

NT 15 2.04

## The BIBLE PROJECT

# THESSALONIAN ISSUES

## 1 & 2 Thessalonians



### WHERE IS THESSALONICA?

Thessalonica is the most important and populous center in Macedonia (NOT Achaia south, Greece). It was the foremost seaport and by the time Paul got there a naval station for the imperial fleet.



2<sup>nd</sup> Journey Acts 15.40-18.22

## Background: Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey 49-53 AD Acts 15.40 -18.22



## BIG IDEA 1: COMMENDATIONS

1 Thessalonians, if not the first New Testament book written, was certainly one of the first. Of course, when it was written there was no “New Testament.” It was written from Corinth (Acts 18.5) about AD 50/51. This is a new form for Scripture—the Letter form.

Paul praises the Thessalonians for their “work produced by faith,” their “labor prompted by love” and their “endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1.3)

Paul supported himself by daytime self-employment (tent-making?) While in Thessalonica he received gifts from the town he had just left—Philippi. See Phil 4.16

When Paul, Silas and Timothy came to Thessalonica,

- The went first to the synagogue **as was their custom...**
- Some Jews believed,
- As did a “large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few God-fearing women.

But jealous “Jews” started a riot saying, “These men who turned the world upside down, have now come here.”

They punish Jason and city officials take note.

*One of John Wesley’s contemporaries said this: Wherever Wesley went there was a revolution. Wherever I go, .... They serve tea.*

The riot arose why? Because a few Jews and their sympathizers followed Paul's teaching? Doubtful. The riot is in the marketplace and the city. Could it be that Paul's daytime employment led to witness and to conversions? Some scholars say this is the situation.

#### ISSUES IN THESSALONICA:

- Paul and Co. had only been in Thessalonica a very short time for them to develop stability in a group of those "called out." "Ecclesia." [This later became the word for "church." *Never in the NT did it mean a place or a building.*]
- Many, if not most, of this group were "gentiles"—they did not have the moral or cultural grasp of the way of life that Jesus taught, based on the OT.
- AND social, legal and cultural pressure had turned violent even before Paul departed under intimidation.

Paul sends Timothy back to encourage and teach. Timothy later catches up with Paul in Corinth to give a good report. THEREFORE, commendations are very effusive.

#### **BIG IDEA 2: THESSALONIANS ARE URGED TO STAY THE COURSE—In other words be faithful and persevering.**

The church had already suffered, as the churches in Judea had, from their own people—"they displease God and are hostile to everyone."

Paul encourages the Thessalonians in the face of persecution. 3.1-4

And Paul deals with apparent questions about himself. He had only been there a short time. Was he just a passing "evangelist" or some kind of cult leader? We can see his concern about being misunderstood in this letter. It will surface many more times in letters to other churches. There were many itinerant "Wise men", Sophists, Rhetoricians, Charlatans and snake oil salesmen. Paul asserts he is not one of them:

- Our gospel came to not simply with words, but with power with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.
- He worked to support himself and those with him—day and night, he says in 2.9
- You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 2.10

2 Thess. begins with encouragement in the face of opposition: The Thess. church is enduring persecutions and trials which is evidence that God's judgment is right. God is just—he will pay back those who trouble you...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. 2 Thess. 1.

#### **BIG IDEA 3: GUIDANCE "live in order to please God."**

[Again, we live to please our Father, not to earn our right to be his 'children'"]

Be sanctified. Hagiasmos—made holy.

Sexual morality: control your body, not in passionate lust like the pagans (*ethne*); do not **take advantage** of others. Strong statement follows—anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject merely human teaching, but the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Love one another.

Live a quiet life. Mind your own business. Work with your hands. Purpose to gain respect and not become dependent on anybody [*—So that no one has power over you?*] 1 Th 4.11-12

Thessalonica had been granted “free city” status back when it stood with Octavian (who became “Augustus Caesar”) and Antony against Julius Caesar’s assassins at the Battle of Philippi. The reason the authorities got involved may have been to protect that status. So Paul encourages the Christians there to stay “under the radar.”

## **BIG IDEA 4: INSTRUCTION CONCERNING THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

Do not be ignorant or uninformed about those who have already died (sleep) among the believers in Jesus. Apparently in the few years since Paul visited, some of the believers had died and there was concern about their destiny.

STATEMENT OF THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION: **We believe that Jesus died and rose again.** (Remember this is a statement made within 20 years of Jesus’ death and resurrection and to Jewish believers who would have had commerce and communication with Jews in Jerusalem.)

On the basis of that theological foundation: God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 4.14 According to God’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive when Jesus comes, will not get ahead of those who have died. No the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we will join them in the clouds to be with the Lord forever. Encourage one another with these words.

Memorable images: the Lord himself will descend

- With a loud command
- With the voice of the Archangel
- With the trumpet call of God





The biblical term is “parousia” the coming of the Lord. That and other words in 1 Thessalonians could be seen in inscriptions in Thessalonica. Among them is the description of the “coming” of an official visit of a “king” or monarch to a Hellenistic city. The public ceremony based on established custom is similar to what Paul describes of the second coming of Jesus. John Chrysostom the great 4<sup>th</sup> century preacher describes this in his commentary on 1 Thess. 4.17.

Compare Paul’s words with a pagan letter of consolation found in Papyrus Oxyrhynchus:

*Irene to Taonnophris and Philo good comfort.*

*I am as sorry and weep over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things whatsoever were fitting, I have done, and all mine, Epaphroditus, and Thermuthion and Philion and Apollonius and Plantas. But nevertheless, against such things one can do nothing. Therefore, comfort one another. Fare ye well. (No. 115)*

***We sorrow not as those who have no hope, Paul writes. What a difference! What a power in the pagan world.***

## **BIG IDEA 5: WORK IS GOOD.**

1 Thess. closes with Paul saying to the church, “we urge you, warn those who are idle ...” 1 Th 5.14

2 Thessalonians is more explicit and directive regarding work: 3.6 ff. We command you to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive. We gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” There are such idle disrupters in your midst. We command them to settle down and earn the food they eat. (2 Thess. 3.12)

But for all “Never tire in doing what is good.” Or “Do not grow weary in well doing.” KJV

Separate yourselves from those who are idle and will not work. But do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as you would a fellow believer. 2Thess 3.14-15

## **BIG IDEA 6: DON’T OVERDO SECOND-COMING SPECULATION.**

1 Th 5.1 We don’t need to write you about “times and seasons.” You know very well that the “day of the Lord” will come like a thief in the night.

BUT you are not in darkness: live as live as people of the day: self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 1 Th 5.8

2 Th 2.1ff: Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, don’t get “unsettled” by a letter that supposedly came from “us” saying that the day of the Lord has already come. This is followed by a somewhat obscure description of what has to happen before Jesus comes back. And Paul follows this with his customary encouragement simply to hold firm what he has already taught them. In other words, don’t let what’s unclear guide. Go by what’s clear and wait for God to clear up the obscure.

Question: Is it possible that those who decided to quit working did so because of the false teaching that the Lord has already come? So sit down and enjoy, our time is now???

There are some churches which major on “end times” and “prophecy conferences.” Good or not?

**NEXT WEEK NT 16--Corinth**

## The Bible Project 2.04

Consider the following if you choose to prepare for the next class:<sup>[L]  
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Also Read Acts 18. 1-11, 1 & 2 Corinthians.

NOTICE THE QUESTIONS THAT PAUL SEEMS TO BE ANSWERING.

Write questions of your own concerning these letters. After a brief introduction, next week's classes will use your questions as the teaching methodology. So write some good questions that will help make clear what Paul is teaching in 1 & 2 Corinthians.

We now go on toward the conclusion of the NT with the completion of the Letters.

### MARKERS

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|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Thessalonians 4 | Sorrow not as those who have no hope. |
| 2 Thessalonians 3 | Those who won't work should not eat.  |

# Roman Emperors of the New Testament

Augustus      d. 14 AD

Tiberius      d. 37

Caligula      d. 41

Claudius      d. 54

Nero      d. 68

Galba      d. 69

Otho      d. 69

Vitellius      d. 69

Vespasian d. 79

Titus d. 81

Domitian d. 96

Nerva d. 98

Trajan d. 117

Hadrian d. 138