



I & 2 THESSALONIANS

TRIUMPHS AND TRIALS
OF A CONSECRATED CHURCH

'He expounds the epistles with impeccable precision.'

William D. Barrick



RICHARD MAYHUE



CHRISTIAN FOCUS





Dedication

To my sister Linda Benjamin, her husband Jerry, and their daughter Katie who faithfully travel across America and Canada in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry, not unlike that of the Apostle Paul.

To Dr. Homer A. Kent who gave me a love for the Greek New Testament and modeled the precision with which God's Word is to be handled (2 Tim 2:15).

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Preface

My great love for the Thessalonian Epistles reaches back over twenty years of: (1) writing my doctoral dissertation on the 'Day of the Lord'; (2) teaching these letters in seminary Greek exegesis courses; (3) teaching Bible Institute (English Bible) courses; and (4) preaching through them expositionally verse by verse. They overflow with doctrinal, pastoral, and personal riches.

The biblical text has been interpreted with the consistent use of grammatical-historical principles of hermeneutics (see my *How to Interpret the Bible* in this commentary series). The doubts and spurious theories of Higher Criticism have not been considered for inclusion in this work. A high priority has been devoted to the original Greek text (UBS4), history, geography, and culture where appropriate. Special attention has been paid to context, i.e. the immediate text, the Pauline epistles, the New Testament, and ultimately the entire Bible. I have endeavored to provide a balanced treatment by first viewing the individual pieces textually/exegetically and then as they relate to the entire Bible theologically. The ultimate end of this volume is to produce a doctrinal (what to believe) and ethical (how to behave) exposition of 1 and 2 Thessalonians which will appear in the 'Focus on the Bible' commentary series.

The English Bible text employed (unless otherwise noted) is the New King James Version. Footnotes have been used





sparingly, except where they will lead the reader to resources which effectively expand a discussion. Of special note are the thirty-three Overviews designed to provide exegetical, thematic, or theological summaries, which supply necessary background for understanding how a part in the Thessalonian Epistles fits into the whole of Scripture.

Deep appreciation is extended to Malcolm Maclean, who championed this opportunity for me to publish the fruit from several decades of study and teaching; to The Master's College and Seminary board of directors who granted me a sabbatical leave for writing; to my colleagues at The Master's Seminary who picked up the slack in my absence, especially Dr. Irv Busenitz and Bob White, who also checked all of the Scripture references; to my daughter Lee Carson who faithfully served as the project computer manager; to my son-in-law Mike Carson who did the original art-work on the map of Paul's Second Missionary Journey; and to my dear wife "B" who did whatever was necessary to bring this writing project to a God-honouring conclusion.

May the Lord be pleased to use this commentary in special ways that will be for the spiritual good of His beloved saints and for His great glory.

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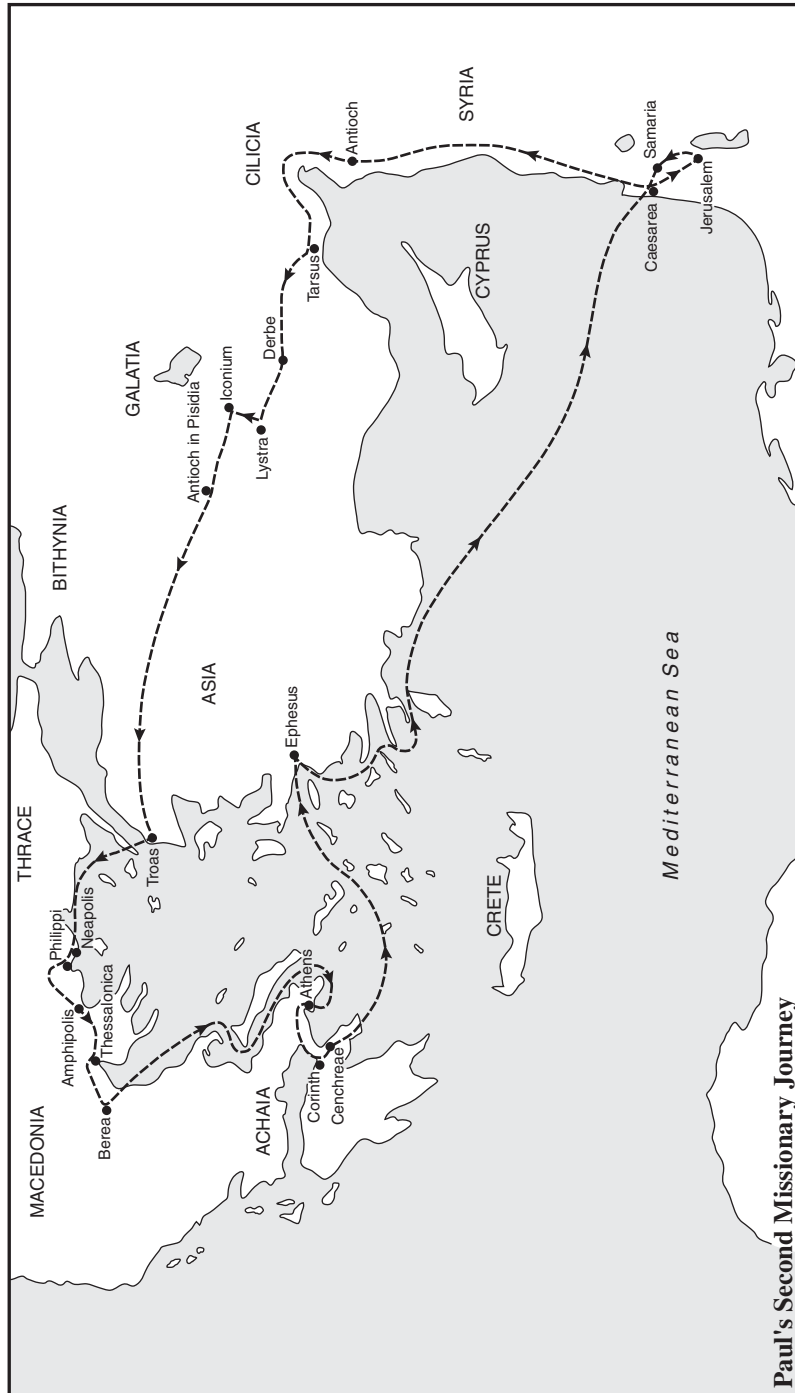
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A Time-line of Paul's Ministry*

	<i>Pauline History</i>	<i>Roman History</i>
		14-37 Tiberius emperor
c. 33	Paul's conversion	
c. 35	Paul's first post-salvation	
c. 35-46	Paul in Cilicia and Syria	Jerusalem visit
46	Paul's second Jerusalem visit	37-41 Gaius emperor
47-48	Paul and Barnabas on first missionary journey	41-54 Claudius emperor
48 ?	<i>Galatians</i>	
49	Council of Jerusalem and Paul's third Jerusalem visit	49 Jews expelled from Rome
49-52	Paul's second missionary journey	
49-50	Paul and Silas travel from Syrian Antioch through Asia Minor to Macedonia and Achaia	
50	<i>Thessalonian Epistles</i>	
50-52	Paul in Corinth	51-52 Gallio proconsul of Achaia
Summer 52	Paul's fourth Jerusalem visit	
52-56	Paul's third missionary journey	52-58 Felix procurator of Judea
52-55	Paul in Ephesus	54-68 Nero emperor
55-56	<i>Corinthian Epistles</i> Paul in Macedonia, Illyricum, and Achaia	
56	<i>Romans</i>	
Spring 56	Paul's last Jerusalem visit	58 Festus succeeds Felix as procurator of Judea
56-58	Paul's Caesarean imprisonment	
Fall 58	Paul's voyage to Rome commences	
Winter 59	Paul's arrival in Rome	
c. 59-61	Paul under house arrest in Rome <i>Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon</i>	
c. 61-64	Paul's final travels	62 Death of Festus; Albinus procurator of Judea
c. 62-63	<i>1 Timothy and Titus</i>	
c. 64-66	Roman imprisonment, <i>2 Timothy, and Paul's death</i>	64 Rome burns

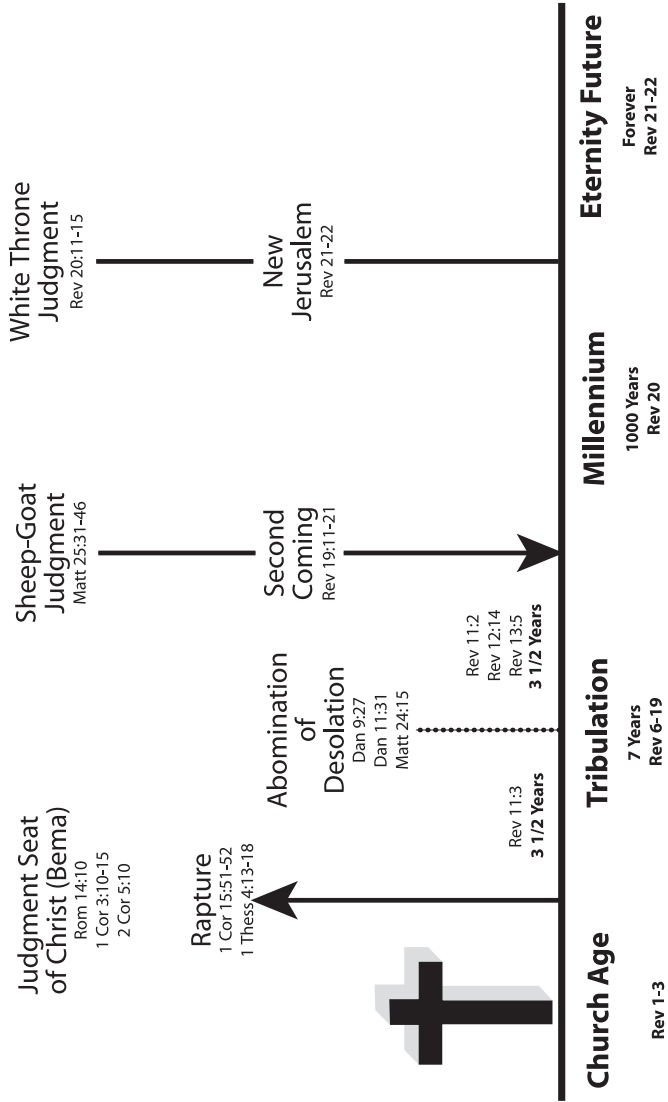
*Adapted from F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 475.



Paul's Second Missionary Journey



Futuristic Premillennialism



Abbreviations

AD	In the year of our Lord
BC	Before Christ
c.	Circa
cf.	Compare
CFP	Christian Focus Publications
chaps	Chapters
DOC	Day of Christ
DOL	Day of the Lord
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
e.g.	For example
ff.	Following verses
ICC	International Critical Commentary
i.e.	That is
lit.	Literally
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NTC	New Testament Commentary
UBS4	United Bible Societies' GNT, 4th rev. ed., 1993
v.	verse
vv.	verses
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary



Introduction

The saga of Paul's Thessalonian experience and the continuing spread of the gospel from Asia to Europe begins in Acts 17, after Paul has traveled from Philippi on his second missionary journey. Resulting from his several month stay in Thessalonica, Paul formed a lifetime relationship with the church as her first pastor. He left the priceless legacy of his two correspondences for churches through the ages to study as a superlative example of evangelism and church planting, biblical shepherding, and doctrinal commitment. These so-called 'eschatological epistles' (because of their prophetic content) are equally rich with intimate insights into the proper relationship between a godly pastor and his committed flock.

Historical Background

The initial reference point for dating Paul's second missionary journey (about AD 49-52) is the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-29) which occurred in early to mid-AD 49. Afterwards, Paul returned to Antioch for a time (Acts 15:30-35) and then decided to revisit the sites of his first journey (Acts 15:36). When Paul and Barnabas could not agree on whether to take John Mark or not (Acts 15:37-38), Barnabas sailed with John Mark for Cyprus (Acts 15:39). Paul afterward selected Silas, who had come from Jerusalem (Acts 15:27, 32, 34), and they set out for Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:40-41).





When in Derbe, they invited Timothy to join them on their trip (Acts 16:1-3). They returned to the locations of Paul's previous ministry and strengthened the new believers (Acts 16:4-5). At this point, the Lord issued His famous Macedonia call to Paul and redirected the spread of the gospel west to Europe (Acts 16:6-10).

The party set out for Macedonia where they first ministered in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15; 1 Thess 2:2). After encountering severe spiritual opposition (Acts 16:16-18) plus illegal persecution and imprisonment (Acts 16:19-34), this small band of courageous ambassadors for Christ departed (Acts 16:35-40). During the several months' ministry in Philippi, a small assembly of believers had been established which numbered Lydia and her household, the Philippian jailer and his family, plus others who must have believed.

At Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

Paul and his companions set out in late fall AD 49 from Philippi for Thessalonica, which was an attractive commercial center in the midst of a politically unique city with a significant Jewish population. They traveled west on the Egnatian Way which extended from Dyrrachium to the west on the Adriatic (modern day Albania) to Byzantium and the Hellespont (Dardanelles Strait) in the east (modern day Turkey). This stone highway was an extension of the Appian Way in Italy and linked Rome with the east, passing through both Thessalonica and Philippi.

They travelled southwest from Philippi to Amphipolis, about a 30-mile journey to this city which was located three miles from the sea. From there, the journey continued southwest for approximately another 30-35 miles to Apollonia and then west another 30-35 miles to Thessalonica. Overall, the journey was about 100 miles in length and took the better part of a week, if they walked. Some have suggested that they might have used horses; it is unknown whether they stayed in each location longer than just overnight.

They arrived in the seaport of Thessalonica (modern day Salonika) on the Thermaic Gulf (modern day Gulf of Salonica) at the northern tip of the Aegean Sea. Thessalonica had been





originally founded by Cassander (one of Alexander's four generals, cf. the four horns of Dan 8:22) c. 315 BC on or near the ancient site of Therma and was populated by people from the nearby villages. He named it after his wife who was Alexander's step-sister.

In 168 BC, Thessalonica became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. In 42 BC, it was accorded the status of a 'free city' because of loyalty to the Emperor. Thus, no Roman soldiers were stationed here and the city had self-government (Acts 17:5-6). Because of its important location, the Roman proconsul resided here.

In Paul's day, the population would have approached 200,000. It ranked with Corinth in Achaia and Ephesus in Asia as a major shipping port. Thessalonica was known to the ancient world as 'the mother of Macedonia' and was said to be 'in the lap of the Roman Empire'.

Paul quickly sought out the Jewish synagogue as was his custom (cf. Damascus, Acts 9:20; Salamis, Acts 13:5; Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13:14; Iconium, Acts 14:1; Berea, Acts 17:10; Athens, Acts 17:17; Corinth, Acts 18:4; Ephesus, Acts 19:8) to declare that Jesus of Nazareth was the Old Testament Messiah (cf. Acts 9:20-22). Over a fifteen day span which included three Sabbaths, Paul preached Christ from the Old Testament to show that the Messiah had to suffer and then be resurrected. He did not merely declare the facts, but persuaded some by his reasoning, explanations, and demonstrations from Scripture. Undoubtedly, Paul recounted his personal encounter with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9).

It could well be that Paul's message here was similar to the message he preached at Pisidian Antioch on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:16-41). There he referred directly to Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33), Isaiah 55:3 (Acts 13:34), and Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:35). He might also have quoted from Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, or used Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-35) as did Peter at Pentecost. The fruit of this two week ministry (Acts 17:4) came from among the ethnic Jews, the Greeks who embraced Judaism, and as usual a number of women (cf. Acts 16:13-15; 17:12, 34).

There seems certainly to have been an unmentioned, but





significant, period of ministry to the Gentiles in Thessalonica between verses four and five of Acts 17. Apparently, after three Sabbaths, Paul turned to the Gentiles just as he had done at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:46; cf. Acts 9:15; 18:6; 22:21; 26:17; Gal 1:16; 2:7-8). This accounts for Paul's elaboration on his ministry in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10, especially his comment about their turning to God from idols (1:9).

Some have questioned whether Paul's ministry exceeded three Sabbaths in length. For several compelling reasons, it strongly appears that Paul's ministry lasted about three to six months rather than just several weeks. First, the Philippian congregation had opportunity to send at least one, probably more than one, offering to Thessalonica (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:16) which could not have happened in a matter of a few weeks. Second, Paul stayed long enough that he had to work night and day to support himself and probably his whole group (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8). Third, the degree of pastoral care and concern indicated in 1 Thessalonians (cf. 2:1-12) could not have taken place over only three Sabbaths. Fourth, neither could the spiritual maturity of the flock be accounted for in just a few weeks' time (cf. 1 Thess 1:6-10).

At some point after Paul's three Sabbaths ministry in the synagogue and seemingly well into his subsequent ministry to the Gentiles, envy drove the Jews to discredit Paul and disrupt his ministry (Acts 17:5-9). They took evil men, who hung around the market place because they had nothing better to do, and formed a riotous mob with them which set the city in an uproar. Next, they sought Paul at Jason's house, where he apparently dwelt during his stay at Thessalonica. They intended to bring the missionaries out to 'the people' which could refer to the growing mob or possibly, but less likely, to the public assembly of the populace which existed in this 'free city'.

However, not finding Paul, they grabbed Jason (possibly the same Jason in Rom 16:21) and other new Christians. These believers were forcibly brought before 'the politarchs', a group of five-six men who ruled Thessalonica at the time. The charges of revolution, insurrection, treason, and sedition were hurled at these Christian men. First, they said that



Paul arrived with a known history of insurrection elsewhere (Acts 17:6). They probably had no knowledge of Paul's past (in light of the long delay in reacting) and certainly used hyperbole for shock value in their highly pejorative charges of the men making trouble (cf. Dan 7:23 [LXX]; Acts 21:38; Gal 5:12). Second, they implicated Jason and the other Christian brethren as acting in complicity with Paul's revolutionary intentions (Acts 17:7). Third, they specifically indicted them for championing another king (or emperor) other than Caesar, in violation of Roman law (Acts 17:7). These false, but serious charges, understandably upset (cf. Matt 14:26; Gal 1:7) the crowd of people who had congregated and the group of city fathers.

Had Paul turned the world upside down? Little did they know with their exaggeration that one day Paul's message would reach Rome (Acts 28:16 ff.), and eventually the whole world. It was true (whether they knew it or not) that wherever Paul went and preached, it usually started trouble (cf. Acts 9 ff.). However, Paul's message was distinctly spiritual, not military, political, or economic in nature.

Had Paul preached Christ as king? Paul is never recorded as referring to Christ as king except in 1 Timothy (1:17; 6:15) which was written more than ten years later. However, he frequently wrote about the kingdom (19 times). Fifteen references are made to the kingdom of God, but four mentions, in varying ways, speak about the kingdom of Christ (Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 2 Tim 4:1, 18). In light of the strong eschatological content of the Thessalonian epistles and their indication of Paul's initial teaching (cf. 2 Thess 2:5), he obviously talked about a coming king and kingdom from heaven that would ultimately eclipse any power on earth, including the Roman Empire and Emperor. But his message was not one of national revolt, rather spiritual redemption. Paul never advocated insurrection, but always promoted the right place for human government (cf. Rom 13:1-7).

The agitators took whatever (if anything) they knew of Paul's past and his message dramatically out of context in order to strike great concern in the hearts of the people. They did this knowingly in the immediate historical context of a

strong anti-messianic spirit prevalent throughout the Roman Empire, which was occasioned by civil unrest at the hands of militant Jewish freedom fighters. Finally in AD 49, due to Jewish disturbances in Rome, the Emperor expelled all Jews from the city (cf. Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:2). The Thessalonian instigators used these broader circumstances, now in their 'free city' known for its loyalty to the Emperor, to provoke swift and severe punishment on those who dared to challenge the Jews on a religious basis, much like the Jews in Jerusalem did against Christ (Luke 23:2; John 19:12).

The scheme worked. Having heard the accusations and wanting to return the city to normal as quickly as possible, the politarchs exacted a 'security' from Jason which seemingly guaranteed that Paul and the missionaries would leave town immediately (Acts 17:9). Whether Jason had to put money on deposit, like bail, or make a verbal pledge is unknown for sure. But the outcome was certain; for after Jason and his Christian brothers were released, they immediately sent Paul and his party away by night to Berea (Acts 17:10).

If Paul thought that the Egnatian Way would soon lead him to Rome, his hopes were dashed for now, as he was detoured off the Way southwest to Berea. It would be almost ten years before he would arrive in Rome (Acts 28:16 ff.).

At Berea (Acts 17:10-13)

Having been officially evicted from Thessalonica (Acts 17:9), the party set out for Berea on a three-four day journey that would have covered 50-60 miles in the late winter or spring AD 50 (Acts 17:10). Although Timothy's name is not mentioned, it can be assumed that he came with them to Berea since it is later reported that he was in Berea (Acts 17:14).

When Paul opened the Old Testament Scriptures in the synagogue, he found a much different response than in Thessalonica. The Jews compared what they had in the Old Testament with what they heard from Paul to determine if his message was true or false (Acts 17:11). It appears there was a very fruitful response (Acts 17:12).

However, the news of Paul's success in Berea quickly reached Thessalonica; so the Jews from there rapidly deployed to Berea

and provoked trouble as before (Acts 17:13). Apparently, Paul was the main focus of animosity, since he alone had to depart but was able to leave Silas and Timothy behind (Acts 17:14). After Paul safely arrived in Athens, he then summoned his two partners (Acts 17:15).

At Athens (Acts 17:14-34)

After being forced by the Thessalonian Jews to leave Berea, Paul most likely sailed to Athens from the port city of Dium on no more than a few days voyage (17:14). However, after completing the twenty-mile trip to the coast from Berea, he could have possibly walked the coastal highway to Athens, accompanied by his Berean friends. Silas and Timothy were temporarily left behind in Berea (17:14). Apparently, the Bereans who accompanied Paul to Athens returned home with a message for Silas and Timothy to rejoin Paul in Athens (17:15). This would have been springtime AD 50.

In the meantime, Paul being provoked by the idolatry of Athens began to preach in both the synagogue and the marketplace (17:16-17). Luke includes some details in Acts 17:18-31. After they rejected Paul's message (17:32-33) and only a handful of people believed (17:34), he departed to Corinth (18:1), which was about a fifty-mile journey either by sea or land. Paul's stay in Athens probably lasted no longer than several months, if that long.

Silas and Timothy had rejoined Paul in Athens sometime during this gospel ministry. It was from Athens that Paul and Silas dispatched Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-2); later Paul sent Silas to Philippi. Sometime afterwards, both Timothy and Silas rejoined Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5). It is possible that Silas brought a gift from Philippi (cf. 2 Cor. 11:9; Phil 4:15).

At Corinth (Acts 18:1-17)

Having either walked (50-55 miles) or sailed, Paul arrived in Corinth which was known for its commerce, but not culture like Athens (18:1), probably in early summer AD 50. Quickly he came across Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers by trade, who had been evicted from Rome with other Jews by

the Emperor Claudius in AD 49 (Acts 18:2-3). As was his habit elsewhere, Paul first went to the synagogue where he reasoned about Messiah from the Old Testament Scriptures (18:4). The Apostle resided in Corinth for at least eighteen months (Acts 18:11).

Sometime early in his stay here, both Timothy (from Thessalonica) and Silas (from Philippi) rejoined Paul to minister with him. During this time, both 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written. Timothy's return with good news about the spiritual faithfulness of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:1-8) prompted the first letter. Later, having learned of some difficulties in the church, Paul wrote a second time to encourage, instruct, and confront.

Timothy arrived in Corinth most likely in late summer AD 50 and therefore 1 Thessalonians would surely have been written in that year. Second Thessalonians followed a few months later, and was written in late AD 50 or possibly early AD 51.

While Paul was in Corinth, the Jews brought him before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, on religious charges. He wisely dismissed the accusation as spiritual wrangling not worthy of his time (Acts 18:12-17). The mention of Gallio is significant for dating purposes. An inscription from the city of Delphi, near Corinth in Achaia, mentions Gallio as proconsul. It was written sometime in the first half of AD 52. Therefore, it has generally been supposed that Gallio's period of oversight would have dated from July AD 51 to July AD 52. Thus, Paul's appearance before the judgment-seat would have been in the latter half of his Corinthian stay and after he had written the Thessalonian correspondence.

Additional Visits

At least four other visits to Thessalonica, after the arrival of 2 Thessalonians, by Paul and/or his companions for ministry purposes are recorded in Scripture. First, in the midst of Paul's third missionary journey while at Ephesus, he sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia (Acts 19:22). Both Thessalonica and Philippi would have been the most likely destinations. Paul apparently could not leave Ephesus but was concerned

for their spiritual welfare as he had been earlier (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess 3:1-7).

Then, after Paul departed from Ephesus on his third missionary journey, but before he sailed from Philippi for Jerusalem, he visited Macedonia for the first and second times in person since his forced departure in Acts 17:9-10. Even though Paul could not immediately return (1 Thess 2:18), it appeared that after the magistrates of Acts 17 had left office several years later, Paul was once again permitted to visit Thessalonica. At least one of these visits had been anticipated in advance (Acts 19:21). Paul refers to these visits in the Corinthian epistles (1 Cor 16:5; 2 Cor 1:15, 16; 2:13; 7:5; 8:1). After the Ephesian riot had ended, Paul left for Macedonia where it can be assumed he visited Thessalonica (Acts 20:1). Later, having first travelled south to Greece, he returned for another personal visit (Acts 20:3) en route home.

Later, during his first Roman imprisonment, Paul hoped for another visit to Macedonia (Phil 1:27; 2:24). It appears from Paul's comments to Timothy (1 Tim 1:3) that Paul made at least one final visit to Macedonia, presumably Philippi and Thessalonica, before his second and final Roman imprisonment. It is most likely then that Paul made at least three personal visits back to Thessalonica for pastoral reasons (cf. 1 Thess 3:1-2, 10). The last known visit by a colleague of Paul does not appear to be prompted by ministry opportunities or concerns. During Paul's second Roman imprisonment, Demas deserted Paul for less than honorable reasons, and returned to what can be assumed was his home in Thessalonica (2 Tim 4:10).

Macedonian Friends

Although Paul must have had numerous friends and traveling companions from Thessalonica, the Scripture names only five. First, there was Jason (the closest Hellenized form of Jesus/Joshua) who gave lodging to Paul and his party on their first visit (Acts 17:5-8) and provided a way for Paul to leave peacefully after the uproar had subsided (Acts 17:9). The Jason in Romans 16:21 is possibly the Jason of Thessalonica.

Second, Gaius of Macedonia (most likely a Thessalonian) was seized along with Paul during the riot in Ephesus (Acts



19:29). This Gaius should be differentiated from Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), Gaius of Corinth (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14), and Gaius the friend of John (3 John 1).

Third, there was a true Thessalonian named Secundus who accompanied Paul on at least a portion of the third missionary journey (Acts 20:4).

Fourth, Aristarchus (another known Thessalonian) was seized with Gaius and Paul in the Ephesus riot (Acts 19:29) and later travelled with Secundus and Paul during at least a portion of the third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). He also accompanied Paul on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27:2) and was later detained with Paul in his first Roman imprisonment (Col 4:10). It appears he was freed either before or after Paul wrote the Colossian letter (Phile 24).

Fifth, Demas apparently was from Thessalonica and had served Paul well in his first Roman imprisonment (Col 4:14; Phile 24) before he deserted Paul for the things of the world and returned home while Paul was incarcerated for a second and final time in Rome (2 Tim 4:10).

1 Thessalonians

Authorship

The apostle Paul identifies himself twice as the author of this first letter to the church at Thessalonica (1:1; 2:18). Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, Paul's traveling companions on the second missionary journey when the Thessalonian church was founded (Acts 17:1-9), are also mentioned in Paul's greeting (1:1). Most of the first person plural pronouns in this epistle (we, us, our) refer to all three. However, during Timothy's visit back to Thessalonica, they refer only to Paul and Silvanus (3:1-2, 6).

Paul's authorship has not been questioned until recently by liberal scholars. The attempts of some to undermine the historically reliable acceptance of Pauline authorship fails in light of the combined weight of evidence favouring Paul, such as: (1) direct internal assertions of Paul's authorship (1:1; 2:18); (2) the letter's perfect correlation with Paul's travels in Acts 16-18; (3) the letter's multitude of intimate details regarding



Paul; and (4) multiple, early, historical verifications.

Date

Timothy had been dispatched by Paul from Athens back to Thessalonica to check on the flock and encourage them in their faith (1 Thess 3:1-2, 5). Timothy returned to Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:5), bringing good news of their faith and love (1 Thess 3:6-8). In response to Timothy's good news, Paul penned 1 Thessalonians, most likely in fall AD 50, while at Corinth.

There is no indication that Paul is responding to a letter as in 1 Corinthians 7:1. Some have conjectured that Paul wrote from Athens (cf. Acts 17:15-34), but there is no evidence that Timothy returned to Paul at Athens. If Galatians was written before the Jerusalem Council (AD 49), then this is Paul's second epistle. If not, then this represents Paul's first canonical letter.

Audience

While Paul had a brief ministry to the Jews at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4), it appears that the broader scope and longer duration focused on the Gentiles (1 Thess 1:9-10). This would lead one to conclude that he wrote primarily to the Gentile converts and would account for the fact that Paul never quotes directly from the Old Testament. However, there are scores of allusions to the only Bible of their day as reference points for Paul's content. A few have suggested that the church was divided into a Gentile group and a Jewish group with 1 Thessalonians going to the Gentiles and 2 Thessalonians intended for the Jews. No credible evidence, internal or external, supports this hypothesis.

Purposes

Paul's reasons for writing flowed from his shepherd's heart which was concerned about the flock from which he had been separated. Some of Paul's purposes clearly include:

- encouraging the church (1:2-10)
- answering false allegations (2:1-12)
- comforting the persecuted church (2:13-16)
- expressing his joy in their faith (2:17-3:13)
- reminding them of the importance of moral purity (4:1-8)

- condemning the sluggard's lifestyle (4:11-12)
- correcting misunderstandings of future events (4:13-5:11)
- defusing potential tensions within the flock (5:12-15)
- exhorting them in the basics of Christian living (5:16-22)

Authenticity

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is strongly attested to early and frequently. Some of these witnesses include:

1. The Didache (c. AD 125)
2. Marcion (c. AD 140)
3. Muratorian list (c. AD 180)
4. Irenaeus (c. AD 180)
5. Tertullian (c. AD 200)
6. Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 200)
7. Origen (c. AD 230)

The canonicity of 1 Thessalonians has never been seriously challenged. Were there other letters written to Thessalonica before this one? There is no evidence whatsoever to that end. It is true Paul corresponded with the Corinthians on more occasions than the two canonical letters (cf. 1 Cor 5:11; 2 Cor 2:3), but he mentioned that fact in his correspondence. There is no parallel in the Thessalonian letters except in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 which most naturally points to 1 Thessalonians.

Major Themes

Six major emphases can be detected in 1 Thessalonians:

- 1) an apologetic emphasis, i.e. the defense of the behavior of Paul and his co-workers;
- 2) an ecclesiastical emphasis, i.e. the portrayal of a healthy, growing church;
- 3) a pastoral emphasis, i.e. the example of shepherding activities and attitudes;
- 4) an eschatological emphasis, i.e. the focus on future events as the church's present hope;
- 5) a missionary emphasis, i.e. the importance of evangelism and church planting;
- 6) a spiritual emphasis, i.e. the centrality of sanctification in the Christian life.

There are several important subjects which Paul might have been expected to address, but in fact did not. They include: (1) church government and offices; (2) spiritual gifts; (3) family matters of the husband, wife, and children; (4) master and slave relationships; (5) church ordinances; and (6) great doctrinal essays such as those found in Romans and 1 Corinthians.

Theological Importance

First Thessalonians makes major contributions in several areas of doctrine:

- 1) Bibliology (the study of the Bible), see 1 Thess 2:13;
- 2) Ecclesiology (the study of the church), see 1 Thess 1:1–3:13;
- 3) Eschatology (the study of future events), see 1 Thess 4:13–5:11;
- 4) Soteriology (the study of salvation), see 1 Thess 1:5, 9-10; 5:9-10, 23-24.

In some cases, the contributions encompass clear, undeniable statements about a certain doctrine. At other times, the issues involve passages that at first glance are difficult to interpret. These latter issues are primarily eschatological and include: the coming wrath (1:10; 5:9); Christ's coming (2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23); the events related to the rapture (4:13-18); and the meaning of the Day of the Lord (5:1-11).

2 Thessalonians

Authorship

As in 1 Thessalonians, Paul identifies himself twice as the author of this letter (1:1; 3:17). Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, Paul's co-laborers in founding the church, are included also (1:1). The evidence, both within this letter and with regard to historical confirmation, strongly points to Paul as the only possible author. Objections to Pauline authorship based on internal factors, such as unusual vocabulary or style of writing, are not weighty enough to overturn this evidence.

The substantiation of Pauline authorship is equally impressive in both letters.

Date

The occasion prompting 2 Thessalonians is not as clear biblically as it was for 1 Thessalonians (cf. 1 Thess 3:1-8). Apparently, Paul was aware of the happenings in Thessalonica through correspondence and/or couriers (cf. 'we hear', 3:11). The church had become more effective (1:3), but the pressure and persecution had enlarged as well. So, Paul wrote to his beloved flock which had been discouraged by persecution (ch. 1), deceived by false teachers (ch. 2), and disobedient to Paul's commands (ch. 3). In all likelihood, this letter follows several months after 1 Thessalonians, in late AD 50 or early AD 51.

Paul remained in Corinth when he wrote this second epistle. Some have suggested that Paul penned this from Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21), but his eighteen months stay in Corinth provided ample time for a follow-up letter to be authored.

In recent years, a few scholars have suggested the possibility that 2 Thessalonians was actually written prior to 1 Thessalonians. At least three reasons argue strongly against this. First, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 refers to a previous letter (most likely 1 Thessalonians), while 1 Thessalonians does not. Second, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-8 reports the occasion for the first letter and it is hard to imagine a letter written prior to this. Third, it is far more likely that the church progressed from less persecution to greater persecution with the passage of time, that doctrinal problems were few at the start but expanded with time, and that there were hints of sinful behavior towards the beginning which later grew into major sin requiring direct confrontation. This is, in fact, the progressive pattern when moving from 1 Thessalonians to 2 Thessalonians.

Audience

See discussion on First Thessalonians (page 25).

Purposes

Paul writes to bolster a church which is growing in the midst of painful trials. The purposes of this epistle are:

- 1) to comfort a persecuted church (1:3-12);
- 2) to correct a frightened and falsely-taught church about the future (2:1-12);
- 3) to confront a disobedient and undisciplined church (3:6-15).

Authenticity

Like 1 Thessalonians, this second epistle has impeccable, early credentials of affirmation. They include:

1. Ignatius (c. AD 110)
2. Polycarp (c. AD 135)
3. Justin Martyr (c. AD 140)
4. Marcion (c. AD 140)
5. Muratorian list (c. AD 180)
6. Irenaeus (c. AD 180)
7. Tertullian (c. AD 200)
8. Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 200)
9. Origen (c. AD 230)

Major Themes

Several emphases appear evident:

- 1) a pastoral emphasis, i.e. encouraging the saints in discouraging circumstances;
- 2) an eschatological emphasis, i.e. correcting prophetic error taught by false teachers;
- 3) an ecclesiastical emphasis, i.e. applying church discipline to flagrantly disobedient believers.

Theological Importance

Eschatology dominates the theological issues. It could well be that this letter is referred to later by Peter when he remarks, through Silas, that some of Paul's teaching is hard to understand (2 Pet 3:15-16). Eternal reward and retribution are discussed in 1:5-10 with such general terms that it is difficult to precisely identify some of the details with regard to time. Matters concerning the Day of the Lord (2:2), the restrainer (2:6-7), and the lawless one (2:3-4, 8-10) provide some of the most challenging prophetic material to interpret. One of



the clearest statements on the fate of unbelievers is found in 1:9. Church discipline is the major focus of chapter three, which needs to be considered along with Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, and Galatians 6:1-5 in order to get a more complete biblical picture.

