

Illustrated Bible Life

Hope for Challenging Times

In the Greek town of Thessalonica, Paul and his companions established a church among the largely Gentile population. Thus, when Paul was forced to abruptly depart the fledgling church due to persecution, these new believers were left on their own to develop a vibrant faith in Christ. Paul went on to Berea, where he faced more persecution, and then to Athens, and from there to Corinth, where he sent two letters to the believers to encourage them in their faith.

What Paul learned about their perseverance in the faith in spite of opposition was in turn an encouragement to him. The Thessalonians had not only kept the faith, but had become known for their “work produced by faith . . . labor prompted by love, and . . . endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Sometimes opposition comes to us, but the Thessalonians show us that we don’t need to give in.

Yet the Thessalonians were not simply ignoring the reality around them. Whether from persecution or natural circumstances, some of the believers had died. The Thessalonians must have become uneasy about their fate, for Paul addressed this matter as well. He reassured them that they needn’t fear for those faithful who had been laid to rest to await the second coming of our Lord: “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, who have no hope” (2 Thessalonians 4:13).

The lessons we learn from our study in 1 and 2 Thessalonians leads us naturally into the next unit, on Timeless Messages for the Journey. The passages selected for this study are ones we seldom focus on, and yet, they all have something to say about God and hope, and our relationship with God even in the darkest of times.

As I write this editorial, the world is in the grip of a pandemic such as we have not seen since the great flu pandemic of 1918. It is one thing to read about the history of a time such as this; it is quite another to experience the day-to-day uncertainty of such times. Yet we are not without hope; God has given us the capacity to adapt to challenging times. We can look to God for certainty, for if challenging times teach us anything, it is that it is a mistake to look for stability in the changing circumstances of life. It is a mistake to look to human beings for answers to questions that can only be answered by the One who created us. Our studies this quarter reassure us that God is more than sufficient to meet any new challenge we find in this fallen world!