

THESSALONIANS INTRODUCTION

The city of Thessalonica

Thessalonica was a city of great importance in Greek influence for about twenty centuries. Being founded by the Macedonian king, Cassander, in 315 B.C., it was named after his wife, who was a sister of Alexander the Great. It was made a political capital at a later time, and was made a "free city" in 42 B.C. because it was on the side of Anthony and Octavius in the Second Civil War. It was located on the Egnation Road, which was a great highway that connected East and West. Because of a great harbor there that it was a strategic point which made it a great and thriving center of culture and commerce. It was a key center in world trade, in Roman government, in Jewish influence, in Hellenistic traditions, and next in Christian missionary approach.

The Church at Thessalonica

When Paul and his companions set sail from Troas across the Aegean Sea and landed in Macedonia, the Christian missionary invasion of Europe had begun (Acts 16:6-12). Leaving Philippi, it would appear from Acts 17:1 that they deliberately selected Thessalonica as a strategic center in which to found a Church. The story is told in Acts 17:1-10. Paul preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, but it is possible to think that his ministry continu-

ed there for several more weeks. Bicknell points that this is presupposed by Paul's working at his trade (I Thess. 2:9), and by his receiving of two gifts from Philippi during this period (Phil. 4:16). Further evidence concerning the length of stay in the city is found in the considerable number of converts from heathenism (cf. I Thess. 1:9). Such was Paul's success that the unbelieving Jews were "moved with envy," and caused so much trouble that Paul and Silas had to leave "by night" (Acts 17:10). They left them a strong, witnessing, growing Church (cf. I Thessalonians 1). ¹

The good report about the continuing success of the strategic missionary Church caused the beleaguered apostle to rejoice exceedingly (cf. I Thess. 2:19-20 and 3:7-9). With immense relief of spirit, and personal affection, he wrote I Thessalonians and sent it by some messenger unknown to us. ¹

Place and Date of Writing

It is believed and accepted that the first letter to the Thessalonians was written from Corinth (Acts 18:5) by Paul in A.D. 50 or 51, which would make it the first of his epistles written. There is still, though, a question in the minds of some scholars who believe I Corinthians to be the first.

Purpose of the Letter

Timothy brought Paul some information about the Church in Thessalonica of which Paul respond-

ed with love and encouragement. But four matters were brought to his attention that concerned him the most, and he wrote to the Thessalonian believers from his heart. (1) There were those who opposed Paul and were slandering his character and ministry. (2) Because of their past with heathen standards, some of the new converts were in danger of becoming lax. (3) On the teaching of the Second Coming there were problems and misunderstandings. (4) There was disrespect for the leadership which affected the discipline of the Church.

1. Beacon Bible Commentary, Volume 9, p. 434.