

GENERAL INTRODUCTORY OUTLINE: First Thessalonians **Compiled by Bob Young¹**

I. AUTHORSHIP: Paul (along with Silvanus [Silas], and Timothy)

A. The authenticity of 1 Thessalonians is affirmed as Pauline by almost all NT scholars.²

B. External Evidence strongly supports Pauline authorship (Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 188,193)

1. Ignatius, [Ephesians 10:1 (1 Thess. 5:17); Romans 2:1 (1 Thess. 2:4)] (c. 110)
2. Polycarp, (c. 110-150)
3. The Shepherd of Hermas [3:6.3; 3:9.2; 10] (c. 115-140)
4. Didache [16:7 (1 Thess. 4:16)] (c. 120-150)
5. Irenaeus (c. 130-202)
6. Justin Martyr (c. 150-155)
7. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215)
8. Tertullian (c. 150-220)
9. Origen (c. 185-254)
10. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386)
11. Eusebius (c. 325-340)
12. Jerome (c. 340-420)
13. Augustine (c. 400)
14. The Marcion canon (c. 140)
15. The Muratorian Canon (c. 170)

C. Internal Evidence is equally strong for Pauline authorship

1. The organization of the church is early since the only officials mentioned are, "those over you" (5:12)
2. The language and style of the letter is Pauline
3. The subject matter of the letters is appropriate for the life time of Paul
4. Pauline authorship is asserted in a customary manner in the opening of the letter, 1:1
5. The first person singular (2:18; 3:5; 5:27) and plural (1:2; 2:15,16,17,18; 3:6,7,9,10; 4:13; 5:12,14,25)

are used in epistle affirming the ascribed authorship

II. HISTORICAL SETTING

A. The founding of the church: The historical context is Acts 16--18, especially Acts 17:1-9 (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3--3:8)

1. Paul, Silas, and Timothy ministered on their second missionary journey in Philippi and left after their imprisonment and subsequent release (Acts 16:11-40)

2. When Paul and Silas arrived in Thessalonica they proclaimed Jesus as Messiah in the synagogue for three weeks causing some Jews, many devout Greeks, and leading woman to believe, but raising jealousy in the Jews to the point that the new disciples were severely persecuted before the authorities, Acts 17:1-9

a. Setting: When Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia they came to Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:1). Perhaps Luke and Timothy were left in Philippi to take care of the new church there

b. When Paul entered the synagogue and argued for Jesus as Messiah, some Jews, many devout Greeks, and leading woman believed and joined Paul and Silas, but the Jews were jealous (17:2-5a)

1) Paul went in, as was his custom, and argued with them from the Scriptures for three weeks,³ 17:2.

¹ Especially helpful has been the work of David Malick, www.bible.org.

² See Guthrie, Bruce, Marshall, Thomas, Morris.

³ Paul may have stayed more than three weeks if he also turned to Gentiles for a ministry as he often did when the Jews rebelled.

- 2) Paul explained and proved from the Scriptures the death, resurrection and Messiahship of Jesus, 17:3
- 3) Some Jews, many devout Greeks, and leading women believed and joined Paul and Silas, 17:4
- 4) The Jews were jealous of Paul and Silas, 17:5a
- c. In an uproar the Jews sought Paul and Silas, but could not find them so they took Jason and some brethren before the authorities and accused them of disturbing the peace and of proclaiming another king against Rome, whereupon the leaders exacted a bond from them before releasing them, 17:5b-9
 - 1) Using some wicked men, the Jews gathered a crowd and set the city in an uproar, 17:5b
 - 2) The Jews attacked the house of Jason looking for Paul and Silas, but when they could not find them, they brought Jason and some of the brethren before the authorities, 17:5c-6a
 - 3) The Jews accused Jason and the brethren of harboring disrupters, and proclaiming Jesus as King against Rome (subversion as with Jesus), 17:6b-7
 - 4) The people and city authorities were disturbed when they heard the accusations, so they took from the hostages a bond and released them, 17:8-9
3. Paul and Silas went at night to Berea, 17:10
- B. The length of Paul's stay in Thessalonica
 1. It may have been for only three weeks (Acts 17:2)
 2. It most probably was longer than three weeks (but still brief)
 - a. The statement in Acts 17:2 may only refer to Paul's ministry among the Jews
 - b. Paul often went to the Gentiles after the Jews had rejected the message (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 19:8-10)
 - c. Paul settled down long enough to pursue his secular trade (1 Thess. 2:9)
 - d. There was a certain amount of organization to the church by the time that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 5:12, although this could have been accomplished by Timothy in Paul's absence
 - e. Philippians 4:16 states that the Philippian church ministered to Paul in Thessalonica in a financial way on two occasions
- C. The Background to 1 Thessalonians
 1. Timothy probably left Philippi to rejoin Paul and Silas in Berea (cf. Acts 17:4,10,14)
 2. After the difficulties in Berea by the Thessalonian Jews, Paul departed and Silas and Timothy remained in Berea (Acts 17:14)
 3. Paul left orders with those from Berea who escorted him to Athens for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him as soon as they were able (Acts 17:15)
 4. Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul at Athens (cf. Acts 17:16; 1 Thess. 3:1)
 5. Timothy was sent to Thessalonica from Athens (1 Thess. 3:2)
 6. After Timothy left, Silas also went to Macedonia (Acts 18:5)
 7. Paul went from Athens to Corinth (Acts 18:1)
 8. Timothy returned to Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6)
 9. Silas returned to Paul at about the same time (if not the same time) Acts 18:5
 10. Paul then wrote 1 Thessalonians in the name of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1)

III. DATE AND ORIGIN: A.D. 50 (or 51) from Corinth

- A. Paul was in Corinth a year and six months (Acts 18:11)
- B. Paul's visit to Corinth probably terminated shortly after Gallio became proconsul in Corinth (Acts 18:12-18)
- c. A.D. 51
 1. The Delphi inscription⁴ makes reference to Gallio as proconsul of Achaia
 2. This inscription can be dated to the first seven months of A.D. 52 (Claudius' twenty-sixth acclamation as imperator)

⁴ Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum or SIG II3, 801.

3. Since proconsuls usually entered their office on July 1, Gallio probably arrived in Achaia as proconsul on July 1 A.D. 51

4. Paul's eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11-17) probably lasted from late summer of A.D. 50 to spring of A.D. 52

C. 1 Thessalonians may well have been written earlier in his time at Corinth when he received word from the return of Timothy and Silas about the church (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6)

D. Therefore, Paul probably wrote 1 Thessalonians in A.D. 50 (or 51)

E. Corinth is the last place where Acts places Paul, Timothy, and Silas together (though they may have been together afterward); Silas is not mentioned at Ephesus, and Timothy is associated with Erastus at Ephesus (Acts 19:22); therefore, Corinth is a natural candidate for the origin of the letter

IV. The Occasion of 1 Thessalonians. The book is clearly written to a group of very new believers who were quickly brought into the faith and then immediately thrown into the "grasp of Satan" as persecutions broke out upon them (Acts 17; 1 Thess. 2:14-16; 2 Thess. 3:3). Malherbe observes that "Paul treated his readers as students in school rather than as crowds needing conversion" (*Thessalonians*, Malherbe, p. 11, quoting Judge, fn.24). Given the circumstances of the Thessalonians, questions would immediately arise:

A. Were Paul's words true?

B. If they were from God, why are they being hindered so by persecution?

C. Now what should they do?

1. Their faith was weak (1 Thess. 3:2)

2. They needed perspective on the disturbances which they were facing (1 Thess 3:3-4)

3. They needed to know how love worked its way out towards others--especially those who persecute them (1 Thess. 3:12)

4. They needed to know how "now" related to the future return of Jesus (1 Thess. 3:13)

5. They needed to know how far to take Paul's exhortations toward godly living (1 Thess. 4:1-5)

6. They needed to know how to act within the church (1 Thess. 5)

V. PURPOSES OF 1 THESSALONIANS

A. Paul wished to express his satisfaction and thanks to God for the healthy spiritual condition of the church, 1:2-10

B. Paul wished to argue against the false accusations against him and his associates, 2:1--3:13

C. Paul wanted to explain to the Thessalonians why he had not returned to visit them, 2:17-18

D. Paul wanted to express his affection for the Thessalonians and his desire to be with them, 3:10

E. Paul wanted to correct some errors in living which the Thessalonians had adopted, (4:1-12; 5:12-18)