

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR

Exploring
Thessalonians

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PART I

1 Thessalonians

Lesson One

1 Thessalonians: A Bird's-Eye View

You are about to begin the study of what is probably the earliest written document in Christian history, written less than 20 years after Jesus' ascension. Its five short chapters are filled with both practical counsel and theological insight. Of special importance in 1 Thessalonians is its presentation of the apostle Paul's fullest description of the Second Advent. Also helpful are its insights into the depth of Paul's pastoral heart and the doctrines of spiritual gifts, sanctification and the deity of Christ.

As with other Bible books, one of the best ways to begin is to read 1 Thessalonians through in one sitting from a translation such as the Revised Standard Version, the King James or New King James Versions, the New International Version, or the *New American Standard Bible*. A first reading should take about 15 minutes. Answering the questions will, of course, take some additional time, but the amount depends upon individual goals in the study of this important book of the Bible.

I. First Impressions of 1 Thessalonians

- A. As you complete your initial reading of each chapter, jot down in three or four sentences what you think the author is seeking to teach you in each chapter.

Chapter 1:

Chapter 2:

Chapter 3:

Chapter 4:

Chapter 5:

- B. Now that you have read 1 Thessalonians, write out your impressions of the book as a whole.

II. First Impressions From *Exploring Thessalonians*

Read the “Introduction to the First Letter to the Thessalonians” on pages 13–26.

- A. Provide a one-sentence statement on the purpose of 1 Thessalonians.

- B. List the eight major themes of 1 Thessalonians

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

- C. Discuss the privileged place of Thessalonica in the Roman Empire.

- D. Reflect on the founding of the church in Thessalonica.
- E. Highlight the main issues related to the occasion and background of the document.
- F. In one paragraph indicate the relevance of 1 Thessalonians for our lives in the twenty-first century.

Lesson Two

Setting the Stage

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 1

A. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and section 1.

1. Who is Timothy and what is his relationship to Paul in the New Testament?

2. Who is Silvanus and what is his relationship to Paul in the New Testament?

3. Discuss why these two men are linked with Paul in the letter's introductory verse

4. Reflect on the meaning of "Lord."

5. Discuss the meaning of "Christ."

6. Summarize what we have learned about Jesus in this verse.

7. Discuss the meanings and function of “grace” and “peace” in this verse.

B. Why do you think section 1 in *Exploring Thessalonians* is titled “A Weighty Introduction?”

Lesson Three

Words of Encouragement and Defense

1 Thessalonians 1:2 – 2:16

Exploring Thessalonians, Section 2-7

A. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5a and section 2.

1. List the most important points in these verses

2. Discuss what verse 2 tells us about the Thessalonians.

3. With section 2 in mind, reflect on what these verses at the beginning of the letter tell us about Paul's approach to ministry.

B. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5b-10 and section 3.

1. Summarize what these verses tell us about the Thessalonians.

2. Discuss what verses 9 and 10 tell us about God and Jesus.

3. In what ways does section 3 help you better understand these verses?

C. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1–4 and section 4.

1. Summarize what these verses tell us about Paul.

2. What do these verses tell us about God?

3. After reading section 4, discuss the reasons for Paul's defense of himself.

D. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:5–8 and section 5.

1. Summarize the meaning of these verses in your own words.

2. Discuss what these verses add to Paul's ongoing defense.

3. In what ways does section 5 help us understand more fully the "motherhood" role of ministry?

E. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9–12 and section 6.

1. Jot down your first impressions after having read these verses.

2. Make a list of what these verses tell us about Paul and his evangelistic team.

3. In what ways does section 6 help us understand more fully the "fatherhood" aspect of ministry?

F. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16 and section 7.

1. Discuss the reason that Paul was so enthused about this congregation.

2. List the points that Paul makes concerning his adversaries in these verses.

3. Discuss the ways in which section 7 in its treatment of the book of Acts helps us understand verses 13–16.

Lesson Four

Words of Concern, Rejoicing, and Prayer

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 8-11

A. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 and section 8.

1. Discuss the significance of the word “but” in verse 17 as it relates to the ongoing flow of 1 Thessalonians 2.

2. List the main ideas in verses 17-20.

3. How does the word “hope” relate to the rest of the passage?

4. Summarize the ways in which section 8 help us understand Paul’s pastoral heart?

5. How does section 8 help us understand the biblical concept of “orphan”?

B. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5 and section 9.

1. Reflect on the meaning of the shift from “we” in verses 1–4 to “I” in verse 5.

2. Summarize the contribution of this paragraph to the ongoing flow of Paul’s presentation.

3. Discuss Paul as a pastor in these verses.

4. In what ways does section 9 help us understand Timothy’s role in the mission to Thessalonica?

5. Discuss the flavors of faith set forth in section 9.

6. Reflect on how those “flavors” should impact on your personal walk with Jesus.

C. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6–10 and section 10.

1. Discuss the significance of the “but” in verse 6 in relation to the flow of the chapter.

2. List the emotion laden words in verses 3–10.

3. Summarize Paul’s emotions in the face of the good news about the Thessalonians.

4. Discuss the contribution of section 10 to your understanding of verses 3–10.

D. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13 and section 11.

1. List the items in this short prayer.

2. Discuss the contribution of the prayer in the ongoing flow of 1 Thessalonians.

3. Reflect on what each of us as individuals can learn from this prayer.

4. According to section 11, what are the Trinitarian implications of these verses?

Lesson Five

Pastoral Instruction

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 12-14

A. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-6a and section 12.

1. Summarize what Paul is telling the Thessalonians in verses 1 and 2.

2. List the items of Paul's concern in verses 3 through 6a.

3. What is the function of the "finally" of verse 1 in the ongoing flow of the letter?

4. In what ways does section 12 help us understand sanctification?

5. Discuss how section 12 helps us understand the apostle's concern with sexuality.

B. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:6b–8 and section 13.

1. List the major ideas in these verses.

2. What do these verses teach us about God?

3. What do they teach us about Paul's ministry?

4. According to section 13, what is it that we moderns won't hear and don't want to hear?

5. Discuss in the light of these verses and section 13 why it is important for the church to speak clearly on sexual morality in our day.

C. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12 and section 14.

1. List the main ideas in these verses.

2. Discuss the problem that Paul is dealing with in verse 11.

3. What are the implications of “outsiders” in verse 12? Why is Paul concerned with them?

4. Reflect on the possible relationship between minding one’s own business and working in verse 11.

5. Discuss how section 14 helps us understand better the implications of living God’s love.

Lesson Six

Instruction on Death and the Second Advent

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 15–17

A. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and section 15.

1. List the key words in verse 13.

2. What is the function of ignorance in that verse?

3. Reflect on the implications of “sleeping” in this passage.

4. Discuss why Paul uses the word “hope” here.

5. In what ways does section 15 help us understand the problem Paul is facing in this passage.

6. In the light of section 15 discuss the difference between Christian and non-Christian grief.

B. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14 and section 16.

1. What is the function of “for” in this verse as it relates to the flow of Paul’s argument in chapter 4?

2. In your own words summarize the meaning of this verse.

3. Some Bible translations have “bring” rather than “take” in this verse. What is the difference? In what ways does section 16 help us understand the issues?

4. Discuss the ways in which section 16 helps us understand the issue of immortality.

5. In the light of 1 Thessalonians 4 and section 16, why is there a tension between the concept of immortality and resurrection?

C. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 and section 17.

1. List the order of events in these verses.

2. Reflect on how these verses relate to the popular teaching on the “secret rapture.”

3. Reflect on the implications of the word “comfort” in verse 17 in light of the entire passage running from verses 13-18.

4. List the ways in which section 17 helps us understand verses 15-18.

Lesson Seven

Final Instructions

1 Thessalonians 5:1-22

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 18-21

A. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 and section 18.

1. Discuss the relationship of these verses to the ending section of chapter 4.

2. List the main ideas in these three verses.

3. Reflect on why Paul may have written these verses.

4. What are the implications of these verses for those of us who live today?

5. In what ways does section 18 help us understand “the day of the Lord”?

B. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 and section 19.

1. Discuss the way the “but” of verse 4 unites this passage to Paul’s ongoing presentation.

2. Discuss the situation of non-Christians in this passage.

3. Discuss the situation of Christians in this passage.

4. Discuss the implications of these verses for each of us as individuals.

5. List the ways section 19 aids in understanding verses 4-11.

C. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18 and section 20.

1. List the items of instruction in this passage.

2. Reflect on what verse 12 And 13 teach about church leadership.

3. Discuss how these verses speak to you personally.

4. Discuss the items in these verses that you most need to apply to your life.

5. Reflect on the ways section 20 helps us understand our responsibility as Christians.

D. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 and section 21.

1. List the items presented in these verses.

2. What does “do not quench the Spirit” mean?

3. Discuss the implications of these verses for our relationship to the Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy.

4. In what ways does section 21 help us understand how to test prophetic activity?

Lesson Eight

Parting Thoughts

1 Thessalonians 5:23–28

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 22, 23

A. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24 and section 22.

1. List the ideas in these two verses.

2. Discuss what these verses teach about God.

3. Reflect on what these verses teach about sanctification.

4. Discuss how section 22 helps us to understand the concept of sanctification.

5. In what ways does section 22 help us understand verse 23 regarding human nature?

B. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28 and section 23.

1. In these closing words, what is it that the apostle is asking his readers to do?

2. Reflect on the implications of verse 25.

3. Discuss the implications of verse 27.

4. How does section 23 help us understand the “holy kiss” of verse 26?

5. Discuss the ways, in light of section 23, that you can help your local congregation be more “ice free?”

C. Having completed your study of the book of 1 Thessalonians, in two or three paragraphs discuss its meaning for your personal journey with Jesus.

PART II

1 Thessalonians

Lesson Nine

Second Thessalonians: A Bird's-Eye View

Second Thessalonians may be one of Paul's shortest letters, but it certainly doesn't lack punch and vigor. In fact, it is one of his most forceful and hard-hitting. It follows shortly after 1 Thessalonians in time and treats many of the same issues, particularly where there were misunderstandings and the need of further instruction. At the very heart of the letter is a return to issues related to the second coming of Jesus, the topic that formed the doctrinal heart of the first letter. The two letters combined provide us with Paul's most extensive treatment on the subject.

As with other Bible books, one of the best ways to begin is to read 2 Thessalonians through in one sitting from a translation such as the Revised Standard Version, the King James or New King James Versions, the New International Version, or the *New American Standard Bible*. A first reading should take about 15 minutes. Answering the questions will, of course, take some additional time, but the amount depends upon individual goals in the study of this important book of the Bible.

I. First Impressions of 2 Thessalonians

- A. As you complete your initial reading of each chapter, jot down in three or four sentences what you think the author is seeking to teach you in each chapter.

Chapter 1:

Chapter 2:

Chapter 3:

II. First Impressions from Exploring Thessalonians

Read the “Introduction to the Second Letter to the Thessalonians.” On the basis of your reading:

- A. Provide a one-sentence statement on the purpose of 2 Thessalonians.

- B. Outline the circumstances that led to the writing of a second letter.

- C. List the five major themes of 2 Thessalonians.
 - 1.

 - 2.

 - 3.

 - 4.

 - 5.
- D. In one paragraph indicate the relevance for 2 Thessalonians for our lives in the twenty-first century.

Lesson Ten

Personal Matters

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 1-3 for 2 Thessalonians

A. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4 and section 1.

1. Compare verses 1 and 2 with verse 1 of 1 Thessalonians. What difference(s) do you find?

2. List the ideas set forth in verses 3 and 4.

3. Discuss the ways in which section 1 helps us better understand verses 1-4.

B. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 and section 2.

1. Summarize in one paragraph the main purpose of this paragraph.

2. Discuss the circumstances undergirding this paragraph. What was happening in the community that caused Paul to write as he did?

3. Examine verses 7-9 and list their main ideas.

4. Compare the teaching of these verses with “the wrath of the Lamb” paragraph in Revelation 6:12-17.

5. What ideas come to your mind when you read the words “eternal destruction”? Why?

6. Outline how section 2 helps us to begin to think about the New Testament view of suffering.

7. Discuss the justice of God in the light of the information given in section 2.

C. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12 and section 3.

1. List the elements found in this prayer.
2. What do you think Paul means when he says he is “always” praying for them?
3. Verse 11 uses the words “work of faith.” Compare that verse with Romans 1:5; 16:26; and Galatians 5:6 and contrast them with Romans 3:20; Ephesians 2:8, 9; and Galatians 2:16. Discuss the difference between good and bad works.
4. Outline the flavors of grace as discussed in section 3.

Lesson Eleven

Instructional Matters

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 4-7 for 2 Thessalonians

A. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 and section 4.

1. In its context, what had happened that led Paul to write verse 2?

2. Summarize the meaning of verses 3 and 4.

3. List the characteristics of the “lawless one” of verses 3 and 4.

4. On first impression, what do you think Paul meant by that description of the “lawless one”?

5. What are the implications of verse 5 when read in the context of verses 2 and 3?

6. Summarize the meaning of verses 6–8.

7. How does section 4 help us understand possible relationships between Paul's counsel in verse 2 and the counsel of 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21?

8. Summarize how section 4 helps us understand the ultimate “lawless one.”

B. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8–12 and section 5.

1. List the ideas set forth in these verses.

2. Summarize possible meanings for verse 8.

3. Does God really send people powerful delusions to lead them astray? Discuss that question.

4. After reading section 5, outline the events at the second coming of Jesus.

5. Discuss how that understanding will protect God's people from the impersonation of the Second Advent predicted by Christ in Matthew 24.

6. In what way does section 5 help us understand the verse about God leading people astray so that He might destroy them?

C. Read section 6.

1. Discuss the meaning of "antichrist."

2. In what ways does Christ's great prophecy of Matthew 24 link 2 Thessalonians with both Daniel and the book of Revelation?

3. Compare the characteristics of the lawless one of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and 4 with the little horn of Daniel 7:25 and the last day power described in Revelation 12 and 13.

4. Outline historical interpretations of the “lawless one” as he operates as a historical figure.

D. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 and section 7.

1. List the ideas set forth in verses 13-15.

2. Discuss in the context of 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul’s admonition to “stand fast” in verse 15.

3. In what ways does section 7 help us to better understand Paul’s counsel to hold on to tradition in verse 15?

Lesson Twelve

Exhortations

2 Thessalonians 3:1-15

Exploring Thessalonians, Sections 8-10 for 2 Thessalonians

A. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 and section 8.

1. Summarize the main ideas in these five verses.

2. Discuss the confidence we as believers can gain from this passage.

3. In what ways does section 8 expand upon the topic of the “the evil one” of verse 3?

4. Discuss the relationship between the “wicked and evil men” in verse 2 and the “evil one” of verse 3.

5. What are the implications of Paul's asking for the prayers of the Thessalonians? How can that be applied in our daily life?

B. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 and section 9.

1. Summarize in your own words the central idea(s) Paul is trying to get across in these verses.

2. Discuss the lessons that we can learn from verses 10-12.

3. Why do you think Paul added verse 13?

4. After reading section 9, discuss how the work problem of 2 Thessalonians relates to the work issue in the first letter.

5. List the five stages in handling a persistent problem as set forth in section 9.

6. What is the relationship between not working and being busy-bodies?

C. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15 and section 10.

1. These two verses present a very sensitive balance on church discipline. Discuss the implications of that balance.

2. Utilizing section 10 and the last 2 pages of section 9, outline Paul's recommendations for disciplining the "no work" offenders.

3. Outline the five aspects of church discipline set forth in section 10.

4. Discuss the difference between destructive and redemptive church discipline.

Lesson Thirteen

Saying Goodbye

2 Thessalonians 3:16–18

Exploring Thessalonians, Section 11 for 2 Thessalonians

A. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16–18 and section 11.

1. Compare this conclusion with that of 1 Thessalonians 5:25–28.
How are they similar? In what ways do they differ?

2. What are the implications of Paul signing with his own hand?
How might that fit with the problem in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 that stimulated this second letter?

3. In the context of the problems being faced by the congregation, reflect on the significance of the twice repeated “peace” in these closing remarks?

4. In what ways did section 11 expand your understanding of these final three verses of the letter?

- B. Having completed your study of the book of 2 Thessalonians, in two or three paragraphs discuss its meaning for your personal journey with Jesus.

