

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST THESSALONIANS

September, 1993

I. Founding of the Church at Thessalonica.

- A. Occurred during the second missionary journey, April 50-Sept. 52AD.
- B. In Troas Paul had a vision to go into Europe, Act.16:9,10.
- 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, Timothy, and Luke 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 (Phil.4:16) would have taken more than a three week duration since it was a hundred miles away.
 - 3. The doctrinal knowledge apparent in First Thessalonians would indicate a longer time with the church.
- J. Based on all this, it is concluded that Paul's stay at Thessalonica was a period of around three months (from the first of November to the last of January of 51AD).
- K. Paul had to leave the city because of the persecution.

Paul's success aroused the envy and enmity of the Jews, Act.17:5.

- 1. They instigated a rabble (rent-a-mob) who attacked the house of Jason where Paul was staying, and hauled both Jason and other believers before the city magistrates on a charge of sedition against Caesar, 17:6,7.
- 2. They bound Jason over. He had to give security for the conduct of his guests, and so to avoid further trouble he got them secretly out of town, 17:8-10 (for the legal procedure see A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the NT*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 95-97).

II. The occasion and date of the writing of First Thessalonians.

- A. When they arrived in Athens (after Berea), Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1Thess.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.
- 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. Paul wrote this letter in early summer 51AD (his second letter after Galatians).

III. Purpose of First Thessalonians.

- A. To express his thankfulness for them.

- B. To defend his ministry against slander, 2:9,10.
- C. To encourage believers to stand against persecution, 3:2,3.
- D. To warn them not to revert to pagan sexual practices, 4:1-8.
- E. To exhort them to work for a living and not sponge off of others, 4:11,12.
- F. To inform them of what happens to the Christians, who die before the Rapture, 4:13-18.
- G. To teach about the day of the Lord, 5:1-11.

IV. Structure of First Thessalonians.

- A. Greeting, 1:1.
- B. Thanksgiving, 1:2-12.
- C. Apostolic Defense, 2:1-12.
 - 1. The Missionaries' Visit, 2:1-4.
 - 2. The Missionaries' Conduct, 2:5-8.
 - 3. The Missionaries' Example, 2:9-12.
- D. Further Thanksgiving, 2:13-16.
- E. Plans for a Second Visit, 2:17 - 3:13.
 - 1. Out of Sight, Not Out of Mind, 2:17-20.
 - 2. Mission of Timothy, 3:1-5.
 - 3. Joy and Thanksgiving at Timothy's Report, 3:6-10.
 - 4. First Prayer Wish for the Thessalonian Christians, 3:11-13.
- F. Exhortation.
 - 1. On Keeping the Traditions, 4:1,2.
 - 2. On Sexual Purity, 4:3-8.
 - 3. On Brotherly Love, 4:9-12.
 - 4. On the Dead in Christ, 4:13-18.
 - 5. On the Day of the Lord, 5:1-11.
 - 6. On the Recognition of Leaders, 5:12,13.
 - 7. On Various Christian Duties, 5:14-22.
 - 8. Second Prayer Wish for the Thessalonians, 5:23,24.
- G. Letter Closing, 5:25-28.