

NOTES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF I THESSALONIANS - INTRODUCTION

The author, Paul, and his friends Silvanus and Timothy, leaders in training, are well known to us. Silvanus, otherwise known as Silas, first appeared in the story in Acts 15:22,27,32. He was Jewish, a prophet who encouraged and strengthened people by his ministry. He accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey.(Acts 15:40) Later he wrote Peter's first letter for him,(I Pet.5:12) which explains why I Peter is in much more sophisticated Greek than II Peter, which Peter wrote for himself.

Timothy joined Paul very soon after Silas in Acts 16:1 at Lystra. He had a Jewish mother and a Greek father, and came to be regarded by Paul as his spiritual son.(I Tim.1:2; II Tim.1:2) He stuck with Paul when others deserted him and could be trusted to preach the same message.

The recipients were the Thessalonian Christians who first heard the gospel from this team of three in Acts 17:1-10. There is much we can learn from Paul's approach

- he started in the synagogue with the people who already knew something of the Bible even though they were legalistic, hard and ignorant of Jesus and His grace.
- he continued week after week to build on their understanding.
- he taught from the scriptures they already knew.
- he reasoned with them; his message was logical and systematic.
- he explained, which means to dig in deeply to locate treasure.
- he gave evidence, which means to display so that others can see what we found.
- he showed how Jesus Christ's death and resurrection was absolutely essential to the Bible message.
- he taught that the Christ or Messiah of the Old Testament was the same person as the Jesus of the New Testament.
- he reached out to all people - men and women, Jews and Greeks, not just those like himself.

We can learn too from the outcome of this approach:

- some but not all were persuaded.
- they were brothers not a hierarchy; Jesus was their king.
- they were based in homes.
- they suffered persecution.
- they were described as 'turning the world upside down'.

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER ONE

1:1 Q.1. What do we know about the three writers of this letter? How had God prepared each one for their ministry together? Why do you suppose they were such a good team? What were the two parts of Paul's greeting to the church in Thessalonica? Why are these two ideas so important to all of us?

1:2-3 Q.2. When Paul talked about his prayer for these Christians what word did he use first? How could he always be thankful for people who sometimes got things wrong? In his prayer what three things did he especially remember about them? Describe in practical terms what these qualities might look like. What was the source of all three? How can this also be our experience?

1:4 Q.3. Does God only choose some people to be Christians?(Matt.22:14; Matt.11:28) Why does He choose anyone?(Jn.3:16) What can we do to make sure we are chosen by Him?

1:5 Q.4. What made the preaching of Paul and the others so effective in Thessalonica? How can we make sure this is also true of our ministry?

1:6-7 Q.5. How had they received his message? How did their response show in their own neighbourhood and beyond? Surely tribulation and joy don't go together, do they?

1:8. Q.6 For what reason had news of what had happened in Thessalonica spread? What effect did it have on Paul's ministry? What difference does the example of the lives of those who profess to be Christians make when we attempt to share Christ with others?

1:9,10 Q.7 What was the key to the Thessalonians response to the gospel? Was it simply a change of behaviour? What were they looking forward to? How does such a view of history change our attitude to life, material things and problems?(Matt.24:45-51)