

**UNIT 3 NEW TESTAMENT****LESSON 8****FIRST THESSALONIANS**

In the first century AD, Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and its largest city.

With the possible exception of Galatians, the two Thessalonian letters are Paul's earliest surviving writings. They give us an illuminating and in some ways, a surprising impression of certain phases of Christian faith and life twenty years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

Readers, Occasion and Purpose

Paul and his companions had to leave Thessalonica hastily in the early summer of AD 50, after making a number of converts and planting a church in the city (Acts 17:1-10). The church comprised a certain number of Jews (Acts 17:4) and a great many devout Greeks or God-fearers and not a few of the principal women. But from 1 Thessalonians 1:9 we may surmise that the majority were idol-worshippers won from heathenism. The circumstances of the departure of Paul, Silas and Timothy meant that their converts would inevitably be exposed to persecution for which they were imperfectly prepared, because Paul had not had time to give them all the basic teaching which he thought they required.

From Berea Paul had proceeded along to Athens where preaching met with a mixed response (Acts 17:32-34) From Athens Paul moved on to Corinth, and up to this point Paul had had little to encourage him. In four successive centres there had been discouragement. A promising beginning had been followed by forcible disruption in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea and in Athens he had moderate success. Small wonder that he began his preaching at Corinth 'in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling'(1 Cor 2:3).

Timothy and Silas had been left behind at Berea, presumably to consolidate the work there. It is a mark, however, of the apostle's anxiety about Thessalonica that Timothy, who had been summoned from Berea to Athens (Acts 17:15), was immediately despatched to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1f) to find out how the young community there was faring in the face of official opposition and Jewish hostility, and to encourage it to stand fast in the faith.

When the messengers came from Thessalonica they brought such a report of the continuing steadfastness of the converts, that Paul saw that the blessing of God had, after all, rested upon his work there. Out of a great sense of relief and reassurance, Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians and it is clear that he wrote it with a full heart.

Together with the good news that reached Paul, there also came a report of certain problems that existed in this young Church. So Paul the Pastor, wrote to meet the need of his flock. The result is a moving document; and while it is true that many of the important Pauline doctrines are absent, it is also true that the letter reveals to us something of Paul's pastoral zeal and his intense interest in the spiritual well-being of his converts.



First Thessalonians clearly was not written to counter one urgent problem such as we see in the Galatian letter; rather, Paul here applies himself at once to the task of meeting a number of needs that had been revealed:

1. Firstly Paul expresses his general satisfaction over the progress of the community and he reflects his joy throughout the Epistle. The principal points, which then called for attention, seem to have been the following.
2. He answers certain charges of self-seeking and cowardice, which had been brought against him, apparently by his Jewish opponents (2:1-12).
3. He encourages the Christians to persevere even in the face of Jewish opposition and persecution (2:14ff).
4. He points out the superiority of Christian morality over pagan (4:4ff), probably to safeguard them from pagan attempts to make new converts to Christianity revert to their old standards.
5. He writes to correct a misunderstanding concerning the return of our Lord. When some of their number died, they thought this meant that they would lose their share in the glory attendant on the Parousia (the Lord's appearing) (5:13ff). Some, possibly, were also worried about when the Parousia would take place.
6. He urges his readers to respect their leaders. A tension may well have been present between some of the leading members and the rest of the congregation (5:13f).

Much of this is explicable as the difficulties which a young, very enthusiastic, but as yet, imperfectly instructed Church would naturally encounter as it sought to live out its faith. we meet the weak and the faint-hearted, the idlers and the workers, the visionaries and the puzzled.

Plan

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Greetings | |
| 2. | Prayer of Thanksgiving | 1:2-4 |
| 3. | Reminiscences | 1:5-2:16 |
| 4. | Relationship of Paul to the Thessalonians | 2:17-3:13 |
| 5. | Exhortation to Christian Living | 4:1-12 |
| 6. | The Parousia | 5:13-5:11 |
| 7. | Further Practical Exhortations | 5:12-22 |
| 8. | Conclusion | 5:23-28 |

SECOND THESSALONIANS

Occasion and Purpose

Shortly after the dispatch of the first letter, it would seem that Paul found it necessary to write to Thessalonica again. His first letter had apparently not achieved all that he desired.



Paul's first letter had not been clearly understood. What he had said about the Parousia was being interpreted as a warning of its imminent approach. As a result of this, some members of the Thessalonian congregation had downed tools and were excitedly preparing for the End (2:1ff; 3:6-13). Paul explains that certain events must take place before the Parousia. As for those disinclined to work, he speaks to them even more sharply than in the former Epistle.

The Epistles were probably written within weeks of each other. In the Second Letter, Paul carries on the work of the first, encouraging the faint hearted, rebuking the slackers, dealing again with the return of the Lord. "It is simply a second prescription for the same case, made after discovering that certain stubborn symptoms had not yielded to the 'first treatment'" (R H Walker).

Plan

1.	Greeting	1:1, 2
2.	Thanksgiving	1:3P 4
3.	Judgement of God	1:5-10
4.	Prayer	1:11, 12
5.	The Parousia	2:1~12
6.	Further Thanksgiving and Prayer	2:13-17
7.	Faithfulness of God	3:1-5
8.	Godly Discipline	3:6-15
9.	Conclusion	3:16-18

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus

These three Epistles have so much in common in style, doctrine and historical situation, they have always been treated as a single group. The group name 'Pastoral Epistles' was first given them by Paul Anton of Halle in 1726.

Written by Paul to two of his fellow-workers, as is indicated by their titles, the First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus; the situation is late in Paul's life; probably written after release from the Roman imprisonment recorded in Acts. The great Pauline themes, such as justification by faith, being in Christ, the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, and of baptism are all muted or absent.

Emphasis falls on 'sound doctrine'; the ministry and organisation of the Churches is all important and the author is much concerned to combat heresy.



Readers

The student may wish to be acquainted with some details of the life of Timothy (drawn from Acts and Paul's Epistles) and Titus (drawn from Paul's Epistles). Most commentaries on the Pastorals give such information; see also the New Bible Dictionary on 'Timothy' and 'Titus'.

Occasion and Purpose

Timothy at Ephesus was faced with grave difficulties. He may have even been disposed to resign his charge and leave the city. The Apostle wrote, bidding him to persevere in his ministry and discussing, for his guidance, the problems which confronted him. False teachers had arisen, who, in attacking the true faith as had been foretold, threatened the religious and moral life of Christians. Paul sends him instructions till he can come himself (1 Tim. 4:13). These instructions are partly personal advice as to conduct which will set an example to others, and partly detailed instructions for the organisation of the Church, in which considerable importance is attached to careful scrutiny of the characters of the office-bearers. The defence against heresy is 'the faith' itself and a well-organised church as the 'pillar and bulwark of the truth'.

In the case of Titus, Paul has a specific occasion for writing, to summon his fellow-worker to meet him at Nicopolis. Titus, left in Crete to build up the defective life of the churches there, is instructed in the qualifications necessary for ministers who will have to teach sound doctrine and confute the many false teachers who threaten the stability of believers. He is told what advice to give Christians for life, both within the Church and in the world outside, and is encouraged in his task by the reminder of the manifestation of God's goodness and grace in Jesus Christ.

A quite different situation is found in 2 Timothy, for Paul, now imprisoned (1:16;2:9) in Rome (probably for a second time), is expecting death by execution very soon. He renews his exhortations to Timothy at Ephesus (1:28). Paul looks back on his accomplished task and looks ahead to his anticipated crown. The Epistle is little concerned with the arrangement of the Church, but concentrates on Timothy and the task, which has been committed to him. Let Timothy take courage from his own sufferings for the Gospel in his struggle to maintain the truth in the face of heresy and moral corruption; be sure to hand it on in turn to trustworthy ministers. Despite the note of farewell, Timothy is finally bidden to hasten to Paul with Mark.

Plan

A. I Timothy

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 1. | Greetings | 1:1-2 |
| 2. | Paul and Timothy | 1:3-20 |
| 3. | Regulations for Worship and Order in the Church | 2:1-4:16 |
| 4. | Discipline within the Church | 5:1-25 |
| 5. | Miscellaneous Instructions | 6:1-19 |
| 6. | Concluding Admonition to Timothy | 6:20, 21 |

**B. II Timothy**

1.	Greetings	1:1, 2
2.	Thanksgiving	1:3-5
3.	Encouragement from Experience	1:6-14
4.	Paul and His Associates	1:15-18
5.	Directions to Timothy	2:1-26
6.	The Last Days	3:1-9
7.	Further Exhortations to Timothy	3:10-17
8.	Paul's Farewell Message	4:1-18
9.	Conclusion	4:19-22

C. Titus

1.	Greetings	1:1-4
2.	Qualifications for Church Officials	1:5-9
3.	False Teachers and the Need to Refute Them	1:10-16
4.	Regulations for Christian Behaviour	2:1-10
5.	Christian Doctrine and Christian Life	2:11-3:7
6.	Closing Admonitions	3:8-11
7.	Conclusion	3:12-15

PHILEMON

Renan calls it a "masterpiece in the art of letter writing." The letter throws light on the character of Paul. The man who could pen the massive letter to the Romans could also write a personal letter to a friend, revealing his tact, his consideration for the feelings of others, his understanding of human relations, and his remarkable capacity for friendship.

Philemon was, it seems, a Colossian Christian (see above on Colossians) owing his conversion to Paul (Philemon 19). His slave, Onesimus, had run away, perhaps with stolen goods (18) and has somehow reached Paul in prison (10).

Paul's letter to Philemon was written to support Onesimus as he bravely returned to his master. It may be that Paul had brought him to faith in Christ (cf. 10). The Apostle sends him back as a changed character (formerly useless, now truly Onesimus, i.e. profitable!) as one for whom he had conceived a deep affection (12) and as a Christian brother, to his master (16). And it is clear that Paul hopes that he will be released by Philemon for service with the apostle (13, 21). But he is determined that everything shall be above board, and that Philemon shall be free to do as he thinks best (14).



Question 1

What happened to Paul in Thessalonica and why did he have to leave in a hurry? (Acts 17:1-10)

Question 2

What does "Parousia" mean? What does Paul say about the Parousia in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11? Summarise it as briefly as you can.

Question 3

What mistake did the Thessalonians apparently make about the Parousia? What did Paul write to try and correct this mistake in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 3:6-15?

Question 4

Write a brief biographical sketch of Timothy from these verses:

1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim.1:18; 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5, 6; 3:11, 15; Acts 16:1, 2, 3; 17:14.

Question 5

Who was Philemon and why did Paul write to him? (Philemon 8-20 esp. v17.)

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY

Read 1 Timothy 6:5b-10. What is Paul saying in these verses? How relevant are they to twentieth century Australia? What do these verses say to you personally?