

Study Guide 3

“Narrating the Present”

Goal: To understand the content and purposes of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13

- 1. To become familiar with the content and purpose of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20*
- 2. To consider the potential purpose(s) of a “2nd Thanksgiving” section*
- 3. To become familiar with the content and purpose of 1 Thessalonians 3:1-10*
- 4. To become familiar with the content and purpose of 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13*
- 5. To gain a sense of how these three passages relate to each other and the previous section (1:3-2:12)*
- 6. To continue the process of noticing (i.e., highlighting) key words and phrases*

1. Divide the Middle into its major sections.

Book 2 of *Inkblotitis* sets forth the following “Ten Rules of Good Bible Reading”:

1. Read the whole book, preferably several times.
2. View the verses in book-level focus.
3. Discover the shape of the text.
4. Highlight recurring words and ideas.
5. Appreciate the differences of genre.
6. Tune in to the historical setting.
7. Use commentaries and other study tools with discretion.
8. Digest your experiences in the word.
9. Live what you’ve learned.
10. Do it again.

In previous study guides, we started working on Rule #3: “Discover the shape of the text.” To do this thoroughly, I suggest 4 steps:

- Step 1: Find the Introduction and the Conclusion.
- Step 2: Divide the Middle into its major sections.
- Step 3: Look at how the sections are connected.
- Step 4: Determine the purpose of the sections.

We’re not going to go through all of these steps now (we’ll be doing these sorts of things as we look more closely at the various sections of the letter), but as part of our effort to get a feel for the overall shape of 1 Thessalonians, see if you can produce a tentative outline of the book—not a detailed outline, but only of the major sections. In other words, “Divide the Middle into its major sections.”

But how? That seems pretty hard, doesn’t it? Well, it might not be as hard as you think. You’ve already read 1 Thessalonians several times, you already something about the Introduction and the Conclusion. It’s easy to identify the major Transitions (prayers) of 3:11-13 and 5:23-24. So all you have to do is see if the first half of the Middle and the last half of the Middle have any major transitions or thematic changes. For now, let’s focus on the first half.

Expanding the 3-Part Shape

Here's what you already know (or something similar):

Introduction: 1:1-10

Middle 2:1-3:13

Transition: 3:11-13

Middle: 4:1-5:24

Conclusion: 5:25-28

So the question is, are there any major divisions or subject changes in 2:1-3:13 and in 4:1-5:28? For the moment, focus on 2:1-3:13.

How would you divide 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:13? What (literary or grammatical clues) did you use to separate the major sections?

2. Explore 2:13-20: Thanksgiving/Introduction Renewed.

Summarize 2:13-20. What are the key subjects of 2:13-20? What has happened to the Thessalonian Christians since Paul left (2:14-16)? What has happened to Paul (2:17-20)? Why would Paul review or narrate these events (cf. this to the 1st Thanksgiving section)?

Why do you think Paul uses a construction (the Thanksgiving) that he typically uses as an Introduction in his letters a second time here in 1 Thessalonians? (Hint: What are the typical functions of an Introduction? Do they have anything in common with Transitions and Conclusions?) Does 2:13-20 seek to accomplish any of the typical purposes of an Introduction?

How does 2:13 relate to the previous section (2:1-12)? And how does it relate to 2:14-20? In other words, how does the idea that the Thessalonians received the word brought to them by Paul/team as "it truly is the word of God" relate to the description of Paul's coming to them and their response?

When did the content of 2:13-20 (and 3:1-5) take place in relation to Paul's original coming to the Thessalonians and his current situation (3:6-10)? How does the last phrase of 2:13 help to make this transition: "who *is working* in you who believe"?

How does the persecution/suffering of the Thessalonians and Paul's absence relate to or affect their relationship? Could it raise (or be used to raise) questions about the genuineness of their original experience and reception of the gospel? Or their relationship to Paul?

What does Paul claim about his relationship and feelings toward them? What is his purpose and passion? Hint: “For what is our hope or joy . . .” How do the Thessalonians know this to be true (perhaps this sets us up for 3:1-10)?

2. Explore 3:1-10: Paul’s Passion and Purpose.

Why did Paul send Timothy to the Thessalonian Christians? Why does Paul introduce that piece of information with the phrase “When we could take it no longer . . .” In other words, how does the sending of Timothy relate to Paul’s relationship with and purpose for the Thessalonians?

What serious issue or problem are the Thessalonian Christians experiencing? How does it relate to the genuineness and health of their faith?

What news does Timothy bring to Paul about their faith and love? (Any significance of it being described as “the good news,” i.e. “gospel” of their faith and love?) What news does Timothy bring about their feelings toward and thus their relationship with Paul?

What effect does Timothy’s report have on Paul? What does Paul’s reaction say about the genuineness of his message and his love? “. . . because now we live if you stand in the Lord!”

Why does Paul again use the word “thanksgiving”? How does “thanksgiving” relate to the idea that the Thessalonians presented safe and sound before God at the coming of Christ is Paul’s joy and crown? How does 3:9-10 relate to 3:1-8?

Extra, Extra . . .

The Narrative portion of an ancient speech—the part most directly related to the key points or arguments—often ended with a topic heading or proposition, which was then taken up in the sections to follow. Narratives thus served to introduce and summarize important facts of the case. In this way, Narratives were introductory, and there could be more than one in a given document, separated and distributed appropriately throughout the course of a speech.

It’s interesting in this regard that Paul’s introductory Thanksgiving 1:2-10 quickly becomes a narration of the events of his past experience with the Thessalonians in a way that prepares for the “defense” of the nature of his coming to them in 2:1-12. Paul then appears to do the same sort of thing with the renewal of “Thanksgiving” in 2:13-20, summarizing a key point of the previous argument (2:13) and then quickly moving into the narration of important events that have taken place since Paul and his team left Thessalonica—thus preparing for his argument in 3:1-10 that the spiritual health and destiny of the Thessalonians is indeed Paul’s passion and purpose (he really does want to come to them). The 3rd statement of thanksgiving (3:9-10) then brings this section to a powerful conclusion with the reiteration of his great desire to see them again and to mend or fix what is lacking in their faith (to continue being their spiritual mentor/pastor).

The Thanksgiving passages of 1 Thessalonians thus tend to function as introduction, not only in general, but also with regard to the specific points (arguments) Paul is making in each section. In other words, Narrative has become a part of the Introduction—which is one of the ways rhetoricians of the time structured their speeches—and Paul has divided it to accomplish two fundamental points in the first half of 1 Thessalonians: Paul’s coming to them was not in vain (as their response showed) and his going or absence in a time of suffering does not undermine the truth of that shared experience or the gospel they received.

So . . . the Past proves the genuineness of the gospel the Thessalonians had received (1:2-2:12); the Present (what has happened since and their present status) proves the genuineness of the gospel they had received—along with Paul’s passion for them (2:13-3:10). That means that the future is open for learning and growth in the Lord Jesus. Paul’s heart is comforted and his desire to present the Thessalonian Christians blameless before God, reignited.

Summarize:

1:2-10:

2:1-12:

2:13-20:

3:1-10:

4. Explore 3:11-13: Transitional Prayer.

Summarize 3:11-13. How does the prayer of 3:11-13 bring the first half of the letter to a close?

How does the content of the prayer relate to the previous sections? Are there any connections with what follows in the 2nd half of the letter?

5. How Do 2:13-20, 3:1-10, and 3:11-13 Fit/Function in the Book of 1 Thessalonians?

How does 1 Thess 2:13-20 and 3:1-10 relate to each other, and to what precedes and follows?

How do the 3 “thanksgiving” passages of 1 Thessalonians relate to each other? Is it one long section (1:2-3:13), punctuated with thanksgiving, or several, tightly-knit but distinct paragraphs and points (1:2-10, 2:1-12; 2:13-20, 3:1-13)?

What role does the prayer of 3:11-13 serve in the shape of 1 Thessalonians?

6. Highlight Key Words and Phrases.

Go through 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13 and highlight/color-code key words, ideas, and phrases. Note how they connect with previous sections.

Moving the sample highlighting to the end of the Study Guides from here on. See below.

Expert's Corner

Key Questions Review

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

- What are the key themes set forth in 1:2-13-20? In what ways did the Thessalonians become “imitators” of the churches of God in Judea?
- Why does Paul narrate what has happened to the Thessalonian Christians and to himself since his original coming/visit with them? What critical question or concern does their suffering and Paul's absence/distance raise for the Thessalonian Christians? How does Paul state or summarize that concept (2:19-20)?
- What role or function does the 2nd Thanksgiving passage serve in the unfolding shape of 1 Thessalonians?

1 Thessalonians 3:1-10

- Summarize the key/leading topics of 3:1-10. Is there a central or governing idea that Paul is trying to establish (i.e., prove) through the details of his being left alone, and the purpose and result of Timothy's trip? What was the result of Timothy's trip?
- Why does Paul say that “we live if you stand in the Lord”? What does this have to do with the “thanksgiving” he gives to God, to the genuineness/reality of his relationship and experience with the Thessalonians, and to the future of their faith?
- How does 3:1-10 relate to 2:13-20?

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

- What role does 3:11-13 serve in the letter? How does 3:11-13 bring the first half of the letter to a conclusion? What themes does it summarize? What ideas does it introduce that become more important in the 2nd half?

Sample Highlighting of Chapter 1

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

²We give thanks to God always for all of you,

constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

³remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.

⁴For we know [= knowing], brothers **loved** by God, that he has **chosen** you, ⁵because our **gospel came** to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we **proved to be** among you for your sake. ⁶And you **became** imitators of us and of the Lord, for you **received the word** in **much affliction**, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you **became** an example to all the **believers** in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has **the word of the Lord** sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but **your faith** in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹For they themselves report concerning us **the kind of reception** we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to **wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

2 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our **coming** to you **was** not in **vain**, ²but after we had already **suffered and been mistreated** in Philippi, **as you know**, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you **the gospel of God** amid much **opposition**. ³For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with **the gospel**, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. ⁵For we never **came** with flattering speech, **as you know**, nor with a pretext for greed—**God is witness**— ⁶nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷But we **proved to be** gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only **the gospel of God** but also our own lives, because you had **become** very dear to us.

⁹ For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹ just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, ¹² so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

3 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—⁷ for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night

and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness **before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.**