

1 Thessalonians

Background To Epistle

1. Paul went to Macedonia in response to the Macedonia call. (Acts 16:9-12).

ACT 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

ACT 16:10 And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

ACT 16:11 Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;

ACT 16:12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

2. He came first to Philippi in Macedonia where he had some success. See "my joy and crown" - Phil. 3:1.

a. He converted Lydia and her family. (Acts 16:13-15). Both she and "her household" were baptized after Paul produced saving faith in them through the preaching of the gospel. (Acts 16:15).

b. He and Silas were then cast into jail because they cast a spirit of divination from a slave girl. (Acts 16:16:16-24).

c. While in jail he converted the jailer and his family through "the word of the Lord" [the gospel]. (Acts 16:25-34).

d. Once Paul had produced faith in them through the gospel he baptized the jailer and "all his household [family]." (Acts 16:33).

1) Based on the fact faith and repentance precede baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38), infants were not baptized if there were any infants or small children in his family.

2) Many "households" do not have infants or small children.

3) Infants are not accountable and have no need of baptism nor can they believe, repent, confess, etc..

3. Paul then put the fear in the city officials by telling them they had beaten Roman citizens without a trial. (Acts 16:35-39).

a. Both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens that gave them certain legal rights.

b. See also Acts 22:25-29; 23:27.

ACTS 22:25 But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"

ACTS 22:26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman."

ACTS 22:27 The commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes."

ACTS 22:28 The commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen."

ACTS 22:29 Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

ACTS 23:27 "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

4. Being released from prison he then revisited Lydia and the other brethren and encouraged them before departing for Thessalonica. (Acts 16:40).
5. Acts 17 records Paul and Silas arriving at Thessalonica. (Acts 17:1).
 - a. This mentioned in this first letter. (1 Thess. 2:2).
 - b. Despite the mistreatment they received at Philippi, they spoke with "boldness" at Thessalonica.
6. There was a Jewish Synagogue there, and Paul and Silas preached in it for "three Sabbaths." (Acts 17:2,3).
 - a. He reasoned with them "from the Scriptures." (Acts 17:2).
 - 1) This would primarily refer to Old Testament Scriptures.
 - 2) It would not exclude the teachings of Christ and the apostles that were also Scriptures whether spoken orally or written.
 - b. He proclaimed to them that Jesus was "the Christ [the Anointed One]," and He had been raised from the dead. (Acts 17:3).

ACTS 17:3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

- c. "The Christ" means Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord, the King, but not an earthly king. (Jn. 18:36).
 - 1) "Christ" was not His last name, but a title.
 - 2) Jesus was God's anointed King, and all must submit to Him for salvation.
- d. Paul always preached Christ crucified wherever he went. (1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14).

Note:

1. We do not know exactly how long Paul was in Thessalonica.
2. He preached in the Synagogue for 3 Sabbaths [Acts 17:2,3], but we do not know how long he was in the city before or after this.
3. It was likely a short time.

Establishment Of Church

1. Paul and Silas preached there on the 2nd missionary journey.
 - a. The 2nd missionary journey is recorded in Acts 15:36-18:22.

b. It is dated about A.D. 50 to 52.

2. The record of them establishing the church there is recorded in Acts 17:1-9.

ACT 17:1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

ACT 17:2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

ACT 17:3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

ACT 17:4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

ACT 17:5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.

ACT 17:6 And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;

ACT 17:7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. "

ACT 17:8 And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.

ACT 17:9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

- They were "jealous" that these people were being converted and were leaving Judaism. (Acts 17:5).
- These so-called religious people were acting in the most ungodly manner. (Acts 17:5,6).
- They falsely charged that Jesus was being declared an earthly king and was violating "the decrees of Caesar." (Acts 17:7).
- "Jason" had to post a "pledge" [bond] that he and the other brethren might be released. (Acts 17:9).
- It was likely based on the condition that Paul would not further disturb the city.
- "Jason" may be the same "Jason" mentioned in Romans 16:21, but there is not enough information to be sure.

ROM 16:21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and **Jason** and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

a. Paul and Silas went to Berea after they left Thessalonica. (Acts 17:10).

ACT 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. "Berea" was 40 miles away from Thessalonica.

b. They had a much better reception in Berea according to Luke. (Acts 17:11, 12).

ACT 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.

ACT 17:12 Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

- 1) The Bereans gave us a wonderful example of "examining the Scriptures daily." (Acts 17:11).
- 2) They did not believe just anything, but verified it by daily examination of the Scriptures.
- 3) This should be the practice of all truth seekers.

4) Truth seekers do not believe everything they hear without verifying it from God's word. (1 Thess. 5:21).

c. The Jews, from Thessalonica, came to Berea to agitate and stir up the crowds. (Acts 17:13,14).

d. Paul went on to Athens, and waited for Silas and Timothy to come as soon as possible. (Acts 17:14,15).

Date of Epistle

1. This is one of the earliest epistles of Paul, and is thought to be written about A.D. 51.

2. It is believed, by some, that Galatians was written earlier than 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

3. Galatians has been dated, by some, in A.D 48 to 49 A.D. just prior to the Jerusalem conference in A.D. 50 recorded in Acts 15. Some also believe the book of James was the earliest or one of the earliest epistles.

4. The books of the New Testament are not in the order of the dates they were written.

Author

1. Paul is the author of this epistle and also 2 Thessalonians. (1 Thess. 1:1; 2:18; 2 Thess. 1:1; 3:17).

2. Some have doubted Paul's authorship and especially second Thessalonians, but there is no real or compelling evidence to deny his authorship of both epistles.

a. Some have challenged his authorship because he does not attack the doctrine that justification is by works of law.

1) It is fallacious to believe this was a major issue in every congregation.

2) It was a big problem at Galatia and some other congregations, but it was not a big issue in Thessalonica.

b. Some have attacked his authorship because it is too similar some epistles they regard as genuine such as 1 and 2 Corinthians.

1) They insist these letters are the work of a forger.

2) This is a very weak argument attacking similarity.

3) Writers and speakers most often have similarities in the things they write and speak.

4) Skeptic frequently attack an epistle by contending it is too dissimilar from his other writings.

c. Some have denied Paul is the author of this epistle by affirming it is too dissimilar to his other epistles and omits many of the doctrinal issues addressed in his other epistles.

1) All of this is fallacious and proves absolutely nothing.

2) It assumes the same doctrinal issues had to exist universally in the congregations.

3) Congregations then or now do not always have the same problems.

3. Paul had established the church there and was very close to these brethren.

- a. This is very evident as one reads these epistles written to the Thessalonians.
- b. Paul gave them his heart along with the gospel message.

Some Reasons For The Writing Of This Epistle

1. Paul wanted to commend this church for many things. (1 Thess. 1:1-10).
2. The church there continued to have persecution. (1 Thess. 2:1-16).
3. Paul was very troubled because he had been forced from this new church so soon, and could not make a personal visit to them. (1 Thess. 2:17-20).
4. It was written because of Timothy's report. (1 Thess. 3:6-9).
5. Paul was fearful the new converts might slip back into idolatry and immorality. (1 Thess. 4:1-8).
6. He was concerned that those outside the church would not be turned off if the church lacked unity. (1 Thess. 4:9-12).
7. He needed to correct some misunderstandings about the 2nd coming of Christ. (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
 - a. See also 1 Thess. 5:1-4.
 - b. The 2nd epistle to this church deals with the subject of eschatology - the doctrine of "last things."
8. The brethren there still needed to be taught more about the Christian life. (1 Thess. 5:12-22).
 - a. The Christian life could not be learned by imitating the unbelievers around them.
 - b. No book of books written by uninspired men would teach them about the Christian life.

Place of Writing

1. It is believed that Paul wrote this epistle from Corinth in about A.D. 51, 2 Thessalonians was written shortly thereafter either in 51 or 52 A.D.. (2 Thess. 3:11).
2. Paul was in Corinth from 50 A.D to perhaps early 52 A.D. (Acts 18:11).
 - a. He had earlier been in Athens from where he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. (1 Thess. 3:1,2).
 - b. Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:5), and Timothy had brought a report about the church there. (1 Thess. 3:6-8).

1 TH 3:6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,
 1 TH 3:7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;
 1 TH 3:8 for now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

- c. From Corinth Paul wrote the church to "complete what" was lacking in their faith. (1 Thess. 3:9, 10).

1TH 3:9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,

1TH 3:10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

City of Thessalonica

1. It was the capital city of the province of Macedonia, and it was ruled by city officials [authorities] called “politarchs” (Acts 17:6, 8).
2. Thessalonica was the largest and most important city of the Roman province of Macedonia, that is, what we know as southeastern Europe.
 - a. It had been made the capital of Macedonia after the Romans conquered it in 148 B.C..
 - b. In 42 B.C. Thessalonica was made a free city by Rome.
 - 1) It was not occupied by Roman troops, and was exempt from certain taxes in part because they did not have Roman soldiers to support.
 - 2) They were given permission to control their own affairs and were mostly self-governed. (Acts 17:6).
 - c. It was located in the northern part of modern Greece, within the sight of Mount Olympus.
 - d. Mount Olympus was where they believed scores or even hundreds of gods dwelt either on the mountain or perhaps in the clouds above it.

Salutation

1:1-2

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

1. “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy”
 - a. “Paul” was his Latin or Roman name. His Hebrew name was “Saul.” (Acts 13:9).
 - 1) Paul omits the word “apostle” in this salutation.
 - 2) The reason is not known, and some have argued it was because his authority was accepted there. It was challenged in Galatia and Paul defended his apostleship in the first two chapters of Galatians.
 - 3) It could be simply because he did not use any descriptive words of Silas and Timothy, and it not wishing to exalt himself above them.
 - b. “Silas” was is the shortened form of the name “Silvanus.”
 - 1) Silas was a prophet and a very respected man in the Christian community. (Acts 15:22, 32).
 - 2) He was with Paul at Philippi and had been cast into prison with Paul. (Acts 16:19).
 - 3) He was a co-worker with Paul in establishing the church at Thessalonica. (Acts 17:4).
 - c. “Timothy” was a very loyal co-worker of Paul, and the one to whom Paul wrote 1 & 2 Timothy.

- 1) He had a Greek father (Acts 16:1), and a Christian grandmother and mother. (2 Tim. 1:5).
- 2) He had known the scriptures from his babyhood. (2 Tim. 3:15).
- 3) Paul refers him as “my son.” likely meaning Timothy had been greatly influenced by Paul spiritually.
- 4) He had worked in Thessalonica. (1 Thess. 3:2, 6).

1TH 3:2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,

1TH 3:6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,

2. “to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

- a. The word “church” comes from “ekklesia” [ehk klay see ah] meaning “called-out” referring to the assembly of people called from darkness to light and saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.
- b. Many of the brethren there had been idolaters before their conversion. (1 Thess. 1:9).

1TH 1:9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

- c. It seems that many, not all, of them had been idolaters. (Acts 17:4).

3. “Grace to you and peace”

- a. Paul mentions “grace” in all 13 of his epistles.
 - 1) Here is used in the sense of God’s unmerited blessings - salvation and material and spiritual blessings.
 - 2) He wishes them to have God’s blessings and peace.
 - 3) This wish is not limited to one or a few of God’s blessings.
- b. It is used twice in this epistle(1 Thess. 1:1; 5:28), and four times in 2 Thessalonians. (2 Thess. 1:2, 12; 2:16; 3:18).

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