

Lesson #13 - I Thessalonians 2019

Before starting this lesson, read **the entire book, chapters 1 - 5.**

Paul's letters for the local churches were put together in logical order.

His first series of books are about **SALVATION** - Jesus as Savior. **ROMANS**, the 2 books of **CORINTHIANS** and **GALATIANS**.

His next series is about the **CHRISTIAN LIFE** - Jesus as Head - **EPHESIANS**, **PHILIPPIANS**, **COLOSSIANS**.

His final series is about the **RETURN OF JESUS** - when He takes us to His home.

This is the last part of the good news - the last part of the Gospel message.

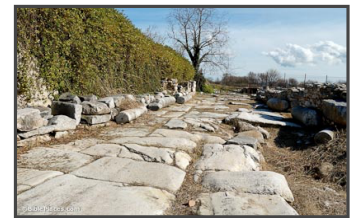
Remember, the Gospel is not just about salvation. It also includes the Christian life and the return of Jesus. The teaching about the return of Jesus is in the book of **1 THESSALONIANS**.

Logically, this is Paul's final topic. But chronologically, it is Paul's first letter to any church.

TEACHING FOR	church members	teaching reproof of action correction of belief 2 Tim. 3:16	SALVATION	CHRISTIAN LIFE	RETURN OF JESUS
			ROMANS 1-2 CORINTHIANS GALATIANS	EPHESIANS PHILIPPIANS COLOSSIANS	1 THESSALONIANS

Like Philippi, Thessalonica was on the military highway - the Egnatian Way. It was some 100 miles south-west of Philippi. Being a seaport, Thessalonica was the center of trade and commerce. It had a population of 200,000 people and was the capital of Macedonia province. The city is still there today.

Paul reasoned with the **Jews** in the synagogue. Some Jews, many God-fearing Gentiles and many prominent women believed. In 1st century Greece, it was common for women to be leaders in politics and religion. The prominent women who put their faith in Jesus were members of the city government.



The Via Egnatia built in 145 BC
It is the road Paul used, traveling to and from Philippi

After 3 weeks Paul and these new believers were kicked out of the synagogue. They began meeting in the home of a

Jewish man named Jason. Paul was able to teach about salvation and the Christian life in detail. He had then begun to teach about the return of Jesus. But before he could go into any detail, Jewish leaders in the city started a riot.

Paul and his team were forced to leave town. Traveling 50 miles south to Berea, Paul began teaching in the synagogue. Once again, Jews and God-fearing Greeks responded, including women leaders from the town. However, the Jewish leaders came from Thessalonica and caused more persecution. This time Paul goes by himself, further south to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed to support the new believers in Berea and Thessalonica.

A few weeks later, Silas and Timothy arrive to say the new believers in Thessalonica are still under heavy persecution. Paul is concerned - about their faith - will they remain faithful? He is concerned about their relationship with

him. Will they blame him for their suffering? He knows if he returns, it will cause them even more problems. So he sends Timothy back to the Thessalonians to encourage and support them. Paul leaves Athens and goes south to Corinth.

After a couple of months, Timothy arrives in Corinth and gives Paul the latest news. The Thessalonians are continuing in their faith in spite of persecution. Because of Paul's basic teaching, they are eagerly waiting for Jesus to return. But they are also going thru great sorrow. The persecution has now led to the death of some believers. The Thessalonians think the return of Jesus is only for those who are alive. The ones who have just died are now going to miss out.

Paul writes immediately. It is his first letter to any of the churches. It is written from Corinth in 51 A.D.

He feels a special bond with them as well as a concern for these brand new believers. He expresses joy at the firmness of their faith; he answers the lies of the Jewish leaders. But his main purpose is to give them further teaching about the return of Jesus.



At the end of every chapter he mentions the coming of Jesus.

1:10 *And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead – Jesus.*

2:19 *For what is our certainty, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes?*

3:13 *May He give you inner strength that you may be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones.*

4:15 *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord...*

5:23 *May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you thru and thru. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 the word *comes* or *coming* is the Greek word *parousia*.

It literally means *to be alongside*. Paul is teaching these believers about the time when Jesus will return and those whom God the Father now sees **in Jesus** will physically **be** alongside Jesus.

OUTLINE

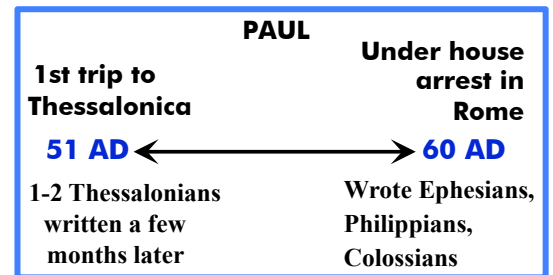
TEACHING OF JESUS' RETURN MOTIVATES BELIEVERS...

- To faithfulness
- To ministry
- To holiness
- To experience comfort
- To spiritual maturity

Over the past weeks, we have been studying the books that Paul wrote while under house arrest in Rome in 60 AD.

Now we need to back up 9 years to 51 AD.

Silas and Timothy had been with Paul when they first went to Thessalonica. So Paul begins chapter 1:1, saying that Silas and Timothy join him in sending this letter. Some of your translations may have the name Silvanus. That was the Latin or Roman form of his name; Silas was the Greek form. The Hebrew form would have been Saul.



CHAPTER 1 – Belief in Jesus' return motivates believers to faithfulness in spite of persecution

Verse 3 talks about *their work of faith, their labor of love and their endurance of certainty in our Lord Jesus*.

This is very general, so at the end of the chapter in verse 9, he explains what he means by each of these phrases.

Their work of faith was their decision to turn to God from idols.

Our salvation is by grace thru faith. It is not thru works.

Yet there is one work that is required for salvation - our decision to say "yes" to God.

That is the work of faith. It took a work or action of faith for the Thessalonians to turn to God from idols.

Their labor of love is serving the living God.

Their endurance of certainty is waiting for Jesus' return.

Notice, this is the same order of Paul's 3 topics - **SALVATION**, the **CHRISTIAN LIFE** and the **RETURN OF JESUS**.

Verse 4 Paul refers to them as *brothers and sisters, loved by God*.

This was a phrase used in the synagogues by Jews for each other.

The word *chosen or elect* was a word used by Jews about the ministry God gave them.

They were God's chosen people - chosen to give His message to the world.

Paul the Jewish rabbi, takes the words used by Jews for Jews and now applies them to Gentile believers. Because of their faith in Jesus, they also are members of God's family, *loved by God*. They also have been chosen for ministry to give God's message to the world around them.

Verse 6 The new believers in Thessalonica became imitators of Paul.

Like Paul, they have given the gospel message to others in spite of persecution.

Verse 7 They became a model for all believers to follow thruout northern and southern Greece.

Verses 8 - 9 Their willingness to identify with Paul and his message of Jesus, in spite of persecution, was being talked about all the way to Rome. Paul knows this because he is staying with a Jewish couple - Priscilla and Aquila. They are in Corinth. They have just come from Rome and told Paul what they had heard.

These Thessalonians are new believers of 6 months or less. Yet in that short amount of time, they have gone thru severe persecution. In fact, some have even died. It is the teaching about Jesus' return that has kept them faithful. Paul reminds them - Jesus' return will bring an end to all the persecution against those in the Body of Christ, the Church.

Verse 10.

To wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead - Jesus, the One who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Both the Old and New Testament talk about the *time of God's wrath*, meaning the time of God's judgment. Another phrase that means the same thing is the *Day of the Lord*. Combining all the information about these phrases in Scripture, we know it is talking about a period of 7 years when God brings judgment on this earth. His judgment will be to let Satan set up his kingdom with Satan's man in charge.

Believers were suffering in the days of Paul because of their faith in Jesus.

In the future, it will be those who oppose God that experience extreme suffering under God's judgment.

Paul says, before that happens, Jesus will return to rescue those who are part of His Body, the Church so they do not experience it.

CHAPTER 2 – Belief in Jesus' return motivates believers to ministry

After teaching the Thessalonians about Jesus for just a few months, Jewish leaders had forced Paul out of town, and then spread lies about him, trying to turn the new believers against him. Paul uses this part of the letter to answer the lies.

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel. We are not trying to please men, but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed - God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. 2:3-6

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil, and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 2:9

Paul assures them he had not come to their city for personal glory. He had not taken their money or been a financial burden to them. While there, he had worked to support himself and received support from the Philippians.

Then he assures them how much he cares about them. They are like his spiritual children. He had gently looked after and nurtured them like a mother. He had instructed, guided and encouraged them as a father. Their lives gave him such joy that he has made every effort to go back and see them.

He closes chapter 2 with an illustration from the Isthmian games that were held every other year in Corinth.

In Paul's day, in order to participate, contestants had to endure 10 months of rigorous training. During that time many became discouraged and wondered if it was worth it. But after the games, the winners were led to the reviewing stand in Corinth. It was there that they received a crown or wreath of pine leaves - equivalent to our gold medals. That was when they knew it was worth all the hardships (see endnote)

Paul says, *In order to give you the message of Jesus, I have experienced problems and suffering. But when Jesus returns and I am alongside Him, all of this will be worth it, because you believers will be there with me. You will be my reason to rejoice. You are my crown - you are my gold medal.*



This is what he means in 2:19-20 *For what is our certainty, our joy or the crown, (the gold medal), in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

The teaching of Jesus' return motivates believers to ministry. We usually think of ministry in what we do within our local church, community or in missions. But it involves far more. Ministry includes what we do in our homes, work or school. It includes being a friend to someone; consistently praying for a person. It even includes ministry to ourselves so that we grow and change in our own life.

In all of these ministries, there will be problems, criticism, false accusations from the outside. From within will be discouragements or feelings of failure. It is then we need to think about the return of Jesus and picture ourselves being at His Reviewing Stand.

People we know will step forward to say,

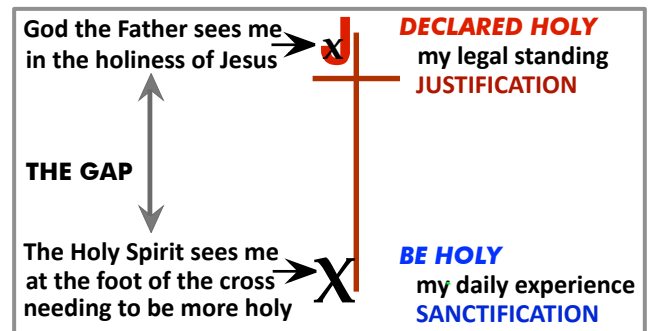
*I am here because of **you**. Not because of what you said, but how you lived and worked. I watched when things became difficult - when people turned against you. I watched your attitude, your quality of work, your responses. I put my faith in Jesus because of your influence.*

In eternity, our *greatest* rewards will not be the literal crowns, but the people who responded to Jesus because of our lives. The teaching of Jesus' return motivates us to a life of ministry - in how we live.

CHAPTER 3 – Belief in Jesus' return motivates believers to holiness

Paul tells the Thessalonian believers how concerned he has been because of their persecution. Now with Timothy's report, he is encouraged. Knowing they are standing firm gives him renewed energy and life. He would love to be with them, so he could give them more teaching. But since that is not possible, he will use this letter to supply what is lacking in their life of faith. Right now it is a lack of holiness and lack of spiritual maturity.

Paul had taught the Thessalonians about salvation. When they accepted the payment of Jesus, God the Father saw them in Jesus. He declared they were holy because the holiness of Jesus had been put on their account. This was their legal standing with God. It was called **justification**.



Now in this letter, he reminds them to **BE** holy in their daily experience - to respond to the **Holy** Spirit. It is called **sanctification**.

He starts his instruction with a prayer

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 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 holy ones. 3:12-13

To put it more simply, Paul says, *I am praying that when you stand alongside Jesus, your daily holiness will have moved closer to the holiness God has put on your account.*

Paul has **prayed** for their holiness. But that is not enough. He also needs to **instruct** them about holiness.

* Holiness in their sexual love.

It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God. 4:3-5

Paul is saying, no sexual activity between single people. This is called fornication.

And that in this matter – (of holiness) - no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish everyone for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 4:6

Paul is writing believers in a local church. In this context, he is saying they are not to have affairs with another believer's spouse. This is called adultery.

*For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject men, but God, who gives you his **Holy** Spirit. 4:7-8*

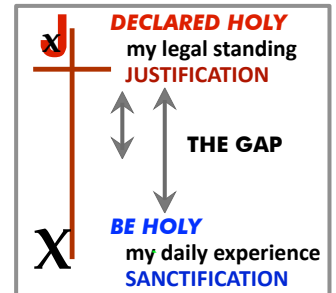
Paul is writing to people who are new believers. They were Gentiles who had been raised in the pagan society of Greece. Love meant expressing your sexual feelings anywhere with anyone. Any kind of immorality was acceptable - it was a basic part of the culture. Paul reminds them, *immorality is not acceptable in your lives as believers, even if it **IS** part of the culture.*

- * Holiness in brotherly love. The things he deals with in brotherly love are rather surprising.
Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. 4:11-12

Holiness in our relationships with other believers means...

- To mind our own business
- To work and not live off of other people, if we are able and there is work available
- To stop trying to run other people's lives
- To stop trying to change other people
- To not let others live off of us
- To teach others to be responsible for their own actions

3:1 - 4:12 Paul says we are to make choices that will close the gap between the holiness of our daily experience and the holiness that God put on our account. Teaching about Jesus' return should motivate us to get that gap closer and closer together.



CHAPTER 4 – Belief in Jesus' return motivates believers to experience comfort in times of grief.

When Paul was with the Thessalonians, his basic teaching about Jesus' return had filled them with joy.

But then, in the persecution, several of the congregation have died. The Thessalonians think those who died are not going to be alongside Jesus at His coming. They will be left out of the **parousia**. Because of this, the believers are now experiencing a sorrow that nothing and no one can comfort.

In our culture, to soften the word “**died**,” we use the phrase “**to pass away**.”

In the 1st century, believers used the phrase “**to sleep**.”

It was a perfect picture of their belief in a resurrection. Just as we know a person's body will be active once again when they wake up from literal sleep, so we know that the body of those who have died will be active once again with the resurrection. The Thessalonians believe in Jesus' return, but they were never taught the details. So Paul writes,

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who sleep, or to grieve like those who have no certainty 4:13

To understand their grief, we need to remember they are Gentiles who in the past had worshipped idols and followed pagan teaching.

Archeology has found a heathen inscription in Thessalonica, from the days of Paul. It read,

After death no reviving, After the grave no meeting again

This was the thinking and culture of these people. They would never be with them again. They would never see them again.

Paul tells them, as believers, we grieve. It is part of our humanness. But we do not grieve like pagans who have no certainty of meeting again. We have a certainty because of Jesus.

Verse 15

According to the Lord's own word...

Paul says this came directly from Jesus when Paul was taught by Him those 2 years he was at Mt. Sinai.

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede (go before) those who have fallen asleep.

Paul is saying that Jesus' return will involve believers who have died as well as believers who are living.

Verse 16-17

For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left, will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

When Jesus returns, He will leave heaven and be in the sky where people can see Him. Before anything happens to those who are living, the bodies of believers who have died will be resurrected. They will have a perfect, resurrection body like Jesus had in His resurrection. Their new body will be instantly united with their soul and spirit which have been with Jesus and which Jesus brings with Him. They are once again a complete person, body, soul and spirit.



This resurrection is only for believers who are part of the Body of Christ - the Church.

That is the meaning of the last phrase in verse 16, *the dead in Christ* - only those whom God the Father declared are *in Jesus*.

After the dead believers have their resurrection bodies united with their soul and spirit, living believers will have their bodies changed without having to die. According to 1 Corinthians 15, all of this will happen in a split second - as fast as the eye can blink. Then suddenly,, these resurrection bodies will be pulled from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. He will then lead us to His home.

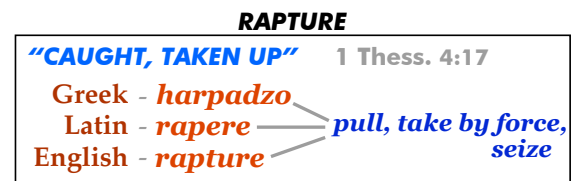
Some people call this return of Jesus the **rapture**. However, others do not use the word because it is not in our English Bibles.

The word “rapture” was first used in the 15-1600s by scholars who were studying from the Greek. They were looking for one word to describe this return without having to explain all the details. They picked their word from verse 17 *After that, we who are still alive and are left, will be caught up, taken up or gathered.*

The Greek word is *harpadzo* which means *to take by force, catch up or seize*.

Then they checked what Latin word had been used in the Vulgate Bible, since that was the language and Bible that had been used for the last 1000 years.

The Latin word was *rápere*. It also meant *to take by force, catch up or seize*.



The English word in the 1600s that meant exactly the same

thing came directly from the Latin - the word “rapture.” Back then it meant *to take by force, catch up or seize*

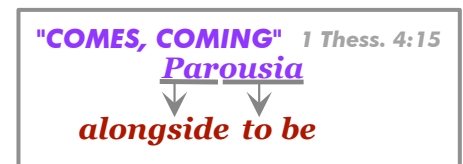
Theologians wanted to emphasize, this was not a gentle floating off into space. It is a forceful, sudden, pulling away. The laws of gravity will be defied. We will be seized away from the earth to meet the Lord in the air to be with Him forever.

In our day, believers have had disagreements about the name and the timing - whether it will happen before or after other events. Tragically it has led to arguments and strong feelings between those who love God.

Because the word “**rapture**” is part of the problem, even tho it is a good word, I no longer use it.

I use the Greek word “**parousia**.” It is made up of 2 Greek words.

This gives the beautiful picture when believers will be taken from the earth to meet Jesus in the air to be alongside Him.



Verse 18

How grieved the Holy Spirit must be when believers fight over this teaching. God gave it to comfort and encourage us in our sorrow. In times of loss and death, we grieve and shed tears. But we do not grieve as others who have no certainty about the future. The teaching about Jesus’ return brings comfort in times of grief.

CHAPTER 5 – Belief in Jesus’ return motivates believers to spiritual maturity.

This involves both the personal lives of the Thessalonians and in the life of their local church.

Even tho people in the world are getting away with evil now, God’s judgment will come. Believers do not have to fear, but they do have a responsibility.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation (from that suffering) through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake (living) or asleep (have died), we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up... 5:9-11

Build each other up thru encouragement. This is the first step to maturity.

Respect those who are over them in the Lord. 5:12

This phrase *in the Lord* includes two meanings. Obviously, it means their Christian leaders. But it also means those who are living in obedience to the Lord and who act like the Lord. Yes, their leaders are **over** them, but their leaders have to be **under** the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Whether then or now, we need discernment about those who want to spiritually lead us.

We are to respect and follow their guidance.

But if they abuse that authority, are not guided by the *Holy* Spirit or are giving false teaching, then we are **not** to accept their leadership - we are **not** to follow them.

Live in peace with one another. 5:13

The local church should be in unity against those who are opposing them.

But Paul does not mean peace at any price.

If within the local church there is wrong teaching or wrong action, it has to be dealt with, even if some members are against it.

And we urge you brothers, warn those who are idle. 5:14

When they are able to work and work is available, church members are not to refuse work and live off of other members.

Encourage the timid, meaning *faint-hearted*.

Some church members are discouraged because of grief, persecution or problems. Encourage them.

Help those who are physically weak or spiritually weak. Be supportive of them, but never become a crutch.

Be patient with everyone.

When people are discouraged or weak in faith, it is easy to be harsh or critical with them. But not everyone can handle problems as well as we can. We need to be patient. But this does not mean we accept, ignore or excuse wrong behavior. When people insist on making wrong choices, we must keep them at arm's length. If they willingly and knowingly keep making wrong choices, we may need to break the relationship completely.

Be joyful, prayerful and thankful. 5:16--18

The word "joy or joyful" in Scripture does not mean *happy*.

Happiness depends on our circumstances.

Joyful means inner stability.

This comes thru **prayer**, asking God for wisdom, discernment and strength.

It also comes thru **thankfulness** - not for the problems or grief, but ...

Thankfulness for who God is and what He can do in spite of the problems

Thankfulness for what He can do *thru* the problems

Thankfulness He knows the answer

In difficult times, it is prayer and thankfulness that give us inner stability - what the Bible calls *joy*.

Stop continually hindering the Holy Spirit. Stop ignoring God's Word being spoken by others. 5:19-20

As believers we are to keep becoming holy.

If we knowingly choose things that are unholy, we will feel inner conflict. The Holy Spirit will convict us.

Sometimes He does it Himself and we have that nagging feeling, that inner voice saying, *this is wrong*.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit uses Scripture to bring conviction.

Or He may use another believer.

Paul says, *Stop blocking or ignoring the Holy Spirit. Stop continually saying no to the Holy Spirit.*

Stop ignoring God's Word being spoken by others.

When the rebuke comes from another believer, we should listen, but we must also make sure that what they say is accurate and not just their personal idea.

Test everything. Accept what is good - meaning what is from God.

Avoid what is evil - what is not from God. 5:21-22

We know it is from God if it agrees with what God has already said in His Word.

The teaching about Jesus' return should motivate us to spiritual maturity.

He now closes with a prayer. I am paraphrasing it from the Greek.

May you respond, so God can bring holiness into all of your life - body, soul, and spirit, so that by the time you are alongside Jesus, you will have come to maturity - you will have become all that God created you to be. 5:23

If we are willing to respond to God, this is possible, because Paul adds,

The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it. 5:24

God will do His part - it is only a question if we will do our part.

Jesus is returning. It has always been taught as imminent. It could happen at any time and there is no other event that must happen first.. But since Jesus has not returned for 2000 years, why did Paul teach the believers it could happen in their day? Why should we believe it could be tonight or tomorrow - when it could be delayed until next month or 5 years from now?

Just suppose God told us it would not happen until 5 years from today.

In our human nature, we would put off doing anything for 3 years.

We would only get serious about doing anything in our life in the 4th year, figuring we had a whole year to work on it.

God wants this belief to be so real and so present that it motivates us every day to faithfulness, ministry, holiness and spiritual maturity - and that it truly brings comfort in times of grief.

The return of Jesus is not just a hope, a “maybe.” It is a certainty that we are waiting for. It could happen at anytime.

Can we say with the apostle John, ***Come quickly, Lord Jesus.***

ENDNOTES

Page 3 Crowns/wreaths were given at the athletic and music events

At the **ISTHMIAN** games, there were sports and music competitions. They were held every 2 years.

Originally the reward was a crown of celery leaves, but in Roman times it was a crown of pine leaves.

At the **OLYMPIC** games, there were sports competitions.

They were held every 4 years at Olympia, 75 miles west of Corinth.

Olive or laurel crowns /wreaths were given.

Laurel crowns were given to soldiers for military victories.