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# THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

**NEW TESTAMENT**

**BOOK 52**

**1 THESSALONIANS**



**The Apostle Paul and Silas in Prison by Tom White**

## SUMMARY

After Paul started the church in Thessalonica, he wrote this first letter to the believers there within just a few months of leaving. In Acts, Luke recorded that Paul preached for three Sabbath days to the Jews in the local synagogue.

However, most scholars believe Paul spent about three months, rather than three weeks, with the Thessalonians because he would have had to have been there long enough to receive more than one offering from the Philippian church.

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica obviously touched not only Jews but Gentiles as well. Many Gentiles in the church had come out of idolatry, which was not a particular problem among the Jews of that time.

Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonian church from the city of Corinth around AD 51, just a few months after having preached in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey.

Upon leaving Thessalonica under duress, Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled to Athens by way of Berea. But after a short time in Athens, Paul felt the need to receive a report from the newborn church in Thessalonica, so he sent Timothy back to serve and minister to the new believers there.

Paul wanted to check on the state of the Thessalonians' faith, for fear that false teachers might have infiltrated their number. However, Timothy soon returned with a good report, prompting Paul to pen 1 Thessalonians as a letter of encouragement to the new believers.

Everyone would like to have some insight into what their future holds. How much more so when it comes to the end of the whole world? First Thessalonians provides Christians with the clearest biblical passage on the coming rapture of believers, an event that will inaugurate the seven-year tribulation.

At the rapture, Christ will return for His people. The dead in Christ shall rise first, while those still living will follow close behind. All believers will meet Jesus in the air to begin an eternity spent with the Lord.

Impressed by the faithfulness of the Thessalonians in the face of persecution, Paul wrote to encourage the Christians in that community with the goal that they would continue to grow in godliness.

Paul knew that the people had been exposed to errant teaching from those in opposition to the way of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. And Paul also understood that unless the young church continued to mature in its faith, the danger would only increase over time.

With that in mind, Paul taught the people that any spiritual growth would ultimately be motivated by their hope in the ultimate return of Jesus Christ. Paul was never interested in simply telling people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, for he knew that what ultimately inspired change was a life of consistently walking in the power of God's Spirit.

## SUMMARY Continued

And so to a group of young Christians with questions and uncertainties, Paul offered the hope of Christ's return, providing both comfort in the midst of questions and motivation to godly living.

Do you ever feel as though your Christian faith has grown stale, that you are withering on the vine when you would rather be flourishing in His service? Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is the perfect remedy for such a feeling.

Its focus on Christ's return provides water for the thirsty soul today, encouraging growth in maturity by providing hope in the midst of suffering or uncertainty. Paul's specific, practical instruction for this process of sanctification can be applied directly to our current circumstances.

By clinging to our hope in Christ, we may see several clear results in our lives: avoiding sexual immorality, refusing to defraud others, appreciating those Christians who serve on your behalf, refusing to repay evil for evil, rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, and giving thanks in all things—to name a few.

This list, of course, is not exhaustive, but the first letter to the Thessalonians makes clear that every Christian should expect to grow in holiness over the course of his or her life.

## NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 2:4** But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.
- 2:12** that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.
- 2:13** For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.
- 3:12** And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,
- 3:13** so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.
- 4:3** For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;
- 4:4** that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,
- 4:5** not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;
- 4:6** that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.
- 4:7** For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.
- 4:8** Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.
- 4:11** that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

**NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued**

- 4:12** that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.
- 4:16** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.
- 4:17** Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.
- 4:18** Therefore comfort one another with these words.
- 5:1** But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.
- 5:2** For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.
- 5:3** For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.
- 5:4** But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.
- 5:5** You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.
- 5:6** Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.
- 5:7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.
- 5:8** But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.
- 5:9** For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 5:10** who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.
- 5:11** Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.
- 5:14** Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.
- 5:15** See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.
- 5:16** Rejoice always,
- 5:17** pray without ceasing,
- 5:18** in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- 5:19** Do not quench the Spirit.
- 5:20** Do not despise prophecies.
- 5:21** Test all things; hold fast what is good.
- 5:22** Abstain from every form of evil
- 5:23** Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5:24** He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

## CHARACTER Definitions

**THESSALONICA** - Paul visited the town, together with Silas and Timothy, on his 2nd missionary journey. He had been at Philippi, and traveled thence by the Egnatian Road, passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia on the way.

He found at Thessalonica a synagogue of the Jews, in which for three successive Sabbaths he preached the gospel, basing his message upon the types and prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Some of the Jews became converts and a considerable number of proselytes and Greeks, together with many women of high social standing. Among these converts were in all probability Aristarchus and Secundus, natives of Thessalonica, whom we afterward find accompanying Paul to Asia at the close of his 3rd missionary journey.

The former of them was, indeed, one of the apostle's most constant companions; we find him with Paul at Ephesus and on his journey to Rome, while in two of his Epistles, written during his captivity, Paul refers to Aristarchus as still with him, his fellow-prisoner.

Gaius, too, who is mentioned in conjunction with Aristarchus, may have been a Thessalonian. How long Paul remained at Thessalonica on his 1st visit we cannot precisely determine; certainly we are not to regard his stay there as confined to three weeks, and Ramsay suggests that it probably extended from December, 50 A.D., to May, 51 A.D.

In any case, we learn that the Philipines sent him assistance on two occasions during the time which he spent there, although he was working night and day to maintain himself. Paul, the great missionary strategist, must have seen that from no other center could Macedonia be permeated with the gospel so effectively as from Thessalonica.

But his success roused the jealousy of the Jews, who raised a commotion among the dregs of the city populace. An attack was made on the house of Jason with whom the evangelists were lodging.

When these were not found Jason himself and some of the other converts were dragged before the magistrates and accused of harboring men who had caused tumult throughout the Roman world, who maintained the existence of another king, Jesus, and acted in defiance of the imperial decrees.

The magistrates were duly alive to the seriousness of the accusation, but, since no evidence was forthcoming of illegal practices on the part of Jason or the other Christians, they released them on security.

Foreseeing further trouble if Paul should continue his work in the town, the converts sent Paul and Silas (and possibly Timothy also) by night to Berea, which lay off the main road and is referred to by Cicero as an out-of-the-way town.

The Berean Jews showed a greater readiness to examine the new teaching than those of Thessalonica, and the work of the apostle was more fruitful there, both among Jews and among Greeks.

## CHARACTERS Continued

But the news of this success reached the Thessalonian Jews and inflamed their hostility afresh. Going to Berea, they raised a tumult there also, and made it necessary for Paul to leave the town and go to Athens

**THESSALONIAN CHURCH -** The Thessalonian church was a strong and flourishing one, composed of Gentiles rather than of Jews, if we may judge from the tone of the two Epistles addressed to its members, the absence of quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament, and the phrase Ye turned unto God from idols.

These, by common consent the earliest of Paul's Epistles, show us that the apostle was eager to revisit Thessalonica very soon after his enforced departure: once and again the desire to return was strong in him, but Satan hindered him, a reference probably to the danger and loss in which such a step would involve Jason and the other leading converts.

But though himself prevented from continuing his work at Thessalonica, he sent Timothy from Athens to visit the church and confirm the faith of the Christians amid their hardships and persecutions.

The favorable report brought back by Timothy was a great comfort to Paul, and at the same time intensified his longing to see his converts again. This desire was to be fulfilled more than once.

Almost certainly Paul returned there on his 3rd missionary journey, both on his way to Greece and again while he was going thence to Jerusalem; it is on this latter occasion that we hear of Aristarchus and Secundus accompanying him.

Probably Paul was again in Thessalonica after his first imprisonment. From the Epistle to the Philippians, written during his captivity, we learn that his intention was to revisit Philippi if possible.

1 Timothy 1:3 records a subsequent journey to Macedonia, in the course of which the apostle may well have made a longer or shorter stay at Thessalonica. The only other mention of the town in the New Testament occurs in 2 Timothy 4:10, where Paul writes that Demas has forsaken him and has gone there. Whether Demas was a Thessalonian, as some have supposed, cannot be determined.

**SILAS -** Silas was a leader in the early church, a fellow missionary with Paul, and a faithful brother. He was a Hellenistic Jew who, it seems, was also a Roman citizen. He is also referred to as Silvanus in Paul's Epistles.

When we first meet Silas in Scripture, he is a leader and teacher in the Jerusalem church. After the Jerusalem Council, Silas was chosen to help communicate the council's decision to Antioch, along with the apostle Paul. Soon afterwards, Paul set out on his second missionary journey, and he chose Silas to accompany him.

On this journey, Paul and Silas traveled to Greece. In Philippi, the missionaries were arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

## CHARACTERS Continued

God then miraculously released them, and the jailer, having witnessed their faith, asked them, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Paul and Silas answered, believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. The jailer was saved that night, and he and his family were all baptized.

The next day, the city officials learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and they were immediately fearful; their mistreatment of Paul and Silas the day before had violated Roman law.

The city leaders immediately released Paul and Silas from custody. The missionaries left town, but they left behind a body of believers—the first church in Europe.

The start of the Philippian church is a great reminder that, even in extremely difficult times, God can bring about great things. God will glorify His name even through our trials and tribulations. Paul and Silas had this perspective, and that's why they were able to sing at midnight.

The fact that the prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas singing hymns is not a detail to be skipped over lightly. As followers of Jesus Christ, we, too, have people watching how we react to life's circumstances.

If Paul and Silas had been griping or protesting or whining about the injustice of their situation, the jailer would have never been drawn to believe in the Lord Jesus. But they responded to their situation gracefully and with joy.

Their actions were completely foreign to how others expected them to react. Because they were salt and light, others had their hearts opened to the gospel.

Later, Silas and Timothy ministered in Berea, and Silas spent extra time in Corinth, ministering after Paul left that city. Silas served with Peter as well; in fact, he is thought to have delivered the epistle of 1 Peter to its recipients.

Silas is a great example of someone who used his gifts to serve the Lord and others with all his heart. The apostles called him faithful, and he was known as one to encourage and strengthen the brothers.

Multitudes in the early church were blessed by Silas, and Paul and Peter were heartened by his faithful companionship. Silas was a brother born for adversity.

## BIBLE TIMELINE

51 AD

Paul Writes to the Thessalonians

1 Thess. 1 - 5

**MAP REFERENCES**

