  |
|   | ▪ Give thanks in everything                   |  |