

Introduction

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Introduction

We begin our study this morning in the book of 1st Thessalonians. It is a book that gives hope to the believer. It acknowledges that this life is hard, but encourages us not to look at our circumstances, but to the reality of the return of Jesus. This is the believer's "blessed hope". It also calls believers to purity. If Jesus is coming back, we should prepare ourselves to meet Him.

2

A Church Planted

The church at Thessalonica was founded by Paul on His second missionary journey in Macedonia (Greece). We read about Paul's visit there in Acts 17:1-9a.

3

A Church Planted

Acts 17:2-3

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

We see that Paul ministered for three Sabbaths, reasoning from the Scriptures Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. Paul goes on to state that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ)

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A Church Planted

Acts 17:4

And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

Notice those who placed their faith in Jesus. Some of the Jews did, but a great “multitude” of devout Greeks did as well as some of the leading women in the city.

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A Church Planted

Wherever God is doing a great work, you can expect Satan and his followers to do all in their power to try to hinder it. A wise teacher of mine used to state, “Where the battle is the strongest, the prize is the greatest. Satan does not fight over piddly stuff!”

Verse 5 states, **“But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar...”**

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A Church Planted

The believers in the city helped Paul leave the city. Those trying to disrupt the work of God may have thought that they had won. However, we must remember that God is always in control. Paul goes on to the next city, but a body of believers who were indwelt by The Holy Spirit remained in Thessalonica.

Paul did not abandon the church. We know that he had contact with them. His letters reflect joy over the spiritual progress the Thessalonians had made.

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Thessalonica

Thessalonica was the largest and most important city in the Roman province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was a thriving seaport located at the head of a protected Gulf of the Aegean Sea.

Perhaps Thessalonica's greatest asset was its location on the Egnatian Way, the major east-west highway of the Roman Empire, which ran from what is now Albania to Byzantium (Constantinople; Istanbul). Thessalonica's main street was part of that great highway linking Rome with the eastern regions of the empire.

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Thessalonica

Thessalonica was founded about 315 bc by Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's generals, who became king of Macedonia after the Alexander's death. When the Romans conquered Macedonia (168 bc) and divided it into four republics, they made Thessalonica the capital of one of them. When Macedonia became a Roman province (148 bc), Thessalonica became its Roman capital.

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Thessalonica

Thessalonica backed Antony and Octavian in their successful campaign against Brutus and Cassius. As a reward, it was made a free city in 42 bc As a free city, Thessalonica enjoyed freedom from certain taxes. But most important, the city was granted a large measure of self-government; its people chose their own magistrates, known as politarchs ("city authorities"; Acts 17:6). Though skeptics once questioned Luke's use of that term, numerous inscriptions have verified its accuracy.

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Population

Thessalonica had a cosmopolitan population of about a quarter of a million people, including a large enough Jewish population to support a synagogue. The Jewish presence in Thessalonica was significant and influential.

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The Church

We know that the church was made up of both Jews and Greeks. Many Greeks had become disenchanted with the polytheism of the Greeks. The monotheism of Judaism would have been appealing and many “God fearing” Greeks had become proselytes. These readily accepted Paul’s message of the Gospel.

However, many of these grew up in pagan idolatry and had much to learn. For the Jews they had come to trust legalistic tradition and rituals and needed to understand the importance of their relationship with God.

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The Church

The charges brought up before the city rulers were serious. Many people who were accused of supporting a king other than the emperor (treason) were put to death. For the rulers of the city, to have such a charge brought to them was troubling. If they failed to act promptly and decisively, they too could be charged with treason and be put to death. The turmoil that drove Paul and his team out of town did not cease when they left. This infant church continued to face persecution in Paul's absence.

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The Church

Those in opposition to the church attacked the character of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Paul will defend his character at multiple points in the book.

In light of the persecution, Paul encourages them to look forward and place their hope and trust in Jesus which is one of the main themes of Paul's writing.

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The Church

The placement of Thessalonica is strategic to the spread of Christianity. Being on the Egnatian Way allows the gospel to be spread to those passing through. It will travel east to Asia Minor, and west to Rome. Its strategic importance allows us to understand the spiritual battle the church was facing.

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So What ...

Each of us have our own area to spread the Gospel. We need to let our light shine. Yes, there may be some resistance, but that lets us know there is something worth fighting for. Like the Thessalonians, we need to look forward . Jesus is coming back and that is our blessed hope!

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