

A dynamic splash of blue water with various shades of blue and white, creating a sense of movement and energy. The splash is centered at the top of the page and extends across most of its width.

# THESSALONIANS

# Welcome to the book of 1 Thessalonians!

To begin your study of 1 Thessalonians meditate upon the contents of the book reflected in the overview chart below. As you consider the four major sections, what do you learn about excellence in faith? We have chosen 4:1 as a key verse that reflects the theme of reaching out to others as we honor Christ. It is God's desire that our being "set apart" (sanctification) would be rich and full (4:3).

Also note the passages listed within the overview chart. Take this opportunity to investigate each one, looking for relationships between the section titles and key verses we have chosen. What have you learned so far about 1 Thessalonians?

## 1 THESSALONIANS Excel More

| <b>Excel in<br/>EXAMPLE</b> | <b>Excel in<br/>FAITH</b> | <b>Excel in<br/>LOVE,<br/>PURITY,<br/>HOPE</b> | <b>Excel in<br/>READINESS</b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1:3,7<br>2:9-12             | 3:5,8                     | 4:7,9,13                                       | 5:5,6,24                      |
| 1-2                         | 3                         | 4  | 5                             |

*"As to how you ought to walk and please God!" 4:1*

This letter to the Christ-followers in Thessalonica provides encouragement to press on in the midst of the everyday grind of life. We must not be content to merely "make it through" but to **excel more** in the grace of God as we see and feel His hand upon our lives.

*Open your heart as you read!*

In what ways is the example of your spiritual walk an encouragement to those who are close enough to observe your life? What are evidences of faith, hope, and love in your example? In what ways do you feel you are prepared for the Lord's return? In what ways are you unprepared? In what ways do you need to "excel more" in your devotion to God?

## **AUTHOR OF 1 THESSALONIANS**

The language and ideas are Pauline, and it is hard to imagine anyone else writing such a letter to the church at Thessalonica other than the man who had been in on its founding. The existence of 2 Thessalonians seems to imply the existence and acceptance of 1 Thessalonians as being genuine. In addition, both letters say they are from Paul (Silvanus, Timothy)!

## **DATE**

The letters to the Thessalonians are among the earliest of the New Testament books. Galatians may have been written earlier but no other of Paul's letters predates these two. The probable date for both 1 & 2 Thessalonians is somewhere between 50-54 A.D. with 2 Thessalonians being written no later than one year after 1 Thessalonians.

## **HISTORY**

Paul visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-10). Even though his stay there was probably no more than three to four weeks he was able to leave behind a nucleus of believers. Naturally, Paul was concerned about how this infant community of believers was getting along. After being tossed out of town for his stand for Christ, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see what was taking place there. Timothy's report encouraged Paul tremendously. The vibrant, growing fellowship became a constant source of joy to Paul - and his two letters are full of commendation. Paul did not want to see this church, which had once taken a stand in a hostile environment, become immobilized by sameness after experiencing such an amazing launch.

He knew that even if they were on the right track they'd get run over if they remained status quo. Paul encourages them to "excel more" in their love for one another and for all men (3:12; 4:10) as well as in their walk with God (4:1); and to be untiring in their encouragement and building up of one another (5:11). Listed below are other major areas in which Paul wishes to see the Thessalonians excel:

1. Their example to others (1:8-9).
2. Their acceptance of Paul's authority from God (2:2,4-5,10,13; 4:12).
3. Their standing firm in the Lord (3:8).
4. Their purity (4:3-7).
5. Their leading a quiet and orderly life (4:11-12).
6. Their hope for Christ's return (5:1-8).
7. Their appreciation of those who serve them (5:12-13).
8. Their admonishment of the unruly, encouragement of the faith-hearted, and help for the weak (5:14).
9. Their rejoicing and praying always (5:16-17) and in everything giving thanks (5:18).

## **Why Study the book of 1 Thessalonians?**

1. This book serves as an excellent example of how Paul followed up new Christ-followers. To paraphrase a well-known public service announcement, "It's 10:00...do you know where your spiritual children are?"

2. To test ourselves to see if we and our assembly are worthy of Paul's thankfulness for our faith, hope, and love - excelling more - just as the Thessalonians were challenged to do.



# 1 Thessalonians Chapter Chart

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Excel As An Example

Read Chapter 1

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 1       |       |           |

## Excel As An Example

1. What are the three things Paul remembered when he thought of the Thessalonian believers? What types of things do you think he thought about as he mentioned individuals and considered each of these things he recalled?
2. To what does Paul appeal for his confidence?
3. What were the evidences of faith within these believers?
4. What should be true of the reputation of any maturing believer?

## What about today?

Write down any evidences of faith you see in your own life. In what labor(s) of love do you participate? How do you display a steadfastness of hope? How would you describe your reputation as a believer?

Reread 1 Corinthians 13 and once again meditate on what is truly important. Do you believe you are a mature believer based upon these standards? Do you fellowship with a mature group of believers - filled with faith, hope, and love?

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 2       |       |           |

Chapter 2:1-12

### **Excel In Ministry**

1. What were the goals of the Apostles as they worked with this new group of believers?
2. How did they continue to move forward amid such opposition?
3. Why does Paul address the issues in 2:1-6? What does this teach us about true authority?
4. In what ways can you "impart your own life" to another person?
5. What are three aspects of a laborer's character mentioned here?
6. There are three actions mentioned. What do they teach us about the nature of serving others?

#### **What about today?**

Paul uses the analogy of a nursing mother as well as a father and his own children. Why did he choose these examples and what do they teach us about true people mission? How would the approach of a mother and a father differ? Who has shown this kind of concern for you? Do you extend this type of concern to others? In what ways are you able? Unable?

Chapter 2:13-20

### **Excel In Commitment**

1. What is the reason for commitment mentioned in verse 13?
2. What was the choice these believers faced as they considered the message of life? Whom does Paul contrast in this chapter?
3. What does the phrase "in person, not in spirit" reveal?
4. In what ways can Satan thwart us?
5. What do you think a "crown of exultation" is?

#### **What about today?**

The Thessalonians tested the spirit behind the message and gave an engaging response. With their willing submission to God's authority they grew quickly and strong. Have you accepted the Word of the Lord for what it really is? 2 Timothy 3:16 gives us insight into the extent of the Word's authority in the world!

## Excel In Faith

## Read Chapter 3

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 3       |       |           |

Chapter 3:1-13

### Excel In Faith

1. What is our destiny?
2. How many times is faith mentioned in this section? (circle them)
3. What do you learn about Satan's abilities and his influence?
4. What do you learn about Timothy's ministry?
5. What caused Paul and the other apostles to "really live?"
6. What were Paul's requests for the Thessalonians?
7. How are our hearts established?

### What about today?

1. What do you learn about the purpose of our trials?
2. Are you excited about your destiny?
3. In what ways is your faith maturing?

Colossians 1:28,29 gives a clear picture of God's goal for our lives!

## Excel In Hope

## Read Chapter 4

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 4       |       |           |

Chapter 4:1-17

### Excel in Hope

1. Circle each time the phrase "excel more" and the word "set apart" are used.
2. In what were they to excel and why?
3. What do you learn about the concept of sanctification (being set apart)?
4. How would you apply 4:11,12 to your life?
5. Why was it necessary to include 4:13-18?

### What about today?

In what ways do you need to excel more in your sanctification? What impurity are you prone to practice? How often do you find yourself thinking about eternal life and what it will be like? In what ways do you feel like you experience peace? Hope? In what ways not?

### My thoughts about myself as a hopeful person:



| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 5       |       |           |

### Excel in Readiness in the Spirit

Read 5:1-13

1. What does it mean to be overtaken like a thief, and why this metaphor?
2. What kind of sleep is being talked about here?
3. What does it look like when a person is living in a sober manner?
4. How can you know if you are being alert?
5. What does a solid leader look like? How should we respond to this kind of leadership?
6. What would you consider an unruly believer? Fainthearted? Weak?
7. How does someone pray without ceasing?
8. What does quenching the Spirit look like?
9. How do a clean body and soul go together?

#### What about today?

Are you ready? In what ways do you see yourself living in an alert manner? Do you feel you are sober by Paul's standards? Read James 5:7-11 in reference to Thessalonians.

### Excel in the Spirit

Read 5:14-28

1. Paul initially addresses the unruly, the fainthearted, the weak, and then all men. He encourages us to live in peace, seeking the good of one another.
2. How does one pray without ceasing?
3. Have you ever seen the spirit quenched? How do you deal with someone who quenches the spirit?
4. Note what care we are supposed to show when considering what truly comes from God (20,21).
5. Read verse 23. How does Paul relate a clean body to a clean soul?

#### What about today?

Examine each of the brief commands in this section. How can you refine your standards for being sober in faith? Think of one person for whom you can seek their welfare today.

### CONCLUSION

Reread 5:24. In the midst of expectation for holiness in lifestyle and a practical faith, Paul's confidence was in the ability of the Spirit of the Living God to bring about spiritual life. His final words (verse 28) reflect a knowledge that continuing in grace was of utmost importance in being perfected by the Spirit.

# Welcome to 2 Thessalonians!

To begin your study of 2 Thessalonians, meditate upon the content of the book reflected in the overview chart below. As you consider the three major sections, what do you learn about a possible purpose of the book? We have chosen 2:1,2 as a key verse that reflects the book's overall theme. As you meditate upon this verse, what instruction do you receive? If we are to have a pure and persevering faith, we must pursue the exhortation given in 2 Thessalonians! God's will is that we stand firm in what we believe (3:13)!

## 2 THESSALONIANS Day of the Lord

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Affliction<br/>and the Day</b></p> <p>1:4,5</p> <p>1</p> | <p><b>Deception<br/>and the Day</b></p> <p>2:10,11</p> <p>2</p> | <p><b>Discipline<br/>and the Day</b></p> <p>3:6,7</p> <p>3</p> |
|--|---|--|

*"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." 5:25*

Also note the scriptures listed within the overview chart above. Take this opportunity to investigate each one, looking for relationships between the section titles and key verses we have chosen. What have you learned thus far about 2 Thessalonians?

This letter provides instruction and encouragement in light of the Day of the Lord. We can be adversely affected by improper response to affliction, distress because of ungodly heresy and deception, and falling into undisciplined living. But the Day of the Lord will come, and Paul exhorts us to be prepared!

*Open your heart as you read and meditate!*

As a believer, do you receive affliction with joy and confidence that God will execute ultimate justice? Have you ever found yourself concerned and distressed over teachings that conflict with the teaching of Scripture? Are you impacted by apathy and undisciplined living?



## **AUTHOR AND DATE OF 2 THESSALONIANS**

See 1 Thessalonians key background.

## **HISTORY**

Since the writing of 1 Thessalonians, the seeds of false doctrine have been sown among this group of Christ-followers, causing them to lose their hope and throw away part of their confidence. Paul removes these destructive seeds and plants again the seeds of truth. In 1 Thessalonians, the Apostle commends the church of Thessalonica for its faith, hope and love (1 Thessalonians 1:3). By the time 2 Thessalonians is written, he commends them for their faith and love (2 Thessalonians 1:3) but the quality of hope is strangely missing in this letter. This hope is directly related to Christ's second coming "looking for the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) and "fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3).

From 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 we discover the central theme of this letter: a misunderstanding (spawned by false teachers or prophets) regarding the coming day of the Lord. Despite reports to the contrary, that day had not come and Paul recounts the events which must take place first. Our response to truth concerning Christ's second coming should not be lazy resignation but a wholehearted giving of ourselves to the gospel.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians hope to be renewed by these comforting words concerning the day of the Lord, and that they will be able to maintain a quiet stability amidst what the future holds - because they know WHO holds the future. To paraphrase Revelation 2:4; they will never again need to be rebuked for having "lost their first hope."

## ***Why Study the book of 2 Thessalonians?***

1. So as not to be fooled by false teachers who say the rapture will take place on a particular date or who make all sorts of strange and far-out predictions concerning Christ's second coming which have no crystal-clear basis in God's Word.
2. To motivate and encourage us to live sensibly and holy in the present age.



# 2 Thessalonians Chapter Chart

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Ready in Affliction

Read Chapter 1

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 1       |       |           |

## Reading One: "Plain Indications"

Read 1:1-5

1. Who was Silvanus? Who was Timothy?
2. What were the plain indications of God's righteous judgment that Paul is referring to?
3. What is given as the reason for suffering?
4. What is an enlarged faith?
5. What gave Paul cause for pride in the Thessalonians?

### What about today?

Describe to yourself the way your faith or the faith of those with whom you fellowship has been enlarged. How did that look? Meditate upon Hebrews 11 as you think about what it means to have an enlarged, vibrant faith!

## Reading Two: "Repayment and Relief"

Read 1:6-12

1. When does Paul believe verse six will take place?
2. In what way do we receive relief?
3. Who will receive retribution? What is retribution?
4. What will be the response of unbelievers in the Day of the Lord?
5. What will be a believer's response in that Day?

### What about today?

How does this section make you feel? In what way do verses 11 and 12 encourage you? God is in charge of repayment for evil (Hebrews 10:30) and will give relief at a future time (Revelation 21:4).

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 2 |  |  |
|---|--|--|

**Reading Three: “Did we miss it?”** Read 2:1-5

1. Why would it be profitable for Satan to disturb the saints with such supposed news?
2. How would (or could) such news be conveyed?
3. What was the effect upon these believers and why?
4. Some further reading and meditating: Apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1; Man of Lawlessness (Daniel 7:25, Revelation 13:5, John 17:12).
5. How will the man of lawlessness be known?

**What about today?**

1. What would be present examples of similar teachings which would disturb the saints and siphon our energy and attention?
2. The events of the future are of acute interest to believers today. Be careful not to be so wrapped up in the program of end time events that you miss the Person Who is and will be revealed (Revelation 1)!

**Reading Four: “Deceived and Deluded”** Read 2:7-12

1. What do you believe is the mystery of lawlessness?
2. Who is the one who is restraining?
3. What more do we learn about the deception? Who will cause it?
4. What will be the focus of delusion? Who will cause it?
5. Contrast the control reflected here in the actions of Satan and those of God. What do we learn?

**What about today?**

Satan is a powerful adversary - yet God wields final authority! Hope in God and cling to what is good no matter what is happening in circumstances around you!

**Reading Five: “Stand Firm, Hold Fast”** Read 2:13-17

1. What was the reason for Paul’s thankfulness?
2. What do we learn that instructs us about our sanctification?
3. For what purpose did God call us?
4. What traditions are proper for us to keep? How were they given?
5. What is the tone of this segment? How does it fit with what is being conveyed with the rest of the book?

**What about today?**

If we are to have eternal comfort and good hope - we must hold to the teachings. There is a difference between the traditions of men and the traditions of God. The former can only comfort and encourage the flesh; the latter will give good hope and eternal comfort!

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 3 |  |  |
|---|--|--|

**Reading Six: “The Faithful and the Faithless”**

Read 3:1-5

1. Do you pray for the rapid spreading of the Word in your world?
2. What does the phrase “for not all have faith” teach you?
3. What was the basis of Paul’s confidence in the Thessalonians?
4. Where are our hearts to be directed?

**What about today?**

What are some tangible situations and ways in which you can more adequately accomplish faithfulness? Read Psalm 37 with this subject in mind.

**Reading Seven: “The Unduly Unruly”**

Read 3:6-18

1. What does it mean to keep aloof and how does it relate to forbearance and forgiveness?
2. What would Paul describe as an undisciplined life?
3. What does a busybody do? What kinds of things does a busybody talk about?
4. How strong was Paul on this topic? Why?
5. Compare 2:17 and 3:13. Are you weary?
6. Note the contrast in 3:14,15 with the idea of keeping aloof.

**What about today?**

1. How does the practice of keeping aloof differ from placing pressure upon someone to conform to your own standards?
2. Evaluate your disciplined lifestyle. Where are you falling short? Where are you measuring up?

**CONCLUSION**

2 Thessalonians provides motivation and practical suggestion to live in light of the Day of the Lord. What a marvelous day it will be for those of us who have escaped the wrath of God!