

THE LETTERS  
TO THE

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THESSALONIANS

H. C. WOODRING  
R. J. LITTLE



*Developed as a study course by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.*

*The Letters to the Thessalonians*

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# STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

**P**aul wrote to seven churches (or groups of churches)—Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. His two Thessalonian letters were probably among the very first of the inspired writings which came from his pen. Yet, in our New Testament, we find them last in order of his church epistles. There is a reason for this. His church epistles are placed, not in chronological order, but in moral order. Since both Thessalonian epistles deal with aspects of the Lord's return and plant our feet on the highest possible ground, they come last. There can be nothing, in this life, beyond the Lord's return.

As you engage in these studies you will learn how the Lord's return affects both the church and the world. You will find that the theme of the second coming of Christ is not only intensely interesting, but also extremely practical. We trust that you will receive a lasting blessing as you study.

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## **Course Components**

This course has two parts: this study course and the exam booklet.

## **How To Study**

This study has twelve chapters, and each chapter has its own exam. Begin by asking God to help you understand the material. Read the chapter through at least twice, once to get a general idea of its contents and then again, slowly, looking up any Bible references given.

Begin studying immediately, or if you are in a group, as soon as the group begins. We suggest that you keep a regular schedule by trying to complete at least one chapter per week.

## **Exams**

In the exam booklet there is one exam for each chapter (exam 1 covers chapter 1 of the course). Do not answer the questions by what you think or have always believed. The questions are designed to find out if you understand the material given in the course.

After you have completed each chapter, review the related exam and see how well you know the answers. If you find that you are having difficulty answering the questions, review the material until you think you can answer the questions. It is important that you read the Bible passages referenced as some questions may be based on the Bible text.

## **How Your Exams Are Graded**

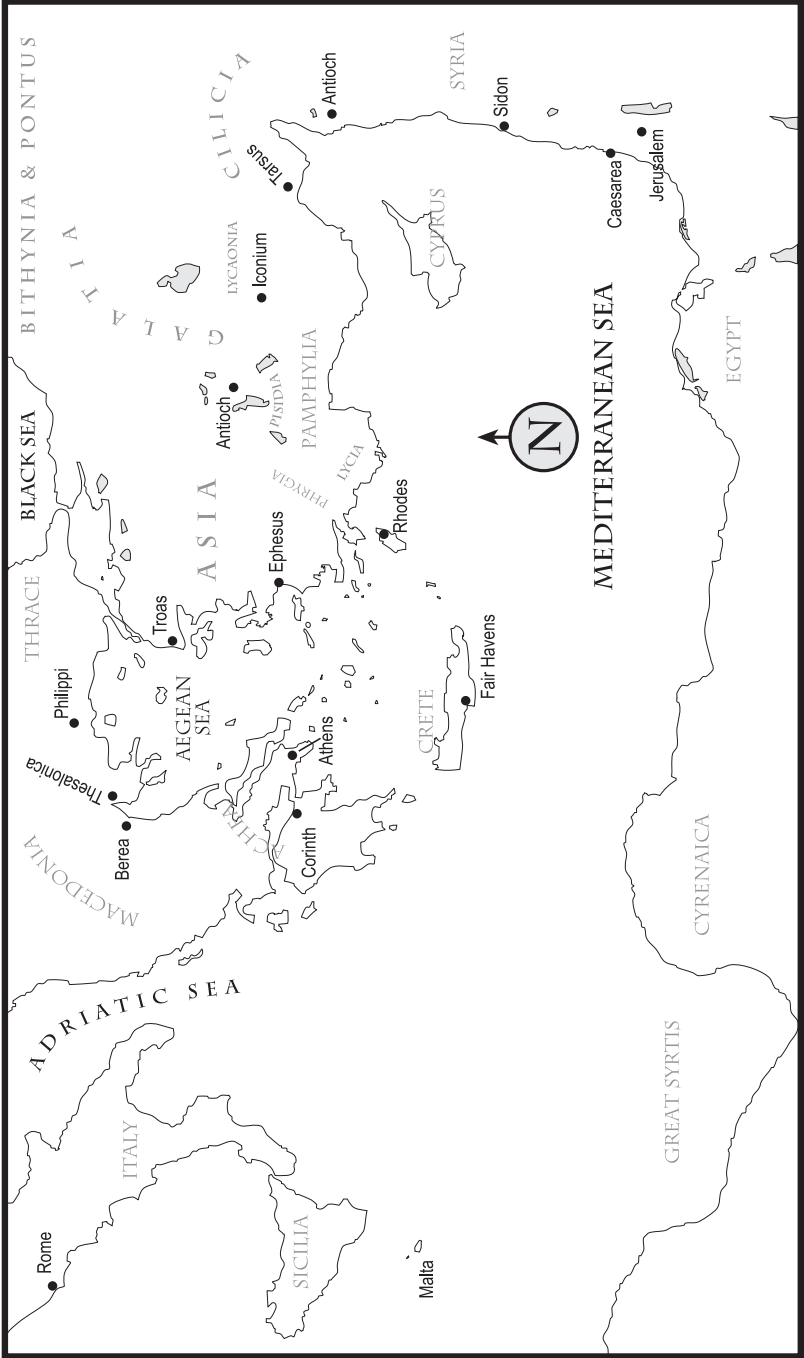
Your instructor will mark any incorrectly answered questions. You will be referred back to the place in the course where the correct answer is to be found. After finishing this course with a passing average, you will be awarded a certificate.

If you enrolled in a class, submit your exam papers to the leader or secretary of the class who will send them for the entire group to the Correspondence School.

See the back of the exam booklet for more information on returning the exams for grading.

“. . . that you would walk worthy  
of God who calls you into His  
own kingdom and glory.”

–1 Thessalonians 2:12



BITHYNIA & PONTUS

GALATIATA

CILICIA

SYRIA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

EGYPT

THRACE

BLACK SEA

ASIA

LYCAONIA

CYRUS

PAMPHYLIA

PHRYGIA

LYDIA

CRETE

CYRENAICA

MACEDONIA

Philippi

Troas

Ephesus

Rhodes

Fair Havens

AEGEAN SEA

CHERSONNE

Athens

Corinth

ADRIATIC SEA

ITALY

SICILIA

GREAT SYRTIS

Rome

Berea

Thesalonica

Corinth

Antioch

Iconium

Antioch

Sidon

Caesarea

Jerusalem

Malta



# Greetings (1 Thess. 1:1-10)

## Introduction

A firm grasp of the missionary movements of Paul and his company is essential to the understanding of the Thessalonian epistles. Therefore we will briefly consider the highlights. At this point you should read Acts 16:1–18:5.

In response to a call for help by a Macedonian man in a night vision, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke left Troas on the second missionary journey and arrived in Philippi. Here Lydia, a seller of purple, was converted and opened her home to the apostles. Next Paul delivered a demon-possessed, soothsaying girl. Incensed at the loss of financial gain, her masters accused Paul and Silas of spreading unlawful customs, whereupon the two were illegally beaten and thrown into prison. During the night, Paul and Silas were freed by a supernatural earthquake, and their jailer was miraculously converted. Publicly vindicated as Roman citizens the next day, they nevertheless were forced to leave the city at the insistence of the magistrates. Luke, however, remained at Philippi until the third missionary journey and Timothy stayed on briefly.

Meanwhile, Paul and Silas journeyed one hundred miles to Thessalonica. At this time Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, boasting a population of 200,000. Politically it was a free Roman city, ruled over by politarchs (Acts 17:6-7). Situated on the great Egnatian road, it was a key city on this strategic military highway which afforded Rome access to the East. Thessalonica was also a great central port and naval station. In addition to its native Greek population, it attracted

prosperous Romans and shrewd Jewish merchants. The Jewish population was large enough to establish a full-fledged synagogue, which also attracted many devout Gentiles. Like most ancient cities, the majority of its population seems to have been common laborers. There was widespread immorality catering to the lustful sea rovers and the sensual pagan population.

In this city, soon to become a base from which the gospel would fan out over Europe, Paul reasoned for three sabbath days in the synagogue, setting forth Christ as the suffering and risen Messiah. Only a sprinkling of Jews believed, but this was more than compensated for by the conversion of many God-fearing Gentiles and not a few of the chief women. Thereupon the unbelieving Jews, infuriated by this loss to Judaism, stirred up a riot. Jason, Paul's host, was dragged before the authorities and was made to put up security for the peace of the city. In this desperate situation, the brethren sent Paul and Silas away under the cover of night.

The two missionaries escaped to Berea, fifty miles to the southwest, where the Jews were far more open to Scriptural proof. Here he was apparently joined by Timothy. But soon the arrival of fanatical Jews from Thessalonica stirred up new trouble, forcing Paul to flee with an escort of brethren to Athens. Silas and Timothy remained behind in Berea to complete the work until they were summoned by Paul, now completely alone in Athens (cf. Acts 17:15-17). Deeply troubled by the news of the turmoil and persecution in Macedonia and concerned for the welfare of the new converts, Paul commissioned Timothy to go to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2) and Silas presumably to Philippi (cf. Acts 18:5).

Reaping only meager results amid the skeptical philosophy of Athens, Paul went on to Corinth, where he remained evangelizing for eighteen months. Here Silas and Timothy met him to report on the results of their Macedonian mission.

The report of Timothy was for the most part highly favorable, filling Paul with renewed hope and great joy. Still, there were minor problems that could become serious if left unchecked. In the light of this situation, Paul penned the first letter to the Thessalonians at approximately 50 or 51 A.D.

His primary purpose was to express his gratitude and thanksgiving to God for the wonderful way in which the Thessalonian believers had withstood pagan opposition and even fiercer Jewish persecution. At the same time he encouraged them vigorously to continue in their steadfastness.



One of the most pressing problems was the whispering campaign launched apparently by unfriendly outsiders and suggesting that Paul was nothing more than a professional evangelist with no real heart concern for his converts. Thus in the opening section of the letter, Paul ably defends his conduct and the character of his ministry.

In addition, the doctrine of the return of Christ had been both abused and misunderstood. Therefore, it was necessary to strictly admonish the disorderly who used this doctrine to be excused from serious earthly responsibilities. On the other hand, certain believers were consumed by the most unseemly grief because through death their loved ones had apparently missed out on the blessings of Christ's return. Paul therefore showed clearly not only the relation of the deceased believers to the rapture, but also the relation of the living believers to the day of the Lord.

Finally, there were instructions in godliness and holiness. All temptations to return to the easy-going pagan life of sexual looseness must be resisted. Spiritual leaders and gifts must be respected. Fellow brethren must be helped in distress. In general, the believer's life should be marked by unceasing prayer, praise, and practical sanctification—all in preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

## The Model Church (Chapter 1)

### A. Introduction (1:1).<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. The three writers (1:1a).

As was the custom in Bible days, the first letter to the Thessalonians begins with the names of the senders. Paul, as moved by the Holy Spirit, was the real author. He included the names of Silvanus and Timothy by courtesy. As cofounders of the church at Thessalonica, they were just as interested in this letter as if they had written it themselves. Because of their heartfelt concern, Paul throughout the letter included them in the little pronoun "we."

"Silvanus" is simply the Roman spelling of the Hebrew name "Silas." Silas was Paul's chief companion on the second missionary journey. He replaced Barnabas after the contention over John Mark

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<sup>1</sup>The author has used the American Standard Version throughout the lessons on 1 Thessalonians.

(Acts 15:37-40). Young Timothy, who had proved himself after his conversion through Paul at Lystra, was likewise invited to join the evangelistic team (Acts 16:1-3). Paul, writing here to converted Gentiles, used his Roman name, meaning “little.”

No high-sounding ecclesiastical titles or flowery descriptions were added to these names. To the simple believers in the model church at Thessalonica, Paul and his companions would be known as fellow believers.

## 2. **True definition of a local church** (1:1b).

Not only is it important to note how Paul introduced himself and his companions but how he described his readers. He addressed them as a “church” or “assembly” of people called out from the rest of mankind. Although the church can refer to the universal company of believers gathered out of the world since Pentecost, Paul was here thinking of the local church or gathering of believers in a particular vicinity, as shown by the added qualification “of the Thessalonians.”

At times local churches are viewed as mixed groups of saved and lost, as in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. Here, Paul took the ideal view of the local church according to divine design. The believers in Thessalonica were constituted a local church solely on the basis of their spiritual position “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” As such, Paul addressed only the saved individuals of the local church at Thessalonica, who were placed in this wonderful position by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). As to its earthly position, the local church found itself in a hostile heathen city in the midst of perils and persecutions. In its heavenly position, it found itself secure in the Father and the Son!

## 3. **Twofold blessing of grace and peace** (1:1c).

In his greeting, Paul desired for the Thessalonians the two blessings they needed most. The first was grace. Grace means that God is set free on the basis of the finished work of Christ to do for man what man cannot do for himself. The Thessalonians had already received God’s grace in conversion; now they needed it in daily living.

The second blessing was peace. Just as grace means that God is free to bestow favor, peace means that man is free to receive it. Every contrary thing on the part of man that would stand in the way of peace was dealt with at the cross. The Thessalonians had been assured of peace with God as an objective fact when they believed; now they needed peace as a subjective reality in the midst of the countless difficulties of their Christian lives.

**B. Paul's thanksgiving to God for the believers in the model church (1:2-10).**

**1. Specific, regular prayer of Paul (1:2).**

A local church of regenerate believers as described in 1:1 could not exist in this dark world apart from a supernatural miracle of grace. Accordingly, as was his constant practice, Paul directed his thanksgiving to God for the transformed lives of the believers forming the church. A normal assembly is composed of all sorts of believers, each of whom has some contribution to make. Therefore, Paul was thankful not just for a select few but for "you all." Paul's appreciation was not simply a general, indefinite feeling of thankfulness; instead he expressed it in a concrete way by specifically mentioning the Thessalonian believers by name on the occasion of his prayers. They were on Paul's prayer list.

**2. Strong spirituality in action (1:3).**

As Paul mentioned the names of the Thessalonian believers over and over again, he remembered their most outstanding spiritual virtues. The expression "without ceasing" was used in Greek of a person with an incessant or recurring cough. Paul just couldn't get out of his mind the wonderful way God had worked in the lives of the Thessalonian believers.

**a. The work of faith (1:3a).**

The first virtue called to Paul's mind was faith. This faith was not some sort of empty, theoretical thing but a faith that went into energetic action and accomplished deeds. Chapter 11 of Hebrews is a good example of faith that does things or belief that bears fruit.

b. **The labor of love** (1:3b).

The next virtue called to mind was love. This is a determined, self-sacrificial love from God which is moved to labor. Labor is the kind of work involving toil, weariness, exhaustion, and cost. Bible love is not a sentimental, fluttery feeling but a manly love of sweat, blood, and tears.

c. **The endurance of hope** (1:3c).

The third virtue is hope. Hope in the Scriptures is not just baseless optimism, wishful thinking, or longing expectation that things will turn out all right in the end; it is rather the assurance given by the Spirit that God will most certainly keep all His promises in Christ, despite every appearance to the contrary. Such hope produces brave patience or steadfast endurance. This hope will enable the believer to bear up under all the trails of this present evil age; it will never be disappointed, for it rests “on our Lord Jesus Christ” when He comes for His church to introduce every believer “before our God and Father.”

3. **Signs of election** (1:4-6).

The thanksgiving of Paul involved not only making specific mention of the Thessalonian believers and recalling their spiritual virtues, but embraced also the certain knowledge of their election. The elect are those chosen unto salvation in past eternity by God. Election always has a positive purpose of producing saved men of a godly character. By Spirit-given insight, Paul immediately recognized, in view of the spiritual characteristics in 1:3, that the Thessalonians had all the earmarks of the elect.

The way Paul addressed them shows that election is no cold, impersonal doctrine. In relation to Paul the elect believers were affectionately addressed as “brethren.” In relation to God they were dearly “beloved.” In addition to involving the warmest Christian fellowship and being bathed in the love of God, the doctrine of election is also practical, as Paul now outlines in a twofold way.

a. **Evidences of election seen in the evangelists** (1:4-5).

Strangely enough, the first token of election was found not in the way the Thessalonians received the gospel but in the way in which it was presented by the evangelists. Although

the election of God is sovereign, it is not arbitrary. God uses means to call the elect to Himself. Therefore, the preaching of the gospel to the Thessalonians was blessed in the most marvelous way. The evangelistic preaching came to be not in word only. Mere accuracy of form or content is not enough, desirable though it may be; more than that is needed if men are to be saved. As channeled through the evangelistic team, the gospel came in the dynamic impact of the Holy Spirit Himself, imparting the utmost confidence to the speakers.

So apparent was the persuasive power radiating from the evangelists that even the Thessalonians were aware of what manner of men they had become. The purpose of this great transformation, says Paul, was “for your sake”—in order that the Thessalonians should be mightily influenced and saved!

b. **Evidences of election seen in the Thessalonian converts (1:6).**

Verse six gives the other side of the proof. Verses four and five show how the gospel was presented to the Thessalonians, but 1:6 shows how the Thessalonians responded to the gospel. By receiving the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit, the Thessalonians became imitators or mimics of the evangelists and of the Lord. Note that, according to the order, the Thessalonians saw first the evangelists and then the Lord whom these witnesses reflected.

Furthermore, they received the word joyfully, literally “having welcomed” it in spite of the outward affliction and tribulation that went with it. The internal joy of the Holy Spirit more than compensated for the physical suffering involved. All this is in direct opposition to human nature and demonstrates that the Thessalonians were supernaturally elect.

4. **Sounding forth the testimony of the Thessalonians (1:7-10).**

a. **The model church an example to the believers (1:7).**

The practical result was that the Thessalonians became an example, model, or pattern. The fact that the word is in the singular shows that it was the church as a whole that became the outstanding example of what a model assembly of believers should be. No other local church was ever singled

out by Paul and set forth as a standard by which companies of believers could measure themselves. It was the believers in the bordering provinces of Macedonia to the north and Achaia to the south who were mentioned as the ones best able to observe and copy the church at Thessalonica.

b. **The model church an exhibition of saving grace to the lost** (1:8-10).

In 1:8 Paul explains how it happened that the Thessalonians came to be known as a typical example of what a New Testament church should be. The supernatural word of the Lord sounded forth from them like a clear, piercing trumpet call or a roll of thunder echoing and re-echoing.

Moreover, the report was not spread “by them” but “from them.” It was not what the Thessalonians said themselves but what was said about them. Their transformed lives and not their preaching resulted in the publishing of the testimony not only in Macedonia and Achaia but everywhere. Since Thessalonica was a great seaport, the news of the faith of the Thessalonians went forth as a traveler throughout the Roman world, so that it was not necessary for Paul to say anything at all. Instead, he overheard the reports circulating as they came back to him. Because the church of Thessalonica had a living, genuine “faith to God-ward,” it could not be hid before men! Two aspects in particular of the Thessalonians’ faith stood out.

First, it was associated with the marvelous Spirit-empowered entrance of Paul and his fellow evangelists (1:9a). Note again that it was the entrance by the preachers and not the reception by the Thessalonians that was remarkable. Mediocre, mechanical gospel preaching not only lacks any semblance of real faith toward God but it is unlikely to produce it in others. Paul’s company arrived with such burning faith that the Thessalonians in turn caught fire and the flame spread abroad to others.

The second thing about the faith of the Thessalonians Godward was their revolutionary conversion and consistent Christian conduct. The conversion is described from the viewpoint of the Greek onlookers and thus is given in factual,

historical language and not in doctrinal terminology. The only theology the world knows anything about anyway is that which it sees in the life of the believer.

The conversion of the Thessalonians had involved a complete about-face that changed them into entirely different persons. Their whole being was now inclined and directed toward God. This positive turning delivered them in a negative way from the enslaving idols from which they had resolutely turned away. Moreover, their conversion was not just a sort of convenient fire escape from hell. The thing that stands out is that the Thessalonians were not saved *from something* so much as *to Someone*. Their conversion was an intelligent decision with two grand objectives in mind.

First, that they might serve habitually and as bond-slaves such a Person as the living and genuine God. Forever through with the sham and shame of paganism, they had discovered a life of fruitful service that meant something. Without a single reservation, they were turning themselves over in devoted bondage to the living God of reality!

Second, it was the Thessalonians' express desire to "wait up" for God's Son from heaven. No wonder their eyes were turned away from the idols of this earth! The expression "wait up" shows that the believers expected the return of Christ at any moment. They did not expect to go through a long tribulation period. One does not wait up all night for a person one expects to arrive at 8:30 the next morning!

One can well appreciate the breathless anticipation of the Thessalonians in view of the description of the Person and work of the Coming One. As to His Person, He is the very Son of God, possessing absolute deity. He also is the Heavenly One Whose source and environment is heaven itself. His matchless Name is Jesus; He is Jehovah Who perfectly saves and delivers from all sin. As to His work, He forever triumphed over death, having been raised from the dead by no less a Person than God Himself. Having triumphed over man's supreme enemy, He is henceforth known as the Deliverer who will even deliver His Own from the coming wrath, which is already on its way and may arrive at any moment.

“The wrath” is not hell or the lake of fire. Hell is not coming to sinners; rather sinners are going to hell. The Thessalonian believers did not have to be delivered from the lake of fire in the future; for them that deliverance was past.

Neither is it the wrath of the judgment seat for either the saved or the lost; all without exception must appear before God for judgment in some form.

“The wrath” is rather that violent indignation or retributory punishment which will be unleashed and openly poured out upon a godless earth in the tribulation period. Compare Revelation 6:17—“for the great day of their wrath is come,” speaking of the arrival of the day of wrath. Revelation 16:1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17 describe the wrath being poured out. Revelation 15:1 notes that the day of wrath is finished with the seven last plagues. Jesus, God’s Own Son, delivers the believers in the Church who have turned to Him by removing them from this wicked earth before God’s wrath falls.



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THESSALONIANS

**EXAM BOOKLET**  
**AK '05 (2 UNITS) THES**

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ADDRESS

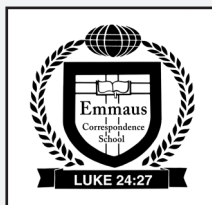
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CITY, STATE, ZIP

COURSE GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

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INSTRUCTOR



*Exam developed by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.*

## A NOTE ON THE EXAMS

The exams are designed to check your knowledge of the course material and the Scriptures. After you have studied a chapter, review the exam questions for that lesson. If you have difficulty in answering the questions, re-read the material. If questions contain a Scripture reference, you may use your Bible to help you answer them. If your instructor has provided a single page Answer Sheet, record your answer on that sheet. This exam contains the following types of questions:

### MULTIPLE CHOICE

You will be asked to write in the letter of the correct answer at the space on the right. Here is an example:

The color of grass is

- A. blue                      C. yellow  
B. green                     D. orange

     **B**     

### WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Questions headed this way are designed to help you express your ideas and feelings. You may freely state your own opinions in answer to such questions.

### RETURNING THE EXAM

See the back of this exam booklet for instructions on returning your exam for grading.

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## CHAPTER 1 EXAM

### GREETINGS

#### EXAM GRADE

***Before starting this exam, write your name and address on the front of this Exam Booklet.***

*Directions: Read each question carefully and write the letter of the correct answer in the blank space on the right. Use the separate answer sheet if provided.*

1. At the time of Paul's first visit to the city, Thessalonica
  - A. was the capital city of Thrace
  - B. had a population of half a million people
  - C. was a free Roman city
  - D. was populated entirely by Jews\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. After founding the church at Thessalonica Paul left because
  - A. his converts were sufficiently established to carry on alone
  - B. a riot in the city made it impossible for him to remain there
  - C. he wanted to be back in Jerusalem in time for the Passover
  - D. he felt the Bereans would be more receptive to the Gospel\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Which of the following was ***not*** one of Paul's reasons for writing 1 Thessalonians? He wanted to
  - A. tell his converts how thankful he was that they were continuing in the faith
  - B. urge Timothy to hurry up and rejoin the main missionary party
  - C. squelch slanderous assertions being made against him
  - D. correct misunderstandings which had arisen regarding the second coming of Christ\_\_\_\_\_

4. 1 Thessalonians was written by
- A. an anonymous author although it is generally credited to Paul because its style is so similar to 2 Thessalonians
  - B. Paul, Timothy and Silvanus
  - C. Paul alone
  - D. Paul and Luke for the “we” passages in the epistle correspond to the “we” passages in the book of Acts \_\_\_\_\_
5. When Paul addressed himself to “the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1 AV) he was
- A. inferring that the church at Thessalonica had so far fallen from the divine ideal that it had become *their* church instead of the *Lord’s* church
  - B. using the word “church” to refer to the larger, universal company of God’s people rather than to the smaller, local company at Thessalonica
  - C. speaking in the broadest possible terms since the church at Thessalonica was composed of both saved and lost in various stages of spiritual development
  - D. taking the ideal and local view of the church and was addressing the local gathering of believers \_\_\_\_\_
6. Paul told the Thessalonians that he remembered them “without ceasing.” He used a word to express himself, usually used by the Greeks to describe
- A. the continual drip of water from a roof on a rainy day
  - B. a nagging cough
  - C. a toothache
  - D. the continual gnawing of a rodent \_\_\_\_\_
7. To the three cardinal virtues of faith, hope and love, Paul specifically linked
- A. the past, the present and the future
  - B. a man, a woman and a child
  - C. the senses of sight, hearing and feeling
  - D. work, labor and patience \_\_\_\_\_

8. The Thessalonians

- A. had all the recognizable marks of the elect
  - B. were in danger of losing their salvation because they lacked the distinguishing marks of the elect
  - C. were the elect of God because of their good works and religious zeal
  - D. had been elected to salvation on purely arbitrary grounds
- \_\_\_\_\_

9. That the conversion of the Thessalonians was genuine was proved by

- A. their turning to God from idols
  - B. their service to the true and living God
  - C. their expectation of the Lord's return
  - D. all the above
- \_\_\_\_\_

10. In the lesson, "The Wrath" is

- A. hell, the future place of unrepentant-sinners
  - B. the Lake of Fire
  - C. punishment upon the godless in the tribulation
  - D. the judgment seat
- \_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

In what way had the Thessalonian believers become examples to those around them? (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

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