

Lesson Fifty-two

1st Thessalonians

The Pastor's Heart			The Pastor's Burden		
	Thanksgiving Remembering Affirming Reporting	The pastor among the flock The flock's response to the pastor	Personal concern Comfort and relief	Sexual purity Prophetic urgency	Stay alert! Encourage one another! Live in peace!
	CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTER 4	CHAPTER 5
Perspective	Looking back			Looking ahead	
Subject	The church itself	The apostle himself	The report	The concern	The balance
Especially Appropriate for . . .	new converts	young pastors	suffering Christians	tempted and uninformed Christians	"sleepy" Christians
Theme	The hope of Christ's return comforts us and motivates us to godly living.				
Key Verses	1:8-10; 4:1, 13-18				
Christ in 1 Thessalonians	Jesus is our source of hope and comfort, the One who rescues believers from the coming wrath (1:10; 4:13-5:11).				

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Author: There is uniformity of belief that the apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians while in was in the city of Corinth, probably around the year 50 AD.

The city: The city of Thessalonica was a critically important city in the New Testament world. It is home to a beautiful harbor in the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea and was the chief seaport in the Roman province of Macedonia. It also had another important characteristic: the Egnatian Way, the main Roman road from Rome to the Orient via modern day Istanbul passed through the city of Thessalonica. Thus, it was easily accessible to other important cities both by land and by sea. Therefore, it was important commercially, politically and militarily. Estimates are that during the time of Paul, the population was about 200,000, consisting of native Greeks, Romans, Jews and Orientals.

The Romans conquered this area in 168 BC, originally dividing it into four districts. About twenty years later, they reorganized it and made Thessalonica the capital city of the entire region. They were given the status of "free city" by Octavian (later called Caesar Augustus) because the Thessalonians helped him defeat their adversaries Brutus and Cassius. As a free city, Thessalonica was ruled loosely by Rome. There was Roman governor there, but no troops were stationed in the city and the citizens were allowed to govern themselves.

In World War I, Allied forces based troops in the city. In World War II, Nazis conquered the city and executed 60,000 Jews from there. The city still exists today with a population of about 300,000. It is typically called Salonica or Thessaloniki.

The occasion of the letter: Acts 17:1-8 tells how the Gospel came to the city through the ministry of Paul on his second missionary journey. As was his custom, he went first to the synagogues and began to preach the Gospel. As was often the case in the New Testament world, devout Jews opposed his message and stirred up trouble for him. They stormed the home of Jason looking for him, but Paul had left the city. Paul didn't feel as though he had adequate time to disciple them, so he sent Timothy back to check on them (1 Thess. 3:1-5). Timothy stayed for a while and taught and encouraged the believers, then caught up with Paul in the city of Corinth. Overall, Timothy gave a good report about what was going on in the church, however, they had some questions about the return of Jesus and what happened to the

believers who died before the return of Christ. Paul wrote this letter to answer their questions and to reassure them in their faith. He also wanted to share with them some things he had not had the time to teach them while he was there in person.

The church was also still facing some of the same persecution that had forced Paul to leave town. His letter served as encouragement to them in the face of this persecution.

Is There Hope After Death?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Death is not a popular topic. No one ever says, “Hey, why don’t you come over to the house and let’s talk about death?” We would all find an excuse not to go! Yet, death is the one thing that unites us all: we’ve all been touched by death and we all have questions about death. The church in Thessalonica had questions about their loved ones who died before the return of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to answer their questions and, as a consequence, provided words of comfort for those who’ve come face to face with death. What does this passage teach us about our hope after death?

I. FOR BELIEVERS, DEATH IS LIKE FALLING ASLEEP

A. First of all, notice that the Bible wants us to know what happens when we die...Paul states that he doesn’t want anyone to be ignorant about those who “fall asleep.” Three times in this passage he refers to death as being asleep. Our English word “cemetery” comes from a word that originally referred to barracks. The barracks are where soldiers go to sleep. They fall asleep at Taps and rise in the morning to Reveille. That is the way it is for believers.

B. This is not referring to “soul sleep” which is a teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This is referring to the body only. The Bible says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Our soul and spirit go immediately into the presence of God at the time of our death on this earth. However, our body “goes to sleep” to await the day of its final redemption.

C. This is beautiful language to describe the death of a believer. When we are physically tired, we need sleep. Sometimes, our bodies are old and worn out and just need to sleep. However, it is important to note that the idea of sleep only refers to the death of a believer, not an unbeliever. Only believers experience rest at death.

II. FOR BELIEVERS, DEATH IS FILLED WITH HOPE

A. Paul does not say they we are not to grieve, only that we are not to grieve like the “rest of men who have no hope.” It is natural to grieve the loss of a loved one and their daily presence in our lives. However, because of Christ, we have hope at the time of death.

B. We recite the Apostle’s Creed in worship each week. Here, in the middle of this passage is a “creed” that is the basis of our hope: *“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.”*

C. What will happen when Jesus comes again?

1. There will be a great resurrection – The dead in Christ will rise first. God doesn’t forget those who have gone before. All the bodies of all the believers of all the ages will be resurrected. He will bring with him their soul and give them a glorious resurrection body like his. How this happens, no one really knows. But the God who created us from the dust of the ground will restore us from the dust of the ground to have perfect, eternal bodies.

2. There will be a great reunion – those who are left will be “caught up with them.” If we are still alive when Jesus comes, there will be a great reunion with our loved ones who have preceded us in death.

3. There will be a great relationship – *“and so we will be with the Lord forever.”* What glorious words! It will be the culmination of our walk of faith. We will see Jesus face to face and be with Him in heaven for all eternity!