

A Study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians (NIV 1984)

“To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 1:1b and 2 Thess. 1:1b)

Contextual Info for Our Study of These 2 Letters

Some Brief Info about Paul

1. At the time of his visit to Thessalonica, Paul had been a Christian for about 17 years. From our study material last week, Thessalonica is in what province?
2. (Acts 13:1-3) About 7 years before, Paul had been sent out on his First Missionary Journey from what city? Who left with him to go on this journey?
3. Note Acts 15:40; 16:1-4. On this Second Missionary Journey, who are Paul’s travelling companions as he arrives in Thessalonica? In the opening verse of both letters to the Thessalonians you will note these names listed along with Paul’s name.

Let’s Take a Look at the City of Thessalonica

4. Thessalonica is now the modern city of Salonika.
5. It lies about 100 miles west of Philippi in the northeast of Greece. It is about 60 miles from Berea. It is about 100 miles from Athens. With all that in mind, what was Paul’s mode of travel when he left Philippi and headed to Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens?
6. Thessalonica was founded in 315 B.C. Its founder was Cassander, the general of Alexander the Great. He named it “Thessalonica” after his wife, Alexander’s half-sister.
7. It is strategically located on the “Ignation Way.” The Ignation Way (Via Egnatia] was a road constructed by the Romans in the 2nd Century B.C., it ran along Northern Greece and Macedonia as an eastern continuation of the Via Appia between Roma and Istanbul (Constantinople, Byzantium), the two great metropolises of the late Roman Empire. The army road was named after Gnaeus Egnatius, proconsul of Macedonia. Like other major Roman roads, it was about 6 meters (19.6 ft) wide, paved with polygonal stone slabs or covered with a hard layer of sand.

8. Thessalonica was a trade city. It was located at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, now called the Gulf of Salonkia, a natural harbor on the Aegean coast of Macedonia. It was an important port city, providing a gateway to the Macedonia interior.

9. It was a flourishing city. Estimated population in Paul's day was round 200,000. It was the most populace city in Macedonia in both the First and Second Centuries.

10. Inland from Thessalonica lay a fertile plain. This plain provided abundant agricultural resources for the city and for the region.

11. Under Roman rule, the importance of the city continued to increase when it became the capital of the province in 146 B.C.

12. About 42 B.C., it was granted status as a "free" city, which meant that it could then be autonomous at the local government level. The local leaders under this system were called "politarchs," a word found only in Scripture in Acts 17:6, 8, and confirmed in inscriptions (for example, there is one on an archway in the city).

13. The makeup of the population was basically Greek, with a smattering of Romans, at least enough Jews to have a fairly active synagogue (in contrast to absence of one in Philippi (note Acts 16:13 and Acts 17:1-2).

14. The Gentile religious climate was dominated by paganism; the cults of Dionysus and the Cabirus appear to have been especially prominent.

14a. The cult of Dionysus was strongly associated with satyrs, centaurs, and sileni; and its characteristic symbols were the bull, the serpent, tigers/leopards, ivy and wine. (Note: Satyrs, the minor forest gods of Greek mythology, had the face, torso, and arms of a man, the ears and tail of a goat, and two goat-like legs). (Note: A centaur is a creature in Greek mythology; the most common centaur definition is a creature with the head, arms, and torso of a human, and the body of a horse.) (Note: Sileni were one of a class of woodland deities, closely related to the satyrs.) Dionysus had the power to inspire and create ecstasy, and his cult had special importance to art and literature.

14b. Cabirus, a deity, was the patron god of the city. The Cabirus figure was a martyred hero, murdered by his two brothers, buried with symbols of royal power, and expected to return to help the oppressed poor in general and citizens of Thessalonica in particular.

The Church at Thessalonica

15. Acts 17:1-4. At what location in Thessalonica did the church get its beginning?

16. Acts 17:4. Who became followers of the Lord?

17. 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10. The converts made the decision to turn to Whom? And they turned from what?

18. 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:4. With what did the Christians at Thessalonica have to face?

19. 1 Thessalonians 1:7. The Thessalonian Christians became a model to whom?

20. 1 Thessalonians 1:10. What had become known? Where?

21. 1 Thessalonians 3:6. How did the Thessalonians feel about Paul?

22. Acts 17:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; Philippians 4:16. Paul preached and worked at the same time. From what church did he receive some support?

Authorship

23. 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:17. Both these letters bear proof that Paul wrote these letters

Date & Place of Writing

24. 1 Thessalonians 2:17. This verse leads us to the conclusion that Paul had not been separated long from the Thessalonians. This seems to fit well with Acts 17:2, 10.

25. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-6. Paul had stayed where? Who had he sent to Thessalonica and that man has just brought news to Paul about the work at Thessalonica?

26. Acts 18:1-3, 12. Who was the emperor? Who was the proconsul of the area?

27. Based on inscriptions at Delphi, Greece, most scholars have concluded that Gallio began his office in the summer of A.D. 51 or 52.

28. Acts 18:11. Paul stayed at Corinth for what length of time?

29. It seems that the logical conclusion is that Paul wrote both letters to the Thessalonians while he was at Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey.

Purposes for Writing 1 Thessalonians

30. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10. To express Paul's pleasure at the healthy state of the church.

31. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:13. To defend Paul and his co-workers against false charges.

32. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:24. To exhort the Thessalonians to carry out Paul's teachings.

Purposes for Writing 2 Thessalonians

33. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12. To reassure the Thessalonians of God's justice and thereby to encourage their continued hope.

34. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. To refute that "the day" had come.

35. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. To describe a proper response to idlers.

In both of these epistles (letters), the reader notes these key ideas;

Persecution or opposition

The practical values of the Second Coming

The importance of faithfulness, regardless of trials