

INTRODUCTION

Authorship

- I. Paul's Passion for the Word (Paul the Theologian)
 - A. The Word of God and the Mind of Paul
 - 1. A Student of the Word of God (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6)
 - 2. A Teacher of the Word (Acts 19:8-10, 20:27; 2 Tim 2:15)
 - 3. A Reasoner of the Word (Acts 17:3; 1 Thess 1:5; Col 2:8; 2 Cor 10:5-6)
 - B. The Word of God and Paul's Recognition of Its Power
 - 1. Recognition of Divine Origin (2 Tim 3:16-17)
 - 2. Recognition of Divine Power (2 Tim 4:13; cf. Heb 4:12; Ps 19, 119; Rom 10:17; 2 Pet 3:14-16)
 - 3. Recognition of Divine Empowerment (Col 3:16, cf. Eph 5:18-21)
 - C. Paul's Gospel and the Scriptures (Acts 17:3; Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 15:3-5; cf. Lk 24:27; Jn 6:46-47)
- II. Paul's Passion for the Lost (Paul the Evangelist)
 - A. Paul Preached to the Lost (Rom 15:20; 1 Cor 2:1-5)
 - B. Paul Prayed for the Lost (Rom 15:30-33; Eph 6:19-20)
 - C. Paul Persevered for the Lost (2 Tim 2:10; 1 Cor 9:19-23)
- III. Paul's Passion for the Church (Paul the Pastor)
 - A. Pastoring the Church to Maturity (Eph 4:11-16; Col 1:28-29)
 - B. Protecting the Church from Error (Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17)
 - C. Producing Church Leaders (1 Tim 3; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:5-2:10)

Recipient

I. The Place of Thessalonica

A. Economic Success

When Alexander the Great was conquering the known world one of his generals, Cassander, overtook the region of Thessalonica and named it after his wife. The city of Thessalonica sits along the coast of the Thermaic Gulf (modern day Gulf of Salonica), which can be located at the northern tip of the Aegean Sea. This strategic positioning made it Macedonia's main outlet to the sea for commerce and trade; making it the regions economic force. Ships from all over the Roman world would have traveled to Thessalonica to do business at its harbor.¹

B. Political Success

Politically, Thessalonica became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia—the region by which Paul often refers to in his writings. The city was in such good standing with the Emperor it was labeled as a “free city.”² The Roman proconsul had his residence in Thessalonica, but did not have to control its internal affairs because it was a “free city.” Acts indicates that the city was controlled by “politarchs.” These men functions as a sort of board of magistrates over the city.³

The combination of its political and economical success made it a great place to live. It was such a success that by the time Paul found his way to the city there may have been as many as 200,000 people living in the area. This of course was a mix of all sorts of Romans, Asiatics, and Orientals.⁴ It is also clear that from Acts 17 there is a large number of Jewish people who were living there because of the fact that Paul went straight to the synagogue in Acts 17:1-4.

Therefore the Thessalonians could have been a mix of rich and poor that could have been anywhere on the social ladder. These people were not just economically different, but also racially different. This is evident in the make-up of the church as will be seen later. The important idea to take home is that these people may have looked very similar to the churches here in Southern California. It is ethnically diverse and in many cases is self governed and independent with a mix of people from all over the world.

¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 15.

² Richard Mayhue, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, FOB (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 17.

³ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

II. The Spiritual Beginnings of the Thessalonian Church

A. The People

1. Jews & God-Fearing Greeks

Prior to arriving to Thessalonica Paul had first stopped at Philippi (Acts 16:11-40). Then upon leaving Philippi Paul made two quick stops at Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1). It is finally in Acts 17:1-10 where we find the humble beginnings of the church in Thessalonica.

The ministry at Thessalonica began with the Jews. Paul had a two-fold purpose in coming to the synagogue. First, Paul wanted to proclaim to them the Old Testament truth that the Messiah must first suffer and rise from the grave. Second, Paul wanted the Jewish people of Thessalonica to know that the prophecy of the Messiah was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus. Essentially, the Gospel message that Jesus brought to the Jews was that Jesus was the promised Messiah from the Old Testament.

This comes to not much surprise for us believers today, but would have been exciting news for the Jewish listeners. The Scriptures are full of passages that speak of Christ's need for suffering, such as in Isaiah 53. This synagogue ministry of Paul marked the beginning of Paul's ministry to the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks (17:4). These God-fearing Greeks were Gentiles who wanted to be part of the monotheistic community of Jews and their upright moral standards. The Greek or Gentile morality was filled with immorality and multiple gods. Often times Greek or Gentiles would join the Jewish synagogue in hopes to identify with the God of Israel and not the gods of the Roman or Greek pantheon. Although these people wanted to be affiliated with the God of the Jews they were often not fully devoted to the rigorous and ritualistic traditions of Judaism.⁵

2. Pagans

Although Luke's account only records the salvation of the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, this does not however tell the entire tale of Paul's missionary time with the Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 indicates that a large portion of Paul's audience in Thessalonica consisted of people who had turned from idols. This would not have been reflected in the group previously mentioned in Acts 17:4; rather, this would seem to indicate that after Paul's 3 continuous Sabbath's he had spent some other time ministering to the Gentiles in that region.

Paul had practiced a similar approach when he ministered to the church in Antioch. Several passages indicate that this was the case (Acts 13:46, cf. Acts

⁵ Ibid., 19.

9:15; 18:6; 22:21; 26:17; Rom 11:13; 15:16; Gal 1:16; 2:7-8). Paul made it a custom and considered it his calling before the Lord to minister to the Gentiles. Therefore, we can be confident that wherever he went he made it a point to be obedient to his calling and to spread the Gospel to those whom God had called him to minister.

Therefore, it is highly likely that a gap of time exists between Acts 17:4 and Acts 17:5. This gap of time that would naturally fit in this part of Paul's ministry is when he would have ministered to the Gentiles. There are several reasons why it is likely that Paul spent more than three Sabbath's in Thessalonica.

The first reason is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, "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." This passage indicates that Paul had a unique work ethic among the Thessalonians that proved that his ministry did not revolve around personal finances. Literally, the text could communicate the idea that Paul worked in the day if he had to, or he would work in the night if he had to. Paul was working around the schedule of the Thessalonians just to minister to them.

The second evidence that Paul likely spent more than 3 weeks among the Thessalonians can be found in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, but more specifically in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." This passage indicates that Paul had a considerable amount of time to establish himself before the Thessalonian church as a credible Christian example. Although this can be accomplished in three weeks, this strong and intimate type of language indicates that it was likely longer.

A third reason that indicates Paul spent longer than 3 weeks among the Thessalonians is found in Philippians 4:16 and 2 Corinthians 11:9. These two passages indicate that Paul had received support from several Macedonian churches while ministering in their presence. Three weeks seems too short of a time to receive multiple gifts in support of Paul and his ministry.

It is for these reasons that we find the audience of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica largely involved converted Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and pagan Gentiles. Paul's ministry among these men was powerful and impactful. It was so powerful that Paul's ministry began to be given much attention by the Jews. These Jews grew jealous of Paul's ministry and acted to remove him from their presence (Acts 17:5-9).

B. The Testing of their Faith (Acts 17)

1. The Opposition's Attitude: Jealousy

The type of opposition faced by Paul and the Thessalonians were rooted in opponents who had an attitude of jealousy (17:5). These were Jews that saw the success of Paul's ministry founded about Jewish principles of the Messiah and fulfilled in Jesus.

2. The Opposition's Alliances: Wicked Men

These jealous people became so hard in heart that they joined alliances with people Luke describes as "wicked men." These are the companions of those obstacles people may face in the ministry.

3. The Opposition's Actions: Hostility

The jealousy of these people was ungodly and was not internally suppressed. Instead, their jealousy overflowed out of their hearts and out into their actions. The manifestation of their jealousy was hostility (v. 5). These individuals started a mob and wanted to hurt Paul and the Thessalonian believers.

4. The Opposition's Accusations: Troublemakers

The accusations that God's enemies charge God's people with is that of disruption and disunity. These individuals said that Paul and those who brought the Gospel to the Thessalonians were men who upset the world (v. 6) and have rebelled against the civil authorities (v. 7). The people of God will always be seen as troublemakers in the eyes of the world because of their desire to live a holy life (cf. 1 Kgs 18:17-18).

III. The Spiritual Maturity of the Thessalonian Church

The early testing of their faith showed the deep roots of the Thessalonian church. These deep roots as they were planted produced much fruit. This fruit was evident by the maturity that was shown by the Thessalonians. The believers in Thessalonica showed their maturity in two major ways. First the Thessalonians showed their maturity in their Christian living. Secondly, the Thessalonians showed their maturity in their understanding of Christian doctrine.

A. Maturity in Christian Living

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians show their maturity in Christian living. The Thessalonians had already been tested by the faith early on in their time with Paul and showed fruit since his departure.

The maturity and growth of the Thessalonian church is seen in 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10, "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 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, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.” It is also seen in 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10. These passages indicate that the Thessalonians had a growing Christian maturity about them.

B. Maturity in Christian Doctrine

This Christian maturity was largely fed by their maturity in Christian doctrine. It is interesting to see what the book of 1 Thessalonians tells us regarding the doctrine of the church. This is largely seen in the topics that Paul chooses to address as he writes the letter. Although an overview of 1 & 2 Thessalonians will be given it is interesting to note a few observations.

First, we can observe that Paul chose to address the topic of the end times in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11. Doctrinally these topics include the resurrection/rapture of the saints, the coming wrath of God in the tribulation period, and the Anti-Christ. This shows that the Thessalonians had beyond introductory information regarding these topics. Of course this doctrine is not left for the stimulation of the mind, but was intended to be applied to the lives of the church.

Outline of 1 Thessalonians

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. Thanksgiving to God for the Thessalonians (1:2-10)
 - A. The Conduct of Thanksgiving: Prayer (1:2)
 - B. The Circumstances of Thanksgiving: Remembrance (1:3)
 - C. The Cause of Thanksgiving: Knowledge (1:4-10)
 - 1. The impressions of the missionaries (1:4-5)
 - 2. The effect on the Thessalonians (1:6-10)
- III. Paul's Ministry Before the Thessalonians (2:1-3:13)
 - A. Vindication of Paul's Preaching Ministry (2:1-12)
 - 1. Preaching with Power (2:1-2)
 - 2. Preaching Removed from Untruth (2:3-4)
 - 3. Preaching Reinforced by Godly Concern (2:5-12)
 - B. Vindication through Paul's Thanksgiving (2:13-16)
 - 1. For Receiving the Word (2:13)
 - 2. For Perseverance in Persecution (2:14-16)
 - C. Vindication through Paul's Separation (2:17-3:13)
 - 1. Desire to Go to Them (2:17-20)
 - 2. Sending Timothy to Them (3:1-5)
 - 3. Delight Over their Progress (3:6-10)
 - 4. Seeking Direction for Them (3:11-13)
- IV. Paul's Exhortation to the Thessalonians (4:1-5:22)
 - A. Exhortation for Holy Living (4:1-12)
 - 1. Continual Improvement (4:1-2)
 - 2. Sexual Purity (4:3-8)

3. Filial Love (4:9-10)
 4. Individual Independence (4:11-12)
 - B. Exhortation Regarding Future Redemption (4:13-5:11)
 1. The Dead in Christ (4:13-18)
 2. The Day of the Lord (5:1-11)
 - C. Exhortation for the Church Body (5:12-22)
 1. Responsibilities to the Leaders (5:12-13)
 2. Responsibilities to All (5:14-15)
 3. Responsibilities to Oneself (5:16-18)
 4. Responsibilities to Public Worship (5:19-22)
- V. Conclusions (5:23-28)
 - A. Petition for the Thessalonians (5:23-24)
 - B. Reciprocation by the Thessalonians (5:25-27)
 - C. Benediction (5:28)