



Georgios Klontzas, The Last Judgment, 16th century, tempera and gold leaf on panel, Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, Venice. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

ENCOURAGING GROWTH & ADDRESSING CHALLENGES
(CA AD 50–51)

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Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Thessalonica

Thessalonica was the capital of Northern Greece (Macedonia) and the most populated city in the province (65,000 to 80,000 people lived within the city wall, and 100,000 more lived nearby).¹ In 316 BC, a general in Alexander the Great's army founded the city. In 146 BC, it became a Roman free city and the capital of the province. Free cities enjoyed special tax concessions and other privileges. By Paul's time, the city was a great commercial center because it intersected the major highways spanning the Roman Empire.

Archeologists have found remnants in ancient Thessalonica that show it to have been a wealthy city with a variety of worship traditions.² They found evidence of a Jewish and a Samaritan synagogue, a Roman forum, a Hellenistic stadium, a temple of Serapis, the Arch of Galerius, and a gymnasium and coins en-

graved with images of Zeus and a variety of other gods (including Egyptian gods like Isis and Osiris). Paul added one more religion to the mix when he introduced Christianity in Thessalonica.

Paul and the Thessalonians

In approximately AD 49, just a few months before Paul first visited Thessalonica, he met with the elders at the Jerusalem Council (Act 15:4–21). There the Church leaders and Saints agreed not to require Christians to live the law of Moses. Within a few months, Paul and his companion Silas embarked on their second apostolic mission. While preaching in Troas, Paul heard in vision a man saying, “Come over into Macedonia” (Act 16:9–12). Paul took his companions Silas, Luke, and Timothy and sailed into Europe. Landing on the east coast of northern Greece, they made their way to Philippi and then traveled eighty miles farther west to Thessalonica (Act 17:1).

Paul started his missionary efforts in Thessalonica at the synagogue with “devout Greeks . . . and the chief women” (Act 17:4). After teaching for three weeks, angry Jews caused an uproar, rallying to destroy the Christians. In the tumult, the mob took a new wealthy convert, Jason, to prison (Act 17:7–9). The Lord directed Paul and Silas to sneak out by night and flee to Berea, Athens, and Corinth (Act 17:10–15).

The new Thessalonian converts grew in the gospel to the point that they were able to send Paul at least four other missionary companions over the next few years (Act 19:29; 20:4). By the time Paul got to Corinth (250 miles away), still on his second apostolic mission, he found the time to write the Thessalonians this letter.

Attested Pauline authorship

Biblical experts have closely evaluated the epistles of Paul for authorship evidence. Much is written on this subject, and many approaches have been made, including textual, stylistic, thematic, grammatical, and computational analyses. Generally, scholars agree that 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, and Philippians are the core of Paul’s writings and represent him best.³

Purpose of the letter

Paul divides his epistle into two messages: first, a celebration of the Saints’ faithfulness, and second, an encouragement for them to progress, “to supply what is lacking in their faith.” Between the two sections Paul inserts a prayer or blessing (1 Ths 3:11–13). He also begins and ends with a blessing.

Chronology

First Thessalonians is either the first book written in the New Testament or the second after Galatians. (Paul was already a skilled writer at this point.) As mentioned earlier, the epistles were organized by length, not by date. Paul wrote the first nine canonized epistles (including Thessalonians) to communities, where the letters were read aloud to the congregation; his last four and shortest epistles were written to individuals (for example, Timothy and Titus).

Table 1. Outline of 1 Thessalonians

Rejoicing in the Saints' Faithfulness	
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1 Thessalonians 1

Formal greeting—1 Ths 1:1

1 Ths 1:1 (JST). “*Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, servants of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, unto the church of the Thessalonians.*” Paul had been in Greece for possibly a year by the time he wrote this letter, and he formally opened it with his companions' Greek names: Silvanus for Silas and Timotheus for Timothy. They had just joined Paul in Corinth after visiting the Saints in Thessalonica (1 Ths 3:6; Act 18:5). Paul includes a coauthor in eight epistles (six times it is Timothy, twice it is Silas, and once it is Sosthenes). The JST adds a significant phrase, introducing the senders as servants of Christ. We find this in at least seven epistles. Paul does not claim leadership but servitude to the head of the Church, God and His Beloved Son.

1 Ths 1:1. “*grace be unto you and peace.*” In his opening formula, Paul usually includes a combination of the traditional Greek and Hebrew greetings (*grace* and *peace*, respectively).

Section of thanks—1 Ths 1:2–10

1 Ths 1:2–3. “*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering . . . your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord.*” In formal Greek letters, a thanksgiving section follows opening greetings. Paul’s gratitude continues for eight verses. This suggests a grateful leadership style filled with prayer. Christian prayers follow the same pattern of expressing thanksgiving after an initial greeting. Paul then exhorts and encourages his audience.

1 Ths 1:4 (NIV). “*For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you.*” The KJV “beloved brethren,” from *adelphoi*, means “all believers,” men and women, young and old. He uses this same title fourteen times in this short letter.⁴ The word *eklogé*, translated “election” in the KJV and “chosen you” in the NIV, is found seven times in the New Testament. The original Greek refers to a divine selection or a general choosing out.⁵ Reformed theologies (like Calvinism) interpret this as unconditional election. But Paul’s Greek word has a broader meaning.⁶ Additionally, the Lord revealed a different definition of *election* to the prophet Joseph Smith in D&C 29:7, explaining that the elect are those who “hear my voice and harden not their hearts.” In this sense, the elect are those who come to Christ and humbly receive His direction. God unconditionally offers all humans His grace, but we must choose to receive it.

1 Ths 1:6. “*ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.*” Most Thessalonian Saints had to endure persecution along with the joy of their conversion (Act 17:6–9; 2 Cor 11:24–26). Before the end of the first century, many early Christians including Paul faced martyrdom. They courageously put their love for the Lord first and accepted all repercussions. Shortly before Paul arrived in Thessalonica, he was beaten, chained, and imprisoned for the sake of the gospel (Act 16:16–26). The last of Jesus’s Beatitudes became very applicable: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:10). Today, our religious persecution is more emotional and social than it is physical.

1 Ths 1:7–9 (NIV). “*you became a model to all the believers. . . . The Lord’s message rang out from you . . . your faith in God has become known everywhere. . . . They tell how you turned to God from idols.*” One person’s good example blesses the doer and the viewer; one person’s goodness motivates another, catalyzing positive change. As the Thessalonian Saints turned from worldliness and idolatry, their example motivated others to turn to God.

1 Ths 1:10. “*to wait for his Son from heaven.*” Initially, the early Christians thought that Jesus’s return to rule and reign was imminent (Act 1:10–11; Rev 1:1, 3). Even Paul speaks at times as if he expects the Millennium to begin in his own lifetime (1 Ths 4:15–17; Heb 9:28). But the Lord said, “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mk 13:32; Act 1:7). They did not understand that Jesus would not rule and reign until after an apostasy and restoration

(2 Tim 4:3). Yet each person has only their lifetime before the end of their world. In this sense, Paul's exhortation to watch and prepare applies to all generations.

1 Thessalonians 2

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica—1 Ths 2:1–12

1 Ths 2:1 (NIV). *“You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results.”* Paul shares a faith-filled recap of his time with the Thessalonians. He believes that the Lord blessed their paths and union. The KJV word “vain,” *kenke*, is translated in the ISV as “was not a waste of time.” Paul's fruitful mission left the Saints with priceless truths.

1 Ths 2:2 (NIV). *“with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.”* Paul refers either to his beating in Philippi right before he arrived in Thessalonica (Act 16:22–37) or to another unrecorded instance of opposition or persecution. The KJV “contention” is translated elsewhere as “opposition” (RSV, NIV) and “conflict” (ASV). Even in times and places of conflict, disciples can refrain from contention (3 Ne 11:29).

1 Ths 2:3–4 (NIV). *“we [are not] trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God.”* Paul did not fear physical abuse (he obviously endured much physical abuse). Instead, he worried about fulfilling his responsibility to God's call (compare JS–H 1:25). Disciples must speak “not as pleasing men, but God” (1 Ths 2:3 KJV). Paul emphasizes that God will try, or prove, our hearts. Saints show devotion to Him in all situations.

1 Ths 2:5. *“neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness.”* We do not know why Paul defends himself here. Was someone attacking his reputation? Was he setting an example to encourage the Saints to do likewise?⁷ We learned earlier in Act 17:13 that rabble-rousers from Thessalonica tried to stop Paul's work. As God knew, Paul's deepest motivation was to love. His outward appearance was not a pretext or “mask to cover up greed” (NIV).

1 Ths 2:6 (BSB). *“Nor did we seek praise . . . although as apostles of Christ we had authority to demand it.”* In all other attested Pauline Epistles, Paul begins with a declaration of his authority and priesthood position. Yet in this letter, Paul's coauthors, Silas and Timothy, were not Apostles.⁸ So Paul waits until here to use his leadership title Apostle (*apostolos*, “one sent forth with orders, a messenger”).

1 Ths 2:11–12 (NIV). *“you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God.”* Paul's memories of his three weeks teaching in Thessalonica demonstrate his gentle and effective missionary style (see Act 17:2). We read of his charity for them as he risked his life and shared his means (2 Ths 3:8–9).

Reception of and opposition to the message—1 Ths 2:13–16

1 Ths 2:13. “*when ye received the word of God . . . ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.*” The Spirit actively testified to the truths Paul taught, which is the same witness that God blesses all sincere seekers. The Spirit applies Jesus’s Atonement as it changes and cleanses repentant believers.

1 Ths 2:14 (NIV). “*you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, . . . You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews.*” Both Jews and Gentiles attacked Christians at this time in riots, chasing them out of their towns, stoning, imprisoning, and crucifying them. Persecution grew worse in the second and third centuries.⁹

Paul’s desire to visit them again—1 Ths 2:17–20

1 Ths 2:17 (CSB). “*brothers and sisters, after we were forced to leave you for a short time (in person, not in heart), we greatly desired and made every effort to return and see you face to face.*” Paul explains that he tried to return to Thessalonica, but unfortunately “Satan hindered us.”

1 Ths 2:19 (BSB). “*who is our hope? . . . you yourselves in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming.*” Paul keeps his hope focused on joining Christ at His coming—whether or not that is a short- or long-term view.

1 Ths 2:20 (BSB). “*You are indeed our glory and our joy.*” Paul’s work is the same as God’s work (as well as all true disciples): “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Mose 1:39).

1 Thessalonians 3

Timothy’s visit—1 Ths 3:1–5

1 Ths 3:1–3 (BSB). “*when we could bear it no longer, . . . We sent Timothy . . . to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that none of you would be shaken by these trials.*” Paul sent his capable companion Timothy to minister to the new branch. They needed comfort and support to become established Saints. Satan consistently tries to uproot new faith with temptations and doubts. Disciples need nurturing to help their faith grow and to prevent the weeds of opposition from taking root.

1 Ths 3:4 (BSB). “*we kept warning you that we would suffer persecution; and as you know, it has come to pass.*” Life is filled with thorns and challenges—spiritual, emotional, and physical. Challenges, including Satan’s temptations, teach mortals “to distinguish good from evil by our own experience.”¹⁰ Earthly afflictions come from three sources: (1) natural parts of life, (2) tailor-made experiences to help us grow, and (3) our own or others’ sins.¹¹ To progress in life, most mortals learn obedience through trials and suffering (Heb 5:8). Discipleship includes suffering to help us grow closer to Christ (1 Pet 4:1).

Similarly, the Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith that even “if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). In April 2019, President Russell M. Nelson warned the Saints, “The adversary is quadrupling his efforts to disrupt testimonies and impede the work of the Lord. He is arming his minions with potent weapons to keep us from partaking of the joy and love of the Lord.”¹²

Timothy’s encouraging report—1 Ths 3:6–13

1 Ths 3:6–7 (BSB). “*just now, Timothy has returned from his visit with the good news about your faith, your love, and the fond memories you have preserved. . . . For this reason . . . we have been reassured.*” Timothy’s report of the Thessalonians’ faithfulness comforted Paul.

1 Ths 3:9 (CSB). “*How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you.*” God continually reciprocates His disciples’ efforts with gifts of love, joy, gratitude, and hope (see Mosi 2:22).

1 Ths 3:10 (NIV). “*we pray . . . [to] supply what is lacking in your faith.*” Paul dedicates the rest of the letter to “supply what is lacking” in the Saints’ faith. Christians covenant to help carry each other’s burdens—both spiritual and physical. To help build faith, disciples gather to share spiritual experiences, pray, study, testify, and encourage each other. Everyone who walks by faith not only builds their own faith but also impacts those within their sphere of influence. Building one’s own faith can strengthen others.

When a rich young man asked Jesus what he lacked in his faith, the Lord told him to live the law of consecration by selling his possessions and following Him (Mt 19:20). Each disciple can humbly and regularly ask the Lord what is lacking in their faith. Elder Larry R. Lawrence felt that “a perfect time to ask, ‘What lack I yet?’ is when we take the sacrament. The Apostle Paul taught that this is a time for each of us to examine ourselves (1 Cor 11:28).”¹³

1 Ths 3:11 (NIV). “*Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus . . .*” Paul expresses his profound love in a sincere prayer or blessing in the next three verses:

- “May our God . . . clear the way for us to come to you” (NIV).
- “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else” (NIV).
- “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy . . . when our Lord Jesus comes” (NIV).

This prayer is another example of how the early Saints expected Jesus’s quick return in His glorified state. They often focus on preparing for Jesus’s Second Coming (1 Ths 4:14–15). This emphasis continued on to between AD 80 and 140, as we read in the *Didache*, or *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*: “Watch over your life: let your lamps be not quenched . . . be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord comes.”¹⁴ A century later in AD 250, Cyprian taught: “Already His second coming draws near to us.

. . . He will soon come from heaven for the punishment of the devil and for the judgment of the human race, with the force of an avenger and with the power of a judge.”¹⁵

1 Thessalonians 4

Live to please God: Sanctification and love—1 Ths 4:1–12

1 Ths 4:1 (NIV). “**As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God.**” Paul turns to the main purpose of his epistle—to strengthen the Thessalonians’ faith, as seen in the phrase “we beseech and exhort” or “encourage you,” (JB2000, BSB). The young Saints have already felt the witness of the truth and now need to become more Christlike, “to walk and to please God” (BLB). Throughout the New Testament, *peripateó*, “walk,” can mean “conduct my life, live.” Paul next gives five answers to their questions (or Timothy’s observations).

1 Ths 4:2 (NIV). “**you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.**” Paul stresses that what he taught did not originate with the missionaries or fellow humans but with God.

Sexual immorality—1 Ths 4:3–8

1 Ths 4:3–4 (NIV). “**It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body.**” Paul begins with a straightforward approach. Learning to control the body is for one’s own good and sanctification (which is the process of becoming a Saint, holy and pure).¹⁶ Sexual immorality was a major problem, as Paul speaks against fornication (*porneia*, which includes incest and adultery and the like) in nine of his fourteen letters.

Biblical translators debate verse 4 more than any other in the letter. The KJV phrase “possess his vessel” is also translated “Take a wife for himself in holiness and honor” (RSV), “Gain mastery over his body, to hallow and honor it” (NEB), and “Control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable” (NIV).

1 Ths 4:5–6 (NIV). “**not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.**” Paul addresses “selfish lust” (JB). At that time worship to pagan gods included immorality as “sacred fornication.”¹⁷ Paul denounces this and repeats that God will “punish all those who commit such sins” (NIV). He repeatedly warned the Saints that all will be held accountable before God for sexual impropriety.

1 Ths 4:7–8 (NIV). “**God did not call us to be impure. . . . Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God.**” If one “disregards” (RSV), “despise” (KJV), or “objects” to (JB) the law of chastity, they reject God. Christians who have repented and been cleansed through Christ’s Atonement have the responsibility to keep themselves clean and holy through fostering the Spirit and serving Him. The Spirit cannot dwell in covenant breakers or even those with unclean thoughts.

Charity and self-sufficiency—1 Ths 4:9–12

1 Ths 4:9–10 (NIV). “**Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God. . . . Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more.**” Of the four or five Greek words for “love,” Paul chooses *agapaó*, “charity” (see 1 Cor 13:4). Jesus’s foremost teaching was the importance of loving as He loves (Jn 13:34). As converts become more Christlike, they strive to develop charity too.

1 Ths 4:11–12 (NKJV). “**aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands . . . that you may lack nothing.**” Paul’s advice to work with your hands is in direct opposition to the teachings of the Epicureans, who scorned work. Similarly, the Greco-Roman patronage system allowed the elite to have lower-class servants and slaves to do all their work—including feeding, washing, dressing, and performing all other menial labor. Paul also encourages the Saints to serve one another as good neighbors to both Christians and non-Christians.¹⁸

Paul also teaches an important aspect of the law of consecration. Yet it sounds like some attempted to live off the generosity of everyone else. The early Jerusalem Christians lived this law as we find it described across the New Testament.¹⁹ In this higher law, all Saints worked for the benefit of the whole and were accountable for their stewardships. The law of consecration creates a Zion society with no poor among them (Mose 7:18). Paul already explained that love must complement hard work (1 Ths 2:9).

Righteous dead will come when Jesus returns—1 Ths 4:13–18

1 Ths 4:13 (NIV). “**Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind.**” Paul addresses the Thessalonians’ question about grieving for departed loved ones (compare Jn 11:11–13). Christians understand that Jesus will awaken all from death to immortality. Watching the passing of loved ones was more common in ancient culture. More children died before the age of ten than lived.²⁰ The Jews’ and Greeks’ mourning practices included dramatic displays. They dressed in sackcloth, tore their clothes, overtly wept with loud shrieking, and threw dirt in the air and on their heads. Jews hired professional female mourners to scream for days. The Mishnah records, “Even the poorest in Israel should hire not less than two flutes and one wailing woman.”²¹ Paul denounced this and said it did not demonstrate a belief in the Resurrection.

1 Ths 4:14–15 (ESV). “**through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.**” Paul tries to correct another misunderstanding on the timing of the Second Coming. Christ will be accompanied by the righteous who have passed from their second estate. Paul’s “we” assumes that he and other Saints will participate in the Second Coming. But the JST took out “we” (here and in verse 17) and replaced it with “they.” This allows for a much longer period before Jesus’s Second Coming.

1 Ths 4:16. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” At the Second Coming, the soul-stirring call of the archangel Michael (who is also Adam) will be heard as a “loud command” (NIV). The trump of God may reference the Levites or priests who blew shofars at the temple (Ezr 3:10). Paul also confirms that the Christians will rise first in the Resurrection.

1 Ths 4:17 (JST). “Then ~~we~~ **which they who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in into the clouds with them who remain, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be ever with the Lord.**” The Latin word for “caught up” is *rapemur*, which is the origin of “rapture,” an English term for the Lord’s Second Coming. The righteous will be caught up with those already resurrected (see also Dan 7:13; D&C 77:12). Paul strengthened the Saints’ faith by teaching God’s plan of salvation. He may have clarified this doctrine because they asked how the dead would come forth.

1 Thessalonians 5

The timing of the Second Coming—1 Ths 5:1–11

1 Ths 5:1–2 (NIV). “Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates . . . you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” The Thessalonians already knew Paul’s eschatological message. The phrase “times and the seasons” (KJV) refers to the time when the Lord would return in glory. Paul refuses to even discuss the timing with them—it was unknowable (as Jesus similarly taught in Mt 24:36–7, 43 and JST, Lk 12:44). Paul uses the image of a thief in the night to underscore that those not watching will be caught unprepared. That day was prophesied hundreds of years earlier in Amos 5:18.

1 Ths 5:3. “when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” Even though the Lord’s coming will be unexpected, Paul’s choice of imagery, “a woman with child,” shows that that coming has many predictable warnings (like the woman’s size, months of gestation, pain, and speed of contractions).²² Likewise, the general timing of the Second Coming is estimated as the signs are fulfilled.

1 Ths 5:4–5 (NIV). “this day should [not] surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.” The symbols of light and darkness relate to the Spirit. As followers of the Light, Saints are given prophets, apostles, and the Spirit as guides. Modern disciples do not have to be unprepared. As Amos taught, “Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amo 3:7).

1 Ths 5:6. “let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” Paul symbolically speaks of spiritual light and darkness as day and night (as Jesus did).²³ Paul does not mean we should literally not sleep; rather he suggests that we should live in the light, enjoying proximity to the Spirit. Like

a lighthouse, disciples can warn others of Satan’s temptations by staying “alert” (NASB) and using “self-control” (CSB) to foster the Spirit.

1 Ths 5:8. *“putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.”* Paul draws from military protection to symbolize how the Saints can defend themselves in spiritual warfare. President Russell M. Nelson used the same imagery.²⁴ Here, Paul uses only two pieces of spiritual armor: (1) the breastplate as a defensive shield built on faith and love, and (2) the helmet as the hope of salvation. This imagery comes from Isa 59:17; “He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head.” Paul’s most in-depth description of the armor of God is in Eph 6:10–17.

1 Ths 5:9–11. *“God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord. . . . Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another.”* Paul explains that his fellow disciples should rejoice in the Lord’s gift of salvation and not waste their energy worrying about God’s wrath or timing. He hopes that the Saints will “build each other up” that they “may live together with him” (NIV).

Relationships with each other—1 Ths 5:12–15

1 Ths 5:12–13 (NIV). *“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.”* These two verses encourage the Saints to love and know their leaders who labor on their behalf. Other translations refer to respecting leaders and appreciating and being considerate of them (RSV, NAS, JB). Backbiting and complaining are not acceptable in God’s kingdom. Leaders are not without fault, but as fellow laborers, Saints can encourage, sustain, and support our fellow disciples.

1 Ths 5:14 (NIV). *“we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”* Paul lightly touches on another problem: some Saints were “idle and disruptive.” Unlike the cultural hierarchy that allowed some not to work, in the Church everyone needed to work hard. In the larger context, Paul addresses the need to contribute to the welfare of the whole Church, especially for the “feeble-minded,” “timid,” or “apprehensive” (KJV, NIV JB). Paul asks the Saints to be patient with each other (and with themselves).

1 Ths 5:15 (NIV). *“Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other.”* Paul closes this subsection with Jesus’s teachings (Mt 5–7; also Pro 20:22). No longer are Saints to take an eye for an eye, but rather they are to follow Jesus’s teaching, “I say unto you, Love your enemies, . . . and pray for them which . . . persecute you,” both in and out of the faith (Mt 5:44).

Relationships with God—1 Ths 5:16–22

1 Ths 5:16–22. Paul concludes with ways to increase our relationship with God.

- “*Rejoice evermore,*” or “*Always be joyful*” (ISV). Saints can praise God as they focus their faith on Him.
- “*Pray without ceasing,*” or “*Pray constantly*” (CSB). A prayerful mind and heart tethers disciples to God day in and day out. We pray consistently many times a day, and when not in a formal prayer, Saints keep a prayer in their heart to commune with the Spirit and so that their thoughts do not offend the Spirit.
- “*In every thing give thanks,*” or “*Give thanks in every circumstance*” (BSB). Expressing gratitude is a powerful way to feel good. Gratitude can fill one with God’s love and displace anger. Selfishness is the antithesis of gratitude.
- “*Quench not the Spirit,*” or “*Don’t stifle the Spirit*” (CSB). Just as a blacksmith plunges hot metal in water to harden it, our hearts become hard when we ignore or quench the Spirit’s influence in our lives. If disciples ignore or misinterpret spiritual promptings, nurse unkind thoughts and words, they extinguish the Spirit. But repentance can spark and rekindle the Spirit’s inspiration.
- “*Despise not prophesyings,*” or “*do not reject prophecy*” (ABPE). We receive new prophecy regularly on our own or from leaders at meetings like general conference.
- “*Prove all things.*” This is more important with the onslaught of wickedness bombarding us at every click. Especially examine the attacks that pull down your faith. Pray for the gift of discernment and do not waste your time in evil, satanic sources. Ask yourself, Is this idea from God or the adversary?
- “*Hold fast that which is good.*” As in Lehi’s vision, hold onto the iron rod, the word of God.
- “*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*” Although this is harder every day, those Saints that retain the Spirit’s guidance can abstain from evil more easily through the power of God.

Paul’s final blessing—1 Ths 5:23–28

1 Ths 5:23 (NIV). “**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord.**” Paul concludes with a blessing or prayer for the souls of the Thessalonian Saints. Rather than reviewing some of their needs, Paul asks God for what they need most: he prays for their eternal well-being. God is faithful and will fulfill all His promises, so we too are given the opportunity to ask for what is most important.

1 Ths 5:25–27 (NIV). “**Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss . . . have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.**” Four times Paul encourages this greeting. A holy kiss was not a Greek custom. Regularly, the JST changed this verse to read, “With a holy *salutation*.”²⁵

1 Ths 5:28. *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”* Grace is the precious gift of forgiveness from God; it is a gift of Christ received through the cleansing power of His Holy Spirit. We can share it with others as we forgive them and share God’s love.

The postscript was not part of the original epistle but was added by a later scribe.

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

Background

Shortly after Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonian Saints, Timothy returned with the news that the Saints were struggling even more with three of the same problems: persecution, fear about the Second Coming, and idleness. Paul tackles the three problems and records a prayer for them in each section.

2 Thessalonians 1

Salutation and thanksgiving—2 Ths 1:1–4

2 Ths 1:1 (JST). *“Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus, the servants of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul opens his letter with his standard Greek greeting. For the second and last time, Silvanus (Silas) joins him as coauthor. This helps us date the epistle to the second mission, when the two were companions. The JST rearranged the KJV’s greeting and added the important title of servants for the missionaries. Becoming a trusted servant of the Lord is the greatest role a disciple can fill. Jesus also lived this role during His ministry.²⁶

2 Ths 1:2. *“Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul’s entreaty for grace and peace expresses his testimony that God is our Father.²⁷ The Restoration brought back a literal and spiritual interpretation of God’s fatherhood.

Table 2. Outline of 2 Thessalonians

1:1–4	Salutation and thanksgiving
1:5–10	Persevere through persecutions
1:11–12	Paul’s first prayer or blessing
2:1–15	Preparing for the Second Coming
2:16–17	Second prayer or blessing
3:1–5	Request for prayer
3:6–15	Need for all to work and avoid idleness
3:16–18	Paul’s closing blessing and personal greeting

2 Ths 1:3–4 (NIV). “We . . . thank God for you, brothers and sisters, . . . because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, . . . we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” The thanksgiving portion of Paul’s opening takes only two verses this time. He acknowledges the Saints’ endurance during tribulations. Difficult as it was, these Saints increased their faith, charity, and patience during persecution. Saints in Thessalonica suffered under the hands of the Jews (Act 17:5). The first third of this letter encourages them to draw closer to God during their trials.

Persevere through persecutions—2 Ths 1:5–10

2 Ths 1:5 (ESV). “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.” Paul comforts the persecuted Saints, reminding them to rely on God to take care of justice. The Saints can use their persecution as a period of refinement for God’s kingdom. Forgiving grudges and developing patience while enduring persecution is better than holding on to anger or vengeance. Even though suffering is often addressed in the New Testament, nowhere is innocent suffering encouraged.²⁸

2 Ths 1:6 (ESV). “since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted.” The promise of God’s justice and peace has sustained many suffering servants of God. Richard Lloyd Anderson observed, “Judgment implies freedom to make choices, so the goal of Paul’s letter is stronger faith plus righteous action.”²⁹

2 Ths 1:7–8. “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel.” When Jesus comes again, the earth will receive a baptism by fire to cleanse it from wickedness.³⁰ Those who do not know God may include those who refuse to know and obey Him.³¹

2 Ths 1:9–10 (JST). “Who shall be punished with **everlasting** destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his **everlasting** power.” The JST emphasizes that God’s power is everlasting, not everlasting destruction. The wicked will receive their just punishment and be excluded from the presence of the Lord until they repent. If the wicked repent and acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Lord taught Joseph Smith, they will also enjoy a kingdom of glory (D&C 76:109–112). At the Second Coming, when Jesus will be glorified, both the departed righteous believers and those still on the earth will join to see Jesus “with wonder” (BSB).

Paul’s first prayer or blessing—2 Ths 1:11–12

2 Ths 1:11 (BLB). “we pray always for you, that He may count you worthy of the calling of our God . . . and work of faith with power.” Paul prays for the Thessalonians as our leaders pray for us.

2 Ths 1:12. “*the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him.*”

The Saints’ relationship with God is reciprocal. The name of the Lord may be glorified in us, and we may be glorified in the Lord. As part of our sacramental covenant to take upon His name, we can radiate His light.

2 Thessalonians 2

Preparing for the Second Coming—2 Ths 2:1–15

2 Ths 2:1–2 (NIV). “*Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us.*” Some deceived the persecuted Saints with false ideas about the coming of Christ. Paul counsels them not to believe everything they hear, “*except ye receive it from us*” (JST). The false prophecy purported that the Second Coming was just around the corner or had already happened and that they missed it. In the Greek, the person who spread these false ideas is not Paul or his coauthors.

2 Ths 2:3 (JST). “*Let no man deceive you by any means: for ~~that day shall not come, except there shall come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.~~*” This is the clearest prophecy of a Christian apostasy in the New Testament (also Act 20:29: “Grievous wolves enter in among you”). The Greek for “falling away” (*apostasiaí*) is a strong word and also means “rebellion” (RSV, NIV), “revolt” (JB), and “mass apostasy” (NAB). The Apostasy was not a passive movement but the devil’s well-planned defection. Satan is also described as “that man of sin” (KJV), “the Rebel, the Lost One” (JB), the “man of lawlessness” (NIV, NAS, RSV), “wickedness” (NEB), and “the son of perdition” (KJV, JST). In Latin, *perdition* means “to destroy.” Within a decade of Paul’s second apostolic mission, he sees the apostasy beginning by Satan and his minions’ relentless efforts to counterfeit Jesus’s teachings.

2 Ths 2:4 (NIV). “*He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*” This verse uncovers Satan as the great usurper and counterfeiter. Paul almost always uses the word *temple* figuratively, referring usually to the Church.³² Here Satan is trying to usurp the place of God.

2 Ths 2:5–6. “*Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know . . . that he might be revealed in his time.*” Paul had previously warned the Saints, but they mixed up messages between true Apostles and false teachers. “His time” is Jesus’s glorious return.

2 Ths 2:7 (JST). “*For the mystery of iniquity doth already work, and he it is who now worketh, and Christ suffereth him to work: ~~only he who now letteth will let, until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way.~~*” The JST changes emphasize the Lord’s control. He allows opposition and temptation to build discernment and separate the wheat from the tares. Some early Christians falsely assumed that Christ’s glorious reign would come soon, but in reality it was the apostasy that came soon. The NIV reads, “For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work.” God

sets bounds on Satan, as do His servants (like Paul) by exposing Satan's falsehoods. It is not until Jesus comes to "annihilate [Satan] by the majesty of His arrival" that Satan will be conquered for the Millennium (2 Ths 2:8 BSB; Rev 20:2).

2 Ths 2:9 (BSB). *"The coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by the working of Satan, with every kind of power, sign, and false wonder."* Satan's use of power and signs will deceive even the elect (Mk13:22). This is why our leaders repeat, "In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost." President Russell M. Nelson added that as we practice "day after day, month after month, year after year," we will "grow into the principle of revelation."³³ We know the ending. God will defeat evil. Jesus will come with celestial beings and change all things telestial by His glory (D&C 5:19).

2 Ths 2:9–10 (JST). *"Even him Yea, the Lord, even Jesus, whose coming is not until after there cometh a falling away, by the working of Satan withal power and signs and lying wonders . . . because they received not the love of the truth."* The Prophet Joseph felt inspired to add a repeated warning of the Apostasy. The adversary has limited powers, although his counterfeits are deceiving. As we saw with Moses at Pharaoh's court, the devil tries to imitate God's miracles (Ex 7:11, 22; 8:7). Satan also has some limited power over the elements and can appear as an angel of light (D&C 61:14–19; 129:8). He can counterfeit the gift of tongues and visions, but not the gifts of healing, hope, and charity.

In this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith repeatedly preached that clever, demonic forces counterfeited truth and perpetuated false ideas.³⁴ In 1842, he published two editorials that addressed inspiration from God versus the adversary. He spoke on the discerning of spirits more than on any topic:

Nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God. Thousands have felt the influence of its terrible power, and baneful effects: long pilgrimages have been undertaken, penances endured, and pain, misery, and ruin have followed in their train; nations have been convulsed, kingdoms overthrown, provinces laid waste, and blood, carnage, and desolation are habiliments in which it has been clothed.³⁵

Similarly, Brigham Young taught, "In all this the power of the devil is limited; the power of God is unlimited."³⁶

2 Ths 2:11–12. *"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth."* In this context, being damned refers to being stopped in progression. Spiritual stagnation comes from finding pleasure in unrighteousness. In many translations, these two verses imply that God has predestined some to damnation. The Restoration reversed this Calvinistic interpretation.³⁷ God does not delude us or act in any way out of spite or trickery. But Satan does, and he deceives humans who lack the guidance of the Spirit into believing his lies.

2 Ths 2:13 (NIV). *"we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work*

of the Spirit.” Paul thanks the Lord for the steadfastness of these new converts. He refers to them as firstfruits, which were offered as a temple sacrifice of the most cherished fruit of the season.³⁸ Paul credits the Spirit’s work of purifying believers, enabling their journey toward exaltation. God chose them because they accepted the truth and believed the Spirit. However, some interpret this verse to be laced with the Protestant theology of God unconditionally saving the elect.³⁹

Like the early Christians, the early Saints in our dispensation also expected the Lord to come sooner than later. Like Paul’s counsel here, Brigham Young cautioned,

Do not be too anxious for the Lord to hasten this work. Let our anxiety be centered upon this one thing, the sanctification of our won hearts, the purifying of our affections, the preparing of ourselves for the approach of the events that are hastening upon us. This should be our concern, this should be our study, this should be our daily prayer. . . . Seek to have the Spirit of Christ that we may wait patiently the time of the Lord, and prepare ourselves the times that are coming. This is our duty.⁴⁰

2 Ths 2:14–15 (NIV). *“He called you to . . . share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So . . . stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you.”* God calls many to serve Him, but Joseph learned that only few are chosen because so many seek for worldliness and act with unrighteous dominion (D&C 121:39–42). Paul’s words were intended to comfort the Saints who had been persecuted and were fearful. The whole section on the Apostasy offered hope to Paul’s audience as it “wove the plight of the church into a larger drama. We must respond to life’s seemingly meaninglessness with a perspective that places life in a larger drama.”⁴¹ Fortunately, life is not a one-act play. We must glimpse the larger picture to see our Savior’s mercy and the Father’s grand plan.

Second prayer or blessing—2 Ths 2:16–17

2 Ths 2:16–17 (NIV). *“God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”* To close this section, Paul records a prayer or blessing for the Saints. Their fears of calamities and looming Apostasy were kept in perspective with the hope that God’s love encourages strength and positive action. Paul weaves the need for good works and faith in and out of this epistle to the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 3

Request for prayer—2 Ths 3:1–5

2 Ths 3:1–3 (NET). *“Finally, pray for us, brothers and sisters, that the Lord’s message may spread . . . , and that we may be delivered from . . . evil people. . . . But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.”* Paul opens the last third

of his letter by requesting prayers before addressing the last problem. He prays for God to deliver them from evil (echoing the Lord's prayer in Mt 6:13). This amounts to asking for the gift of discernment, which helps identify evil.

2 Ths 3:4–5. *“ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.”* Paul's request shows his spiritual desires. He asks God to bless the Saints with the spiritual gifts of love (*agape*, “charity”) and patience.

Need for all to work and avoid idleness—2 Ths 3:6–15

2 Ths 3:6–7 (NIV). *“we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive. . . . For you yourselves know how ye ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you.”* The Greek for “idle” also means “disorderly.” Paul's context refers to the idle who refused to work and live the higher laws of the gospel. The wealthy Roman patronage system likely contributed to the problem, as wealthy individuals expected servants to do their work. Jesus will not come again until the Saints live the law of consecration, so not working caused further problems (1 Ths 4:14; Act 2:44). The Lord calls on all to follow His example by serving others.

2 Ths 3:8 (NKJV). *“nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.”* Paul uses himself as an example of one who worked to supply for his own needs. Paul was a tentmaker or leatherworker (Act 18:1–3; 2 Cor 11:9). The Semitic idiom “to eat someone's bread” was pejorative, connoting a parasitic relationship. Like Adam and Eve, we are to earn our own living (see Gen 3:19; 2 Kng 9:7).

2 Ths 3:10 (NKJV). *“we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”* The word Paul uses for “commanded” (*paraggelló*) is also used for military and court orders. He really means this was a command. He is not referring to the sick or those who cannot work but to those who are unwilling to work. The law of consecration requires all to contribute to care for the needy.

2 Ths 3:11 (NIV). *“We hear that some among you . . . are not busy; they are busybodies.”* The play on the word “busy” addresses the need for all to work and to avoid distracting other workers (see also 2 Ths 3:12).

2 Ths 3:13 (NIV). *“brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.”* This sounds like President Spencer W. Kimball's statement, “Life is like my shoes, worn out in service.”⁴² The adversary discourages humans from doing good.

2 Ths 3:14–15 (NIV). *“Take special note of anyone who does not obey. . . . Do not associate with them. . . . Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.”* Paul cautions Church leaders to gently correct those in need so others are not led astray.

Paul's closing blessing and personal greeting—2 Ths 3:16–18

2 Ths 3:16. “*Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always.*” This blessing or prayer is significant with the current persecution and fears. Yet even in the worst times, the Saints can be at peace as they trust in God and allow the Spirit to guide their thoughts and actions. At His Last Supper, Jesus promised His disciples, “My peace I give unto you” (Jn 14:27). In a beautiful gift, God provides the Spirit’s witness of peace (D&C 6:23).

2 Ths 3:17–18. “*The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. The second epistle to the Thessalonians was written from Athens.*” At this point in the letter, the handwriting probably changed from a scribe to Paul. However, scholars assume the italicized postscript was added by a fourth-century scribe who got the location wrong. Both this epistle and the book of Acts evidence that Paul was in Corinth at this time.⁴³

Notes

1 Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 14.

2 Malherbe, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 14–15.

3 These are the books that have the most evidence of having been written by Paul without as much editing or scribal interference. The other Pauline Epistles still may have been outlined, approved, or signed by Paul. Paul’s scribes may have been strictly following Paul’s words (Rom 16:22) or could have been allowed some freedom (perhaps the case in Ephesians). But these seven are the standard by which the others are measured. This list is given in the order that the letters were probably written, at least according to our best historical estimation.

4 1 Ths 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 27.

5 “*Eklogé*,” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1589.htm>: “Particularly that by which he determined to bless certain persons through Christ, Romans 11:28; . . . according to an election which is due to grace, or a gracious election, Romans 11:5.” In addition, see Act 9:15; Rom 11:7, 28; 1 Ths 1:4; 2 Pet 1:2.

6 See discussion in Rom 8:33 on God’s elect and the five points of Reformed and Calvinistic theology. See also Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166; Lynne H. Wilson, “A New Pneumatology: Comparing Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Spirit with His Contemporaries and the Bible,” *BYU Studies* 51, no. 1 (2012): 119–152.

7 Malherbe, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 153–155.

8 As mentioned earlier, just because Paul is included among the Apostles does not mean he was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. This definition of *apostle* is further complicated when we read a modern revelation to Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer from Joseph Smith in 1829: “I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called.” D&C 18:9. These two men were asked to seek out the Twelve Apostles, but they were not called to the original quorum in 1835. See D&C 107.

9 Tacitus's *Annals* (15:44) recorded how Nero blamed Christians for the fire he started in Rome in AD 64: "Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular." Most persecution was local until the third century. In the Roman government, "religion could be tolerated only as long as it contributed to the stability of the state. . . . [There was] no rival for the allegiance of its subjects. The state was the highest good in a union of state and religion." Earle E. Cairns, "Christ or Caesar," chap. 7 in *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

10 Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Circumstances* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1989), 50; see also Bruce C. Hafen, "Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ," April 1997 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

11 Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2007), 30.

12 Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better," April 2019 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

13 Larry R. Lawrence, "What Lack I Yet?," October 2015 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

14 *Didache* 16:1, in Jonathan A. Draper, *The Didache in Modern Research* (New York, NY: Brill, 1996), 108.

15 David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 606.

16 Bruce R McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1958), 675. "To be sanctified is to become clean, pure, and spotless; to be free from the blood and sins of the world to become a new creature of the Holy Ghost, one whose body has been renewed by the rebirth of the Spirit."

17 *The Navarre Bible: Revelation* (New York, NY: Four Courts, 2005), 42.

18 For example, Gal 5:13; also, Rom 7:6; 9:12; 1 Tim 6:2.

19 Act 2:44–45; 4:34; Rom 15:26; Gal 2:10; also see D&C 42.

20 Ken M. Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 143. Christian Laes claims that less than fifty percent of children lived fifteen years. Christian Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

21 Mishnah, *Ketuboth* 4:4.

22 The same imagery was often used in the Old Testament, including in Isa 13:8; 21:3; Jer 6:24; 49:24; and Mic 4:10, and by Jesus in Jn 16:21.

23 See, for example, Mt 6:23; Jn 1:5; 12:35, 46.

24 Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better."

25 Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; and 2 Cor 13:12.

26 Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45. To emphasize the message of ministering or serving, I especially love the Weymouth translation of Mk 10:45: “The Son of Man also did not come to be waited upon, but to wait on others.”

27 See, for example, Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3–4; Eph 1:2; Php 1:2; Col 1:1; 1 Ths 1:1; and 2 Ths 1:1.

28 See Act 5:40–42; Rom 8:17; Php 1:29; 3:10; Heb 5:8–9; 1 Pet 2:20–23.

29 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2007), 84.

30 Joe 2:30; Mal 3:2; Mt 13:40; 2 Pet 3:10; D&C 64:24.

31 2 Ths 1:8; Rom 1:19–21, 28–29.

32 The epistle known as Ephesians teaches that Christ becomes our temple cornerstone, Apostles become the foundations, and members fit into their places as a holy temple of the Lord. Eph 2:21.

33 Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our Lives,” April 2018 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

34 Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 11–12, 62, 65, 72, 113–114, 366–368.

35 “Times and Seasons, 1 April 1842,” p. 744, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-april-1842/10>; spelling and punctuation silently modernized. Joseph Smith continued, “As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles: for I contend that if one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the learned, the tongue of the eloquent, and the power of the mighty. And we shall at last have to come to this conclusion, whatever we may think of revelation, that without it we can neither know nor understand anything of God, or the devil; and however unwilling the world may be to acknowledge this principle, it is evident from the multifarious creeds and notions concerning this matter that they understand nothing of this principle, and it is equally as plain that without a divine communication they must remain in ignorance.” George A. Smith, one of Joseph’s closest companions and cousins, observed, “There was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits.” Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 21.

36 John A. Widstoe, comp., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1954), 117.

37 John Calvin (1509–1564) reformed Christianity by emphasizing five beliefs known as TULIP: (1) Total depravity from the original sin; (2) Unconditional election; (3) Limited atonement; (4) Irresistible grace; and (5) Perseverance of the Saints. Joseph Smith denounced all five of these foundational points of Reformed Christianity.

38 See, for example, Ex 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26.

39 The KJV translation speaks of Reformed Christians’ belief that the elect are saved or damned without any mortal effort. By honoring God with complete control, agency was removed. The *Westminster Confession* taught

that God chooses to save only certain mortals: “As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto.” *Westminster Confession* 3.6. Again it teaches in 12.1 and 3: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death . . . this effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit.”

40 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–1886), 9:3.

41 Beverly R. Gaventa and David L. Petersen, *The New Interpreter’s Bible One-Volume Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 760.

42 Spencer W. Kimball, quoted in Gordon B. Hinckley, “He Is at Peace,” *Ensign*, December 1985, 41.

43 Act 17:1–9, 18:1–18. Additionally, Silas was serving with Paul in Corinth and was his coauthor; see 2 Ths 1:1. Biblical students can trace when and where Silas was a companion to Paul, and it overlaps with his second apostolic mission to the Gentiles. Paul was in Corinth for eighteen months, giving him time to write, send, and receive correspondence from the Thessalonian Saints. For more, see Anderson, *Understanding Paul*.