

INTRODUCTION TO 1ST THESSALONIANS

- I.** Authorship, place and date of writing.
- A.** Pauline authorship has been essentially undisputed.
 - B.** F.C. Baur's ascription of the epistle to one of Paul's disciples who wrote it after 70AD to revive interest in the Parousia is but a curiosity in the history of criticism.
 - C.** Both of the epistles to the Thessalonians are super-scribed with the names of Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, with Paul recognized as the real author. Cf. 1The.1:1; 2The.1:1
 - D.** In 1The.2:18, Paul speaks by name in the 1st person singular and further refers to Timothy in the 3rd person in 3:2,6.
 - E.** Further, Paul's use of "we" and "us" when he is referring to himself alone is as evident in this epistle as his others e.g., 1The.3:1 cf. Act.17:15ff.
 - F.** Paul founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey circa 51 – 53 AD.
 - G.** He was forced to leave Thessalonica due to Jewish persecution with his success arousing their envy and hostility. Act.17:1-5
 - H.** Unable to stop their evangelistic success alone, the Jews instigated certain market-loungers that were known for trouble-making to form a "flash-mob" turning the city into a boisterous uproar.
 - I.** They attacked the house of Jason, where Paul was staying, and unable to find Paul and company, dragged Jason and others before civil authorities charging them with sedition against Caesar and inciting a riot. Act.17:6-8
 - J.** After posting bond, Jason, etc., was freed and they immediately helped Paul and Silas to escape under the cloak of darkness to Berea. Act.17:9-10
 - K.** After a short stay at Berea, Paul was sent ahead to Athens where Silas and Timothy were to rejoin him as soon as possible. Act.17:11-15.
 - L.** After a short stay in Athens (~ 3 months), Paul and Silas departed for Corinth where Timothy joined them. Act.18:1,5
 - M.** It was from Corinth that both 1st and 2nd Thessalonians were penned.
 - N.** 1st Thessalonians was written ~ 51-52 AD with the 2nd epistle written a few months later.
 - O.** This is the 2nd epistle written by Paul contained in the N.T. canon only preceded by Galatians ~49AD.
- II.** Background to Thessalonica.
- A.** The city is located in the region of Greece known as Macedonia.
 - B.** It is situated in the north-western part of the Aegean Sea.
 - C.** The city was founded about 315 BC by Cassander and named for his wife, a half-sister of Alexander the Great.
 - D.** The region of Macedonia was united into one Roman province in about 146 BC, with Thessalonica as the natural choice for its capital as it was the major seaport of Macedonia.
 - E.** Further, it was strategically located on the Via Egnatia, a military highway spanning Macedonia from east to west.
 - F.** It was made a free city in 42 BC by Antony and given the right to independent rule.

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- G. It was ruled by politarchs, generally thought to number between 5 – 7.
 - H. The inhabitants were generally native Greeks but contained a considerable mixture of Romans, Asiatics, Orientals and a sizeable group of Jews.
 - I. It facilitated travel producing strong commerce and maritime commercial activity.
 - J. Because of its location, Thessalonica is called “the key to the whole of Macedonia” and some believed it to be the “mother of all Macedon”.
- III.** The founding of the Thessalonian church.
- A. As noted, the founding occurred during the 2nd missionary journey of Paul.
 - B. In Troas Paul had a vision to go into Europe after being thwarted by the H.S. to avoid Asia and Bithynia. Act.16:6-10
 - C. The missionary team crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas to Neapolis (Act.16:11), a distance of about 125 miles, in two days.
 - D. From there the missionaries went immediately to Philippi, a distance of about 10 miles.
 - E. There is quite a lengthy description of their ministry in Philippi. Act.16:12-40
 - F. It is reasonable to believe that Paul and his co-workers Silas and Timothy stayed at Philippi around three months (the letter sent to them shows they were well grounded in doctrine).
 - G. Leaving Philippi they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica (Act.17:1; it would have taken them about 5 days to travel the 70 miles).
 - H. The ministry at Thessalonica is described in Act.17:1-10.
 - I. Although Act.17:2 mentions the fact that Paul reasoned in the synagogue for three Sabbaths (Act.17:2,3), it is reasonable to assume that their ministry was of much longer duration for the following reasons.
 - 1. The persecution occurred after the three Sabbaths.
 - 2. The fact that the Philippians gave monetary assistance to Paul on two occasions (Phi.4:16) insinuates a longer than three week duration since it was a hundred miles away.
 - 3. The doctrinal knowledge apparent in 1st Thessalonians would indicate a longer time with the church.
 - 4. The fact that Paul supported himself by manual labor (1The.2:9) indicates a longer stay or his argument of 2The.3:8 loses punch.
 - J. Based on all this, it is concluded that Paul's stay at Thessalonica was a period of around three months.
- IV.** Occasion and purpose for writing.
- A. When they arrived in Athens (after Berea), Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1The.3:1,2,5) to encourage the believers there and report back about the condition of the church.
 - B. Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth (3:6), from which place the two Thessalonian letters were written.

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- C. Paul was concerned about how the church might react to his sudden and unannounced departure and about having to leave the church without experienced leadership.
 - D. Timothy's report gave Paul cause for praise for the healthy state of the church.
 - E. This is a letter from a relieved and grateful pastor.
 - F. This sparks the initiation of the letter beginning with expressing his thankfulness for them (1:2ff).
 - G. That he left enemies behind, the letter prompts Paul to defend his ministry against false charges and slander as to his: Message (2:3); Motive (2:5); Method (2:9-10) and making his departure and prolonged absence an issue (2:17-18).
 - H. The epistle includes encouragement to these believers to stand fast in the face of persecution (3:2-4).
 - I. He warns and exhorts them:
 - 1. Not to revert to pagan sexual practices (4:1-8).
 - 2. To work for a living and not sponge off others (4:11-12).
 - 3. Treat their spiritual leaders properly (5:12-13).
 - 4. Apply the appropriate doctrine toward various categories of believers (5:14-15).
 - J. He then teaches concerning what happens to believers relevant to the rapture (4:13-18) and reminds them of the previous teaching concerning "the day of the Lord" (5:1-11).
- V. Outline.
- A. Greeting. 1:1
 - B. Thanksgiving. 1:2-4
 - C. Further cause for thanksgiving. 1:5-10
 - D. Paul's defense of his ministry. 2:1-12
 - 1. The message. Vss.1-4
 - 2. The motives. Vss.5-6
 - 3. The methods. Vss.7-8
 - 4. The example. Vss.9-12
 - E. The Jewish persecution. 2:13-16
 - F. Affection, desire to visit, and sending of Timothy. 2:17-3:5
 - 1. Out of sight, not out of mind. 2:17-20
 - 2. Sending of Timothy. 3:1-5
 - G. Response to Timothy's report. 3:6-10
 - H. Prayer request. 3:11-13
 - I. Exhortations. 4:1-12
 - 1. To sexual purity. Vss 1-8
 - 2. To brotherly love. Vss 9-10
 - 3. To simplify niche. Vss 11-12
 - J. Doctrinal teaching. 4:13-5:11
 - 1. The rapture. 4:13-18
 - 2. The Day of the Lord. 5:1-11
 - K. Instructions on church relations. 5:12-15

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- L. Various, personal Christian duties. 5:16-22
- M. Final prayer request. 5:23-24
- N. Closing. 5:25-28