

I Thessalonians

Background

Synagogues found outside the boundaries of Palestine are generally a sign of Jewish migration. There are three primary explanations for the migration of Jewish communities outside the Palestine region: natural migration (self-relocation), post-captivity resettlement (such as the Assyrian and Babylonian migrations), or forced resettlement resulting from expulsion or persecution.

The presence of a synagogue in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-6,*13) suggests that it was a refuge city for Jews who fled to the region as a result of post-captivity resettlement (II Chronicles 36:22/II Kings 17:5) or expulsion (Acts 8:1, 12:1-2, 11:19-20, 13:14-50, 19:20-22; *Antiochus IV, 171 BCE).

Primary Teaching theme: *Persecution for the sake of the Gospel- (Doctrine of Enduring Faith)*

Thessalonica had a mixed population of Greeks and Romans, as well as a small Jewish community. Enough Jews, numbering about twenty thousand, were present to organize a synagogue in the local area. Thessalonica was a high-traffic thoroughfare connecting travelers between continents, specifically Italy and the Far East.

The apostle Paul celebrated the citizens of Thessalonica for their enthusiastic response to the gospel. The Church of Thessalonica is an icon for the region, one of the few with a larger population of non-Jews compared to the Church of Philippi, where Paul had less success earlier in his ministry.

The core message in the epistle to the Thessalonian Church is focused on the persecution they endured for embracing the Gospel while opposing the secular beliefs embedded in their culture. In the way that many Jewish followers of Messiah were punished for their acceptance of the Messiah, Paul references how the Macedonia Church has also suffered. (IThess. 2:14-16)

the persecution they endured for embracing the Gospel,

Don't be moved because of affliction cp 3-4

He encourages them not to be moved or to change their position of faith in the face of their affliction. (I Thessalonians 3:3-5) He warns them against falling back into the patterns of sin and to abstain from fornication, lust, and uncleanness. (4:1-7)

The final subject addressed by the Apostle is their hope in the coming of the Lord, the return of the Messiah. The new, non-Jewish believers faced the dilemma of rejecting their traditional secular beliefs in favor of the security offered by a newfound faith.

Many family members of the Thessalonians have died while waiting for the return of the Son of God. The Gentile believers had great expectations and hope concerning the Messiah's return.



The pending return of the Messiah created opportunities for many erroneous teachings and false alarms regarding the return. The Apostle encouraged them to hold fast without wavering from the truth he taught them.

Resurrection and Ascension cp 4

Many Jews and Gentiles alike believed that His return was imminent and that it would occur in their lifetime. The newfound Jewish believers hoped to make amends for their previous rejection of Him. In contrast, the Gentile believers relied upon His return to affirm their decision to reject their cultural and secular influences.

He does not want anyone in the Church, Jews or Gentiles, to be ignorant, without accurate knowledge and information, or ill-informed about the Messiah's return. As a result of the heightened awareness and expectancy of the Lord's return, questions have now been raised about believers who died before the Lord's return. How shall they benefit from the promise of eternal life?

Those with family members who followed their influence to believe in the Son of God (God actively present on Earth) are now pondering the validity of their faith and fate. The hope for the return of the Messiah was questioned because He had not yet returned, while many hopeful believers had died awaiting His return.

Paul does not want the hopeful to be ignorant about those who sleep, those who have died before the re-appearing of the Lord. He does not want them to be sorrowful for their loved ones as those who have no hope or belief in life after death. (4:13)

The Apostle reiterates the premise of Christ's resurrection. He physically died and was raised from the dead by the power of God. The God that raised Christ from the dead had the power to raise all those who died with their faith and hope in the Son of God (God actively present on Earth). The Church must find hope in the resurrection of Jesus; Paul explains that all those who are asleep in Jesus, through faith and belief in the Messiah, will accompany Him when He returns.

The Apostle unveils this revelation as a word received by God, the "word of Lord." He is not offering a mere opinion but an inspired revelation he has received on this issue in the same manner God enabled him to teach and preach on many other aspects of the gospel. (Galatians 1:11-12)



Resurrection and Ascension cp 4

- Those that remain Alive and those that are Asleep

In His revelation, the recipients of eternal life are divided into two class types: **those who remain alive and those who are asleep**. The difference between the class types goes beyond one group being alive and the other dead. Those who are alive will have a more significant challenge than those who are dead. The living must remain and be found faithful upon the return of the Messiah, which implies their status is subject to change. The second-class type represents believers who died holding fast to their faith in the Messiah; after death, their status as faithful is not subject to change. Those who are alive should use those who have died as an example of remaining loyal to their belief.

The Apostle further addressed the inability of those who are alive to impact those asleep in Christ. Living believers or non-believers have no ability or influence to prevent the awakening and resurrection of those who have died (asleep) in Christ.

The English rendering of **prevent** implies that the first class cannot stop the second class from attaining their inheritance. A closer in-depth review of the text reveals that the Greek word “*phthano*” used in the verse means “to anticipate beforehand *or already attain in advance*.” Applying the definition to the scripture explains that those who remain alive in Christ will not *attain* the promise of eternal life *in advance* or *before* those who are asleep.

The revelation within this text offers hope to believers who are concerned about family and friends who have passed away before them. Apostle Paul assured them that their belief in Jesus, the Messiah, would not be in vain and that those who have died believing in Him would be the first to receive the reward of eternal life.

(4:14-15)

Resurrection and Ascension cp 4

- The Archangel and Dead in Christ

The Apostles’ revelation continues with a description of the Messiah's second coming. The Lord Himself shall descend. He certifies that God will descend from heaven, not an Angelic representative.

God's descent is a literal illustration of God coming to man's rescue, as man cannot ascend to reach God. Many religious interpretations of the Christian faith suggest that men can reform their ways and become righteous and pure, thereby ascending into heaven to live with God. In this revelation, the Apostle explains that man does not rise or ascend into the Heavens beyond Earth to meet God on equal footing in His domain; instead, God descends from the heavens, making Himself accessible in the clouds in Earth’s domain to meet with man.



His appearance will be announced with a shout from an Archangel; the angelic introduction follows the pattern of His first appearance. (Luke 2:8-9,13) The first to rise to meet Him will be those who died believing in Him. The Messiah will return to the earth on a cloud in the same manner that He departed. (Acts 1:11) He will bring with Him the resurrected dead. The presence of the resurrected dead offers validation evidence of the true Messiah. Although they will have spiritual bodies that will not reflect the image of their former nature, they will know their identity and stand as witnesses rescued from death to be made alive forever. (4:16)

Resurrection and Ascension cp 4

- Caught to meet the Lord vs. Rapture Theory

Those who remain faithful shall be caught up, or, more accurately, they shall “go up, or ascend” together with the resurrected dead in Christ. The appropriate term in Hebrew for *going up or ascending* is “*Aliyah*”, [ah-lee-ot]. The Hebrew term “*Aliyah*” is the correct term used to express “*caught up*.” As a Biblical term, the word illustrates an individual or an entire nation when approaching the presence of God.

Personal ascent -

The Torah service held on every Sabbath required assigned readers to recite pre-selected Torah passages. The final passage read in the Torah celebration was assigned to a man seated in the audience. The walk to approach the *bimah*, a Jewish altar or pulpit, is called an “*Aliyah*.” [ah-lee-ot], a symbol of the journey to approach the sacred words of God, the Torah.

National ascent -

The trek to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate the High Holy Days was an ascent or “*Aliyah*” [ah-lee-ot]. All those who lived outside Jerusalem when making their journey to celebrate the commanded feast had to make a literal ascent when approaching the Holy City, as it was elevated higher than any other city in the region.

The Messiah’s return to earth will begin with His descent from the heavens. (4:16)

Those who are alive and remain will ascend alongside those who are resurrected and go up to meet with God. The meeting in the air, among the clouds, illustrates the physical ascent into God’s presence, *into the cloud of His glory*, which has been a signature of His presence throughout Scripture. (Exodus 24:18,40:34-35)

The English word “*rapture*” is derived from the Old Latin word “*raptura*”, which means “*to seize by force*.” Neither the Greek nor the Latin languages provide an accurate translation for the Jewish term “*Aliyah*”, which means “to ascend” or “to go up”.

In Jewish culture, the concept of being "caught up in the air" is represented by families making their tri-annual journeys from their homes to Jerusalem. All families outside Jerusalem would travel along a continuous incline to reach the temple city. The ascent symbolized "going up" to converge at the meeting place – the Temple of God. (4:17)



The "rapture theory" was introduced in the 1830s. It suggests that believers in Christ will be raised up from the earth and taken away. No historical evidence exists to support the theory that it was taught or endorsed among first-century church leaders. The concept is primarily based on interpreting the Greek word as "*harpazo*" in I Thessalonians 4:17, which means "to snatch away."

Rapture theology is a Protestant belief that originated during the late American Renaissance. Fundamental Baptists, Pentecostals, non-denominational evangelicals, and some Methodists are the groups primarily known to support it. The central theme of the "Rapture Theory" is the belief that Christ will return to earth in two phases: a secret return for His saints and a subsequent visible return with the saints alongside Him.

Potential timelines were attached to the theory, including a pre-tribulation rapture that would remove believers from the earth before the seven-year tribulation period, holding them in abeyance until Christ returns to earth for the millennial reign. There is also a mid-tribulation timeline that believers in Christ will be rescued in the middle of the tribulation period (3 ½ years) before the worst judgments can occur. They would also be held in abeyance until Christ returns to earth for the millennial reign. It is unclear where the souls are held while awaiting the end of the Tribulation and the final return of Christ.

Resurrection and Ascension cp 5 ***- The Thief in the Night/ Day of the Lord***

The Apostle recognized that people understood the day of the Lord would arrive unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. The premise that people are not prepared for the Lord's return applies to those who are unaware as well as to those who have lost hope because He has not yet returned.

Those who declare peace and safety because they do not believe that God will return and judge humanity will be surprised by sudden destruction. They will be caught unaware as the house is robbed by a thief at night, and they will not be able to escape the destruction just like a woman cannot escape the travail of giving birth to a child.

Those that are alive and remain faithful are not in darkness; therefore, the day of the Lord will not overtake them as a thief. The reference to children of light is symbolic of illumination, not perfection or holiness, which implies they are morally superior to others. Their distinctive difference lies in their illumination of the truth; they are not ignorant or in the dark, lacking knowledge of the truth. (5:4-6)

Armed with such illumination, they should not "*sleep*," meaning that they should not be Spiritually dead and not aroused by the truth as those that are in the dark. Children of light should be watchful and sober, expecting and waiting for the return of the Lord diligently without wavering from what they believe.

Those who are spiritually asleep are like those who are drunk at night, unaware of their surroundings or the consequences of their behavior. Sobriety is associated with being in the light of day and among those who are enlightened with the truth. (5:7-9)

Those who are alive and those who have died in Christ both have hope in the return of the one who died for us because we will all live together in eternity with Him. With these words, the Apostle instructs the Church to comfort and edify (build up) one another. (5:10-11)



II Thessalonians

Primary Teaching theme: *Affirming the Return of Christ*

The Apostle's message affirming the return of Jesus Christ continues in this segment of the epistle to the Church in Thessalonica.

The Return and the Gathering cp 2

The Apostle provokes his audience with the firm belief that he and his fellow brethren, Silvanus and Timothy, have regarding the Lord's return. (II Thess. 1:1) As believers, they have no doubts concerning His return and the meeting of the saints that will be "*gathered together under*" Him. The reference to a "gathering" as opposed to a "taking away" continues as a consistent reference to explain what will happen when the Lord returns.

They are confident about His return and want to encourage others not to be shaken or unstable in their thinking, nor to be turned away from this truth. The Apostle does not wish the Church to be troubled or afraid of other spirits, the opposing words from others, or even the words written in this epistle.

He doesn't want them to be afraid to believe the truth about the day of Christ, which is at hand, present, and impending upon them. (2:1-2)

The Falling Away cp 2

The Church is challenged not to allow men to deceive them. Allowing natural men to deceive them about spiritual truth is a strong charge against the Church. The Apostle addressed the deception already present in the Church, noting the questions regarding the expected return of the Lord. The confidence of many believers waned because the number of family members dying before the Lord's return was increasing.

Paul informs the Church that Christ will not return until there is first a falling away. Apostasy, or falling away, reveals the man of sin, the deceiver. The man of sin is also referred to as the son of perdition; he is not Satan but is under his influence and used to bring others into his deception. Perdition means "to bring to ruin"; deception intends to steal one away from the truth and, therefore, ruin what should be their intended outcome.

Lying wonders and signs will be used to deceive the elect. Men will not turn from truth by acts or works of dark behavior. The son of perdition will draw the attention of believers with works that appear to be good, virtuous, and miraculous. These works are lying wonders because they are done with the intent to draw people away from the truth about the true God. (John 8:44, Rev. 12:9)



Loving the truth is what will allow believers to avoid being overtaken by deception. With loving truth and holding fast to the truth that they love, believers will perish or be ruined by the work of deception.

God does not cause believers to fall away, but He will send delusion to test their love of the truth and faithfulness to Him. Delusion will come to reveal the man of sin and to expose those that will believe his lies.

The review of information by the Apostle is parallel to the teachings of Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:24, concerning the rise of false prophets and the deception of the elect (those chosen).

Pray for the Free Course for God's Word cp 3

The Church is challenged to be alert and to pray for the word of God to have free course and uninterrupted access across the world. The Apostasy that threatened the Church was the work of unreasonable (out of order), wicked men determined to undermine the faith of believers in the Messiah and in His return.

The Church was instructed to withdraw fellowship from anyone who walked in a disorderly manner, including those who claimed membership in the Church. Those who chose to disregard tradition, the oral transmission of fundamental truth about the gospel, were to be avoided.

There were reports of people who walked disorderly and were known as busybodies looking for opportunities to become disruptive. They were instructed not to keep company with anyone identified for failure to adhere to the words written in the Apostle's letter. Such people were to be counted as enemies, yet admonished as brothers. (3:14-15)

The return of the Messiah not being realized in the era of the first century Church marks the most significant threat leading to Apostasy in Church history. The potential for future apostasy continues as a prophetic warning for the modern Church today.

