

1 Thessalonians: Background

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Ro 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Interpretation of the Scriptures. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. (Westminster Confession Chapter 1, part 9)

Review: Paul's Second Missionary Journey: From Antioch to Philippi to Thessalonica (Acts 15:36–17:15) (see map)

The Setting: The City of Thessalonica

- *Strategically located:* Thessalonica (modern Salonika) is approximately 33 miles from Philippi and is strategically located on the Thermaic Gulf straddling the Via Egnatia.
- *Large City:* It had a population of approximately 200,000. In Paul's day Thessalonica had about 200,000 people with an important Jewish community. Many Gentiles were converted in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4).

Paul's strategy took him to the larger cities and for a very good reason. It was not because they had no burden for these people, but because apparently it was Paul's strategy to minister in the larger cities with a view to having those churches reach out into the smaller communities as people naturally moved in and out of the larger and busier cities (see 1 Thess. 1:7-8).

Once people were led to Christ and trained, these new converts could take the gospel to other regions (cf. 1:8-9) and vastly multiply Paul's ministry

- *Capital City:* It was the capital of Macedonia and the largest, most prosperous city in Macedonia. "probably founded by Cassander in 315BC and named for his wife, the daughter of Philip II.
- *Free City within Roman Empire:* In 188 B.C. was made a Roman province. At that time, the city became the seat of Roman administration and later was declared a free city. The Roman road, Via Egnatia, was built through the city and the walls were built around the city. The politarchs desired civil order to maintain their 'free city' status with the Romans. Free city status was jealously guarded by the people who were extremely sensitive about anything that might result in imperial disfavor. (see Acts 17:7).
- *Wealthy city.* Thessalonica was a wealthy city, but wealth was not evenly distributed. Wealthy Romans settled there and Jewish merchants were attracted by the commercial advantages of the city (see Acts 17:4)
- ◆ *Multicultural city:* Thessalonica was the site of many cults, reflecting the cosmopolitan mix of the population. Archeology has uncovered places for worship of the Greek Pantheon, the Emperor, and cults such as those of Isis, Serapis, Osiris or Mithra.
- ◆ *Via Ignatia: the Roman Road:* Thessalonica was on the Ignation way, one of the major Roman roads. The Roman road system extended from Britain in the west, to the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers (today Iraq) in the east, and from the Danube River in central Europe to as far south as North Africa. The total length of hard-surfaced highways constructed by the Romans has been estimated to be well over 50,000 miles (80,000 kilometers). The infrastructure of the empire that attempted to destroy Christianity also made possible its spread to the very farthest frontier regions of the then-known world.
- ◆ *Prominent Jewish Community:* The fact that the Jews could influence the civil authorities reveals their power (Acts 17:5). The incident of their imprisonment and deliverance suggest that the politarchs were bent on justice and legal protection for Paul and his companions.
- ◆ *Sinful city:* The strange mixtures of a seaport city and the rites of the worship of the Cabiri cult caused the Apostle to make a special exhortation for holy living (1 Thess. 4:1-8). The church became established and endured despite the cultural and religious pressures against it. They were surrounded with a culture of heathenism and gross immorality. This led to enormous temptation to return to their old ways and significant persecution if they refused to recant their faith in Christ.

History: The Birth of the Thessalonian Church (Acts 17:1-9)

Obedience to God, Heart for the people: The birth of the church at Thessalonica was the result of both God's leading and the attentive ears of Paul and his missionary team. 1 Thess 1:2: *We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.*

Paul & Silas reflect Jesus' heart for Jerusalem: Lu 13:34 *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Paul had Jesus' heart for Thessalonica.*

Acts 17:1-9 1: When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

The Gospel is delivered to the Jew first: The Gospel was for the Jew first, then the Gentile: Ro 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

God's plan remains unchanged in the NT: Acts 15: 7-9 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs. 9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

Acts 17:2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said.

Bible-centered preaching (Acts 17:2, Romans 1:16) The Word of God is central in Paul's methodology. The key to Paul's strategy and the ability of this church to endure the pressures they faced from the religious persecution of the Jews and the paganism of that day was their knowledge of the Word. In a little over three weeks he taught this congregation a great deal of Bible doctrine.

Acts 17:4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

Multi-ethnic church: From its beginnings, the church in Thessalonica melded Jew and Gentile.

Re 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Acts 17:5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

John 1: 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Acts 17:6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,

This charge of treason is the first recorded after the trial of Jesus before Pilate and could have been an outgrowth of the eschatological preaching of Paul at Thessalonica as seen in these epistles.

Acts 17:7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8 When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9 Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.

2Ti 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Hebrews 11:36-12:4: "The world was not worthy of them."

36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.

37 They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated--

38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

1 ¶ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Reflect on Paul's experiences with the Macedonian churches: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea. What might he have felt in the face of such experiences? How did he respond?

Paul sent Timothy back to Macedonia for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging the Thessalonian believers and to bring back a report about their faith and spiritual condition. Paul learned of the spiritual stamina of the Thessalonian converts in the face of fierce persecution and opposition (1:6; 3:6-10).

Paul, Silas & Timothy

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

Silas (Silvanus) Silvanus a Roman citizen, the companion of the apostle Paul on several of his missionary journeys

- Silas was chosen by the council of Jerusalem to convey the council's reply to the church at Antioch. (Acts 15:22)
- Silas (aka Silvanus) accompanied Paul through Asia Minor and Greece on second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-40)
- Silas was imprisoned with Paul at Philippi (Acts 16:19-24), where they were delivered by an earthquake.
- He is mentioned along with Timothy in the epistles of Paul (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:1). He preached with Paul.
- Faithful brother in the Lord: 1Pe 5:12* With the help of *Silas*, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Silas may have been the scribe and courier for the Apostle Peter in his first letter (1 P 5:12) to its scattered recipients
- Tradition says he was the first bishop of Corinth and that he died in Macedonia.

Timothy

- Timothy = name means "honoring God"
- Resident of Lystra
- Mentioned in Acts 16-20; Appears in 9 epistles either as joining in Paul's greetings or as a messenger.
- Paul had commissioned Timothy to oversee the Christian community in Ephesus and vicinity
- His father was a Greek and mother a Jewess; he was Paul's travelling companion and fellow laborer

References

1 Thessalonians: An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary
by J. Hampton Keathley III hamptonk3@bible.org 1998 <http://www.bible.org/docs/nt/books/1th>

James Everett Frame, The International Critical Commentary, a Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1912, 1960, p. 10.

Biographical sketches of Christians of the past. <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/200.html>.

Major Themes in 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Key Verse

1 Thessalonians 4:14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a subject found at the close of every chapter. Concerning Christ's return there is a two-fold emphasis of both a confident expectation along with the call to live in readiness in the light of His imminent coming.

How then should we live? The doctrine of the return of Christ for the church is a truth that should transform how we live as individuals and as a corporate body of God's people.

1 Thessalonians 1:10-2:20

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

2 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.

3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,

9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

ⁱ James Everett Frame, The International Critical Commentary, a Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1912, 1960, p. 10.