

# 1 THESSALONIANS

## Thessalonica

Thessalonica (Salonika), the large and prosperous capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia, so named in honour of a half sister of Alexander the Great, was ancient even in the time of Paul. 315 BC Therma ("hot springs") founded; then Thessalonica built nearby which expanded to absorb the earlier city.

Situated on the Via Egnatia, a road which ran from Italy all the way to the East and with a large harbour, it fitted Paul's criteria for mission i.e. the hub of a communications network effectively to transmit the Gospel..

Essentially a Greek city, it also had a Roman population and, unlike Philippi a sufficiently large Jewish colony to have a synagogue (Acts 16v13; Acts 17v1).

## The Founding of the Church (Acts 17v1-10)

Paul and his companions arrive having been forced out (albeit in style) from Philippi (Acts 16). As per his usual practice Paul goes to the synagogue (over 3 Sabbaths i.e. about a month), supporting himself all the while – tent making? (1Th.2v9; 2Th.3v7-9; Acts 18v1-4). His preaching focuses on Jesus as Messiah and of the necessity for His death and the fact of His resurrection. He is effective, reaching "some" Jews, "a large number of God fearing" Gentiles (either actual converts to Judaism or those sympathetic) and many prominent women. But there is a violent (mainly Jewish) backlash (Acts 17v6-7). By accusing Paul etc. of proclaiming Jesus as "king" they are guaranteeing Roman attention and action (cf Jn.19v12-13) and also protecting themselves from charges of treason. However it is disingenuous as every devout Jew was longing for the coming of the true "King" – the Messiah.

Some of the new Christians are bound over to keep the peace whilst Paul and the others are smuggled out of the city by night. They travel to Berea but are followed there by their opponents, forcing Paul to flee once again (Acts 17v10-15). Eventually he makes his way via Athens to Corinth (Acts 18v1f), arriving bruised and battered and not a little fearful (Acts 18v9-10; 1 Cor.2v3).

## Occasion for Writing the Letters

Desperate to hear news of the fledgling church in Thessalonica, to which he had so briefly taught the faith, Paul sent Timothy to them (1 Th.3v1-2,5) and it is his hugely positive report (1 Th.3v6) that prompts Paul from Corinth, to write his two letters, the first in the summer of AD 50. These two letters being probably the earliest extant Christian writings. Paul uses "we" in the text, indicating a common mind and heart with his team of Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy. Timothy's report hugely encourages Paul and renews his longing to see them again. (1 Th.3v10).

## Five-Fold Reasons for the Letters

- A] A great love and concern for the Church and a desire to articulate his joy over their growing and resolute faith.
- B] A need to vindicate himself from various accusations.
- C] A need to answer particular concerns about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.
- D] A need to put belief in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming in an ethical context.
- E] To address issues connected with their life as a church

## A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON 1 THESSALONIANS

### CHAPTER 1

#### 1:1

*Silas / Silvanus* Paul's assistant after the quarrel with Barnabas over Mark (Acts 15v36) ; with Barnabas he took the Council of Jerusalem's decision to Antioch. Various called a "leader" (A.15v22); "prophet" (A.15v32); "preacher" (2 Cor.1v19); he also became a secretary to Peter (1 Ptr.5v12).

*Timothy* Gk father and Jewish mother, mother and grandmother both believers (2 Tim.1v5; Acts16v1); knows Bible from youth (2 Tim.3v14-15); mission team with Paul (Acts 19v22; 1Cor.4v17; Phil.2v19); co-author of several letters (2 Cor; Phil; Col; 1 & 2 Thess; Philemon); entrusted by Paul's to be his special representative to difficult Corinth (1 Cor.4v17;16v10) and to delightful Thessalonica (1 Thess.3v1); ends up leading a Church (1 & 2 Tim.).

*Lord - Divinity / Jesus - Humanity / Christ -Messiah*

*Grace and Peace* – God's unmerited favour; wholeness (peace with and the peace of God) cp 1 Th.5v3.

## 1:2-3

**A] A great love and concern for the Church and a desire to articulate his joy over their growing and resolute faith.**

### 1:2

*Prayer, full of thanksgiving* - (1 Th.1v2-3; 2v13; 3v10-13; 5v23; 2 Th.1v3,11-12; 2v13, 16-17; 3v16 cf 1 Th.5v16-18). Paul also covets their prayers for him and his companions (1 Th.5v25; 2 Th.3v1-2).

Bearing in mind that he had only known these new believers for about a month! (1 Th.2v15; 3v12; 3v5; cf 2 Cor.11v28-29). What it is for this chief of apostles to call them his "joy, glory and crown!" (1 Thess.2v19-20; 3v9-10,12-13). He rejoices how they welcomed both him (3v6,9) and the message that they preached (1v6; 1v9; 2v13); how their faith has stood severe testing (1 Th.1v3; 2v14;3v8) and how they in turn are becoming role models to others (1 Th.1v7-9; 3v9).

### 1:4 – God has chosen you...

**The Election of the Thessalonian believers i.e. the reality and truth of their conversion, is evidenced by:**

- How the Gospel was proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Th.1v5).
- How they received the Word (1v6; 1v9; 2v13).
- How their lifestyle matched their profession of faith (1 Th.1v9, 14; 3v6; 4v7 9-1f), so much so that they in turn model discipleship Christian living to others and their renown has spread to all of Greece – Macedonia and Achaia were the 2 provinces into which Greece was divided (1 Th.1v7-8).
- Persecution (1 Th.1v6; 2v14-15; 3v3-5; 2 Th.1v4-5; 2v15; 2 Tim.3v12; Jn.15v18)

### Election

We are Chosen to be put into Christ **OR** In Christ we are Chosen.

e.g. A train from London to Edinburgh:-

Are we predestined to get on the train to Scotland? **OR** Once we have boarded the train (for whatever reasons), we are then (and only then) predestined to get to Scotland.

Remember Jn.6 God draws and gives us to Jesus but on our part we listen, believe and receive.

### 1:5 our Gospel

Elsewhere called "the Lord's Message" (1v8); "the Gospel of God" (2v1,8-9); "the word of God" (2v13); it is "the Gospel of Christ" (3v1; cf 1 Cor.1v23-24; 2v2).

## CHAPTERS 2 & 3

**B] A need to vindicate himself from various accusations.**

"He was simply a self-seeker only in it for himself, who left at the first sign of trouble, allowing others to face the music and who never come back." (Acts 17v2,10). The fact that Paul sends so much time answering the accusation says something again about the fact that he can't bear that they should think ill of him but also suggests that the accusations (by Christians; by opponents) were gaining some credence.

### Paul's Defence

- They had longed and tried to get back to the Thessalonian church (1 Th.2v17-18; 3v1,10-11).
- They had a track record of faithful and courageous service (1 Th.2v1-2; 3v2-4,7; 2 Th.3v2).
- Their motives were entirely pure and honourable (1 Th.2v3-5).
- They had never looked for material or financial reward – even though they could have (1 Th.2v6,9; 2 Th.3v7-9).
- Their ministry was marked by kindness and care not by manipulation and power (1 Th.2v5-12).

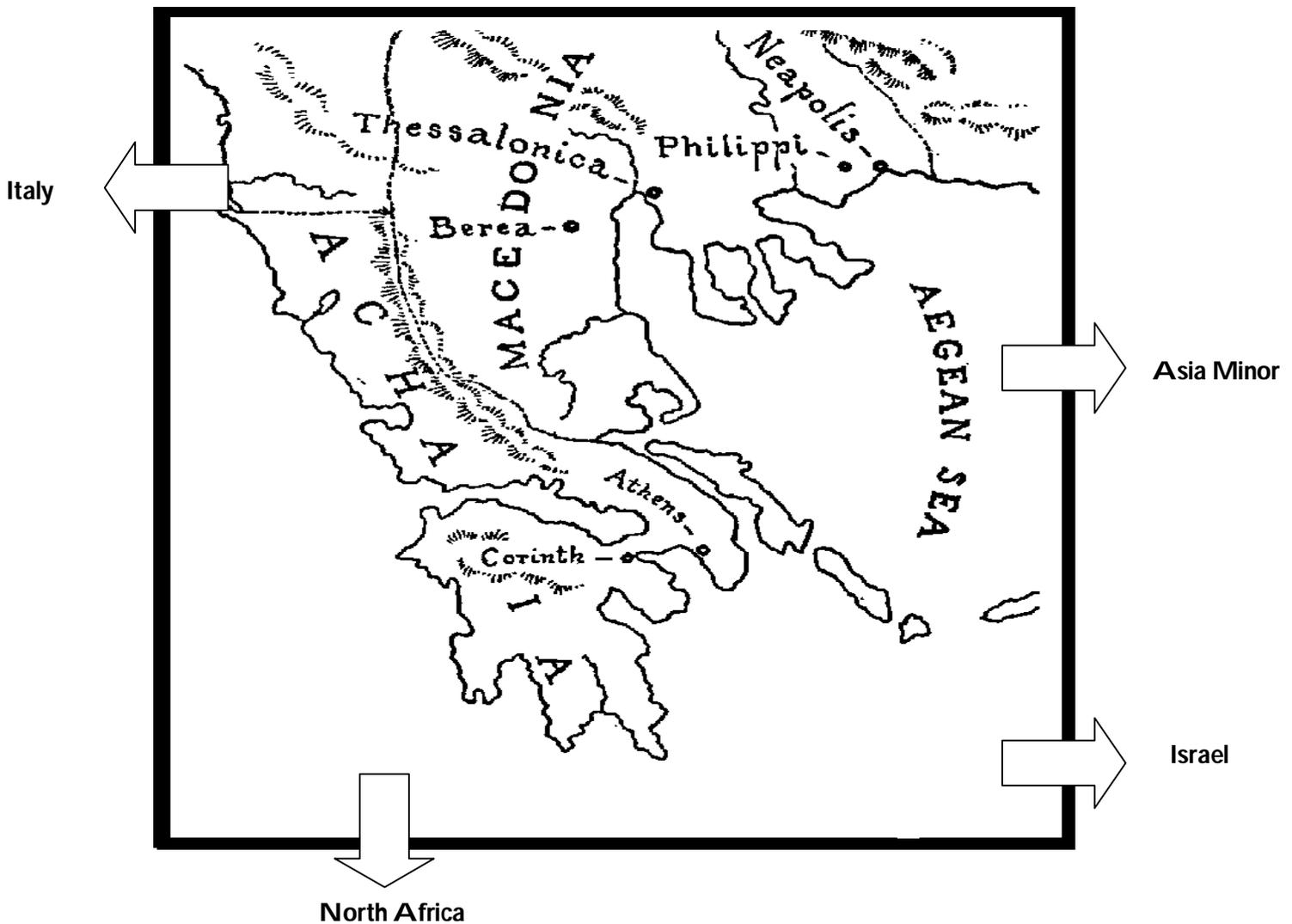
### 2:18

*Satan hindered us* (1 Th.3v5; 2 Th.3v3; Eph.6v10f; 2 Cor.10v4).

Word used lit. "*cut into*" and used of a military tactic of destroying bridges and breaking up roads to delay an enemy advance or to make progress impossible.

Not told what is the nature of this obstacle (but see 2Th.3v2?). Satan is a foe also faced by the Thessalonians themselves (1 Th.3v5). This Spiritual Adversary has power and might (2 Th.2v9-11) but in Christ we can be safe and secure (2 Th.3v3).

We are in the same battle (Eph.6v10f).



## FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Paul just couldn't get enough of the Thessalonian church. He couldn't see enough of them or pray enough for them.  
Why do you think that he had such a love for people he had only known for about a month? In 1 Thessalonians are there any clues to this by looking at how he viewed his calling under God and by how he lived his life among them and by his attitude towards them from the beginning?

How might we begin to share that same love of and commitment to *all* those among whom we worship and share our Christian life?

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2. Paul was subject to what appears to have been a malicious campaign of slander and of gossip. So much so that he was forced to put pen to paper to clear his name.

How well do you speak of your brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Th.4v9-10;5v15) and how well do you speak of those in Church leadership (1 Th.5:12-13)?

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3. Paul says that "Satan stopped us" from taking a particular course of action (1 Thess.2v18). Yet elsewhere we read that the Holy Spirit acted to stop them (Acts 16v6-7).

How do you think Paul discerned the difference between what on the surface might appear to be two identical set of circumstances?

How do we discern God's guidance as opposed to promptings that come through our own thoughts, desires or wilfulness?

How real and relevant to your own Christian walk is this spiritual enemy known as Satan?

## 1 THESSALONIANS (Study 2)

### RECAP

Paul has five main reasons for writing to the church at Thessalonica.

### C] A need to answer particular concerns about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.

References to 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming in both letters: (1 Th.1v10; 3v13; 4v13-5v11,23; 2 Th.1v6-10; 2v1-12)  
25% of the two letters is taken up with 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus.

**What is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming?** In a nutshell = 2 Th.1v5-10; 1 Cor.15v24; Phil.2v9-11.

### JESUS AND THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING

- Several parables and some explicit teaching especially in Mt.24; Mk.13; Lk.21.
- Other unrecorded teaching by Jesus as we gather from 1 Th.4v15.

### Basic Details from Mt 24, Mk 13 and Lk.21

- False Messiahs will arise, some of whose claims will be accompanied by miracles.
- Revolutions, wars and rumours of wars.
- Famine and pestilence.
- Earthquakes.
- Signs in the heavens.
- Persecution.

### Before..

- The sudden, visible and glorious return of the Lord Jesus (2 Th.1v6-9).
- Bringing reward to believers and judgement on the wicked.

### Therefore..

We must be alert and prayerful (1 Th.5v5-8).

### There will be Warning Signs BUT

- No-one knows the day nor the hour, not even the “human” Jesus (Mt.24v36).
- Jesus’ return will be visible and world-wide (Mt 24v30) – i.e. no “secret return” (2 Th.2v1-2).
- Peter would be an old man (Jn.21v18-19)
- Gospel must be preached through all the world (Mt.24v14; Mk.13v10).

### THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA

Had become disturbed and concerned over five main areas:-

1. **When will the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming take place – indeed has it already happened?**
2. **What will be the signs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming?**
3. **What will it be like?**
4. **What will be the status of believers who have already died?**
5. **Who is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming for?**

Situation further complicated by different teachers saying different things and even forged letters and false prophecies circulating, purporting to come from Paul (2 Th.2v2; 1 Th.5v19-23).

### PAUL’S TEACHING ON THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING

His main word is the *Parousia*– the “Presence” or “Coming” of Jesus (1 Th.2v19; 3v13;4v15; 5v23; 2 Th.2v1,8), a word used of the arrival of important personages or of a royal visit.

2<sup>nd</sup> Coming based on certain, sure and historically verifiable facts (1 Th.4v14).

### 1. When will the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming take place – indeed has it already happened?

Answer = 1 Th.5v1-3; 2 Th.2v2 and they “*know this very well..*” (1 Th.5v2).

### 2. What will be the signs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming?

**a.** “Peace and safety” (1 Th.5v1-3) cf “*as in the days of Noah...*” (Mt 24v37f).

**b.** Persecution (Mt.24v9f; 2 Th.1v4ff) – is the persecution which the Thessalonian church was currently undergoing making them think that these were the last days?

**c.** The Man of Lawlessness is revealed (2 Th.2v1-3).

## WHO IS THIS “MAN OF LAWLESSNESS?”

**ci.** The “Anti-Christ” (A-C) of 1 & 2 John i.e.

- Someone *opposed* to Jesus e.g. “I’m anti apartheid / anti blood sports...”(2 Th.2v4a)
- Someone setting self in the *place* of Jesus e.g. antibiotics (2 Th.2v4b; 1 Jn.2v22; 4v1-4; 2 Th.2v7; hence 1 Th.5v20-21).

**cii.** Many “mini” A-Cs and the spirit of A-C around at the moment (1 Jn.2v18-19; 4v1-3). Then will come *the* Anti-Christ at the end of time.

**ciii.** He imitates Jesus’ return.

- “Revealed” (2 Th.2v3,8 **cp** 2 Th.1v7).
- “Coming in power and splendour” 2 Th.2v9-10 **cp** 2 Th.1v10; 2v8).

**civ.** Doomed to destruction (2 Th.2v3,8)

It appears that the Lawless One has broken out to wreak havoc with all the power of Hell, when in reality he has been released to be destroyed. The One who rejects all authority will be annihilated by the One who holds all authority.

**cv.** Some -Thing (2 Th.2v6); Some -One (2 Th.2v7) restrains him at this present time:-

- Law and Order against a Man of Lawlessness
- The Holy Spirit
- A Mighty Angel of God (cf Rev.7v1f; 20v1-3).

Tantalisingly “*you know..*” (2 Th.2v6)!!

### 3. What will it be like?

- Visible (1 Th.3v13; 4v16-17; 2 Th.1v7; 2v8).
- Glorious (2 Th.1v7,10; 2v8).
- Believers will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air (1 Th.4v17).
- To be with the Lord – forever! (1 Th.4v17; 5v10; cf Jn.14v3).

### 4. What will be the status of believers who have already died? (1 Th.4v13)

- How will they be accommodated? – can’t imagine.
- Will they be in some way disadvantaged by being already dead?
- Are they under God’s judgement even, because they have died? (cf 1 Cor.11v27-32)

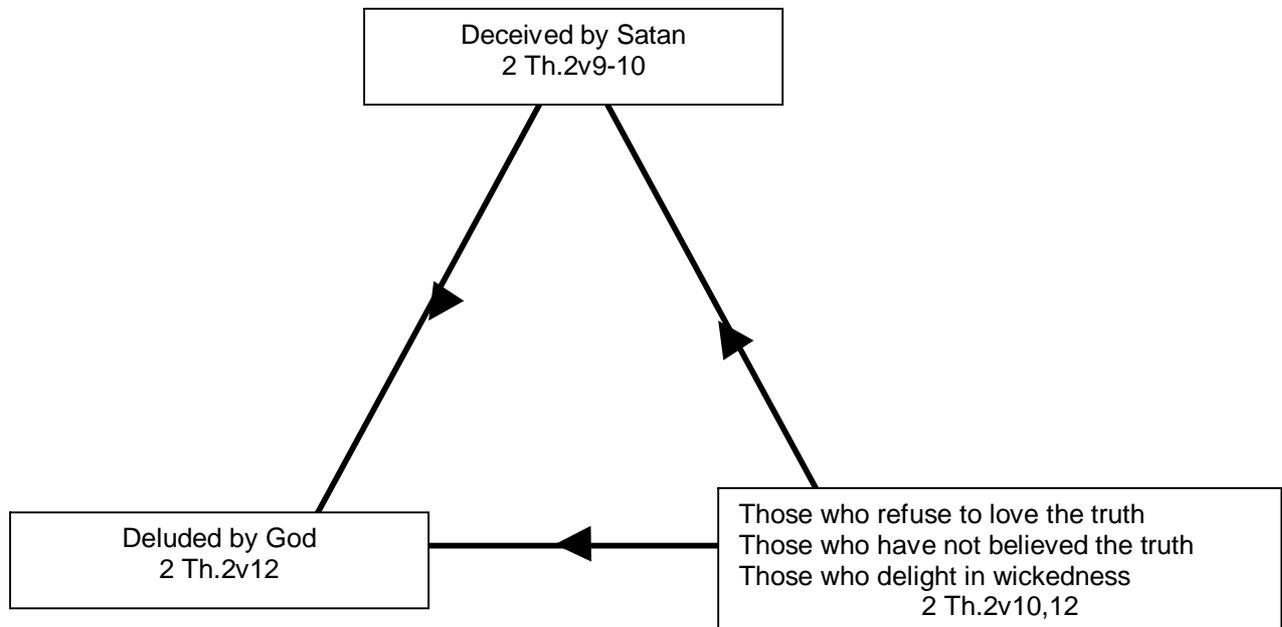
### Answer – Jesus’ own word on this (1 Th.4v15)

- Not mourn as those who have no hope (1 Th.4v13).  
The righteous dead are “*Asleep*” (1 Th.4v13,14,15) = “*asleep in Him..*”
- The righteous dead will not be excluded but rather will rise first (1 Th.4v15-17).  
“*Those who die in Christ, live in Christ.*”

### 5. Who is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming for?

- The believer, for blessing, reward and eternal life (1 Th.2v19; 4v17; 5v9-10; 2 Th.1v5; 2v13-14).
- The rejecter, for judgement, condemnation and eternal death (1 Th. 1v10; 2v14-16; 5v9; 2 Th.1v6-9; 2v10-12)  
- away from Christ’s “face” (2 Th.1v6,8-9 **cp** 1 Th. 4v17).

“Wrath of God” (1 Th.1v10; 2v16; 5v9) = God’s settled and unchanging attitude and emotion towards sin



- Finally to deal with sin and with Satan (2 Th.2v3,8).

#### **D] A need to put belief in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming in an ethical context.**

He enjoins them not to concentrate so much on when will it happen and what will be the signs but rather, given the certainty of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, on what sort of person should they be – in the here and now?

#### **Overlap with issues connected with E and their wider Christian life.**

- Endurance (1 Th.1v3,10; 2 Th.1v4; 2v15).
- Blameless and holy (1 Th.3v13 cf 1 Th.2v10; 1 Th.5v5-8).
- To respond to death in a different way as do the pagans (1 Th.4v13).
- To be alert and self-controlled (1 Th.5v6-8).
- To encourage and to build one another up (1 Th.4v18; 5v11)
- Not to be idlers or spongers (1 Th.2v6-9; 4v11-12; 5v14; 2 Th.3v6-15).

#### **E] A need to address issues connected with their life as a church**

Paul “encourages, comforts and urges” (1 Th.2v12); “instructs” by the authority of Christ (1 Th.4v1-2); “asks and urges” (1 Th.4v1); “asks” (1 Th.5v12); “urges” (1 Th.5v14); “commands in the name of the Lord” (2 Th.3v6,12); “urges in the Lord Jesus” (2 Th.3v12); “instructs” (2 Th.3v14); all with the same desire = 1 Th.4v1; 5v23.

We are not of the night (1 Th.5v4-8)!

#### **Within and Without the Church = Holy Relationships**

- sexual morality (1 Th.4v3-8; 5v26).
- brotherly love (1 Th.4v9-10; 5v15).
- church leaders (1 Th.5v12-13; relevance of 1 Th.4v11 challenges to leaders?).
- worship matters (1 Th.5v16-22 cf 2 Th.2v1-2).
- community (1 Th.4v11-12).

**WHAT has God drawn your attention to in these reflections together?**

**THAT is what He is saying to you today.**

**IF there is nothing that has especially caught your eye then you may want quietly and carefully to revisit the letters to see if you missed that “still small voice”. Alternatively, there may be nothing specific, in which case what are the principles and lessons that you will take from 1 & 2 Thessalonians and how will you apply them to your Christian life?**

## FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Paul obviously thought that teaching on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ was an important part of informing and equipping new Christians.

Why do you think we no longer appear to have that same emphasis, not just in instructing new believers but in teaching believers in general?

What might be the pluses and minuses of focussing more often on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming?

2. Paul also spends quite an amount of time speaking about God's judgement and "wrath" on sin and on unrepentant sinners.

Do you think that the Church spends enough time talking to sinners about sin and the consequences of sin?

Do you think that the Church spends enough time talking to Christians about sin and the consequences of sin?

3. In the light of a Holy Spirit and a call to live a holy life (1 Th.4v7-9), what might we do to:
  - a) develop our own personal holiness?
  - b) develop holy relationships with one another?

What do you think holy relationships in the Church look like?

4. What has God has said to you from 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and how will you apply what he has said to your Christian life?
5. What advice would you give to a new Christian?

If you are a new Christian, what advice would you like to receive?

*or*

When you were a new Christian, what advice would have liked to have been given?