

WAITING FOR CHRIST'S COMING

Lesson Aim: Teach the coming of Christ and appreciate the work of God in new believers.

Suggestion: Have the students read the Scriptures and answer the questions in the student lesson and insert the following questions where they fit the lesson for class discussion.

Introduction: 1 Thessalonians divides into two basic parts. The first three chapters are "personal," and the last two are "practical." The first chapter is a chapter of personal thanksgiving. Paul, writing from Corinth, had just received an uplifting report from Timothy concerning the spiritual transformation of the Thessalonian believers. He responds with thanksgiving and appreciation for the work of God in their lives as they "wait for His Son from Heaven . . . who delivered us from the wrath to come" (1Thes 1:10).

What did Paul appreciate about the church at Thessalonica and thanked God? 1:2-3

Paul thanked God always for the spiritual changes He made in the believers at Thessalonica. He spoke of three specific changes in their lives. First, he was thankful for their "work of faith." It was work that proved their faith was genuine (James 2:18). It was faith based on God's promises about the Rapture, being delivered from the Tribulation and living with Christ forever which produced a spontaneous witness for Christ in a hostile environment. This shows the importance of telling believers what God has promised believers in order to have a working church. Second, Paul was thankful for their "labor of love." It was love that caused them to toil with strenuous effort. It was love that was motivated by God's love for them. He loved them so much that He sent His only Son to die for their sins in order to keep them from going to Hell. They had never heard of such love from their pagan gods. With gratefulness they sacrificed their possessions, personal comfort and safety to show their love for God. Third, Paul was thankful for their "patience of hope." This refers to a hope that is steadfast, not moved by persecution. Their hope of future glory and joy with Christ and other believers at the Rapture made their suffering bearable (1:10; 4:13-18).

How could Paul know that the believers in Thessalonica were elected and saved by God? 1:4

Jesus said that we can know a person's true nature by their fruits (Mt 7:20). Paul knew these believers were the elect of God by the fruits they produced (1:3). How does a person get elected by God? Jesus gives this answer, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me, draws him" (Jn 6:44). But how does the Father determine which ones He should draw to His Son? Jesus tells us in the next verse: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes to Me" (Jn 6:45). Jesus said, His Father teaches truth to all people in one way or another. Then it is man's responsibility to hear the truth that the Father has told him and then learn the truth by applying it to his life. Those who learn the truth will come to Jesus. They are the elect. So Jesus says sinners have a responsible part in their election. Isaiah agrees and says, "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way . . . for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:6-7). Paul says, God predestinates (elects) those that He foreknows. What does He foreknow? Those that will respond to the truth. Then He calls, justifies and glorifies such a person (Rom 8:29-30). Peter agrees and tells converts that they are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet 1:2). What does "foreknow" mean? God knows everything about everyone before He created anyone. Does that mean He knows who will hear and learn the truth that He teaches them? It cannot be denied. So God foreknows those who will receive His Son and predestines (elects) them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29).

What is the purpose of God's wrath during the Tribulation? 1:10

God's wrath will cause Israel to repent and receive Jesus as her Messiah so He can rule the earth from Jerusalem. Gabriel gave Daniel a prophecy for Israel that would last for 70 weeks of years (490 yrs) - Dan 9:24. When Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, 69 weeks of years were fulfilled, but a gap in the prophecy occurred. The last 7 years will not be fulfilled until the Tribulation when Israel will finally repent, receive Jesus as Messiah and be cleansed of her rebellion against Him (Zech 12:8-13:1). This will allow Christ to rule the earth from Jerusalem as His Father promised Him. Then Christ will destroy Antichrist and all of His enemies, cast Satan into the abyss and rule the earth for 1000 years.