

1-2 Thessalonians

FACT SHEET

Date and Occasion

Probably around AD 50, Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica, but he left Timothy and Silas there. They later joined him in Corinth, and Timothy apparently carried letters back and forth. The church was dealing with persecution, maybe even the death of some of their leaders (Acts 17:1-9, 18:5)

Why 2 Letters?

These two letters were written very close together, probably within a couple months of each other. They address mostly the same topics, but from different perspectives. It seems pretty clear that something happened that caused Paul to have to remind the believers of the truths of what it means to be in Christ and encourage them to stay true.

The Free City of Thessalonica

Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. It was known as a *free city*, which meant the people lived under their own laws with minimal government interference. This was different from a colony, which was under Roman civil law, or an imperial city, which was under the emperor's direct rule. While the Romans were mostly of the upper class, the main Greek-speaking population made their money mostly through trade. The city was one of the finest commercial ports in eastern Macedonia, and an important destination on the main east-west highway, the *Via Egnatia*. There appears to have been a substantial Jewish presence in the city as well.

The Parallel Structure of the Epistles

	1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians
1: Salutation and Thanksgiving (<i>eucharistō</i>)	1:1-3	1:1-12
<i>Personal History</i> (unnecessary to reiterate this in the 2nd epistle)	1:4-10	
2: Remember (<i>mnēmoneuō</i>)	2:1-13	2:1-13
<i>Personal History</i> (unnecessary to reiterate this in the 2nd epistle)	2:14-3:7	
<i>Note of Encouragement</i>	3:8-10	2:14-15
3: Benediction (<i>autos de...loipon</i>)	3:11-4:1	2:16-3:5
4: Commands (<i>hai parangelias</i>)	4:2-12, 5:12-22	3:6-15
<i>Eschatological Discourse</i> (answering a specific question)	4:13-5:11	
5: Closing Prayer for Peace (<i>autos de...</i>)	5:23-28	3:16-18

Keep the Text in Historical Perspective

As you read, remember that these are the *first* writings of Paul that we have. Many of the ideas here are answers to specific issues. Paul continued to develop the way he expressed the realities of being the church. Because these are so early, Thessalonians can be confusing on its own. Reading it in the context of the rest of Paul's later writings is very important.