

INVITATION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

The book of Acts tells how Paul, Silas, and Timothy brought the good news about Jesus to Europe around AD 51 (see p. 1549). They began in northern Greece, which was then known as Macedonia. They went first to the city of Philippi, where many people became followers of Jesus. But a mob attacked Paul and Silas, and local officials beat and imprisoned them and forced them to leave the city. (Timothy was Greek so he was left alone, but Paul and Silas were Jews so they were treated with hostility and suspicion.) The three went to the city of Thessalonica where many more people became Jesus-followers. But another riot broke out. Paul and Silas were accused of defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus, and they narrowly escaped with their lives (see p. 1551). They went to the nearby city of Berea, where the people listened to them respectfully. But their opponents from Thessalonica came and stirred up the crowds. For his safety, Paul had to be sent away to the city of Athens in Achaia (southern Greece). Paul was concerned that the believers in Thessalonica might stop following Jesus because of the opposition they were facing. So when Silas and Timothy caught up with him, he sent Timothy (who could make the trip more safely) back to Thessalonica to encourage the believers. When Timothy returned with the welcome news that the Thessalonians had remained faithful, Paul wrote to them to express his joy. He also used the opportunity to provide some teaching and correction the community needed. Like all of Paul's letters that are preserved in the Bible, this one follows the pattern that was typical for correspondence of the time. There's an opening section that names the sender and the recipients, then offers a good wish. A thanksgiving and prayer often follow. The main body of the letter comes next. Finally, there's a closing section that expresses

more good wishes and extends greetings to and from people that the sender and recipients both know. In the main body of this letter, Paul first talks at length about his relationship with the new believers in Thessalonica. He recalls his time with them and says how grateful he is that they've remained faithful to Jesus. After wishing them a blessing, he makes a transition to provide briefer teaching and instruction on several practical matters. (These are probably things that Timothy told him about after his return visit to Thessalonica.) : Paul teaches the Thessalonians to avoid sexual immorality, to love one another and to work hard and earn their own livings. : He explains that believers who die before the coming of the Lord are not lost. They'll be raised from the dead at this royal, public appearance of the Messiah. But Paul reminds the Thessalonians that Jesus will come back suddenly and unexpectedly. So they should live in such a way that they won't be ashamed to greet him, whenever he comes. : Finally, he advises them how to live as a community of Jesus-followers. In all of his advice and teaching, Paul's basic message is, "Keep up the good work!" Even though he addresses the Thessalonians as his brothers and sisters, Paul also says that he, Silas and Timothy treated them the way a mother or father would. This shows the pride and affection they had for these first European followers of Jesus, their dear offspring in the faith.