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Something Special

Imagine that you just received a package marked “priority mail.” That’s a surprise... you haven’t been expecting anything from anyone. Opening the box you find a fragile scroll made of papyrus, the material that was used for thousands of years before modern-day paper. The papyrus is rough and frayed at the edges. As you unroll the scroll, noticing small tears here and there from repeated handlings, you realize that this is a set of very old letters. There is bold and precise handwriting at the beginning, and at the end you see an irregular, large scrawling signature. It’s obvious from first glance that these letters are not official documents but instead are personal, heartfelt messages from someone who cared deeply about those to whom he was writing. You have received an ancient, intimate communication between a wise, compassionate man and a very dear group of people.

This very special scroll that you have imagined and all the writings in it are not make-believe. They are a description of the real letters to the Thessalonians found today in our Bibles which contain the true and living words of our Holy God. Even these personal letters of the apostle Paul were inspired by the Holy Spirit and are completely authoritative and communicate God’s truth without error.

What was the reason for these special letters? What had happened to these people that warranted such messages? What could you learn about your own life by discovering more about them? Why did God choose this particular time to bring these letters to your attention?

These questions will be answered as we study the precious, well-preserved letters known to us as 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. The lives of our 1st century Christian ancestors will inspire us. The example of the ministry of Paul will challenge us. The teaching of the Lord through the words of Paul will enlighten our understanding of deep and mysterious truths. These letters contain something for everyone and Paul commanded that they be read to the entire church at Thessalonica. They are worth reading over and over and over again, until their pages in your Bible are as worn as pages of papyrus in an old scroll.

Please read the portion of 1st Thessalonians on the next two pages.

Please pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding of God's Word.

Please open your Bibles to 1st Thessalonians to answer the following questions.

Who is this letter from, and to whom is it addressed?

According to 1st Thessalonians 1:2-10, how are the following described:

Paul and his mission team –

The Thessalonian believers –

God –

Jesus –

Holy Spirit –

The gospel –

Please look at the beginning of the Thessalonians' story, found in Acts 17:1-10.

Where did Paul go?

How long was he there?

What did he explain?

What was the positive result according to verse 4?

What was the negative reaction according to verses 5 – 9?

What happened to Paul and Silas according to verse 10?

How would you describe the Thessalonian church at the time of Paul's departure, based on the passage from Acts and 1st Thessalonians 1:1-10?

What else can you learn about the Thessalonians based on the following verses?

1st Thessalonians 2:8

1st Thessalonians 2:13-14

1st Thessalonians 2:19

1st Thessalonians 3:2-6

2nd Thessalonians 1:4-5

After a short time with Paul, a group of Jews and God-fearing Greeks, and influential women had their lives changed forever. It was the best thing that could have happened to them, but it didn't mean that life would be perfect from then on. Maybe Paul told the dear Thessalonians the same thing he said to the believers in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch: "strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.... [they said]... 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.'" Acts 14:22 ^{NIV}

We've only scratched the surface regarding the lives of the Thessalonians, but at this point we can see that although they were new believers, they were living faithfully in the midst of a hostile environment.

Please look over the description of the Thessalonians in the 2 previous questions. What impact does their testimony have on you? How can you follow their example?

LESSON TWO: 1st Thessalonians 1:3-10

A Good Reputation

"We give thanks always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers..." So wrote Paul to his dear friends in Thessalonica. Our previous lesson showed us that the Thessalonians received the truth of the gospel and it changed their lives forever for the better. Let's look at three special characteristics that defined the reputation of this church.

∞ Please pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding of God's Word. ∞

Spread The Gospel

New life. Changed life. Faithful, loving, hopeful life. This is the result of the gospel! The gospel is a declaration, an invitation, and a transformation. But it doesn't start or end with us. In this lesson, we will focus our attention on the many facets of the gospel.

☞ *Please pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding of God's Word.* ☞

Please read 1st Thessalonians 1:4-5 and fill in the blanks below.

The lives of the Thessalonians were altered for eternity because of God's _____ of them (verse 4) and Paul's _____ to them (verse 5).

Please look up the definition for the following words:

Election: Strong's #1589

Greek word:

Greek definition:

Gospel: Strong's #2098

Greek word:

Greek definition:

Please consider the implication that Paul makes by putting these two concepts side by side in his letter. What do you learn about election and the gospel by reading 1st Thessalonians 1:4-5?

What do you learn about election and the gospel by reading 2nd Thessalonians 2:13-14?

What are the correct responses to the gospel and the specific details of the gospel, based on 1st Corinthians 15:1-4?

What is one of the results of the gospel, based on Ephesians 1:13?

The message and importance of the gospel is communicated repeatedly throughout the letters to the Thessalonians. Let's look at the many ways Paul refers to the good news and discusses its implications.

Please notice the words and phrases used to refer to the gospel, and note the delivery, content, and result of the gospel. (Where the category is not applicable, I have placed a —.)

	References to the Gospel	Delivery of the Gospel	Content of the Gospel	Result of the Gospel
1 THESS 1:5	<i>Gospel</i>		—	—
1 THESS 1:6-7	<i>Message</i>		—	
1 THESS 1:8	<i>Message</i>			
1 THESS 1:9-10	—			
1 THESS 2:2	<i>Gospel of God</i>			
1 THESS 2:4	<i>Gospel</i>		—	—
1 THESS 2:8	<i>Gospel of God</i>		—	
1 THESS 2:9	<i>Gospel of God</i>		—	—
1 THESS 2:12	<i>Called</i>			
1 THESS 2:13	<i>Message, Word of God</i>			
1 THESS 3:2	<i>Gospel of Christ</i>			
1 THESS 4:7	<i>Called</i>	—	—	
1 THESS 4:15-17	—			
1 THESS 5:8-10	<i>Hope of Salvation</i>	—		
1 THESS 5:23-24	<i>Called</i>			

How can you deliver the gospel the way the Paul, his coworkers, and the Thessalonians delivered it?

The Thessalonian believers were suffering in the midst of a worldly and intolerant culture because of the impact of the gospel on their lives. Was it worth it? Oh yes!

Please summarize, from the chart, the results of believing the gospel.

From the description of the gospel in 1st Thessalonians, what is most meaningful to you?

The life and times of Paul and the Thessalonians. I would not have wanted to live during their day. But I do want to live today in the way that they lived then. May the power of the gospel be evidenced in my life and yours. It is absolutely worth whatever changes or hardships may come.

LESSON FOUR: 1st Thessalonians 2:1-18

Be an Example

The storyline of the inspiring movie Fly Away Home sets the stage for our study today.

Amy is only 13 years old when her mother is killed in an auto wreck in New Zealand. She goes to Canada to live with her father, an eccentric inventor whom she barely knows. Amy is miserable in her new life...that is until she discovers a nest of goose eggs that were abandoned when developers began tearing up a local forest. The eggs hatch and Amy becomes "Mama Goose." The young birds must fly south for the winter, but who will lead them there? With a pair of ultra light airplanes, Amy, her dad and their friends must find a way to do it. ⁴

III. MISSION RESULT: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14

IV. MISSION HINDRANCE: 1 Thessalonians 2:14-18

How did Paul imitate Jesus and live his life according to Jesus' teaching in Luke 9:20-26?

What was Paul's motivation for what he did? What is your motivation for what you do?

The following verses contain statements similar to those Paul made to the Thessalonians. What should we be aware of?

1st Corinthians 2:4-5

2nd Corinthians 2:17

Galatians 1:10

Ephesians 3:8

1st Timothy 1:11-12

All that Paul and his co-workers did was for the purpose of proclaiming and offering the gospel to everyone. His purpose was clear, as you noted from 1st Thessalonians 2:12: that the Thessalonians would know the Lord and "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." ^{NAS}

*We are ultimately called to be conformed to the character of God. Not called to **be** God, but to be **like** Him so that we can know Him and be with Him. But the enemy of God wants to and tries to thwart God's plan.*

How does Paul say that Satan hindered the gospel, according to 1st Thessalonians 2:15-18?

Please look up the following word:

Hindered: Strong's #1465

Greek word:

Greek definition:

What does Ephesians 6:12-13 make clear?

Satan was at work hindering the gospel message in Thessalonica, and Satan was at work hindering Paul's return to Thessalonica. Although I am well aware of the truth from Ephesians, I am often slow to realize that the enemy is at work around me. Take a moment to evaluate your circumstances.

Is Satan hindering the witness of the gospel in your life in some way right now? If so, how?

Whether you answered yes or no to the question above, the next two questions will remind you of important strategies in our ongoing battle against spiritual wickedness.

What basic training is given in Ephesians 6:14-18?

What do we need to pray for and remember when we are sharing the gospel, according to the verses below?

Acts 26:18

2nd Corinthians 4:4

Colossians 1:13

When we stand firm in the Lord and see His victory over darkness, we will rejoice just as Paul did.

How does Paul describe his rejoicing in 1st Thessalonians 2:19-20?

The health and well-being of the Thessalonian congregation is of no small concern to Paul, for it offers public evidence of his success as God's missionary. "He thus yearns for them in part because, as his converts, their steadfast loyalty to Christ means that his own life has counted for something."⁵

Who will stand with you before the Lord Jesus as evidence of your ministry?

Whoever might think that Paul was a tough, crusty, arrogant man should consider his comments made in this letter. How very tender he was toward the Thessalonians, in person – according to 1st Thessalonians 1:7-8 (gentle as a nurse and mother with fond affection for them), and in word – according to 1st Thessalonians 2:19-20. This man loved these people with all his heart because he loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart and soul and mind and strength.

Paul followed Jesus which made him a man worth following. Is this true of you? Are you a Mama Goose?

LESSON FIVE: 1st Thessalonians 2:17–3:10

Thinking of you

Sometimes you just feel like you need to explain what's been going on in your life and give details! God's word is like that sometimes too. The personal information communicated by Paul helps us know him better and also gives us an opportunity to see how the Lord worked out His ways in His servant's ministry.

☞ Please pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding of God's Word. ☞

Please fill in the blanks with words and phrases from 1st Thessalonians 2:17 – 3:5 to complete Paul's message below based on that passage.

Do you have any idea how very homesick we became for you, dear friends? Even though it hadn't been that long, and it was only our bodies that were separated from you, not our _____, we tried our very best to get back to see you. You can't imagine how much we missed you! I, _____, tried over and over to get back, but Satan _____ us each time. Who do you think we're going to be proud of when our Master Jesus _____ if it's not you? You're our

The Day of the Lord

I enjoy sunrises. I love the brightness that the sun brings to the day. I have been fascinated especially by sunrises at the beach, when I have awakened early enough to see the stars in the dark sky, then see them disappear during the gradual approach of the great ball of fire rising up over the ocean. This event lasts for about an hour as the dark sky goes from black to grey to white to blue and as the clouds are edged with a bright red glow. The scene changes from moment to moment. And then, the sun is up! Brilliant and almost blinding! Based on Psalm 118:24, I can say: This is the day that the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it!

There is another day on the horizon, but its arrival will be terribly different from the dawning of a beautiful new morning. As we study Paul’s explanation of this future day, we will be glad that he first told us that believers will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air.

☞ Please pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding of God’s Word. ☞

Please read 1st Thessalonians 5:1-11.

What are the descriptions of this “day?” (Fill in the blanks below with phrases from the verses given.)

Verse 1 – it is called _____

Verse 2 – it is called _____

Verse 2 – it is unpreventable because _____

Verse 2 – it arrives secretly like _____

Verse 3 – it is unexpected because people are saying _____

Verse 3 – it is surprising because it comes _____ (one word)

Verse 3 – it is irreversible like _____

Verse 3 – it is threatening because no one will _____

There are nineteen specific references to the “day of the Lord” in the Old Testament, and in other verses it is referred to as “the day” or “that day.” While some see the day of the Lord as only one specific time of cataclysmic judgment, I understand it to be an extended period of time which will begin with judgment during the seven-year tribulation and then continue with blessing throughout the thousand year reign of Christ during the Millennial Kingdom, after which is a final, comprehensive time of judgment.

What do the following verses tell you about the judgment phase of the Day of the Lord?

Isaiah 2:12

Isaiah 13:9-11

Joel 1:15

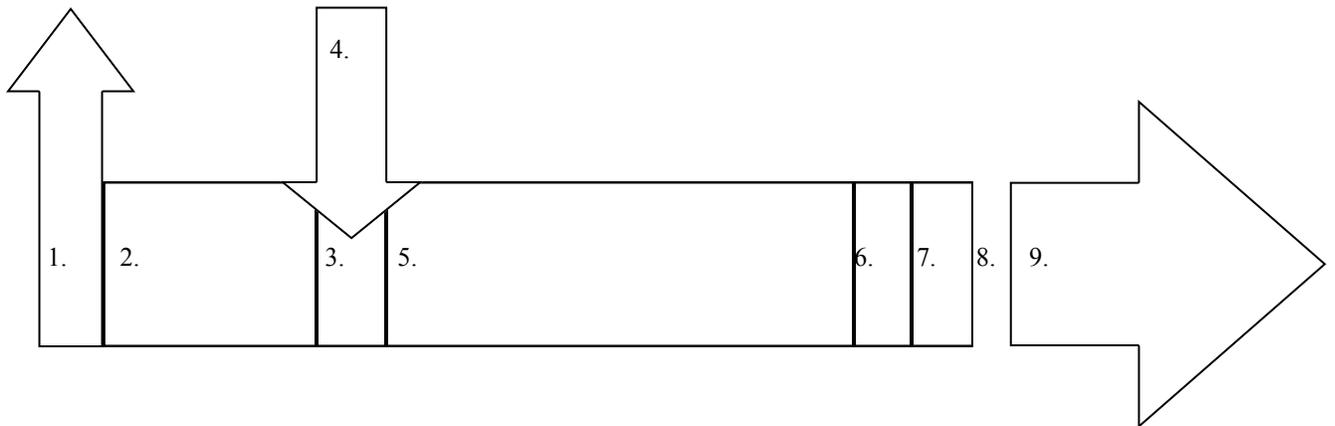
Zephaniah 1:14-16

Joel 2:1-32 is a detailed, yet condensed, summary of the Day of the Lord. It describes the horror of the day, but also the dual purposes of the extended time period (judgment and blessing). Jesus describes the initial judgment phase of the Day of the Lord in Matthew 24-25. An extended description of this time is found in Revelation 6—22, which includes the times of judgment as well as blessing (at the end!).

Here is the order of key end-time events in Bible prophecy, based on a literal (rather than allegorical) view of Scripture. This is based on a dispensational view of end-times, viewing rapture as pre-tribulational and viewing the Second Coming of Christ as a literal reign on earth for 1000 years.

1. Rapture of the church (John 14:1-3, 1 Cor. 15:51-53, 1 Thess. 4:13-18)
2. Tribulation period — 7 years (Dan 9:27, Matt. 24:4-28, Rev. 4 – 19)
3. Armageddon (Isa. 63:1-6; Joel 3:2; Rev. 16:12-16, 19:19-21)
4. Second coming of Christ to establish Himself as King (Zech. 14:4, Matt. 24:27-31, Rev. 19:11-16)
5. The Millennial Kingdom — 1000 years (Isa. 32:1-3, 60:1-22; Rev. 20:4-6)
6. Final Rebellion of Satan (Rev. 20:7-10)
7. Great White Throne Judgment (2 Tim. 4:1, Rev. 20:11-15)
8. Creation of New Heavens and New Earth (Ps. 102:25-26; Isa. 65:17; Matt. 24:35; 2 Pet. 3:10, 12-13; Rev. 21:1)
9. Eternal State (Rev. 21:2-22:15)

Label the events which will occur in the future on the timeline below based on the notes above.
(It is obviously not drawn to scale!)



We will study more about future events when we look at the second letter to the Thessalonians. Unless we are caught up to meet Jesus first! That could happen any moment!

What does Paul tell you about the believer’s relationship to the judgment of the Day of the Lord, in 1st Thessalonians 5:4-10? (Fill in the blanks below.)

Verse 4 – believers are not in _____

Verse 4 – the day will not _____

Verse 5 – believers are sons of _____, not _____

Verse 6 – we are to be _____ and _____

Verse 8 – we are to be _____

Verse 8 – we have put on _____

Verse 9 – God has not destined us for _____

Verse 9 – God has destined us to obtain _____

Verse 10 – salvation is through _____ who _____

Verse 10 – the result of salvation is that we _____

If you read 1st Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11, you will see that Paul first described being caught up in the air (rapture), and then described the sudden, surprising arrival of the judgment of the Day of the Lord. By placing these two events side by side, and by stating that we are not destined for God’s wrath, Paul indicates that rapture comes first. Because the Day of the Lord will arrive suddenly and unexpectedly, the timing of rapture is also sudden and unexpected.

How does Paul want the Thessalonians to respond to this instruction, according to 1st Thessalonians 5:8 and 11?

pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you by any means

2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

2 Thessalonians 3:3-5 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. ⁵ Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ

2 Thessalonians 3:12-13 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. ¹³ But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Based on your study of the Letters to the Thessalonians, and the impact of Paul's teaching on your life, what title would you give to this study?

How would you summarize what you have learned?

What changes, if any, have God's ancient words brought about in your life?

The following verse impacted me tremendously and has become the centerpiece around which both letters revolve. It is my prayer for myself and for you as we wait for Jesus!

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 May the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we also do for you. May He make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Amen.