

Through the Bible - 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Derek Illman – 4/23/2025

(Editor's note: I will add some comments in blue below to clarify some of the things that Derek mentioned in his talk. – Joshua Tallent)

While in Corinth, Paul's disciples Silas and Timothy, met with him after returning from Macedonia. They would catch up with Paul in Corinth after he'd been working with the congregation there for several months. Silas and Timothy brought him news of how the Thessalonians were doing which prompted Paul to write these letters. We can also infer that Paul is looking back on the Thessalonians positively and with excitement! Evidence of this can be found in 1 Thes 2:8 "...Because you had become very dear to us..." and also in 1 Thes 2:7 "...as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children..." Paul is approaching this congregation with an air of responsibility, but also with a very special kind of care and love. he's remembering their receipt of the Master's teachings to them and the expectant hope that they'll hold fast to them. To me, this reads like something the pastors of our church would write if they were addressing a letter to us.

[JT: Timothy was Jewish, as was confirmed by Paul when he circumcised him.]

So, if we overlay that setting and mood to Paul's letters to the Thessalonian congregation lets examine some text and see what we find. We should also keep in mind that the Corinthians that Paul is working with at the time of writing the letters to Thessalonica are also new believers. They struggled more significantly, though, than the Thessalonians with the Jerusalem Council's outcome (Acts 15) so Paul's experience with both sets of these new believers was very different.

As we keep going, it looks to be building into a sort of sermon of encouragement to the Thessalonians that they are a great community with a specific opportunity to be an influence to a huge number of people. Thessalonica was the capital of the region and a major trading hub. You can see this in the verses below:

1 Thes 1:6 - "You became imitators of us and of the Lord..." **[great community following the Master]**

1 Thes 1:7 - "...you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" **[be a witness to your area, a major trade city]**

1 Thessalonians 2, the theme keeps going.

1 Thes 2:17 - "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while-in person, not in spirit-were- all the more eager with great desire to see your face."

Paul misses the people he created community with. He understands his larger mission, but there is a genuine feeling that Paul has for this community. He is eager to once again participate in person with their community. Then something really cool happens, Paul writes: "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exaltation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."

This is a practical example of the fulfillment of Matthew 28, the Great Commission. Matthew [the Biblical Book] was written just 5 years before these letters to the Thessalonians.

[JT: The book was likely written down approximately 5 years earlier, but that does not mean Paul had access to it. However, the teaching of the Great Commission would have been well known among the believers, and would have been part of the memorized teachings of Jesus that were passed down orally.]

That these groups of Gentiles are becoming believers seems to demonstrate that the Jews are taking the message seriously by direct action and in Paul's eyes, at least this group of Thessalonians whom he is writing to, are representatives of "the Nations" that are hearing about God. Not just that, but they are our "glory and joy." Paul is excited and eager to present the Gentiles to Jesus at the "end" as evidence of that work. So many parables from Matthew showing application in Paul's letters here.

[JT: Paul left Thessalonica because he was run out of town (see Acts 17).]

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11 (Important because it talks about the Coming Day of the Lord)

[JT: Paul's belief in the coming Day of the Lord is based on the teaching of the prophets, not just a blind faith.]

Paul is really coming through with the pastoral message in this section of scripture. What does Paul want us to take away from this? What do we see about the type of lives we live; and why do we do it?

What is a sober life? There is a likeness to drunkenness, but does that just mean that if we never drink we're ok? No, but rather, we are sober and vigilant because the Messiah's return is immanent! "Like a thief in the night..." There is an urgency that we are still called to today. Our lives must also be sober and vigilant, we must live according to His calling. return every day and focus in on how we are living our lives. This is a walk, a journey, motion is needed to achieve.

Can we compare this then, with 2 Thes 2? "The man of lawlessness" is the "man without (or against) the Torah?" Some verses to juxtapose or compare against the "lawless man" with a sober life of vigilance:

1 Timothy 1:9 - "...realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers..."

Titus 2:14 - "...who gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds.

[JT: The man of lawlessness is the anti-Messiah, the opponent of the Messiah who is prophesied to come and lead people away from the Torah. We can talk about the more later!]

[JT: The question of where we go when we die is complex and we have to be careful to hold all of these things loosely. We don't have a ton of information in the scriptures, and many things are unclear. That being said, when we die we understand that our souls go to Sheol, the grave. There are two potential destinations in Sheol: Paradise, also called Abraham's Bosom, the holding place for

the righteous, and Gehinnom/Gehenna, the place for the wicked. Jesus tells us this in his parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. However, it's unclear from other texts if Paradise is somehow connected to the heavenlies where the throne of God is. We don't know for sure exactly where Paradise is, but we do know that we want to be there, not in Gehinnom.

The Lake of Fire is the final destination for the wicked after the final judgement. Derek mistakenly called Gehinnom the Lake of Fire, but those are different places, from what we can tell.

The "rapture" is a relatively new concept in Christian theology, developed in the 1840s by John Nelson Darby and other dispensationalists. The idea that we are raptured to go up to heaven is not in keeping with the teachings of the prophets, who speak of the Messiah returning the Jewish people to Israel and ruling over them there. I believe that the rapture is that miraculous ingathering, and the destination is Israel, not heaven.

Wherever we go, we will be in our resurrected bodies, not spirits. We will have some elevated physical form, a result of the resurrection of the dead.

The New Heaven and the New Earth are created AFTER the 1000 year reign of Messiah on earth.

These are difficult concepts, but we will try to unpack some of them when we study Revelation.]