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Article 52: First Thessalonians at a Glance

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FIRST THESSALONIANS AT A GLANCE

This book relates Paul's founding of the church at Thessalonica and reviews its responsibilities in light of the future return of Christ (the Rapture).

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

REPEATED RAPTURE REMINDERS

No other biblical book, regardless of its size, gives as much space to the rapture as does 1 Thessalonians. This glorious event is referred to in each of its five chapters. (See 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23.)

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **Paul**. He was also known as Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11). This relentless enemy of Christians (Acts 8:3; 22:5, 19; 26:11; Gal. 1:13) would, following his conversion (Acts 9:3-9), become the greatest missionary, church planter, soul winner, and theologian in church history, authoring nearly half of the New Testament books!
2. What? The books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.
3. When and where? Written 51 A.D. from Corinth.
4. Why and to whom? Offered as a basic overview of the rapture and addressed to the church at Thessalonica.

KEY EVENTS

1. The marks of a model church
2. Events involved in the founding of the Thessalonian church (part one)
3. Events involved in the founding of the Thessalonian church (part two)
4. Facts about the rapture
5. Living in light of the rapture

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Paul**, author of 1 Thessalonians and at least 12 other New Testament books, church planter, evangelist, missionary, and perhaps the greatest of all the apostles
2. **Timothy**, Paul's associate, sent by the apostle from Athens to help the church in Thessalonica

KEY PLACES

1. **Thessalonica**: a city in Macedonia, visited by Paul during his second missionary trip at which time he established a church there and would later write two epistles (1 and 2 Thessalonians) to that church

2. **Philippi:** the city Paul had visited just before coming to Thessalonica

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. The passage in 4:13-18 is the most detailed single account of the rapture in the Bible.
2. Chronologically, it is the first of two New Testament passages referring to the rapture in detailed account. See 1 Cor. 15:51-54 for the second passage.
3. It is also the first portion of scripture to associate the following events with the rapture
 - The departed saints returning with Jesus (4:14)
 - The shout of the archangel (4:16a)
 - The sound of the trumpet of God (4:16b)
 - The catching up of living believers (4:17)
4. This epistle emphasizes the second of two cardinal doctrines proclaimed by the early church, namely, (1) the resurrection of Christ, and, (2) the return of Christ.
5. The Thessalonian church was one of two churches where Paul was hindered by Satan in his plans to visit its congregation (2:18; Rom. 1:13; 15:22).
6. It offers the first of two key verses used to support the triunity of man (5:23; Heb. 4:12).
7. Of the many churches established by the apostle, only a few (six to be exact) would receive a New Testament epistle from Paul. Of the six, only the church at Corinth and the one in Thessalonica were blessed with two inspired letters.
8. The church at Thessalonica was founded by Paul during his second missionary journey. (See Acts 17:1-10.)
9. Paul spent at least three weeks in Thessalonica in the home of Jason (possibly a kinsman, see Rom. 16:21) organizing the church, working all the while as a tentmaker, that he might not be a burden to the believers. (See 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-12.)
10. His visit there is short lived, for the gospel is opposed by some unbelieving Jews. Thus, under cover of night, Paul, Timothy, and Silas leave for Berea.
11. He soon is driven from Berea by the same vicious Jews and heads for Athens. Timothy and Silas remain in Berea.
12. While in Athens he sends word to Timothy requesting that his young helper go back and strengthen the work at Thessalonica, which command Timothy obeys (1 Thess. 3:1-2).
13. From Athens, Paul goes to Corinth. Here at a later date both Silas and Timothy catch up with him. Timothy brings a good report concerning the work in Thessalonica. Paul is overjoyed and writes both 1 and 2 Thessalonians from Corinth at this time.
14. His first letter was written to encourage, establish, instruct, and inspire. The church was apparently composed of a great many Gentiles (Acts 17:4).
15. Henrietta Mears writes: "Paul's success in Thessalonica has not been the usual experience of missionaries among the heathen. Carey in India, Judson in Burma, Morrison in China, and Moffat in Africa waited each seven years for his first convert. But here, the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to reap a sudden harvest" (*What the Bible is all About*, p. 532).
16. The church was noted for its soulwinning zeal (1 Thess. 1:8).
17. The members were not, however, good Bible students (Acts 17:11).

18. There were difficulties in the congregation.
- Some were lazy (2 Thess. 3:10)
 - Some were busybodies (2 Thess. 3:11)
 - Some were disobedient (2 Thess. 3:14-15)

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLICAL BOOKS

1. 2 Thessalonians:

- 1 Thessalonians explains why deceased believers will not miss out on the rapture
- 2 Thessalonians explains why believers will not be involved in the Tribulation

NAMES FOR TYPES OF JESUS

1. The Lord Jesus Christ (1:1)
2. God's Son from heaven (1:10)
3. Christ (2:6)
4. Jesus (4:14)
5. The Lord Himself (4:16)