

A photograph of a sunlit forest with green trees and a grassy field. Sunbeams (crepuscular rays) are visible filtering through the canopy. The sun is positioned behind a tree trunk in the center, creating a bright lens flare. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

CALLED TO HIS KINGDOM

1 THESSALONIANS

WILDERNESS CAMP

1 THESSALONIANS

**CALLED TO
HIS KINGDOM**

STUDY NOTES • 2025



WELCOME

Dear Young People,

Welcome to Wilderness Camp 2025! We are really looking forward to studying Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians together.

Wilderness Camp is designed to help us regularly put aside time away from the distractions in our lives to spend time with God and His Word. To meet this aim, the camp involves a personal commitment by each of us as attendees to study 1 Thessalonians. These notes will help in accomplishing that, as we try to enter the lives and circumstances of the believers in Thessalonica and come to appreciate the letter they received.

The camp will be structured around interactive workshops and discussion groups rather than a series of talks, so the more time and effort we put into preparing, the better the camp will be - both for ourselves and everyone else!

What does this mean for me?

As an attendee at Wilderness Camp, you are expected to:

- Prioritise attendance at the **Preparatory Workshops** and your **Mentor Sessions**.
- **Listen to the series of studies**, available on the website.
- Study 1 Thessalonians using the **Camp Notes / Workbook**, as well as any other materials you may find helpful.
- **Mark your study** into your Bible.

With that done, we will all be well prepared for the activities at the Camp.

We would like to thank the many Brothers and Sisters who have contributed to these notes and pray that God will remember their work for good.

1 Thessalonians is an enjoyable and achievable study. We recommend you plan out and regularly put aside time for your study in order to complete it. Please get in touch with us early if there is anything we can do to assist you in planning or completing your study.

We trust that each of us will be inspired by this letter to '*walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His Kingdom and glory*', and look forward to sharing Wilderness Camp 2025 with you, God willing.

In hope of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Wilderness Camp Committee

November 2024

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RESOURCES

In preparing these notes, the following sources have been most helpful and are recommended to any who may like further reading.

BOOKS

In-text Citation	Full Reference
(Booker, pXX)	Waiting for His Son by Bro George Booker (1985). Published by <i>The Tamarisk Publishing Company</i> , England.
(C&H, pXX)	The Life and Epistles of St Paul by Conybeare & Howson. 16 th Reprinting (1980), <i>Eerdmans Publishing Company</i> , Michigan. (<i>Non-Christadelphian</i>).
(Emerson, pXX)	Walk Worthy of God by Bro David Emerson (2016). Published by CSSS, South Australia.

STUDIES

- *The Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians* - Bro Matt Davies
- *1 & 2 Thessalonians* - Bro Roger Lewis

KEY ABBREVIATIONS & REFERENCE WORKS

ESV = English Standard Version
ISV = International Standard Version
LEB = Lexham English Bible
LXX = The Septuagint Old Testament
NASB = New American Standard Bible
NIV = New International Version
Roth = Rotherham's Translation
RSV = Revised Standard Version
YLT = Young's Literal Translation

Cp = compare
Gk = Greek
Heb = Hebrew
mg = margin
s/w = same word

Barnes = Barnes Commentary

Camb. Comm. = The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

C&H = The Life and Epistles of St Paul by Conybeare & Howson

ECNT = Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, *Thessalonians*, by Gary Shogren

ESV Study Bible = The ESV Study Bible, Crossway, 2008 Ed.

Mounce = Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament, by William D Mounce

Str = Strong's Concordance

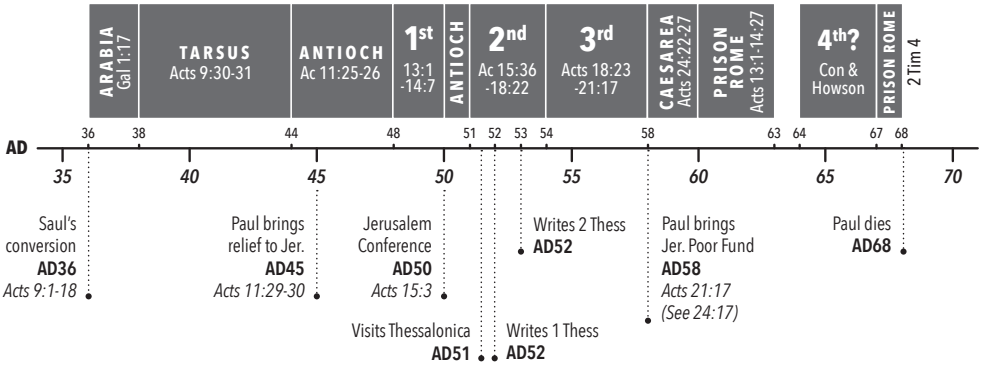
TDNT = Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

Thay = Thayer's Greek Definitions

A scenic landscape featuring a stone path that leads up a lush, green mountain slope. The path is constructed from large, irregular stones in shades of grey, tan, and reddish-brown. The surrounding vegetation is dense and vibrant green, with some taller trees and shrubs scattered across the hillside. In the background, the mountain rises against a bright blue sky filled with soft, white clouds. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

BACKGROUND

TIMELINE OF PAUL'S LIFE



Taken from Conybeare & Howson, Pg 832-834



PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY KEY

- ① Paul & Silas begin at Antioch (Ac 15:36)
- ② Go through Syria & Cilicia (15:41)
- ③ Come to Derbe & Lystra, Timothy joins them (16:1-3)
- ④ Phrygia & Galatia (16:4-6)
- ⑤ Forbidden to preach in Asia... and Bithynia (16:6-7)
- ⑥ Vision at Troas... Come over to Macedonia and help us (16:8-9)
- ⑦ ⑧ Samothracia & Neapolis (16:11)
- ⑨ Philippi (16:12)
- ⑩ ⑪ Pass through Amphipolis & Apollonia
- ⑫ **Arrive at Thessalonica (17:1)**
- ⑬ Paul and Silas sent to Berea (17:10)
- ⑭ Paul brought to Athens (17:15)
- ⑮ Come to Corinth (18:1)
- ⑯ Come to Ephesus (18:19)
- ⑰ Syria, Caesarea and Antioch (18:18,22)

INTRODUCTION

Of all the ecclesias of the first century, those of Macedonia stand without parallel. Founded on Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey, the believers of Philippi and Thessalonica would come to be two of his most beloved ecclesias.

Right from their call to the Gospel, their story is extraordinary. Against his own intention, Paul was directed to Macedonia by a divine vision where he would find fertile ground for the sowing of the Gospel message. No sooner had it taken root, however, and severe opposition arose, leading to the expulsion of their teacher from the region.

Taken from the fledgling ecclesia of Thessalonica at such an early stage, the Apostle was gripped with an urgent desire to know how they were progressing in the Truth, and to build them up in their newfound Hope. And so, after sending Timothy to support the ecclesia, he wrote them a letter - the First Epistle to the Thessalonians.

The story of these new converts is both dramatic and relatable. Like us, they were young in the Truth. Like us, they lived in surroundings hostile to its growth, and therefore needed the guidance and example of fathers in the Truth such as Paul. And like us, they were waiting for the return of Christ.

Paul's first letter to this ecclesia, therefore, provides rich exhortation for us, as we seek to walk worthy of God, who has called us unto His Kingdom and glory, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

THE HISTORY OF THESSALONICA

MACEDONIA

It was Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedon (reigned 359-336 BC), who first brought Macedonia to prominence by subduing the territory of Macedonia and Greece. Alexander then rapidly expanded the kingdom into an empire, overthrowing the Persians and extending Macedonia's dominion from the Greek peninsula down to Egypt in the south and across to India in the east.

The next two hundred years saw the Macedonian Empire gradually disintegrate through infighting amongst the generals who succeeded Alexander, eventually succumbing to Roman supremacy in 168 BC. The king of Macedonia was defeated and exiled to Rome, and his kingdom was broken up into four independent republics that were required to pay annual tribute to Rome. A further uprising was squashed in 146 BC, and Macedonia became a Roman province with the four sections as administrative units.

Thessalonica, formerly the head of one of the four republics of Macedonia, became the capital over the entire region when they were united into a Roman province.¹

THE RISE OF THESSALONICA

The Battle of Philippi (42 BC) brought Thessalonica to eminent status in the Roman world. This battle marked a major turning point in the history of Rome, turning the page on the 500-year-old Roman Republic to commence its most famous epoch – the Roman Empire (27 BC – 476 AD).²

The victor of this battle, Octavian – the great nephew and successor of Julius Caesar – later honoured Philippi for the role it played in his rise to power as the first Roman emperor. But it was not only Philippi that benefited; the nearby town of Thessalonica had, to her own advantage, thrown in her lot with Octavian as well, and was rewarded accordingly. Thessalonica was named a *Liberæ Civitates*, that is, a *Free City* – a status that conveyed important privileges which will be considered shortly.

THE CITY OF THESSALONICA

The city of Thessalonica was set on a hill sloping down to the sea, guarded by mountain ridges on either side. The city looked down upon the sheltered *Thermaic Gulf*, or Gulf of Thessalonica, over whose waters, on the distant horizon, hung the snow-capped peaks of Mt Olympus, the fabled home of the Greek gods who had once commanded the lives and affections of the Thessalonian converts (cp 1Th 1:9).

¹ C&H p248.

² See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the significance of this transition, as well as a further description of the battle of Philippi and the honourable status Rome placed upon Philippi and Thessalonica in response to their loyalty.

Thessalonica itself was a Greek city, originally named *Therma*, after the hot springs which still exist in the region. The city received its current name from one of Alexander the Great's generals, Cassander, in honour of his wife, Alexander's sister. It is said that Philip of Macedon had named his daughter *Thessalonica* in celebration of a military victory obtained at the time of her birth.³

Thessalonica was a melting pot of the cultures of the day:

It was ideally situated to be the **Roman** capital of Macedonia as it was built on the *Via Egnatia*, one of the greatest Roman military roads, built to connect Rome with its eastern provinces. It was also well connected by sea, with its busy seaport sharing the trade of the Aegean Sea with Corinth and Ephesus. Accordingly, it was made the seat of Roman administration in Macedonia. With a thriving population of some 100,000 or more⁴ at this ideal intersection between Rome and the East, Paul realised when he reached Thessalonica that *'he had reached the point most favourable for the glad proclamation... along the whole [Roman road]... no city was so large and influential as Thessalonica.'* (C&H, p247). It has been well observed that:

"This may explain, at least on geographical terms, the words of Paul: "From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place" (1Th 1:8).' (Booker, p7).

As a 'free' city, Thessalonica was able to maintain its **Greek** character and enjoyed the privilege of self-governance over its citizens, in a similar fashion to other free cities such as Athens, which had received the honour owing to its rich cultural heritage. Thessalonica was governed by local magistrates called '*politarchs*' as Luke accurately notes in Acts 17:6, who presided over the assembly of the people, described by the Greek word '*Demus*' in Acts 17:5. An inscription discovered on a triumphal arch in Thessalonica confirms that the magistrates were called '*politarchs*', and that there were seven of them in number.⁵ These Greek rulers held the power of life and death over the citizens of the place, and were responsible for its law and order, as no Roman garrison was stationed within their jurisdiction.⁶ As a result, *'There is no doubt that the magistrates of such cities would be very careful to show their loyalty to the Emperor on all suitable occasions, and to avoid every disorder which might compromise their valued dignity, and cause it to be withdrawn.'* (C&H, p257). This show of loyalty to Rome and its peace (the *Pax Romana*) would prove to have consequences for the ecclesia in time.

Finally, a considerable population of **Jews** were to be found in Thessalonica. Conybeare & Howson (p250) explain that the Jewish population of Thessalonica has always been considerable throughout history, and that in Paul's day, *"the synagogue" of the neighbourhood was at Thessalonica'*, given the evident lack of Jews in Philippi and the intervening towns. This Jewish presence would also have dramatic implications for the Apostles and the believers who would shortly be called to the Truth.

³ C&H p248, note 1.

⁴ ESV Study Bible, *Introduction to 1 Thessalonians*.

⁵ C&H, p259. This marble inscription is now housed in the British Museum. The description reads, *'This large stone was built into a wall at the Vardar Gate of Thessalonica... The inscription is important... because it is one of the few stones that attests the existence of the office of politarch, mentioned in the Bible (Acts 17:6 and 8) and in only a few other literary sources.'* (www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1877-0511-1, Accessed 15/11/2024).

⁶ C&H p257.

PREPARING THE WAY

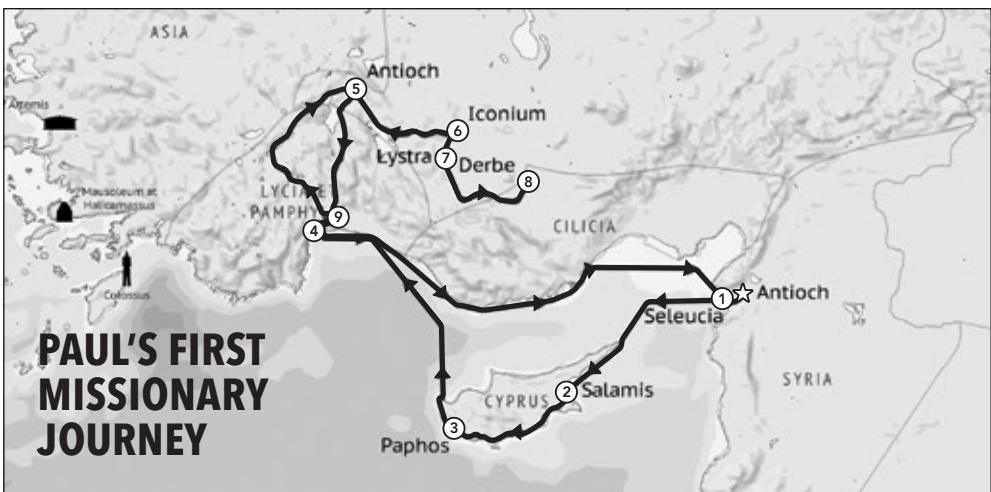
The story of the Thessalonian ecclesia begins on the 2nd Missionary Journey of Paul, as he fulfilled his commission to take the name of Christ *'far hence to the Gentiles'* (Acts 22:21). Though Paul would become *'the Apostle of the Gentiles'* (Rom 11:13), his work would involve converting the children of Israel (Acts 9:15), and that would be the place where he would begin when he arrived in the coastal town of Thessalonica, on the northern shores of the Aegean Sea.

As the brief timeline of the life of Paul illustrates (p6), it was approximately 15 years earlier that Paul, or Saul as his name was, had been struck down by a blinding light on the Damascus road, changing the course of his life forever. His encounter with the risen Lord had brought Paul to a realisation that the Gospel he had so vehemently opposed, was in fact the Truth. Upon accepting that fact, Paul became an unstoppable force for good as he took up his commission to take the Gospel *'unto the ends of the earth'* (Acts 13:47).

Before commencing the 2nd Missionary Journey, there is a little that must be said regarding the history of the man who would bring the Gospel to Thessalonica, for it bears heavily upon the experiences of the ecclesia.

THE FIRST JOURNEY (ACTS 13-14)

After spending over 10 years in Arabia, Tarsus and Antioch, Paul was commissioned by the Holy Spirit, along with Barnabas, to commence the work of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-2).



Paul's first journey took him from Antioch in Syria through the relatively local districts of Galatia - what is now eastern Turkey. The two men had a standard approach for any town they arrived at:

Paul's Standard Approach to Preaching		Acts
1	Head to the synagogue to preach	13:5,14; 14:1
2	<p>Deliver a well-reasoned summary of the Gospel. Given their Jewish audience, this would be deeply rooted in the Scriptures, (e.g. their speech at Antioch in Pisidia) and would include arguments such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reading of Scripture, as in Antioch v14-15⁷ • Highlights from Jewish history, contending that it all led to the coming of the Saviour, Jesus v16-23 • John Baptist emphasised Israel's need to repent and prepared the way for Messiah v24-25 • The Jews of Jerusalem killed Jesus, fulfilling prophecy because they didn't understand it v27-29 • God resurrected Jesus and there are witnesses alive to prove it v30-31 • Jesus' resurrection was foretold in the Jewish Scriptures v32-37 • Through this man, all who believe (Jew & Gentile) can have their sins forgiven - something Law of Moses could never do v38-39 • An invitation to salvation and warning against rejecting the Gospel (v26, 40-41) 	Ch 13
3	Predictably, their message inflamed at least some Jews and appealed to the Gentiles	13:42-45
4	When the envious Jews rejected Christ, Paul turned to offer the Gentiles the hope of life	13:45,46-49
5	<p>Almost inevitably, this led to consequences for Paul and his companions. In Antioch, the Jews stirred up some of the female proselytes,⁸ and the 'chief men' or politicians of the city, so that a public outcry was made against the missionaries, forcing them to leave the city.</p>	13:50

Having left Antioch, Paul and Barnabas walked down the road to Iconium, where a similar series of events transpired (Acts 14:1-5).

Sometimes, in towns where the Jewish population was less, such as the district of Lycaonia (Acts 14:6), Paul and Barnabas' method of preaching changed somewhat. Of course, they still taught the same Gospel, but their starting point differed as they countered pagan superstition rather than Jewish prejudice (v15-17). Yet even here, Paul and Barnabas were pursued by the envious Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who came and stirred up the people to stone Paul to the point of death (v19).

⁷ Like Philip, they probably 'began at the same Scripture' (cp Acts 8:35). Cp Christ's approach in Lk 4:16-22.

⁸ That is, Gentiles who had espoused the Jewish hope and joined themselves to the synagogue. It seems they also held some political status in Antioch, as Cambridge Commentary describes them as 'the devout women of honourable estate', and the ESV as 'devout women of high standing'.

So it was that a pattern emerged on Paul's first journey – a pattern that would continue all his life. He would preach the Gospel 'to the Jew first' and then to the Gentile⁹. The Jews would be incited to envy and would oppose his preaching¹⁰. He would be cast out of the synagogue and take up an alternative centre of operations in the city¹¹, from whence he would teach all who came to hear – Jew or Gentile – until it was time to move on, or force of circumstances moved him on. These 'circumstances' were often oppression from the rulers who had been stirred up by prominent Jews in their city.¹²

THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE (ACTS 15)

The Jewish opposition to Paul's preaching, however, did not remain outside the ecclesia. Jewish prejudice was deep-rooted, and no sooner had Paul returned to Antioch from his 1st Missionary Journey at the close of Acts 14, when a group of brethren arrived from Jerusalem claiming that a believer had to keep some elements of the Law of Moses, such as circumcision, in order to be saved. This led to a major argument in the ecclesia at Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas on one side, and these brethren from Judea on the opposing side (Acts 15:1-2).

Alarmingly, however, news soon arrived at Antioch that these Jewish brethren, or 'Judaisers' as they are often termed, had not stopped at Antioch. They had tracked down all the places Paul and Barnabas had visited on their first journey, teaching that Paul was correct in preaching Christ, but that he had omitted some essential details, such as the need to be circumcised in order to be saved.

Paul quickly found himself in an impossible situation: he needed to revisit Galatia to correct the false teachings of the Judaisers, and yet at the same time it was vital he go to Jerusalem to address the source of the problem.

He therefore did two things:

1. He wrote a letter to the ecclesias of Galatia, addressing the problem of this 'new Gospel' of the Judaisers, which the Galatians had adopted 'so soon' after their conversion (Gal 1:6-7). That is the epistle to the Galatians.
2. He then left for Jerusalem, along with Barnabas and other brethren, to deal with the root cause of the problem. This led to the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15 – a landmark consultation in the first century ecclesia, which laid out a set of foundation principles for the unified walk of Jew and Gentile in the ecclesias (Acts 15:23-29).

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch accompanied by brethren from Jerusalem, including Silas who would later join Paul on his 2nd Missionary Journey. The brethren brought with them the letter from Jerusalem which was read out to the ecclesia. The letter settled the issues in Antioch, bringing great 'consolation' and joy to the ecclesia (Acts 15:30-31).

⁹ Rom 1:16; cp Acts 13:46; 18:4-7; 19:8-9.

¹⁰ Note the theme of Jewish opposition against Paul throughout his missionary work recorded in Acts: **13**:45,50; **14**:2,4,5,19; **17**:5,13; **18**:5-6,12; **19**:8-9,13; **20**:3,19; **21**:11,27.

¹¹ Such as the house of Jason in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), the house of Justus in Corinth (18:7) and the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus (19:9-10).

¹² As in Antioch (Acts 13:50), Thessalonica (17:5,8) and Corinth (18:12, although the Jewish attempt was unsuccessful v14-16, and Paul remained there a while longer v18).

THE SECOND JOURNEY (ACTS 16-18)

Paul was not one to sit still for long, however, and he was anxious for the recent converts of Galatia. While they had originally 'run well' in the Truth (Gal 5:7), he knew they had been 'bewitched' (3:1) by 'false brethren' (2:4) who wanted to submit them once more to the 'yoke of bondage' of the Law of Moses (5:1-3). He was fearful that his 1st Missionary Journey had been in vain (4:11), and so great was his concern for them that he describes them as '*my little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you*' (4:19).

It was this anxiety for their welfare that drove Paul to propose a second journey to Barnabas:

'Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.' (Acts 15:36).

Barnabas was agreeable to the work, but he and Paul disagreed sharply on whether John Mark should accompany them. *'The contention was so sharp between them'* that Barnabas went on his own mission with John Mark to Cyprus, and Paul commenced his 2nd Missionary Journey with Silas (Acts 15:40). See map p6.

Revisiting Galatia

The first portion of the second journey involved visiting and 'confirming' the ecclesias throughout Syria, Cilicia and Galatia that had been formed during the first journey (Acts 15:41-16:6). Along the way, *'as they went... through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem'* (16:4 ESV). Then, having reassured the ecclesias and imparted the conclusions of the Jerusalem Conference, Paul turned his attention further afield.

The Call to Macedonia

It is at this point that the second journey takes a wonderful, and most unexpected, turn. Paul intended to head west into the area of Asia Minor, now western Turkey, described as 'Asia' in Acts 16:6. But he was '*forbidden by the Holy Spirit*' to preach there!

No doubt somewhat perplexed, Paul then looked north, towards Bithynia, '*but the Spirit suffered them not*' (v7). How confusing this must have seemed for Paul! What was God doing? Wasn't he meant to be preaching? And if so, then why did it have to be so difficult?

But Paul was undeterred. He knew that life in Christ was not intended to be easy; he had taught the Galatians as much (Acts 14:22). And so, with the west and north both out of bounds, he headed north-west to Troas, and it was only when he arrived there that he received a vision from Christ confirming that this was the way he should go (Acts 16:8-10).

THE LORD IN THE LIFE OF PAUL

Who was 'the Lord' who had called Paul and his companions to preach the Gospel in Macedonia (Acts 16:10)?¹³

It turns out, frequent reference is made to 'the Lord' in the life of Paul, including a number of visions he received from him. On each occasion, 'the Lord' is a reference to the Lord Jesus who had selected Paul to be his 'chosen vessel' to bear his name (Acts 9:10-17):

¹³ The Gk *kurios* translated 'Lord' in Acts 16:10 occurs over 100x in Acts and is used of both God (2:39) and Christ (2:36). It is used of both in Acts 2:34. The context, therefore, must determine who it refers to in each case.

- Acts 9:4-6; 22:8-10; 26:15 - He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus
- Acts 16:9-10 - He sent the vision of the man from Macedonia
- Acts 18:9-10 - 'The Lord' spoke to Paul in a night vision, encouraging him for his work in Corinth.
- Acts 23:11 - The Lord reassured Paul that he would survive to reach Rome.

This was a tangible demonstration of the promise given by the Lord Jesus, following his commission to 'teach all nations' in Mt 28:18-20: '*Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*¹⁴ Amen.' (ESV).

The vision of the man from Macedonia seems to be the first 'tangible' assurance from Christ that he actually wanted Paul to conduct this second journey. It is a powerful lesson for us in our endeavours in preaching the Truth, that just because doors seem to close, it doesn't mean God doesn't approve, or that we should just give up. Perhaps God just has different plans. This highlights the importance of prayerfully seeking God's direction at each step of the way.

As Paul set sail to Macedonia, however, he did so with a divine tail wind (literally)! It has been noted¹⁵ that a subsequent voyage from Philippi to Troas took 5 days, whereas on this occasion the journey from Troas to Neapolis (the port of Philippi) took only 2 days (cp Acts 16:11-12 with 20:6). And so it was with God's blessing that the Gospel landed upon the shores of Europe - for the first time, insofar as the journeys of Paul are concerned.

Philippi (Acts 16)

The first major stop of Paul's company was Philippi, which occupies the remainder of Acts 16. In this Roman town, or 'colony' as it is referred to in Acts 16:12, the Gospel found a very special place in the hearts of a few, including Lydia, the Jailor, and both of their households. But Philippi was a hostile environment for any religion that was associated with Jewry, because it was largely populated by veterans from the Roman legions and its populace were fiercely loyal to Caesar¹⁶. At the time of Paul's arrival in Philippi in about AD 51, the Jews had recently been expelled from Rome (as mentioned retrospectively in Acts 18:2). This led to a spirit of antisemitism in the Roman population of Philippi as well. When Paul arrived, there was no synagogue, indicating a depleted Jewish population.¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, Paul's preaching and miracles in Philippi were met with harsh opposition. They were brought before the magistrates with the accusation that, '*These men, **being Jews**, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, **being Romans**.*' (Acts 16:21).

The beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas followed, along with their miraculous deliverance at midnight. Having been released the next day, Paul returned to the house of Lydia (v40), and after comforted the newly formed ecclesia, set out on a three day journey to a very different, and more politically imposing, city - that of Thessalonica, capital of Macedonia.

¹⁴ Gk *aión*, translated 'world' in the KJV and 'age' in the ESV & Roth, can mean either 'forever' or 'a period of time, an age' (Thay). Here it is a reference to the Jewish age that concluded in AD 70.

¹⁵ By Conybeare & Howson, Ch 11, p219.

¹⁶ See Appendix 1 for further details.

¹⁷ The New Testament scholar, FF Bruce, explains that there had to be 10 Jewish men present in order to form a Jewish synagogue (*New Testament History*, p119,145).

THE ECCLESIA OF THESSALONICA



FORMATION OF THE ECCLESIA (ACTS 17)

We are not told how long the journey from Philippi to Thessalonica took, but the noting of Amphipolis and Apollonia by Luke (Acts 17:1) implies that these may have been Paul's resting places each night. Each of the four towns lies on the Egnatian Way and is separated by about a day's journey (50-60km) from the next, so that a 3-day journey appears likely.¹⁸

It would have been an agonising 160km walk for Paul and Silas, their backs raw from the Roman beating in Philippi (Acts 16:23,33), and their arrival at Thessalonica in such a state made an impression upon those who became sympathetic to their message (1Th 2:2).

Despite his physical condition, however, Paul was not to be held back, and Acts 17:1 commences the account of his preaching in Thessalonica, and of the inception of that ecclesia.

1 *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:*

Thessalonica, as noted in the background (p9), was very different to Philippi, in that it had a sizeable Jewish population. Given no synagogue is mentioned in Amphipolis, Apollonia or Philippi, it has been suggested that the synagogue here was the centre of Jewish life for the wider district.¹⁹

As such, the reception to Paul's message would be markedly different in Thessalonica compared with Philippi, and the challenges the ecclesia would face would also be of a different nature (see Appendix 1, p103).

2 *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,*

As his manner was

Paul's norm when he entered a town was to walk straight to the synagogue. For example, he did this after his conversion in Damascus (Acts 9:20,22), on his first journey at Salamis (13:5), at Antioch in Pisidia (13:14), and in Iconium (14:1).

This was not simply a blind habit; it was a principle, as Paul explained in Antioch: *'it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you'* (Acts 13:46). Cp Rom 1:16.

Three sabbath days

This would require a minimum stay in Thessalonica of two weeks, however this was only the period of his preaching in the synagogue, after which he evidently went to the house of Jason (v5-6). A longer stay is indicated by:

¹⁸ C&H, p245.

¹⁹ C&H, p250. They also note that some manuscripts have the definite article. YLT & Darby: *'where was the synagogue'*.

- The language of Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians (1Th 2:9; 2Th 3:7-8),
- The fact that the Philippians sent two relief packages to him while he was in Thessalonica (Php 4:16).
- The fact that the greater portion of the ecclesia appears to have been Gentiles, who were likely converted after the synagogue period (see p23).

It seems probable, therefore, that Paul was in Thessalonica for about 2-3 months.

Reasoned with them out of the Scriptures

Reasoned Gk *dialogomai* G1256 = 'to say thoroughly, that is, discuss in argument or exhortation' (Str). From which we get English 'dialogue'.

This word occurs 13x in Scripture. Of those, 10 occurrences are in Acts, all of which relate to Paul. For example, he 'disputed' (s/w) in Athens (17:17), 'reasoned' in Corinth (18:4) and 'reasoned' at Ephesus (18:19). This was Paul's signature approach - he always had a carefully thought out, well-reasoned argument from Scripture - a powerful lesson for us in preaching the Truth! A summary of Paul's argument is given in v3.

3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Opening Gk *dianoigo* G1272 = 'to open thoroughly, to expound' (Str). s/w used of Christ's 'opening' of the Scriptures to the disciples, and of their eyes to understand who he was (Lk 24:31-32,45).

Alleging Gk *paratithemi* G3908 = 'to place alongside, that is, present' (Str).

The Jews struggled with the thought that their Messiah - the Anointed of Yahweh - would have to suffer, let alone die (e.g. Lk 24:17-21).

Paul therefore opened up the Scriptures and laid out the truth concerning Christ before them. The substance of his message is summarised in the remainder of the verse:

	Paul's Message (Acts 17)	Old Testament	Conclusion
1	That the Messiah had to suffer and die (v3)	Isa 53:10 - 'It pleased Yahweh to bruise him'	The servant of God must die ²⁰
2	The Messiah would be resurrected (v3)	Psa 16:10 - 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell'	The candidate of Yahweh would be resurrected ²¹
3	That 'this Jesus' is the Messiah (v3)	-	-
4	That he will be King (v7)	Psa 110:1-2 - 'Yahweh said to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand'	The Messiah would be heir to David's throne as king over all ²²

Having established his OT foundation, Paul would go on to contend that Jesus of Nazareth was the perfect candidate for the Messiah:

- He came from God - the miracles proved it (Acts 2:22).

²⁰ Other OT refs: Gen 3:15; Psa 22:1-21; Dan 9:24-26; Zech 12:10; 13:6

²¹ Other OT refs: Psa 2:7; Isa 53:10-12; Jonah 1-2

²² Other OT refs: Gen 22:17; 49:10; 2Sam 7:12-13; Psa 2:6,12; Zech 6:12-13

- He was killed – everyone knew it (Lk 24:18).
- He was resurrected – 500 people saw him (1Cor 15:3-6).

And in addition to all that, according to the 70-weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9, he came at exactly the right time. Jesus was indeed the Messiah!

Thus, Paul shared with them ‘*the things concerning the Kingdom of God*’ (Acts 17:7) ‘*and the name of Jesus Christ*’ (v3).

4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

Consorted Gk *proskleroo* G4345 = ‘to give a common lot to, i.e. to associate with’ (Str). Vines indicates it means ‘*they joined themselves to*’ or ‘*threw in their lot with*’ Paul and Silas. ESV: ‘joined’.

Three groups of people aligned themselves with Paul and Silas:

Description	Identification	Response
‘Some of them’	Some of the Jews of the synagogue	‘Some’
‘The devout Greeks’	Proselytes attending the synagogue	‘A great multitude’
‘The chief women’	Wives of the statesmen of the city	‘Not a few’

The latter group is interesting, because back in Antioch, women of high standing had been stirred up *against* Paul (Acts 13:50), but here they are standing *with* Paul. These women would have influenced their husbands, the politicians of the city, creating a groundswell of support for the missionaries.

So Paul had a huge tailwind here in Thessalonica – an unusual experience for the Apostle, and an exciting opportunity for the spread of the Gospel into Europe. But this public interest also caught the attention of the Jews, who were not a little concerned (v5)!

5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

The Jews which believed not... moved with envy

Some Jews had believed and joined the new ecclesia (v4), but those who didn’t were left watching their numbers in sharp decline. Not only had some of their fellow Jews deserted, but ‘*a great multitude*’ of the Gentiles who had previously converted to Judaism and joined the synagogue had now left as well. This incited a deep spirit of jealousy in the Jews that remained. Like those of Christ’s day, they didn’t like Paul’s *doctrine*, but they were more concerned about his *disciples* – the followers who had deserted them (Jn 18:19). As in Antioch, it was when the Jews ‘*saw the multitudes*’ that they were filled with envy (Acts 13:45).

The unbelieving Jews would prove to be one of the greatest enemies of the spread of the Gospel in the first century. From Acts 9:23, the title of ‘**the Jews**’ is frequently used by Luke as a shorthand expression to refer to Jewish people who opposed the Gospel – e.g. 9:23; 12:3; 13:45,50; 14:2,4; 17:5,13; 18:12 etc. (ESV Study Bible on Acts 9:23).

Took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company

The Jews who opposed Paul had a problem, however, and that was that many of the leaders of the city were sympathetic to his cause, owing to the conversion of their wives (v4). The Jews were therefore forced to resort to base tactics. They walked down to the marketplace and pulled together a bunch of idle men who were loitering there. These men have been aptly described as, *'degenerate individuals of negotiable morality. From the marketplace - loiterers, troublemakers, people for hire, whose allegiance could be bought with a price.'*

Lewd fellows Gk *poneros* G4190 *aner* G435 = 'bad' 'men' (Thay)

Baser sort Gk *agoraios* G60 = 'belonging to the marketplace' (Thay). Thayer adds that the word can refer to those who frequent the marketplace, e.g. 'hucksters, petty traffickers, retail dealers, idlers, loungers, the common sort, low, vulgar.'

The ESV captures the scene well in v5: *'But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.'*

Set all the city on an uproar

The Jews' goal was to incite a mob mentality, because once people are in a frenzy they are liable to get caught up with the crowd rather than being influenced by logic (Acts 19:29,32).

Assaulted the house of Jason

ESV: 'attacked'

And sought to bring them out to the people

People Gk *demos* G1218 = 'the mass of people assembled in a public place' (Thay).

Conybeare & Howson (p258) suggest that *demos* is a technical term referring to the 'senate' or 'assembly' of the people, which was part of Thessalonica's policy of self-government, and one of the privileges imparted by Rome upon a *Free City* (see p8).

6-7 ***And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, [one] Jesus.***

Again, the NIV portrays the scene (v6-7): *'But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."'*

Drew

i.e. 'dragged' (ESV, NIV). This was a violent process - the same word is used to describe the way in which Paul *'dragged off'* men and women to prison, in Acts 8:3.

Jason and certain brethren

Unable to locate the 'ringleaders', they capture some of the new converts. As it turns out, this was possibly a more powerful tactic for the Jews to use, for Paul was more concerned

about his new brothers and sisters going through persecution than he was for himself (see note v10).

The rulers of the city

Rulers of the city Gk *politarchs* G4173 = 'A ruler of a city or citizens' (Thay). See comments p9 regarding the significance of this term.

Turned the world upside down

Ironically, it was the accusers who were causing the trouble! But the accusation was a cover for their real motive. This was a sore point with the Jews at this time, because they had recently been expelled from Rome because of the unrest they had caused – apparently for rioting over this very same issue! The historian Suetonius wrote in about 120 AD:

'Because the Jews of Rome were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus he [Claudius] expelled them from the city'.²³

Many NT scholars believe that *Chrestus* here is a reference to *Christ* (including FF Bruce in his comments on the above citation). To the pagan historian, Christ would have seemed little more than a rebel leader whose teachings had led to extreme in-fighting amongst the Jews. Suetonius' comment is almost certainly a reference to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Emperor Claudius in AD 49, recorded in Acts 18:2.

Whom Jason hath received

A common ploy of the Jews in opposing Christianity was to target those who *associated with* its proponents. Compare the parents of the blind man who was healed, who were scared that they would be excommunicated from the synagogue if they associated with Christ (Jn 9:22).

These all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.

This was an extremely serious charge. As FF Bruce explains,

'Shortly after Claudius' edict expelling the Jews from Rome, disturbances not unlike those which precipitated that edict broke out at Thessalonica. Paul and his companions, who brought the Gospel to that city... incurred opposition from the leaders of the local Jewish community, who brought a serious charge against them before the civic magistrates (the 'politarchs'): "These men who have been subverting the whole world have come here also... they flout Caesar's decrees and proclaim a rival emperor, Jesus" (Acts 17:6-7). The wording of the charge fits well into the picture of unruly movements within Jewish communities throughout the empire... which constituted a threat to public order in places where the Jews were resident'.²⁴

8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

The accusation had the desired effect. In the same way that Pilate was pressured by the Jews that he was '*not Caesar's friend*' if he let Jesus go (Jn 19:12), so the rulers and the crowd feared they could not let this go unchecked, because that would imperil their 'free' status

²³ Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25:4, cited by FF Bruce (1969) in *New Testament History*, Ch 23, p297.

²⁴ FF Bruce (1969) in *New Testament History*, Ch 23, p300.

before Rome, and the politarchs could lose their position. The rulers therefore felt bound to act (see quote p9, from C&H p257), which they do in v9.

9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

ESV: *'And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.'*

Jason and the other brethren who had been arrested had to 'post a bond' (NIV), that is, they had to hand over a sum of money (no doubt a large one), and then ensure there was no more trouble in the city, otherwise they would forfeit the money, and possibly be imprisoned themselves.

This direct attack on the brothers and sisters deeply troubled Paul. He later writes that he would have given his own life for the new believers (1Th 2:8), like a mother or father for their child (cp 1Th 2:7,11). When he later travelled to Berea and then to Athens, he was restless because of his anxieties about how the Jews were treating his brothers and sisters back in Thessalonica, and whether they were able to withstand the pressure. In the end, it was all too much, and he had to send Timothy to find out how they were faring (1Th 3:1-5).

10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

The brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas

Paul doubtless felt like he had no option. If he stayed, it was not he who would suffer, but the brothers and sisters who lived here.

On other occasions, when it was Paul himself who was under threat, he was in no hurry to leave (cp Acts 14:19-20; 16:40).

By night

This shows the seriousness of the situation. Joseph and Mary had had to flee under cover of darkness when Herod wanted to kill Jesus (Mt 2:14), and Paul was later evacuated by night when the Jews had plotted to murder him (Acts 23:20-21,31).

Unto Berea... went into the synagogue of the Jews

Paul was undeterred, though not unaffected. All these persecutions and worries had a tremendous impact on him, but he would not let his troubles impede the progress of the Gospel.

It has often been said that the Berean ecclesia was *'more noble'* than the Thessalonian ecclesia. Notice, however, that the statement in v11 that *'these were more noble than those in Thessalonica'* is referring to the Jews of Berea (v10) whose response was far more honourable, in that they searched the Scriptures to see whether Paul's arguments (which he took from them, cp v3) really held up. This was an immense contrast to the Thessalonian Jews, the majority of whom had *not* believed, and were instead filled with envy against Paul (v4-5).

It wasn't long before the Thessalonian Jews heard that the man who had escaped under cover of darkness was now preaching openly in Berea, so they gave pursuit and, arriving in Thessalonica, stirred up the people against Paul once more (v13).

With the Thessalonian Jews so militantly opposed to him that they were prepared to shadow his steps to prevent his preaching work being effective, Paul was now forced to leave

Macedonia. And so, in v14 he headed to the coast, bound for Athens (v15), leaving Silas and Timothy to care for the new ecclesia at Berea (v12,14).

This brought an end to the Macedonian portion of Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey. It was not until well into his third journey, some five²⁵ or so years later, that Paul would again have the opportunity to visit his brothers and sisters in Macedonia, including the Thessalonians.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

By piecing together the Acts record with a few details from the epistles, it is possible to construct a chronology of events around the formation of the ecclesia:

#	Events (Acts)	Paul	Silas	Timothy
1	Paul, Silas & Timothy visit Thessalonica (17:1-9). ²⁶	Thess (17:1)		
2	Paul & Silas flee to Berea (17:10). No mention of Tim. ²⁷	Berea (17:10)	Thess?	
3	Jews of Thessalonica pursue Paul to Berea (17:13).	Berea		
4	Paul flees to Athens leaving Silas & Timothy in Berea (17:14-15).	Athens (17:15)	Berea (17:14)	
5	Message to Tim & Silas to meet him in Athens (17:15).			
6	Paul waits & preaches in Athens (17:16-31).			
7	Timothy & Silas come (implied by 17:15).	Athens (in response to 17:15)		
8	Paul sends them back to Macedonia. ²⁸	Athens (1Th 3:1)	Philippi / Berea?	Thess (1Th 3:1)
9	Travels to Corinth & preaches there (18:1,4).	Corinth		
10	Silas & Timothy return from Macedonia (18:5).	Corinth (18:5)		
11	Tim conveys good news of Thessalonians (1Th 3:6-7).			
12	Paul inspired to redouble his preaching (18:5).			
13	Paul, Timothy & Silas write 1 Thess (1Th 1:1; 3:1-7). ²⁹			

²⁵ 1.5yrs at Corinth (18:11) + 3yrs at Ephesus (20:31) = 4.5yrs, plus travelling time and 'some time' in Antioch (18:23).

²⁶ Likely for about 2-3 months (see comment on Acts 17:2, p16-17).

²⁷ Given Timothy is not mentioned in 17:10 when Paul and Silas were evacuated from Thessalonica, some have suggested he remained in Thessalonica a short while longer. We know that he was in Berea by the time the Jews of Thessalonica arrived to stir up trouble in 17:13-14, so it is of little consequence either way.

²⁸ While neither the arrival nor the departure of Timothy and Silas to/from Athens is mentioned in Acts, it is reasonable to assume that both men came here from Berea (based on Paul's urgent request in Acts 17:15), and that Paul sent both men back to Macedonia - Timothy to Thessalonica (1Th 3:1-5), and Silas to another Macedonian town - either Philippi or Berea - implied by Paul being 'alone' in Athens (1Th 3:1) and also point #10 in the table.

²⁹ Probably about 3 months after they left Thessalonica, given events #2-12 in the chronology table (including the formation of two ecclesias - in Berea & Athens) all had to take place during the intervening time. This would make the ecclesia only about 6 months old!

MEMBERS OF THE ECCLESIA

The ecclesia at Thessalonica was made up of a mix of brothers and sisters:

- Some Jews (Acts 17:4).
- A 'large multitude' of the devout Greeks (that is, Gentile proselytes who had converted to Judaism and joined the synagogue, Acts 17:4).
- A reasonable number of 'the chief women' - wives of the politicians (Acts 17:4).
- Jason (Acts 17:5).
- Aristarchus (Acts 20:4; 27:2).
- Secundus (Acts 20:4).
- As a general rule, the members of the ecclesia had 'turned from idols' (1Th 1:9), meaning the greater portion were most likely Gentiles who were not formerly proselytes, but rather pagan worshippers.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

As events took a turn for the worse, Paul must have been reminded of the sufferings of his Lord at the crucifixion. They show the truth of Christ's words, *'if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you'* (Jn 15:20).

Paul in Thessalonica		Christ's Crucifixion	
v3	This Jesus... is Christ	Art thou the Christ?	Lk 22:67
v5	The Jews which believed not	If I tell you, ye will not believe	Lk 22:66-67
v5	Moved with envy	For envy they had delivered him	Mt 27:18
v5	The Jews formed a violent mob	Sent band of men with weapons	Jn 18:3
v5	Set all the city on an uproar	Pilate saw... a tumult was made	Mt 27:24
v6	Turned the world upside down	The world is gone after him	Jn 12:19
v7	Contrary to decrees of Caesar	Forbidding tribute / speaking against Caesar	Lk 23:2 / Jn 19:12
v7	Saying that there is another king, Jesus	Saying that he himself is Christ a King	Lk 23:2
v8	Troubled the people and rulers	Chief priests moved the people	Mk 15:11

This was the introduction the Thessalonians were given to the Truth! Paul would later write, *'verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass'* (1Th 3:4). He might well have said that, in him, they had seen *'Jesus Christ crucified among you'* as he wrote to the Galatians (Gal 3:1). See also comment on 3:2, p60.

The big question that faced the brothers and sisters at Thessalonica, and that precipitated Paul's letter to them, was *how would the ecclesia respond to the sufferings they would face?*

The question that remains for us - are we prepared to stand up for the Truth irrespective of the cost as *'partakers of Christ's sufferings'* (1Pet 4:13)?

THE JEWISH PLOT

When we turn to the epistle itself, we find that the letter which at first appears so simple in its warmth and joy, so serene in its expressions of Paul's overflowing love for the ecclesia, is in fact interlaced with references to a threatening antagonism towards the men who had imparted the Gospel to the Thessalonians.

The militant opposition of the Jews towards Paul and his companions – both in Thessalonica and then Berea – as well as the forceful suppression of the ecclesia, was sufficient cause for concern for Paul as he journeyed from Macedonia, and is noted frequently in his letters:

- 'Having received the word in much affliction' (1Th 1:6).
- 'We were bold... to speak unto you the Gospel... with much contention' (1Th 2:2).
- 'Ye also have suffered... of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who... have chased us out (KJV mg)' (1Th 2:14-15).
- 'That no man should be moved by these afflictions' (1Th 3:3).
- 'All your persecutions and tribulations... them that trouble you' (2Th 1:4-6).

By the time he wrote his first letter to them, Paul had tried to visit Thessalonica on at least two occasions since his sudden departure, but each time his intentions were thwarted by 'Satan' (1Th 2:18) – that is, the Jews and their Gentile allies whose threats to the ecclesia (some of whom they had secured a bond over) prevented Paul's return (see p55).

A SHIFT IN STRATEGY

With Paul's departure from Macedonia, the Jews began to change their approach. They realised that brute force – while it had served a purpose in physically removing the missionaries from the region – was limited in that it could not regain the loyalty of those who had left the synagogue for this new religion. It was the *following* that the Jews coveted, and to regain it they would have to reclaim the hearts of the converts. The only way to do that was to undermine their trust in the men who had brought the message.

At first, only a few references to this character assassination by the Jews stand out from the epistle. Take, for example, the way in which Paul needs to justify the preaching and conduct of the missionaries in Ch 2:3-6 (NIV):

*'The appeal we make does **not** spring from error or impure motives, **nor** are we trying to trick you... We are **not** trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we **never** used flattery, **nor** did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were **not** looking for praise from people, **not** from you or anyone else...'*

But closer inspection reveals a considerable list of accusations levelled against Paul, each of which he needed to answer for the sake of these fresh converts, as laid out in the table on the following page.

It soon becomes clear that '**the Jews which believed not**', who had chased the missionaries from Thessalonica and then pursued them to Berea,³⁰ had not stopped their attacks. They now commenced a systematic campaign of slander which sought to undermine Paul and his message.

³⁰ Acts 17:5; 1Th 2:15; Acts 17:13 respectively

Paul's fear was that the insidious teachings of Judaism would undermine the newfound faith of the believers, and so after commencing his letter by expressing his appreciation for them and their continued faithfulness since their calling, he goes on to address the list of accusations and insinuations that his Jewish opponents had evidently rumoured following his sudden departure. Paul would doubtless have heard of these through Timothy.

Paul's Statement / Answer (1Th 2)		Implied Jewish Accusations
2:3 ISV	'Our appeal to you does not spring from deceit, impure motives, or trickery.'	Paul's been trying to trick the new converts, motivated by his own gains.
2:4	We were 'put in trust of the Gospel' by God.	He's just a self-appointed preacher.
2:4	Not as pleasing men, but God.	He's a people-pleaser. All he wants is popularity.
2:5	Neither at any time used we flattering words as ye know .	Paul's good with words, and he makes you feel good about your zeal for the Truth,
2:5 ISV	'We did not come... with a scheme to make money. God is our witness!	But really, he's on a money-making mission and he's prepared to use underhand tactics to get it - even preaching to the Gentiles!
2:6	Nor of men sought we glory - neither of you, nor of others.	And at the end of the day, it's really all about him.
2:7,8 ISV	'We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children'. In fact, we would have given our lives for you, if the need arose.	He doesn't actually care about you one bit. You only matter in terms of how much you can add to his credentials.
2:9	Ye remember ... labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you.	Even if he's not making much money, Paul just runs this scheme because he gets free food and lodging.
2:10	Ye are witnesses, and God , how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves.	Even Paul's moral integrity is questionable. He's not quite so good as he presents himself.
2:11	As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, <u>as a father his children</u> , that ye would walk worthy of God.	So why would you look to him for spiritual leadership?
2:13	We thank God that 'ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us... not as the word of men, but as it is in truth , the Word of God'.	So, now you can see that really all Paul and his followers brought to Thessalonica was a clever invention of men.
2:17-18 ESV	But since we were torn away from you , brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you— I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.	And if you want the signal proof of all that - just look at the way he runs away and leaves you on your own the moment he is challenged for his teachings!

So concerned was Paul for his Thessalonian brothers and sisters that he goes on in the closing verses of Ch 2 to explain to the Thessalonians that even his Kingdom vision was preoccupied with the prospect of seeing them in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:19-20).

Additionally, as can be seen from the preceding table, Paul had appealed time and again to the fact that the Thessalonians themselves had witnessed firsthand the apostles' genuine dedication - both to the Gospel and to themselves. This highlights the significance of the theme of the phrase '*as ye know*' throughout the Epistle.

Nobody could accuse Paul of self-centeredness or negligence, and Ch 3 would go on to illustrate this further. To his own detriment (3:1), Paul sent Timothy to enquire after their welfare (v2). Paul was concerned that the persecution of the Jews might undermine their faith (v3-5). But on Timothy's return, Paul was filled with relief because the brethren had both held to the faith taught by the Apostles and maintained their affection for them (v6-8). Paul then concludes the first half of the Epistle with a prayer that he might see his Thessalonian brothers and sisters again soon - again a reminder of how deeply he cared for them.

But, despite the present faithfulness of the Thessalonians, they were still very young in the Truth, so Paul proceeds to educate and exhort them, cautioning that any who say (as the Jews would have) that Paul's teachings could be '*despised*', were in fact despising God, who had given the missionaries His Holy Spirit (4:8; cp 5:20). The ecclesia had to be on their guard against the influence of Jewry, whose aim was to stop Paul preaching to Gentiles such as these very brothers and sisters to whom he now wrote (2:14-16).

Consequently, at the conclusion of his letter, Paul '*adjures*' the brethren that this letter be read to every single brother and sister in Thessalonica (5:27). All of them needed to know how deeply the Apostle cared for them, and to be strengthened and fortified for the persecutions that were yet to come.

OVERVIEW

OF 1 THESSALONIANS

STRUCTURE OF THE EPISTLE

PART 1: LOOKING BACK - THANKSGIVING & REASSURANCE

Ch 1 - Paul's Thankfulness for the Ecclesia

- 1:1 Greeting
- 1:2-3 Thankfulness for the Thessalonians
- 1:4-10 Their conversion & example

Ch 2 - Paul's Defence of the Missionaries

- 2:1-12 The Missionaries' Defence against Jewish detractors
 - v1-2 Their persecution in Philippi
 - v3-6 Their impeccable motivation
 - v7-8 Their gentle nurturing
 - v9 Their self-sufficiency
 - v10 Their personal integrity
 - v11-12 Their fatherly direction
- 2:13-16 Jewish antagonism to the Gospel
- 2:17-18 Paul's desire to see them again
- 2:19-20 Paul's vision for the Thessalonians

Ch 3 - Paul's Ongoing Care for the Ecclesia

- 3:1-5 Timothy sent to establish & comfort them
- 3:6-8 Timothy's good report
- 3:9-13 Paul's hope to see them again

PART 2: LOOKING FORWARD - INSTRUCTION & EXHORTATION

Ch 4-5 - Paul's Exhortations to the Ecclesia

- 4:1-8 An exhortation to moral holiness
- 4:9-10 An exhortation to brotherly love
- 4:11-12 An exhortation to diligence
- 4:13-18 An exhortation concerning the Resurrection
- 5:1-11 An exhortation concerning the return of Christ
- 5:12-13 An appeal to respect ecclesial elders
- 5:14-22 Final exhortations
- 5:23-28 Closing prayer and charge

THE WRITING OF THE EPISTLES

TIME OF WRITING

The above chronology indicates **1 Thessalonians** was written soon after Silas and Timothy met up with Paul at Corinth in Acts 18:5. This harmonises well with the facts:

Writing of 1 Thessalonians	Writing of 2 Thessalonians
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Written soon after the conversion of the Thessalonians (1Th 1:6-9; 2:17), which occurred on Paul's 2nd Journey (Acts 17:1-10). 2. Paul had recently preached throughout Macedonia and Achaia (1Th 1:7-8), including Athens (3:1). 3. Timothy had been sent back on his own since Paul's visit (1Th 3:1-2). 4. Timothy had just returned from Macedonia (1Th 3:6; 1:1) which happened soon after Paul arrived at Corinth (Acts 18:5) for his 18-month stay (v11). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Written after 1 Thessalonians. 2. Paul, Silas & Tim were still all together (2Th 1:1), therefore on 2nd Journey. 3. Some issues which Paul gently cautioned of in first epistle (1Th 2:9; 4:11; 5:14) he now warned need fellowship action (2Th 3:6-12). 4. The opposition against Paul was more sophisticated; someone had forged a letter from Paul since his first epistle (2Th 2:2; 3:17). 5. No other significant stop during Paul's 2nd Journey after their 18-month stay in Corinth.
<p>Conclusion: Written early in Paul's 18-month stay at Corinth³¹ on his 2nd Journey (approx. AD 52).</p>	<p>Conclusion: Written later in Paul's 18-month stay in Corinth on his 2nd Journey (approx. AD 53), perhaps a year or so after 1 Thessalonians.</p>

REASONS FOR WRITING

As can be seen from the background considerations, the Apostle clearly had a number of key objectives in mind as he took up his pen to write to the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica:

1. To express his love, thankfulness and appreciation for the Thessalonian ecclesia.
2. To answer the accusations and insinuations that had been promulgated by Jewish enemies of the Truth, whose aim was to undermine both the missionaries and their mission of sharing the Truth with these Gentile believers.
3. To encourage the brothers and sisters with the hope of Christ's coming.
4. To further exhort and educate them in some matters of the Truth, both clarifying doctrine and instructing in practice.
5. To express his ardent desire to come and see them as soon as the Lord permitted.

³¹ Camb. Comm. and other commentaries note that the subscription below 1Th 5:28 in some Bibles - *'The first epistle unto the Thessalonians was written from Athens'* - is not part of the original, inspired text; it was added later by scribes/copyists in certain manuscripts to provide contextual information, but is factually incorrect in this case.

THEMES

Many of the themes of 1 Thessalonians continue into the second epistle as well. For completeness, references throughout both have been included below.

THE COMING OF CHRIST

The return of Christ is referenced in every chapter of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, often with the Greek word *parousia* (first occ. in 1Th 2:19).

Coming Gk *parousia* G3952 is from *para* (near) + *ousia* (being), hence = a 'being near' (Str), 'presence, coming or arrival' (Thay).

The word *parousia* refers to the physical presence of a person. For example, see how it is used of the physical presence of Titus, Paul and others (1Cor 16:17; 2Cor 7:6-7; Php 1:26).

Parousia is a key word throughout 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Of the 24 occurrences in Scripture, seven are in 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and six of these refer to the Lord Jesus Christ's return to the earth (1Th 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2Th 2:1,8). The final reference speaks of the 'coming' of the Roman Catholic Apostacy in 2Th 2:9.

Each reference to the return of Christ in the two epistles fills out both the Thessalonians' and our own understanding of what Christ's return will mean.

The Coming of Christ	
1Th 1:10	<i>'To wait for His Son from heaven... which delivers us from the wrath to come'</i>
2:19	<i>'What is our hope...? Ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming'</i>
3:13	<i>'Unblameable... at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'</i>
4:15 -16	<i>'The coming of the Lord... the dead in Christ shall rise first'</i>
5:23	<i>'Blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'</i>
2Th 1:7	<i>'The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels'</i>
2:1,8	<i>'Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...' (ESV)</i>
3:5	<i>'The patient waiting for Christ'</i>

The coming of Christ was not simply a first principles doctrine for the Thessalonians; it was a reality. They expected it any day and lived in that anticipation.

EXHORT

Paul refers to the idea of exhorting, encouraging and comforting one another frequently throughout the epistles using two closely related Greek words: *parakaleo* (a verb), and *paraklesis* (a noun).

Exhorted Gk *parakaleo* G3870 = 'to call to one's side' (Thay). Occurs in 1Th 2:11; 3:2,7; 4:1,10,18; 5:11,14; 2Th 2:17; 3:12.

Exhortation Gk *paraklesis* G3874 = 'a calling to one's side, and so to one's aid' (Vines). Used in 2:3; 2Th 2:16.

Both words arise from the root words *para* ('to the side') and *kaleo* ('to call'), and therefore hold the idea of calling someone alongside to encourage and comfort, or at times to rebuke.

The first few occurrences are used in retrospect - looking back to exhortations the brethren had provided in Thessalonica (2:3,11; 3:2), or the comforting effect on Paul of the news of their faithfulness (3:7).

In the latter half of 1 Thessalonians, the word *parakaleo* serves to highlight the structure of this section, for Ch 4-5 include a list of exhortations to the ecclesia, with each major section beginning or ending with this word, translated 'exhort/comfort' (see Structure, p28).

BRETHREN / EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE

The word *adelphos* ('brethren') occurs 28 times across Paul's two letters to Thessalonica, making an average of once every five verses. This, along with Paul's frequent expressions of endearment for the ecclesia shows how much he loved them. For example:

- 2:7: 'we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children' (ESV)
- 2:8 'being affectionately desirous of you'
- 2:11 'we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children'
- 2:17 'taken from you... in presence, not in heart'
- 2:19 'what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting... Is it not you?' (ESV)
- Cp 3:1,5,6,8,9; 5:25,26; 2Th 1:3-4,11; 2:13.

AS YE KNOW

The phrase 'as ye know' or similar is prolific throughout the epistle, emphasising the fact that the Thessalonians had witnessed the things Paul was writing about, so they should trust their recollection and not be swayed by the persecuting Jews around them (see note 1:5).

- 'As ye know' (1:5; 2:2,5,11),
- 'For yourselves... know' (2:1; 3:3; 5:2; 2Th 3:7),
- 'For ye remember' (2:9),
- 'Ye are witnesses' (2:10),
- 'When we were with you, we told you... and ye know' (3:4),
- 'For ye know' (4:2; cp 2Th 2:6)
- 'Remember ye not?' (2Th 2:5)

Paul also adds further weight on a couple of occasions when he calls God to witness (2:5,10).

A REAL LETTER

'A brief glance at Paul's introductory words... reminds us of an important truth.

*1 Thessalonians is a real letter
written to real people.*

It is not, first and foremost, a theological treatise to be analysed. As a letter, written probably hurriedly in the midst of an incredibly busy life, it requires reading as if through the lips of first-century believers. Something of the fires of persecution and trial, or at least of sacrificial labour, must flavour our study of such letters.

We must rouse ourselves from the comforts of our easy chairs... before Paul the beloved apostle may begin to speak to our hearts, and not just our intellects.'

BRO GEORGE BOOKER
WAITING FOR HIS SON, PG 28

A field of bluebonnets in bloom under a sunset sky. The flowers are in various stages of opening, with some showing white centers. The background features a line of green trees and a bright, hazy sunset sky with soft orange and purple tones.

PAUL'S THANKFULNESS

FOR THE ECCLESIA

CHAPTER 1

PAUL'S THANKFULNESS FOR THE ECCLESIA (1TH 1)

Having recently arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:1), Paul had commenced the work of preaching in that city while anxiously awaiting the return of Timothy and Silas from Macedonia with news of the ecclesias. Their arrival brought a burst of new life to the Apostle as he heard the good report of his brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. Paul doesn't actually explain this background until Ch 3, but as he opens this letter, the sense of joy he felt at the news of the ecclesia's ongoing faithfulness is palpable.

Given the strong Jewish contingent in Thessalonica who were trying to undermine Paul's reputation and message, it was important the ecclesia understood how much he loved them. So, along with Timothy and Silas, he opens the letter by reflecting on their recent conversion to Christ and describing how much this ecclesia meant to him. He then encourages them to continue their example of faith and to wait patiently for the return of Jesus Christ.

GREETING (1:1)

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus

i.e. 'Paul, Silas and Timothy' (NIV), who were now all together in Corinth (Acts 18:5, p22).

Silas and Timothy were Paul's companions on his 2nd Missionary Journey. Paul and Silas set out together from Antioch in Syria (Acts 15:40), and they picked up Timothy in Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). The two brethren remained with Paul throughout the journey, except for a short mission or two when Paul sent them elsewhere (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 1Th 3:1), presumably finishing up with Paul back at Antioch in Acts 18:22.

In contrast to most of Paul's epistles³², he does not open the letter by setting forth his apostolic credentials. He likewise omits any mention of his apostleship when writing to the Philippians many years later (Php 1:1). These two ecclesias of Macedonia held a deep and unwavering respect for the Apostle, so that there was no need for him to emphasise his God-given authority.

Unto the church

Church Gk *ekklesia* G1577 = 'a gathering or assembly' (Thay). Comprised of two words: *ek* = out of, *kaleo* = to call. Thus, it refers to a group of people who have been 'called out' for a particular gathering or purpose.

³² Contrast the opening verse of Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

The choice of the word 'ecclesia' to describe the believers is an important one, for it emphasised to the Thessalonians that they had been called out from their old way of life - be that the synagogue (Acts 17:4), or, for most of the converts, idolatry (1Th 1:9).

The word carries no less meaning for us, who have been *called out* to live lives dedicated to God, displaying to those around us the wisdom of God's principles for life (1Pet 2:9-12). In Ch 4-5 of this epistle, Paul will go on to explain what this looks like.

Which is in God... and Christ

Paul assures the Thessalonians that they were 'in' God and Christ. The meaning of this phrase is aptly described by a number of metaphors used by Paul and by Christ himself:

- They were 'in' God and Christ as branches, or extensions, of the vine (Jn 15:1-4,10).
- They were 'in' God and Christ as body parts springing from, and directed by, the head (Eph 4:15-16).

The Thessalonians had died to their old way of life, and their life was now '*hid with Christ in God*' (Col 3:3). They were feeling the pressure of their new allegiance, as their persecutors had turned public opinion against them (Acts 17:5-8), so it was essential that the believers came to understand that they are valued by God and are part of His family.

Grace...

Paul begins the epistle with his signature introduction, but it is no passing formality. Rather, Paul had such a deep appreciation for the underserved favour, or grace, he had received from God, that he opens and closes every single epistle bearing his name with a reference to God's grace! He appreciated that it was 'the grace of God' (the meaning of 'Ananias') that had called him out of darkness (Acts 9:17), and this became the motivating force in his life (1Tim 1:12-16; Gal 2:20-21), to the point where he was prepared to give his life (Acts 20:24).

The Macedonian ecclesias are noted for the way in which they responded in kind to God's grace shown towards them (2Cor 8:1,4 s/w 'gift'). Similarly, God's grace to us impels a response (Tit 2:11-12).

And peace

Paul was also consistently appreciative of 'the peace of God', but his reference here seems a little unusual at first. The believers were new to the Truth and undergoing extreme trial, and Paul expresses his desire that God's peace will be with them! What does he mean?

Paul is, of course, speaking of a different kind of peace. It is not the peace of an absence of challenges, but rather an inward assurance that God has everything under control *despite* the storms around us (Jn 14:27; 16:33; Php 4:7). Few individuals in history have shown such appreciation for this mental peace as Paul did, and ironically he faced persecutions that few could match (2Cor 11:23-28).

THANKFULNESS FOR THE THESSALONIANS (1:2-3)

2-3 *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;*

We give thanks to God always

Paul often mentions his prayer list in his epistles, praying for both ecclesias and individuals, as well as specific topics:

Paul's Prayer List	
Ecclesias	Rome (Rom 1:9), Corinth (1Cor 1:4), Ephesus (Eph 1:16), Philippi (Php 1:3-4), Colossae (Col 1:3), Thessalonica (1Th 1:2), and for all ecclesias (Eph 6:18).
Individuals	Timothy (2Tim 1:3), Philemon (Phm 1:4) and Onesiphorus (2Tim 1:16-18).
Israel	That they might be saved (Rom 10:1).
Brothers and sisters	That they will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show love in knowledge and judgement (Php 1:9) - Increase in knowledge, wisdom & spiritual understanding (Col 1:9) - Be counted blameless before Christ (1Th 5:23; 2Th 1:10-11) That he can be reunited with his brothers and sisters (1Th 3:10; Rom 1:10)

It would have been most encouraging for the Thessalonians to hear that Paul was thanking God 'without ceasing' for them (cp 2:13), and it left them - and us - a wonderful example to follow (5:17-18). Everywhere he went, Paul was praying. Never 'too busy' or 'too tired', prayer was essential to his life and mission. With such an extensive prayer list, he would have had little time to think of his own needs. He was constantly focused on the needs of others and how the Truth could be furthered.

Remembering without ceasing

Again, the constancy of Paul's appreciation to his God for his brothers and sisters is noted frequently by the Apostle:

Rom 1:8-9	First, I thank my God ... for you all... <u>without ceasing</u>
1Cor 1:4	I thank my God <u>always</u> on your behalf
Eph 1:15-16	Wherefore I also... <u>cease not to give thanks</u> for you
Php 1:3	I thank my God <u>upon every remembrance</u> of you
Col 1:3	We give thanks to God ... praying <u>always</u> for you
1Th 1:2-3	We give thanks to God <u>always</u> ... remembering <u>without ceasing</u>
2Th 1:3	We are bound to thank God <u>always</u> for you
2Tim 1:3	I thank God ... that <u>without ceasing</u> I have remembrance of thee in my prayers <u>night and day</u>
Phm 1:4	I thank my God , making mention of thee <u>always</u> in my prayers

Work of faith... labour of love... patience of hope

The emphasis is not just on their faith, hope and love, but the outworking of these characteristics in the lives of the believers.

The word 'of' indicates 'as a result of'. Hence the NIV translates the phrase, 'your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope'.

Work	Gk <i>ergon</i> G2041 = 'business, employment; an act, deed, thing done' (Thay).
Labour	Gk <i>kopos</i> G2873 = 'a beating, intense labour' (Thay).
Patience	Gk <i>hupomone</i> G5281 = 'steadfastness, constancy, endurance' (Thay).

There is a progression here:

1. From their general good deeds (**work**) that were motivated by their **faith** in God when they initially received the Truth,
2. To their intense efforts, to the point of pain and fatigue (**labour**), for the Truth and their brothers & sisters, as their **love** for God and their brethren deepened,
3. And finally, their endurance (**patience**) as they persevered in their commitment and service, despite immense hurdles, spurred on by their **hope** for the future.

These three stages are also seen in v9-10:

1. Turned to God from idols = work of faith (**mental** acceptance of the Truth).
2. Serve the living and true God = labour of love (**moral** change).
3. Wait for His Son from heaven = their patience of hope (**physical** transformation).

In fact, so important are these aspects in the life of a believer, that Paul brings them up multiple times throughout the epistle.

Quality	Speaks of 1:8-10	Prayer for 3:10-13	Defense with 5:8
Faith v3	Conversion v8	Growth in faith v10	Breastplate of faith
Love v3	Service v9	Increase in love v12	And love
Hope v3	Patient waiting v10	(Approval by hope v13)	Helmet - hope of salvation

The brothers and sisters had to ensure that, however new or old they might be in the Truth, they were always deepening their *belief in* and *love for* God, for these would shield them against attacks to their faith and arm them with a strong hope of what is coming beyond the struggles of this life.

Paul writes of this triplet on many occasions, underscoring the applicability of these characteristics to all of God's children.³³ Finally, the practical outworking of faith, love and hope are again emphasized in Heb 6:10-12.

Patience

Patience is a necessary part of character development, and as the ecclesia was suffering persecution, they needed encouragement to patiently endure. James writes, *'the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing'* (James 1:3-4). Cp Heb 10:36; 12:1.

In the sight of God

It is important to recognise that the outworking of our faith, hope and love are *'in the sight of God'*, for it is His perception that matters. The writer to the Hebrews specifically mentions that *'God is not unrighteous to forget'* this (Heb 6:10). While we can only see the work, labour and patience, it is the motivation underlying these - the faith, love and hope - with which God is most concerned.

³³ Rom 5:2-5; 1Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5-6; Col 1:4-5, cp Heb 10:22-24

THE CONVERSION & EXAMPLE OF THE THESSALONIANS (1:4-10)

4 *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

Election Gk *ekloge* G1589 = 'the act of picking out, choosing' (Thay).

The 'elect' are literally 'the chosen'. The Thessalonians had been chosen by God unto salvation, no matter what the envious Jews might say.

Israel, of course, were first God's chosen nation (Deut 4:37; Isa 41:8-9; 43:10; 44:1-2; 45:4), but through their blindness and wilful ignorance (Acts 13:46; Rom 11:7,11-12) the Gentiles have been brought in, so that 'the elect' comes to describe all who have accepted God's call. No doubt the Jews felt a little uneasy about this, as Paul later observes (1Th 2:16).

5 *For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*

Our Gospel

i.e. 'The Gospel of God' (2:2). This is the only Gospel Paul taught (Rom 1:1), and he received it directly from Christ (Gal 1:11-12).

Not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit

NIV: '*not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.*'

Power Gk *dunamis* G1411 = 'force' (Str); 'strength, power, ability' (Thay).

The Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get *dynamite*, is often associated with the effect of the Holy Spirit. The power with which Paul and his companions brought their message was from the Holy Spirit. (Cp Acts 1:8: '*Ye shall receive power (s/w *dunamis*) after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you*').

Interestingly, there is no record of the Thessalonians witnessing any miracles when Paul was with them. While it is possible that he performed some miracle there that was not recorded, and probable they had heard of the healing of the mad girl and the miraculous escape at Philippi (Acts 16:18,26), it seems most likely that Paul is referencing the way they came into the Truth. The call of the Macedonian brothers and sisters was no accident; it was specifically designed by God with numerous interventions through the Holy Spirit (see *The Call to Macedonia*, p13).

And in much assurance

NIV: '*and deep conviction*' - Paul had a thoroughly reasoned argument from Scripture (Acts 17:2-3), and he was absolutely convinced of it. It is true that he was aided by the Holy Spirit, but he also would have put in many hours of careful preparation (1Tim 4:13-15; 2Tim 2:15).

As ye know

This is the first time this phrase occurs in the epistle, and it becomes a theme throughout (see Themes, p31). Paul employs this and similar phrases to remind the Thessalonians of what they have seen and heard with their very own eyes, so that they are not deceived or intimidated by their Jewish enemies. He used it to remind the ecclesia of:

1. How the missionaries had conducted themselves (1:5; 2:5,9-11; 2Th 3:7),
2. The sufferings they had endured to share the Gospel with them (2:1-2; 3:3,4), and

3. Things he had taught them when he was in Thessalonica (3:4; 4:2; 5:2; 2Th 2:5-6).

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord

Followers Gk *mimetes* G3402 = 'an imitator' (Thay, Str). ESV 'imitators'.

Paul was commending the Thessalonians for mimicking the behaviour and character of the missionaries. Barnes notes in his commentary, 'This does not mean that they became followers of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, in the sense that they had set themselves up as teachers, or as the head of a sect, but that they **imitated their manner of living.**' Proof of this can be seen in 1 Corinthians, where Paul first forbids 'following' individuals to make up factions in the ecclesia (1Cor 1:10-13; 3:4), and then instructs the believers to be *followers*, or more correctly, *imitators*, of him (4:16; 11:1).

The Gk word *mimetes* occurs 7x in Scripture:

- Of imitating his example (1Cor 4:16) as he imitates Christ (1Cor 11:1; 1Th 1:6).
- Of imitating other ecclesias or individuals (1Th 2:14; Heb 6:12).
- Of imitating God (Eph 5:1; 1Pet 3:13 YLT).

Many years later, Paul could again write to the Philippians, '*Brothers, join in imitating me* (Gk *sun-mimetes*)' (Php 3:17 ESV). His life was so exemplary that at every stage he was able to encourage the believers to look up to him, for in copying him, they would be imitating Christ.

Would others be following Christ if we were to ask them to live their life in the same way we are?

Having received the word in much affliction

Affliction Gk *thlipsis* G2347 = 'pressure' (Str). s/w 3:3,6-7; 2Th 1:4,6 trans 'tribulation'.

From the early days after their conversion, the Thessalonians had been under immense pressure. The Jews who had instigated a riot (Acts 17:5) and then pursued them to Berea (v13) would hardly have let up when Paul left. If anything, their persecutions only seem to have intensified (see 2Th 1:4 and p24).

TRIALS IN THE TRUTH

Afflictions and tribulations are guaranteed in the life of a believer (Jn 16:33; 1Pet 4:12-13; Acts 14:22). As Paul says: '*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*' (2Tim 3:12). There can be all manner of reasons that God sends trial into the life of a believer - sometimes for our own benefit, sometimes for others'. We often will not know the reason for our sufferings, but the question is how we respond to them. Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians might turn out to be the stony ground, having received the word with gladness, but when affliction (s/w *thlipsis*) or persecution arose, they would leave the Truth (Mk 4:16-17). The visions John was given contain a number of references to the incredible reward that awaits those who patiently endure under such 'tribulations' (Rev 2:10; 7:14 - again, s/w *thlipsis*). Cp Heb 12:5-11.

7-8 *So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.*

So that ye were ensamples

Ensamples Gk *tupos* G5179 = primarily means 'a blow' (from *tup* = 'to strike'), and therefore indicates the 'impression or mark' made by a blow, a 'stamp' made from a die, or a 'form or mould', and thus 'an ensample or pattern' (Vines).

This is a remarkable word to use of such a young ecclesia! They were only about 6 months old in the Truth (Chronology, p22), yet Paul writes that they became a pattern for the ecclesias of Macedonia (including Philippi and Berea) and Achaia (Corinth, Athens and Cenchræa) to follow.

THE POWER OF EXAMPLE

The story of the ecclesia at Thessalonica illustrates the incredible power of example:

- Christ's example had inspired Paul (1Cor 11:1).
- Paul's example then inspired the Thessalonians (1Th 1:6).
- The Thessalonians then inspired many ecclesias throughout the region (v7).

This has been true countless times in history - one man or woman's life might change many more, who in turn will inspire more again. You never know what God can achieve using the power of example; but it all begins with a godly, upright character.

Sounded out

Sounded out Gk *execheomai* G1837 = 'to echo forth, that is, resound' (Str). Cambridge Commentary states, *The Greek word suggests a clear ringing note, "as of a trumpet".* It also explains that the word is in the perfect tense and therefore implies not a transient sound, but rather one with an ongoing effect.

No sooner had they heard the Gospel, the Thessalonians went about telling everyone about it - friends, family, work colleagues and perhaps even strangers. This is remarkable, given the 'bond' that had been placed over their heads to secure calm (Acts 17:9).

In every place... spread abroad

Geographically, Thessalonica was well placed to be the springboard of the Gospel in Europe, situated on the Via Egnatia with its port on the shores of the Aegean (see Background, p8-9).

The success of the missionaries' preaching and their conversion was truly extraordinary, for news of it had spread beyond Greece and reports had made it back to Paul within a short 6 months or so (see Chronology, p22).

9 *For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;*

NIV: *for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us...*

v9-10 are the demonstration in the lives of the Thessalonians of their faith, love and hope mentioned by Paul in v3 (see table p37).

They themselves

i.e. Those who have heard of the Thessalonians' conversion from around the world (v8).

Turned to God from idols

An important facet of the Greek and Roman cultural background in Thessalonica was its devotion to idolatry, including an array of Greek, Roman and Egyptian gods, as well as the worship of the emperor as a divine being. This is what the Thessalonians had left behind.

This change is so easy to read about and so hard to appreciate. The Gospel made a dramatic change to the lives of these individuals. People do not normally change their gods (Jer 2:10-11), yet the Thessalonians had done exactly that and would have been going through all the emotions of having lost a social network, given up old practices and trying to make new, godly habits.

This verse, together with Paul's teaching on morality (4:1-8) and his scant reference to the Old Testament Scriptures throughout the epistle, indicates that the Thessalonian ecclesia were predominantly Gentile. The preaching in the synagogue had been successful (Acts 17:1-4), but it appears the time in the house of Jason afterwards had brought far more Gentiles into the Truth, inciting the Jews to envy (cp Acts 17:5).

To serve the living and true God

This appears to be an allusion to Jeremiah 10:10, in the context of Jeremiah's illustration of the folly of idolatry (v2-12). The Thessalonians had learned that the 'gods' who were said to reside on the legendary Mt Olympus were nothing more than lifeless idols (1Cor 8:4-6). Bro George Booker observes that *'some of the most exquisite irony and sarcasm in the Old Testament is reserved for the "no-gods" and those who trust in them (1Ki 18:27; Isa 44:9-20)'* (p39). The illusionary sources of satisfaction and help of our age are no better, and we need to have the spiritual perception to identify them. As God Himself observes,

'Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any' (Isa 44:8).

Also compare Paul's teaching at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17), and his speech to the Athenians who revered the same false gods (Acts 17:22-25,29).

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

These were all essential elements of Paul's message he first preached to them:

- That Jesus is the Christ - the Messiah or 'Anointed' (Acts 17:3),
- That he died and was resurrected in accordance with the Scriptures (v3), and
- That he will return as king (v7).

To wait for His Son from heaven

The Thessalonians were so excited to hear of the return of Christ that their anticipation of that day had become proverbial throughout the ecclesial world. The coming of Christ becomes a central theme of both letters Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (see Themes, p30).

Each day they lived in eager anticipation of the Lord's return. What better attitude to adopt in the final moments before our Lord's return?

whom he raised from the dead

The resurrection of Christ is the confirmation to all that he is indeed the Son of God (Rom 1:3-4) and the man appointed to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

which delivered us from the wrath to come

'Delivered us' should be in the present tense, as this is an ongoing work of Christ:

- ESV: 'who delivers us from the wrath to come'.
- YLT: 'who is rescuing us from the anger that is coming.'

Paul speaks of 'the wrath of God' that is coming on Jew and Gentile at some length in the early chapters of Romans. This will be exhibited in the judgements at Christ's return (see Rom 1:18; 2:6-11; cp Rev 11:15-18; 19:11-15). Those who do not obey the Truth will be rewarded with 'indignation and wrath' (Rom 2:8-9), whereas those who '*by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality*' he will reward with 'eternal life' (v7,10). It is only through Christ that we can be saved from wrath (Rom 5:8-9; 1Th 5:9).



PAUL'S
DEFENCE
OF THE MISSIONARIES

CHAPTER 2

PAUL'S DEFENCE OF THE MISSIONARIES (1TH 2)

Paul now turns his attention to the Jewish opposition in Thessalonica who were defaming him by claiming that he was just a 'fair-weather' friend who had come to Thessalonica with his Gospel message, but when the going got tough, he ran away and left the new ecclesia to face the persecution alone. In approaching Ch 2, it may be helpful to review the table of implied accusations that the Jews were making against Paul, as there is a flow throughout the chapter (see 'The Jewish Plot', p25).

JEWISH INSINUATIONS

'Although he does not name them, it is quite plain that he [Paul] was already suffering from those enemies who never ceased to vex him while he lived. As we learn afterwards, these enemies were the Jews. When they had opportunity, they used open violence; they roused the Gentile mob against him; they had him scourged and stoned.

*When his body was out of their reach, they assailed him through his character and affections. They crept into the churches which his love and zeal had gathered here and there, and scattered injurious suspicions against him among his disciples. He was not, they hinted, all that he seemed to be. They could tell stories about his early days, and advised those who did not know him so well to be on their guard. Evangelising paid him quite as well as harder work, and his paltry ambition was gratified by lording it over his ignorant converts. Such messengers of Satan had apparently made their appearance in Thessalonica since Paul left, and **this chapter is his reply to their insinuations.**'*

(Expositor's Commentary on 1Th 2:1-12)³⁴

In this chapter, Paul shows the claims made against him to be false by drawing on the Thessalonians' own knowledge of the facts around his time spent with them. He does this by his frequent use of 'reminder language' (2:1,2,5,9,10,11 - see Themes, p31).

Paul also uses the theme of a caring family throughout the chapter to illustrate how much the missionaries truly care for the ecclesia:

- In v7-8 he likens them to a nursing **mother** affectionately caring for her children,
- In v11 he likens them to a caring and wise **father**,
- And finally, in v17 he likens the ecclesia to **orphans** who were bereft of their parents when Paul and Silas were taken away.

³⁴ Also compare *Cambridge Commentary on 1 Thessalonians, Introduction*, Ch 4, p23-24, which has a similar list of aspersions from Paul's opponents, and asserts they were of Jewish origin based on Paul's denunciation of them in 2:14-16, as well as 'the general probabilities of the case'.

THE MISSIONARIES' DEFENCE AGAINST JEWISH DETRACTORS (2:1-12)

Despite suffering for their efforts in preaching the Gospel, Paul and his companions continued to preach because they were accountable to God and had been entrusted with His message. Their motivation was not personal gain nor to elicit the praises of men, but rather to please God.

1 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

For yourselves, brethren, know

This is Paul's second use of 'reminder language' in the epistle, the first being in 1:5. The ecclesia could remember Paul's arrival, only about 6 months prior.

Our entrance... was not in vain

Vain Gk *kenos* G2756 = 'empty, void of substance or power' (Camb. Comm.).

'*Was not without results*' (NIV). Despite the hardships they had faced, the coming of Paul and his companions had resulted in the formation of a new ecclesia in Thessalonica.

In 3:5, Paul uses the same word to express his anxiety in this regard - he had feared they might succumb to the pressure of their persecutors, making the missionaries' labour vain, and this was one of the reasons he sent Timothy back to the young ecclesia.

Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 to remain steadfast in the service of our Lord, for labour in the Lord is never in vain in God's sight.

2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God with much contention.

But even after that we had suffered... at Philippi

In Philippi, Paul and Silas had healed the girl with the mental illness which resulted in them being dragged before the magistrates, beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:16-24). Such a public shaming could be expected to curtail the spreading of the Gospel in the Macedonian area and dampen Paul and Silas' enthusiasm in preaching. But quite to the contrary, their preaching continued and the response in Thessalonica was highly successful. God truly blessed their labour.

Shamefully entreated

Shamefully entreated Gk *hubrizo* G5195 = 'to be insolent, to behave insolently, wantonly, outrageously' (Thay).

Christ used the same word in his parable about the King's servants being '*entreated spitefully*' when calling people to the marriage of His son (Mt 22:6). Paul was one of these servants, and he was treated like his Lord (s/w also used of Christ in Lk 18:32).

Later, Paul describes a second visit to Macedonia in a similar way: '*For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears*' (2Cor 7:5).

Bold in our God

Paul and his companions had complete confidence in what they were preaching. They did not have a fair-weather approach, but rather a strong faith able to withstand the storms of

life. Their response to persecution in Philippi had not been to run away, but to strengthen the ecclesia and then move on to Thessalonica and continue the work.

This is an example to us as we strive to live like Christ in an evil world. Being bold in our God is easier if we know what we stand for and why. Laying a firm foundation is essential in being able to remain strong in faith even amidst trial and persecution (cp Mt 7:24-27).

Much contention

Contention Gk *agon* G73 = 'an assembly or place of assembly; the place of contest, the arena or stadium' - especially used of the Greek games, and hence refers to the struggle or contest for the prize (Thay).

Paul uses this word in the context of fighting the fight of faith (1Tim 6:12; 2Tim 4:7) and it is used in Hebrews 12:1 to describe the race of life. This was no trivial matter for Paul - as he wrote to Timothy, it was the struggle of his life, and he would continue it until his death.

Considering the sufferings Paul endured for the sake of the Truth, he clearly wasn't in it for personal gain or glory. He truly appreciated the mercy that had been shown to him, firmly believed the things he stood for and wanted to extend that mercy to others.

3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

For our exhortation was not of deceit

Exhortation Gk *paraklesis* G3874 = 'a calling to one's side, and so to one's aid' (Vines).

One commentary translates this phrase '*our entreaty to you was not with lies*' (ECNT). Paul was not a false teacher going about to lead others astray like those described in Ephesians 4:14 (ESV): '*so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*'.

Nor of uncleanness

This carries the idea of moral corruption and is used in that context in Ch 4:7, where Paul shows it to be the opposite of holiness. Paul says his teaching '*does not spring from... impure motives*' (ISV). Interestingly, the *effect* of his teaching was that the Thessalonians had left the immorality of idol worship and turned to serve the living God (1:9).

Nor in guile

NIV: '*nor are we trying to trick you*'. This same word is used to describe the behaviour of Elymas in Acts 13:10, who not only opposed God's Truth, but used deception to lead others astray also. This was not the last time Paul would be accused of this (2Cor 12:16).

4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

Wey: '*But as God **tested and approved** us before entrusting us with His Good News, so in what we say we are seeking not to please men but to please God, who **tests and approves** our motives.*'

In this verse lies a comparison. In the same way that God tested the apostles and found them worthy as bearers of His Gospel, so they in turn perform their duty of sharing the Gospel in a trustworthy manner.

Allowed of God

In classical Greek, the word 'allowed' is used to describe testing people to see if they were fit for public office (ECNT). It is the s/w 'trieth' later in this verse. Paul saw it as a privilege to be entrusted to preach the Gospel (1Tim 1:11-12). Is this how we view preaching?

This is the first of several metaphors Paul uses in this chapter in the context of his relationship to the ecclesia. Here he likens his role to that of a steward who has been entrusted with something of immense value. Cp v7,11,17.

Not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts

A person who tailored their message to appeal to the rich and influential might secure prestige for their message and wealthy support for their efforts. Not so Paul and his companions; they preached a sincere and consistent message approved by God. They were answerable to a higher authority than that of man, and conscious that they were always in the presence of that higher authority. As Paul shows in Galatians 1:10, by seeking to please men over God, he would betray his calling as a servant of Christ.

Ironically, whereas Paul had evidently been accused of trying to please men, it was actually the Jews who were renowned for seeking the praise of men rather than God (Jn 12:43; cp Rom 2:29).

Hearts

Cambridge Commentary says that the heart, in the language of the Bible, 'is "the inner man," the real self, the centre and meeting-point of all our thoughts, feelings, and resolves.' It is there that God tests our motives and efforts (Jer 17:9-10), and it is His evaluation alone that counts.

5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

ISV: 'As you know, we did not come with flattering words or with a scheme to make money. God is our witness!'

Flattering words

Flattery and smooth talking are widely condemned throughout Scripture (Prov 2:16; 20:19; 28:23; 29:5; Rom 16:17-19). This not only shows God's opinion of it, but the constant warnings highlight its effectiveness in appealing to people. The fact that Paul did not use that later earned him mockery (2Cor 10:10).

Cloke of covetousness

ESV: '*pretext for greed*'. The word picture is that of a cloak hiding that which is beneath it, 'i.e. "show, pretence, pretext" put forth in order to cover one's real intent' (Barnes). The word 'cloke' is aptly used to describe the showy prayers of the Pharisees which were a cover, or 'pretence', to obscure from the public their hypocritical treatment of the widows (Mt 23:14).

Paul and his companions did not preach the Gospel for financial gain - covert or otherwise. v9 shows the proof of this as the Thessalonians could bear witness.

God is witness

Instead of using the reminder language again, Paul calls upon a much higher witness: God Himself. Back in 1Sam 12:3-5, Samuel called upon God to witness to his integrity, showing

that Samuel had not misused his office for personal gain. It is God's assessment of us that will determine whether we stand or fall, not what other people think of us (2Cor 10:18).

6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Nor of men sought we glory

i.e. in the sense of 'praise' (NIV). The aim of Paul and his associates was not to gain a reputation as successful preachers (cp 1Cor 4:5; 2Cor 10:12).

Paul did not flatter nor seek to impress his hearers to gain popularity. This was contrary to the philosophers of the day whose focus was on winning respect and prestige. Rather than seeking glory for himself, Paul encouraged the ecclesia to walk worthy of God's glory (v12) and he considered seeing them in the presence of the Lord as his 'glory and joy' (v20).

When we might have been burdensome

ESV *'though we could have made demands as the apostles of Christ'.*

Burdensome - *'The Greek properly refers to that which is "weighty - heavy, burdensome." Anything that weighs down or oppresses - as a burden, sorrow, or authority, would meet the sense of the Greek. It seems probable, from the context, that the apostle did not refer either to authority or to support exclusively, but may have included both.'* (Barnes Comm.)

Paul and his companions did not make demands of the ecclesia either in imposing their authority to gain power and prestige, or to supply their needs while they preached, but instead worked night and day to provide and preach (v9).

As the apostles of Christ

This was a very select group. Initially it consisted of only the 12 disciples of Christ (Lk 6:13), and later it was broadened to include a few others (1Cor 15:5-7), including James the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19), Barnabas and Paul (Acts 14:14), Silas and possibly Timothy (1Th 1:1 & 2:6). Yet Paul did not appeal to the prestige that this title could have carried, nor to the rights conveyed upon them by the Lord (1Cor 9:14-16).

7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

ESV: *'But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.'*

Even as a nurse cherisheth her children

Cherisheth Gk *thalpo* G2282 = 'primarily means "to heat, to soften by heat;" then, "to keep warm," as of birds covering their young with their feathers' (Vines). Only other occ is Eph 5:29 in the context of a husband caring for his wife.

This is Paul's second metaphor: the nursing mother (cp v4). As a mother understands her own children and knows better than anyone how to care for them, so Paul shows a special care towards his spiritual children, seeking to help them grow to spiritual maturity.

The metaphor illustrates the intensity of his love and constant remembrance of them, for a mother cannot *'forget her sucking child'* (Isa 49:15). He was prepared to go through great personal trial for the spiritual development of his *'little children, of whom'*, he writes in Galatians 4:19, *'I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.'* His desire is to see a family likeness of Christ being formed in his spiritual children.

8 *So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*

So being affectionately desirous of you

Affectionately desirous Gk *himeiromai* G2442 = 'a yearning; to long for' (Str).

This is the only occurrence of this word in the Bible. In Greek literature³⁵, the word carries the idea of deep maternal longing, it was used on a tombstone to describe grieving parents greatly desiring their son. Paul's use of the word highlights his parental love for the ecclesia.

We were willing to have imparted unto you... also our own souls

'Or rather "lives"... If it had been necessary, he [Paul] would have been ready to lay down his life; see 1Jn 3:16... His object seems to be to assure them that he did not leave them from any want of love to them, or from the fear of being put to death... he appears to have left them because he could not longer remain without exposing others to danger' (Barnes). Cp Php 2:17; 2Cor 12:15.

9 *For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God.*

For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail

Roth: *'our toil and hardship'*. Labour = s/w 1:3. Paul chooses his words to trigger a visual memory for the believers of Paul, Silas and Timothy labouring to provide for themselves. This manual labour was a living demonstration of their love and care for the believers, and was something Paul maintained throughout all his journeys (see table below).

Because we would not be chargeable unto any of you

ESV: *'that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the Gospel of God.'* Their labour in supporting themselves provided an example for others to follow (2Th 3:8-9).

Why did Paul not want to be chargeable?³⁶	Reference
To not hinder the preaching of the Gospel	1Cor 9:12
Not abuse his power	1Cor 9:18
Remove opportunities for others to criticise	2Cor 11:9,12
Parents ought to lay up for the children	2Cor 12:14
To show an example of how to support the weak	Acts 20:35
It is more blessed to give than receive	Acts 20:35
As an example for others to follow	2Th 3:8-9

In contrast to his refusal to accept the 'right' of provisions (outlined in Mt 10:9-10; 1Cor 9:14; Gal 6:6 ESV), Paul did accept voluntary gifts because of the generous spirit in which they were given (Php 4:15-18; 2Cor 11:9). Yet he still chose to work 'with his own hands' right through his missionary journeys (Acts 20:34), leaving us an exceptional example of devoting ourselves to preaching while also providing for ourselves and families. Cp Neh 5:14-15.

³⁵ ECNT. Also see Camb. Comm. on 1Th 2:8.

³⁶ Adapted from *'Walk Worthy of God'*, D. Emerson, p38

10 *Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:*

Ye are our witnesses and God also

As with v5, Paul uses both the Thessalonians and God Himself as witness to the integrity of his character. Paul was forced to answer the criticism and insinuations of others - not to defend his reputation, but rather to prevent his work of preaching from being sabotaged.

How holily and justly and unblameably

Like Samuel of old, Paul claims a consistency of character and a faithfulness to the duties he performs and puts his character up on trial for others to bear witness to (1Sam 12:3-5).

11 *As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,*

We exhorted and comforted and charged

Exhorted Gk *parakaleo* G3870 = 'to call to one's side' (Thay), root word pf 2:3. Idea of encouraging and strengthening by consolation. See Themes, p31.

Comforted Gk *paramutheomai* G3888 = 'to soothe, console, encourage' (Vines). This word carries the idea of speaking with counsel or advice.

Charged Gk *martureo* G3140 = 'to bear witness to' (Vines on 'witness'). Paul bore witness to the message he had received on the road to Damascus.

Roth: *'consoling you, and soothing, and calling to witness'*. All these words provide us with a picture of Paul's preaching style as he established an ecclesia. He didn't just stand up in a synagogue and give a public lecture; he also came alongside people, listened to them and provided words of encouragement and advice, just as a good father will do to his children.

As a father doth his children

The third metaphor: Paul as a father (cp v4). Paul had the nurturing qualities of a mother and the direction and guidance of a father. He uses the metaphor of a father in 1Cor 4:15-16 likening himself to a father who had begotten the Corinthians through the Gospel.

12 *That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his Kingdom and glory.*

That ye would walk worthy of God

Vines describes this word 'walk' as *'signifying the whole round of the activities of the individual life... It is applied to the observance of religious ordinances as well as to moral conduct'*. It is a theme throughout many of Paul's epistles:

Positive commendation to walk:	Negative instruction to walk:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In newness of life (Rom 6:4) • After the spirit (Rom 8:4) • In honesty (Rom 13:13) • By faith (2Cor 5:7; Rom 4:12) • In good works (Eph 2:10) • In love (Eph 5:2) • In wisdom (Col 4:5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not after the flesh (Rom 8:1,4) • Not after the manner of men (1Cor 3:3) • Not in craftiness (2Cor 4:2) • Not by sight (2Cor 5:7) • Not in the vanity of the mind (Eph 4:17) • Not disorderly (2Th 3:6, 11)

Worthy Gk *axios* G516 = 'of weight, worth, worthy' (Vines).

'Worthy' involves the idea of balancing out. If we imagine a set of scales, our conduct or walk is on one side, and God's characteristics on the other. If our behaviour is consistent with our beliefs, then those scales will be balanced, but if our conduct does not bear the family likeness of God's children, then those scales will be out of balance.

Who hath called you

Paul speaks five times about the 'calling' of the Thessalonians in his epistles, using this Gk word *kaleo* 1Th 2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2Th 2:14, and the related Gk *klesis* 2Th 1:11. This 'call' is one that we do not deserve, but which God has graciously extended (cp 2Th 2:13-14; 1:11).

Unto His Kingdom and glory

This is the motivation and reward for a 'worthy walk'. Cp 2Th 1:5. To appreciate the reward, we need to spend time meditating on it - imagining what it will be like to live in God's Kingdom. The Thessalonians did this right from their conversion (1:10).

JEWISH ANTAGONISM TO THE GOSPEL (2:13-16)

In this section, Paul both commends the Thessalonians for their response to the Gospel and imparts a scathing indictment on their Jewish persecutors, providing us with a powerful example of men and women who eagerly accepted the Truth and were energised by it, despite the persecution and hardships involved.

Here Paul bluntly states the facts around the behaviour of the Jews and its consequences. On the flip side, in Rom 10:1-3 he expresses his heartfelt desire that Israel might accept their Messiah and be saved.

13 *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*

Thank we God

Paul's spontaneous response to others accepting the Truth was continuous thankfulness to God. Paul was conscious that whilst he might be planting the seed of the Gospel, it was God who gave the increase and so it was God's work, not his own (1Cor 3:6,7).

Ye received the Word of God... ye received it not as the word of men

Received (1) Gk *paralambano* G3880 = 'to receive near, i.e. to associate with' (Str).

Received (2) Gk *dechomai* G1209 = 'to take with the hand' (Thay).

This was not the first time Paul had been accused of inventing his message (Gal 1:11-12), and the Jews had doubtless made this accusation against him in Thessalonica as well. But when the converts had heard the Gospel and the power and conviction with which it was preached (1:5-6), they 'took hold of it' as God's Word. The result was that the Word took hold of them, as the next phrase goes on to show...

Which effectually worketh also in you that believe

Effectually worketh Gk *energeo* G1754 = 'to put forth power, be operative, to work' (Vines).

Roth: 'which is also inwardly working itself in you who believe.' When a person truly takes hold of God's Word, it has a transformational effect (Rom 12:1-2). If it doesn't, it is because

it has not truly taken root (Mk 4:15); it is a dead faith (James 2:17). The outworking of the Word had been seen both by the Apostles (1:3) and by believers everywhere (1:8-9).

Do we let the Word change us? Or do we somehow compartmentalise our lives, so that our Bible study and meditation does not have to have a bearing on how we live?

14 *For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:*

Followers of the ecclesias of God

Followers Gk *mimetes* G3402 = 'an imitator'. See note 1:6. This was an encouragement and reminder to the ecclesia that they were not alone in facing persecution.

In Christ Jesus

This is a phrase used commonly by Paul and emphasises the oneness we have in Christ. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gal 3:28) and neither circumcision nor uncircumcision have value (Gal 5:6). In receiving Christ, both Jew and Gentile find themselves cut off from their fellow countrymen.

Your own countrymen

i.e. Both the envious Jews and the Gentile people and rulers, the latter being stirred up by the former (Acts 17:5,8).

Even as they have of the Jews

Paul and Silas were an interesting pair to write this verse together:

- Silas was originally a member of the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 15:22) so that he would have been personally acquainted with these struggles.
- Paul, on the other hand, had once been the ringleader of these persecutions (Acts 8:1,3; 9:1-2,13,26,31; 26:9-11).

These persecutions continued after the conversion of Paul (Acts 12:1-3).

15-16 *Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.*

We cannot miss the unmistakable bitterness of this passage, as Paul now lists out 6 accusations against the Jews, each of which could be amply substantiated and which, taken together, grossly discredit his detractors:

1. Killed the Lord Jesus

When Paul taught in the synagogue of Thessalonica that the Messiah had to suffer and rise (Acts 17:3), he likely echoed his speech in Antioch which would have infuriated the Jews:

'They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him' (Acts 13:27). Cp Peter's speech (Acts 2:22-23).

2. Killed... their own prophets

As Christ (Mt 23:37) and Stephen (Acts 7:52) testify. The current generation were as bad as their forefathers, even though they honoured the prophets they had killed (Lk 11:47-48)

3. Have persecuted us

i.e. Have 'chased us out' (KJV mg). Paul had been chased out from **Damascus** (Acts 9:23-25), **Jerusalem** (9:29-30), **Antioch** (13:45,50), **Iconium** (14:2,5-6), stoned at **Lystra** (14:19), then chased again from **Thessalonica** (17:5,10) and **Berea** (17:13-14). Even now as he wrote this letter, the Jews of **Corinth** were mounting opposition against him (18:6,12-13).

4. They please not God

Contrast to Paul in 2:4 and to the behaviour he encourages the believers to show in 4:1.

5. Are contrary to all men

The Jews were hostile to all because they opposed the spreading of the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles and went out of their way to hinder it. Cp Mt 23:13.

6. Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles

As in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), Jewish opposition to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles is one of the great themes – not only of Acts – but of the entire New Testament. No wonder Paul unleashes his denunciation against Jewry, who had been entrusted with the covenants of promise (Rom 9:4), but who refused to share them, even when directed by God!

To fill up their sins always

Paul draws on an ominous OT allusion here of iniquity being 'filled up'. In Genesis 15:16, God told Abraham that his children would live in Egypt until the fourth generation because the *'iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full*'. In other words, God was going to give the Amorites more time before His judgments would come upon them. But not so the Jews of Judea! In an awful reversal of circumstances, it was now the measure of their sins that was already sufficient to warrant divine judgment.

During his ministry, the Lord had warned Jewry that they were *'filling up the measure of their fathers'* (Mt 23:32) as prophesied by Daniel (Dan 8:23; 9:24). God gave them 40 years of opportunity following their murder of His Son (alluded to in Heb 3:9,17), but they had declined to repent. In Stephen's words, *'as your fathers did, so do ye'* (Acts 7:51), and so 'the wrath' would now be unleashed upon them.

The wrath is come upon them

'Them' = the Jews of v14-16, and *'the wrath'*, as the KJV and other translations correctly render it, is a specific demonstration of God's anger against His people. It is the wrath warned of by John the Baptist which would now come upon them in the judgements of AD 70 (Mt 3:7,10).

Their judgment was so certain that Paul writes as though it has happened. In AD 70 God's judgements would come down upon the nation, their beloved Temple would be destroyed, and they would be scattered throughout the nations from whom they had tried to withhold the Gospel.

A VIVID MEMORY?

It is just possible that Paul the Pharisee had once been in Jerusalem listening to a teacher issue a blistering attack on the religious elite, and that years later he recalls that visit...

1Th 2	Paul's Indictment	The Lord's Woes	Mt 23
v15	Killed... their own prophets	Kill the prophets	v31
v15	Persecuted us	Persecute them from city to city	v34
v16	Forbidding... Gentiles	Shut up Kingdom against men	v13
v16	To fill up their sins alway	Fill up measure of your fathers	v32
v16	Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost	Upon you may come all the righteous blood shed	v35,36

PAUL'S DESIRE TO SEE THEM AGAIN (2:17-18)

Having considered the character of his opponents, Paul now returns to the theme of his love and care for the ecclesia.

17 *But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.*

Being taken from you

Taken Gk *aporphanizo* G642 = 'to bereave of a parent or parents' (Thay). Cp English word 'orphan'.

ESV: '*But since we were torn away from you*'. The brethren had not run away; quite to the contrary, they had been '*torn away*' against their will. Earlier, Paul used the metaphors of a mother and a father; now he describes the ecclesia as being left an orphan when he and Silas were torn away from them.

For a short time

So great was Paul's concern for his friends that, no sooner had he fled Thessalonica than he started making plans to return! These attempts to return could have happened when he was in either Berea or Athens (Acts 17:10,16).

In presence, not in heart

Although physically absent from the ecclesia, they were very much in his thoughts. Cp Col 2:5. Paul was always conscious of his brothers and sisters (2Cor 11:28).

Endeavoured the more abundantly... with great desire

Desire Gk *epithumia* G1939 = 'a desire, craving, longing, mostly of evil desires,' frequently translated 'lust' (Vines). It is the same word the Lord uses in Lk 22:15 to describe the desire he had to partake of the Passover with his disciples.

Paul made every possible effort to return. It was not through a lack of trying that they could not get back to Thessalonica.

18 *Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.*

We would have come unto you... once and again

Paul had tried multiple times already to revisit the ecclesia. He felt that the work was only half done - the brethren needed further nurture and edification in the matters of the Truth, they were facing intense opposition from the Jews and now added to that were the accusations and insinuations that sought to undermine Paul himself. Paul desperately wanted to see them again and reassure them that he had not just fled from persecution.

Satan hindered us

Satan is a Hebrew word brought into the Greek and simply means 'an adversary' (1Ki 5:4; 11:14,23,25). In this situation, Paul is evidently referring to the opposition initiated by the Jews in Thessalonica and empowered by the Gentile rulers, which labelled Paul and Silas, as the 'leaders' of the new religion, troublemakers who would not be welcome in the city.

The approach taken by the politarchs had been clever. Rather than arraign Paul and Silas and physically punish them as had been done in Philippi, they instead targeted newly baptised members of the ecclesia, using them as leverage against the Apostles by placing a bond over them (Acts 17:9). Paul was used to suffering (2Cor 11:23-30) and undeterred by it (Acts 14:19-20), but if he were to return, it would be the ecclesial members who would suffer, rather than Paul.

It appears the Jews are described as 'the tempter' in 1Th 3:5. Those who were an 'adversary' to Paul in his preaching work (2:18) would prove to be a test to the fundamental faith of the new converts, and so Paul speaks of them as those who would 'tempt, or test', them.

PAUL'S VISION FOR THE THESSALONIANS (2:19-20)

19-20 *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

NIV: *'For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.'*

Crown of rejoicing

Crown Gk *stephanos* G4735 = '(a) "the victor's crown," the symbol of triumph in the games or some such contest; hence, by metonymy, a reward or prize; (b) "a token of public honor" for distinguished service' (Vines)

The picture is that of an athlete having competed in the Greek games, and after a gruelling race in the arena, he is presented with the victor's crown: a laurel wreath, the *stephanos*.

Paul was currently competing in this arena of life - the *agon* ('contention') of v2. It was a fierce struggle, involving incredible self-control, endurance and single-minded focus, as he explains using the same analogy in 1Corinthians 9:24-27. The crown for which he was competing was an incorruptible one, and in his 'Kingdom Vision' of these two verses, Paul sees himself crossing the finish line, and as he falls to his knees in exhaustion, he looks up to see his Thessalonian brothers and sisters there - beyond the finish line - his victory crown, ready to be presented without fault or flaw by the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was the crown for which Paul ran, and that can be the crown for which we run also, in our race of life. Everything Paul did was with the eternal wellbeing of his brothers and sisters in mind. Unsurprisingly, he felt the same way about the Philippians as well (Php 4:1).

The victory crown is described in five different ways in the New Testament:³⁷

Description	Rewarded for	Reference
Crown of Righteousness	A good fight in view of Christ's appearing	2Tim 4:8
Crown of Life	Endurance under trial	James 1:12
Crown of Rejoicing	Dedicated and genuine preaching	1Th 2:19
Crown of Incorruption	Leading a disciplined life	1Cor 9:25
Crown of Glory	Faithful shepherding of God's flock	1Pet 5:4

Is it not you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

This is Paul's second allusion to the coming of Christ in this letter, and the first use of the Greek word *parousia* ('coming' - see Themes, p30).

This is Paul's crowning argument in his rebuttal of his Jewish opponents in Ch 2. They had asserted he did not care; that he'd simply run away and left them to their own devices. He now gives them an insight into his own Kingdom Vision: and it involves them, standing accepted in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ!

This must have provided immense encouragement to the ecclesia to continue on despite the persecutions they were facing. One day, the Lord will return, and when he does, he will bring freedom from all oppression and the hope of being united with Paul before Christ.

For ye are our glory and joy

Glory Gk *doxa* G1391 = 'the honor resulting from a good opinion' (Vines).

It was people responding to God's call through the work of Paul which brought him honour. Winning followers for Christ was what Paul counted as most valuable.

³⁷ In contrast to the *diadem*, which is a king's royal crown (e.g. Rev 19:12).



PAUL'S ONGOING CARE

FOR THE ECCLESIA

CHAPTER 3

PAUL'S ONGOING CARE FOR THE ECCLESIA (1Th 3)

In Ch 3, Paul now comes to the events that prompted his letter. Following his premature departure from Thessalonica, Paul was filled with concern for the new ecclesia, and desperately wanted to revisit the ecclesia. Events had not shaped up that way, however, so Paul resorted to sending Timothy to strengthen and encourage the ecclesia and bring back news of their wellbeing (v1-5). The remainder of the chapter records Paul's joyful relief at Timothy's report (v6-8), and his prayer for their fellowship and spiritual growth (v10-13).

Refer to the background (p22) for a detailed explanation of the movements of Paul, Timothy and Silas around the time this epistle was written.

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE (2:17-3:13)

There appears to be a strong chiasmic³⁸ structure in this section, from 2:17-3:13:

- 2:17a.....**A** Being taken from you
2:17b-18.....**B** Endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face
2:19-20.....**C** Ye are our... joy
3:1-2.....**D** Could no longer forbear... sent **Timotheus**... comfort you concerning your faith
3:3.....**E** That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know...
3:4.....**E'** We told you that we should suffer tribulation... and ye know
3:5-7.....**D'** Could no longer forbear... **Timotheus** came... we were comforted... by your faith
3:8-9.....**C'** We joy for your sakes
3:10.....**B'** Praying exceedingly that we might see your face
3:11-13.....**A'** Direct our way unto you

The text hinges on the central two verses of 3:3-4 in which Paul stresses to his brothers and sisters that his desire was that they would not be swayed from the Truth by the persecution that they were suffering. He reassures them that this is exactly what the preachers had anticipated and forewarned them of.

TIMOTHY SENT TO ESTABLISH & COMFORT THEM (3:1-5)

1 *Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone.*

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear

This links back to 2:17, where Paul '*greatly desired*' to see his brethren. Perhaps his feelings were akin to those of Nehemiah who became 'sick' with 'sorrow of heart' when unable to come to the aid of his brethren (Neh 2:2).

³⁸ A 'chiasmus' or 'chiastic structure' is a literary device in which a set of words / phrases / ideas are repeated in reverse order as an aid to memory and/or to draw attention to the central point. When depicted graphically, the figure resembles the Greek letter 'chi' (X), hence the name 'chi-asmus'.

We thought it good

ESV: 'We were willing'; NASB: 'We thought it best.' Good = s/w 'willing' (2:8) and is also translated 'take pleasure' in 2Cor 12:10 where he tells the Corinthians it was 'for Christ's sake' he was willing to endure hardship.

To be left at Athens alone

It was no doubt difficult for Paul to be left alone in Athens. It was a city of depravity, 'wholly given to idolatry' (Acts 17:16) with few like-minded believers. Acts 17:34 seems to indicate Paul's preaching was less successful here than elsewhere.

LOVE FOR OUR BROTHERS & SISTERS

Paul's spirit of anxious care for his brothers and sisters is a wonderful lesson for us. So strong was his love that it would not be satisfied until he had taken positive action in sending Timothy to their assistance.

Do we feel the same longing for our brothers and sisters - even for those we don't see on a regular basis? Do we make every effort to seek their welfare, even at personal cost to ourselves? Do we have strategies to help us consistently remember the needs of others?

2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

Sent Timotheus

Timothy had only served with Paul for a few months since being recruited near the start of the second journey (Acts 16:1-2) but had already earned Paul's trust, even at such a young age. Some 15 years³⁹ later or so, Paul still describes Timothy as young (1Tim 4:12; 2Tim 2:22). Paul would later send him on another mission to the Philippians, along with the commendation, 'I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state' (Php 2:20).

It seems Timothy did not play as prominent a role in the initial preaching in Thessalonica (cp Acts 17:2,10), so was not a primary target of the Jews' persecution.

The city of Athens was about 500km from Thessalonica, so that Timothy's round trip to visit the ecclesia would have been about 1000km. This was an immense undertaking for a young man who suffered 'frequent ailments' (1Tim 5:23 ESV), not to mention the task at hand!

Minister of God

Minister Gk *diakonos* G1249 = 'one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, a servant, attendant, minister' (Thay). s/w 'deacon' 1Tim 3:8-13.

As a servant of God, Timothy rendered himself a servant both to Paul (Acts 19:22) and to the ecclesias he visited. In this he displayed the spirit of Christ who 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister' (Mk 10:42-45).

Fellowlabourer

Fellowlabourer Gk *sunergos* G4904 = 'a co-labourer' (Str). A compound of G4862 *sun* = 'with/together' and G2041 *ergon* = 'to work' - thus 'to work together.'

³⁹ As suggested by C&H, Appendix 3: Chronological Table, p832-834.

This is a great compliment to the young Timothy, to be a coworker with Paul and Silas! Cp Rom 16:21 (s/w).

'IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH'

Timothy, the 'servant of God' and 'coworker' with Paul, would have to be one of the greatest New Testament examples of a man who remembered his Creator in his youth (Ecc 12:1). As noted earlier, it was some 15 or so years later that Paul wrote to Timothy:

'Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity' (1Tim 4:12).

Youth need not be a barrier to valuable ecclesial contributions - if, like Timothy, we study to become 'wise unto salvation' (2Tim 3:15; 2:15), if we 'meditate upon these things' and 'give [ourselves] wholly to them' (1Tim 4:15). Cp Psa 119:9.

Establish

Establish Gk *sterizo* G4741 = 'to make stable, place firmly, set fast, strengthen or make firm' (Thay). s/w 'strengthen' (Lk 22:32; Rev 3:2), 'stablish' (James 5:8).

Paul made every effort to strengthen and encourage those he converted: he was never content to simply baptise people, but desired them to be strong in faith and develop the fruit of godliness. This was one reason he initially set out on his second journey - to 'confirm / establish' the ecclesias from the first (Acts 15:41; 16:5). Nevertheless, he always recognised that any spiritual fruits were truly the work of God and Christ, and that it is ultimately they who have the power to establish our faith (3:13; 2Th 2:16-17).

To comfort you concerning your faith

Comfort Gk *parakaleo* G3870 - see Themes, p31.

As Christ had not left his orphaned disciples without help (see Jn 14:18 'comfortless' = *orphanos*), but sent them the Comforter (Jn 14:16 'Comforter' = *parakletos*), so Paul did not leave the Thessalonian orphans (2:17) without help, but now sent Timothy to comfort (*parakaleo*) them. This adds a beautiful dimension to the type of Christ that the Thessalonians had witnessed among them in the coming of Paul (p23).

3 *That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.*

Moved by these afflictions

Moved Gk *saino* G4525 = 'to wag the tail (of dogs); metaphorically, to flatter, fawn upon, or to move (someone's mind)' (Thay). Only occurrence in NT.

Afflictions Gk *thlipsis* G2347 = see note 1:6 (s/w).

Paul wanted the faith of the Thessalonians to be stable, not to falter or waver. The word translated 'moved' carries the idea of being moved by flattery - like a dog wagging its tail to receive something from its owner. The risk was that they would be tricked or enticed by the 'kind' words of former friends, or the enticing propositions of the Jews.

The idea is reminiscent of the Baal worshippers in Elijah's day halting between two opinions (1Ki 18:21) and of being tossed 'to and fro' by winds of doctrine and deceitful men (Eph

4:14). The afflictions that the Thessalonians were to endure could make their faith waver, so Paul encourages them not to be moved – cp 2Th 2:2; 1Cor 15:58.

We are appointed thereunto

Appointed Gk *keimai* G2749 = ‘to lie outstretched, laid up, made’ (Str).

ESV: ‘We are destined for this’.

The same word is used to describe Paul being ‘**set for the defence of the Gospel**’ (Php 1:17), and a city ‘**set on an hill**’ (Mt 5:14). It indicates a position in which one is placed, and particularly applies to a sentry posted by his officer (Booker, p75). As the sentry is appointed to a post, so we are appointed to suffering (cp 2Tim 3:12).

4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation: even as it came to pass, and ye know.

We told you before

Wey: ‘We forewarned you’; ESV: ‘We kept telling you beforehand’.

Paul knew from experience what would happen to the believers, so he warns them of trials in advance, that they might not be taken unawares.

We should suffer tribulation

Tribulation Gk *thlibo* G2346 = ‘to crowd, afflict, throng’ (Str). Similar Gk to ‘afflictions’ v3. This word refers to the sufferings that arise from the ‘pressure of circumstances, or the antagonisms of persons’ (Vines), e.g. ‘narrow’ (Mt 7:14); ‘crush’ (Mk 3:9 ESV); ‘troubled’ (2Cor 4:8).

5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

The tempter

Tempter Gk *peirazo* G3985 = ‘to test (objectively), i.e. endeavour, scrutinise, entice, discipline’ (Str). Only other use of the word as a noun = ‘the tempter’ in Mt 4:3.

The Jews were intent on undermining Paul’s preaching from the outset (2:16; Acts 17:5), and therefore form the most likely candidate referred to by Paul as ‘*the tempter*’. While both the Jews *and* their Gentile rulers had been an ‘adversary / Satan’ to Paul and Silas, preventing their return (2:18), the rulers were really only interested in the civil peace of the region, so probably had little interest in the ecclesia. The Jews, on the other hand, were jealous of Paul’s success and therefore sought to undermine the believers’ faith.

Paul knew the brethren would be persecuted and tempted and was dreading the thought that some might be turned from the Truth by this opposition, withering under trial like the seed in Christ’s parable (Mt 13:5-6,20-21).

Our labour be in vain

Labour Gk *kopos* G2873. s/w 1:3; 2:9; 2Th 3:8.

Paul’s fear for the Thessalonians here was intensified by what had recently happened in Galatia, where the new converts there had been hoodwinked by the Judaisers to return to the Law shortly after their conversion (Gal 1:6-7), so that all the work of his 1st Missionary Journey was at risk of becoming ‘vain’ (Gal 4:9-11). Paul’s labours with the Macedonians had

not been in vain so far (1Th 2:1), and he wanted that to continue until the return of Christ (cp Php 2:16).

TIMOTHY'S GOOD REPORT (3:6-8)

In contrast to the painful suspense of v1-5, Timothy's return in v6 brings such relief and joy that Paul was comforted in the face of his own trials by hearing of their steadfastness (v7-8). Paul lived for the ecclesias and he could therefore say, like John, 'I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth' (3Jn 4).

6 *But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:*

JB Phillips: 'But now that Timothy has just come straight from you to us—with a glowing account of your faith and love'

Good tidings

Good tidings Gk *euaggelizo* G2097 = 'to announce good news, especially the Gospel, declare glad tidings' (Str). Almost exclusively used of the Gospel message.

The return of Timothy brought such good news that Paul compares it to the Gospel message! This was indeed 'good news from a far country,' and had a very refreshing effect on the Apostle (cp Prov 25:25). Paul and his companions had initially brought the 'good tidings' of the Gospel to the Thessalonians and now the ecclesia could reciprocate this with the 'good tidings' of their faith and love in the face of great opposition.

Is this the report that Christ will receive of us? What will be the result of harsh trial in our lives?

Ye have good remembrance of us always

Remembrance Gk *mneia* G3417 = 'remembrance, memory, mention' (Thay).

Every other occurrence of this word is found in connection with prayer,⁴⁰ implying that this was not simply an idle remembrance, but a prayerful one. The 'good remembrance' of the Thessalonians matched that of Paul's (cp 1:2 'mention', v3 'remembering'). Just as he remembered them unceasingly before the Father in prayer, so they in return, kept Paul always in remembrance before God.

The Thessalonians had maintained their close bond with Paul, and the efforts of his opponents had been unsuccessful in alienating them. They had not believed the slanderous accusations of his adversaries. Paul must have felt a great deal of relief after this joyful report from Timothy!

Desiring greatly

Desiring greatly Gk *epipotheo* G1971 = 'to long for, desire' (Thay).

The same word is used to describe Paul's longing to see the Philippians (Php 1:8), the Romans (Rom 1:11) and Timothy (2Tim 1:4). The intensity of the longing is perhaps best

⁴⁰ i.e. Rom 1:9; Eph 1:16; Php 1:3; 1Th 1:2; 2Tim 1:3; Phm 1:4.

shown in its use by Peter when he says we should 'desire' the Word as a newborn baby craving milk (1Pet 2:2). This was an all-consuming, ever-present desire of the Thessalonians and the missionaries to see each other (cp also 1Th 2:17, diff Gk word).

7-8 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

Paul had sent Timothy to 'comfort you concerning your faith' v2, and now his report had comforted Paul *because of their faith* v7! The news from Timothy not only cheered Paul; it greatly emboldened him on in his ministry, so that in Acts 18:5, in response to Silas and Timothy's return from Macedonia, he redoubled his efforts to proclaim the very same message that he had taught in Thessalonica.

We were comforted over you

As Titus and Paul were later comforted by the dedication of the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:6-7,13).

Our affliction and distress

Affliction Gk *thlipsis* G2347 = 'pressure' (Str). s/w 1:6.

Distress Gk *anagke* G318 = 'constraint; by implication, distress' (Str). Often refers to constraints imposed by duty, law, circumstances etc. (cp Thayer definition).

Paul's 'affliction' and 'distress' did not stop when he left Thessalonica; he continued to experience persecution from the Jews (Acts 17:13-14, 18:6-7), not to mention his constant anxiety for the care of the ecclesias. We know how Paul was feeling at the time he wrote the epistle, because he tells the Corinthians how he was when he arrived in Corinth after his time in Athens:

'When I came to you... I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling'
(1Cor 2:1-3).

These words were written by the great Apostle to the Gentiles - weakened, lonely, and anxious, to the point that he was physically shaking.⁴¹ It was amidst all these trials that Timothy arrived with good news of the Thessalonian brethren. Such news was like a breath of fresh air for the Apostle - a burst of new life, as he goes on to say in v8.

By your faith

The most important thing to Paul was that they had maintained the foundation - their 'faith' in the Gospel he had taught (cp 2Cor 1:24; 1Jn 5:4). It was from this that everything else would spring, including their friendship and love. This is the second time Paul mentions the power of the example of their faith - see notes on 1:8.

For now we live

Paul had been under so much strain that the pressure had affected him physically, to the point where it was almost certainly compromising his health (see notes on 1Cor 2:3 above). He was fearful of the spiritual 'death' of the Thessalonians - more so than the prospect of his own physical death (cp Acts 20:24-31). So, when news arrived of their continued faith, it gave a fresh burst of energy and life to the Apostle and revitalised his preaching efforts (Acts 18:5).

⁴¹ The Gk word for 'trembling' in 1Cor 2:3 is *tromos* = 'a trembling or quaking with fear' (Thay).

Stand fast

Stand fast Gk *steko* G4739 = 'to be stationary, (figuratively) to persevere' (Str).

In contrast to being 'moved' by their afflictions (v3), they were to remain spiritually steadfast against the temptations and persecution of the world around them. This is a common exhortation in Paul's epistles (1Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Php 1:27; 4:1; 2Th 2:15).

PAUL'S HOPE TO SEE THEM AGAIN (3:9-13)

9 For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

In view of Timothy's uplifting report, Paul now asks, 'How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?' (NIV).

For what thanks can we render to God

Render Gk *antapodidomi* G467 = 'to requite or repay', whether good or evil (Str, Thay). s/w 2Th 1:6 'recompense.'

So grateful was Paul to his God for the conversion and faith of the Thessalonians, that he could not find adequate words to thank God. Compare the spirit of the Psalmist:

'What shall I render (s/w LXX) unto Yahweh for all his benefits toward me?' (Psa 116:12)

Paul saw his brethren as a blessing from God, never attributing praise to himself but recognising always that it was 'God [who] gave the increase' (1Cor 3:6).

How willing are we to recognise the hand of God in 'our' achievements? Are we, like Paul, at one with God in our objectives, so that *His* victories become *our* cause for joy and thankfulness?

10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face

i.e. Regular, consistent and unceasing prayer (1Th 5:17, Rom 12:12).

Praying Gk *deomai* G1189 = 'to beg, petition' (Str). Diff to the ordinary word for prayer (used in 1:2), and really means 'begging or beseeching' (Camb Comm).

'Exceedingly' is a compound word in the Greek, '*hyper-ek-perissou*' from 3 base words: '*hyper*' (G5228), '*ek*' (G1537), and '*perissos*' (G4053)⁴². The word means 'to be present overabundantly or to excess' or 'to have more than enough' (TDNT). Paul uses the same word in 5:13 ('very highly'), and Eph 3:20 ('exceeding abundantly').

Paul had actively endeavoured to return (2:17), and never gave up pleading with God 'day and night'! But it would be another 5 years or so before Paul would be permitted to return

⁴² The Textus Receptus (from which the KJV New Testament is translated) has three separate words, whereas the Nestle-Aland Text (used for most modern translations) combines them into a single word, corresponding to G5655 in the NIV concordance / G5238b in the NASB concordance.

on his 3rd Missionary Journey in Acts 20:1-2. For now, the Lord had work for him to do in Corinth, as (it appears) he was shortly to find out (Acts 18:9-11).

And might perfect that which is lacking in your faith

ISV: *'we may equip you with whatever is lacking in your faith'.*

Perfect Gk *katartizo* G2675 = 'to complete thoroughly, repair or adjust' (Str).

Despite Timothy's visit and favourable report, evidently there were things Paul still wanted to address with them. It was Paul's standard procedure to revisit ecclesias shortly after establishing them wherever possible. Issues would emerge and questions would arise as an ecclesia settled and grew.

11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

Direct Gk *kateuthuno* G2720 = 'to make straight, guide, direct; of the removal of the hindrances to coming to one' (Thay)

This had happened before (Acts 16:6-10). Paul hoped that the way could be cleared for him to visit them, by the removal of Satan who was hindering his return (2:18). Cp Psa 37:23.

And our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way

Paul was constantly aware of the role of Christ in directing the events of his life and the world around him (see box on p13). We know that Christ has been 'highly exalted' by God and that He 'hath put all things under his feet' both in heaven and in earth (Php 2:9-10, Eph 1:22). The angels have been put under Christ's command (1Pet 3:22), so that he is now responsible for directing providence as deputy to his Father - something Paul often acknowledged (1Cor 16:7; Php 2:19,24).

12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

The Lord make you

i.e. The Lord Jesus Christ (v11).

Increase and abound

Increase Gk *pleonazo* G4121 = 'to do, make or be more; increase; by extension, to superabound' (Str).

Abound Gk *perisseuo* G4052 = 'to superabound, be in excess, be superfluous' (Str).

In love

Love Gk *agape* G26. See note on 4:9 for explanation of this kind of love, p76. This is a self-sacrificing love based upon an appreciation of God's love towards us.

The answer to this prayer of Paul is seen in Paul's next epistle, 2Th 1:3: *'We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren... because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.'*

13 *To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

Stablish your hearts unblameable

Unblameable Gk *amemptos* G273 = 'irreproachable, blameless, faultless' (Str).

We can never become faultless before God by our own virtue, it is the work of Christ to *present* us faultless with a covering (atonement) for our sin (cp Eph 5:25-27; Col 1:21-22) if we 'continue' or 'abide' in him (Col 1:23; 1Jn 2:28).

In holiness

Holiness Gk *hagiosune* G42 = 'sacredness' (Str), 'moral purity' (Thay).


The theme of holiness (separation from moral defilement) is one that runs through the breadth of Scripture. Israel were called out of Egypt to be holy, just like God is holy (Lev 11:44-45), and the same exhortation is applied to us (1Pet 1:15-16). It is the work of Christ to present us faultless, but he can only do so if we maintain separation from the defiling influence of the world around us (2Cor 6:17-7:1; Rev 14:4-5).

The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints

Saints Gk *hagios* G40 = 'sacred, physically pure, morally blameless or religious, ceremonially consecrated' (Str).

There is a play on words in the Greek which the KJV doesn't capture. The word for 'saints' (*hagios*) is the root word for 'holiness' (*hagiosune*). The NIV captures this link: *'May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and **holy** in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his **holy ones**.'*

The vision of Revelation, given to John some 40 years later or so, depicts this company of holy ones who will accompany Christ as a great multitude arrayed in white robes (Rev 7:9,13-15). The Kingdom Vision of Ch 7 is inspiring to read, as is also the picture of Christ returning with the saints to judge the nations (Rev 19:11-16). To those who seek to develop their faith and demonstrate godly love, the hope has been given of joining this company of holy ones who will accompany Christ 'fashioned like unto his glorious body' (Php 3:20-21) to 'appear with him in glory' (Col 3:4).

A dramatic coastal landscape featuring a high, rocky cliff overlooking the ocean. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the water is a deep blue with white foam from the waves crashing against the rocks. The foreground shows a sandy, rocky slope with sparse, dry vegetation.

PAUL'S EXHORTATIONS

TO THE ECCLESIA

CHAPTER 4

PAUL'S EXHORTATIONS TO THE ECCLESIA (1TH 4-5)

Having considered the events of the past, in the conversion, persecution and subsequent dedication of the Thessalonians in Ch 1-3, Paul now turns his attention to the future. Ch 4-5 mark the second half of the epistle in which Paul exhorts the ecclesia concerning matters of conduct and doctrine. 'Exhortation' is the key word of Ch 4-5 (see Themes, p31).

AN EXHORTATION TO MORAL HOLINESS (4:1-8)

In this first section, the Apostle exhorts the believers to live holy lives by avoiding sexual immorality. While these principles applied equally to all in the ecclesia, this would have been a particularly challenging area for those who had converted from paganism, as discussed in the box below.

PAGAN INFLUENCE IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Society in Thessalonica, as in all large cities in the Greek and Roman worlds, was rife with sexual immorality. The influence of pagan religions with their associated rituals was seen and felt everywhere, and governed the moral values of society. An extract from the World History Encyclopedia⁴³ aptly describes the negative influences of these pagan religions:

'The dominating religious theme of all ancient societies was that of fertility; of crops, herds, and people. The divine powers who ruled the universe occurred in male and female pairs, and so could be approached for the benefits of fertility for humans. This was particularly relevant to the creation and worship of the various mother goddesses in the region... [including] Aphrodite (Greece), and Venus (Rome). All these goddesses ruled human sexuality, the erotic uses of the body, birth, and children...'

'Prostitutes awaited the crowds leaving the amphitheatre each evening. They performed under the arches, and from the Latin fornix ("arches") we have the word 'fornication'. Prostitutes often were incorporated into the religious festivals, chiefly among the goddesses associated with fertility and sexual love.'

Unsurprisingly, when immorality is cloaked as highly religious, these same practices and worse were also common in the everyday life of citizens outside of any religious context. The brothers and sisters in Thessalonica had grown up with this perverted moral code ingrained as their 'normal'.

⁴³ www.worldhistory.org/article/1797/prostitution-in-the-ancient-mediterranean/

1 *Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

Furthermore then

i.e. Given all that has been addressed in Ch 1-3 – the Thessalonians' conversion, the preachers' sincerity, and the ongoing mutual love between them – '*therefore we ask you...*'

We beseech you

Beseech Gk *eratao* G2065 = 'To question, ask, request, entreat, beg' (Thay). ESV: 'we ask and urge you'.

Exhort you by the Lord Jesus

As already noted, 'exhort' is a key word in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, and particularly in the latter half (see p31). He now 'calls them alongside' to 'perfect that which is still lacking' in their spiritual life.

That as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk

Cp 2:13: 'when ye received (s/w) the word of God'. Paul is referring to the message he taught, but as he has shown, his example was consistent with that message. Cp Php 4:9.

And to please God

Note the distinct contrast with the Jews – Paul's focus is on pleasing God, whereas the Jews, who killed God's messengers and even His Son, 'please not God' (2:15). God becomes a central focus of this section on moral conduct – see v1,3,5,7,8.

So ye would abound more and more

Abound Gk *perisseuo* G4052 = s/w 3:12 – 'to superabound, etc.'

More and more Gk *mallon* G3123 = 'very, very much, denoting constant increase' (Bull.)

Paul is asking them to focus wholeheartedly on living in a way which pleases God. If we are to avoid the distractions and temptations of the world, our minds and hearts must be concentrated in another direction. Cp Rom 12:21.

2 *For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.*

Commandments Gk *paraggelia* G3852 = 'a charge, a command' (Thay). This was originally a military word (ESV Study Bible). The noun form appears only a few other times, each time in relation to a charge: 1Tim 1:5,18; Acts 5:28; 16:24.

The 'commandments' appear to be a reference to the principles of the Truth, several of which he is about to expand upon or clarify in Ch 4-5.

THE SUPPOSED INADEQUACY OF SCRIPTURE

The Roman Catholic Church use this verse (1Th 4:2, along with 2Tim 2:2), to teach that the Bible only includes *part* of what believers need to know about God and His Truth. They say that, because Paul gave spoken commandments in addition to writing letters, the Bible must not contain all we need to know for salvation. They call these oral teachings 'Tradition', and say that they are to be accepted on an equal footing with Scripture:

'Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, entrusted to the church.' (Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine, p251).

By 'Tradition' the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) means:

*'Divinely revealed truth taught **orally** by Christ and his Apostles which is not found in the Bible, although recorded for all time by churchmen in the early age of the Church.'* (Father Smith Instructs Jackson, p58).

Solution: The RCC position is based on the unsustainable assumption that the oral teaching of the apostles contained saving truth that was additional to that contained in the completed Scriptures. If 'Tradition' is essential, then it follows that the word of God given to us in the Scriptures is not sufficient to impart salvation. This contradicts the teaching of Christ's apostles: see 2Tim 3:15; Rom 1:16; James 1:21; 1Cor 1:17-18.⁴⁴

Additional Note: Unsurprisingly, the RCC position stands in direct contrast to the 'Foundation' clause of the Christadelphian faith, as outlined in the BASF:

*'That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets and the apostles, **is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes** at present extant or available in the earth and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except as may be due to errors of transcription or translation. 2Tim 3:16; 1Cor 2:13; Heb 1:1; 2 Pet 1:21; 1 Cor 14:37; Neh 9:30; Jn 10:35.'*

3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.

This is the will of God

The 'will of God' encompasses His overall plan of salvation for mankind (1Tim 2:4), but also His specific plans for the lives of individual believers. Everything He does is with the intent of fulfilling this purpose (Rom 8:28).

Your sanctification

Sanctification Gk *hagiasmos* G38 = 'purification, purity' (Str), 'separation to God' (Vines). s/w v4, 'holiness' v7. Very similar word to 'holiness' and 'saints' in 3:13

This word continues the theme of holiness (see notes on 3:13). Paul now proceeds to show the Thessalonians *how* they must strive to live in a state of holiness before God.

That ye should abstain from fornication

Abstain Gk *apechomai* G567 = 'to hold one's self off, refrain, abstain'(Thay). There needs to be mental determination followed by action.

Fornication Gk *porneia* G4202 = 'illicit sexual intercourse' (Thay).

'Fornication' is a broad term *'which referred to adultery, fornication or other sexual immorality'* (ESV Study Bible, 1Th 4:3). This may be anything from physical activity to entertaining unlawful desires in one's heart (Mt 5:28). It is the equivalent in the OT to the

⁴⁴ See *Wrested Scriptures*, Bro Ron Abel, p4-5.

word 'zanah' and includes every sort of sexual sin. Thayer adds that it refers 'metaphorically [to] the worship of idols' - this is because idolatry often included immorality.

As noted earlier, fornication was a very real problem in pagan cities and was not considered disgraceful by the Gentiles. Consequently, one of the major outcomes of the Jerusalem Conference was that this activity must be abstained from (Acts 15:20,29; 21:25). Paul continually warned the ecclesias against it (cp 1Cor 6:13-20).

A GODLY CONSCIENCE

Joseph, who was separated from his family and ecclesia at only 17 years of age, formed an ideal role model for the new converts as an example of fidelity in the face of temptation. Perhaps this faithful young man came to mind as Paul thought upon how to encourage a 6-month-old ecclesia to withstand the temptations of their immoral society:

1Th	The Thessalonians	Joseph	Gen
3:11	Our Lord... direct our way	God did send me	45:5
4:1,10	Abound more and more	Name means 'The increaser'	39:2-3
4:3	Abstain from fornication	Joseph 'refused' Potiphar's wife	39:7-9
4:6	That no man... defraud his brother	My master... hath [not] kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife	39:9
4:8	He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God	How then can I... sin against God	39:9

Joseph's ever-present awareness of God (one of the great themes of his life⁴⁵), helped him withstand temptation when alone, showing the importance of a godly conscience.

4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.

How to possess his vessel

ESV 'how to control his own body'.

Possess Gk *ktaomai* G2932 = 'to get, that is, acquire by any means' (Str).

Vessel Gk *skeuos* G4632 = 'a vessel, utensil for containing anything' (Mounce).

Literally speaking, a vessel is a physical container for holding things in⁴⁶. As such, it is taken in Scripture to represent us - humans - who have been designed to hold the glory and character of God and to be used for any given purpose He has intended, as the maker of the vessel (Jer 18:6 & 2Cor 4:7). This is particularly seen in the life of Paul, who was 'a chosen vessel' to hold the name of Christ (Acts 9:15).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Gen 39:9; 40:8; 41:16,25,28,32,51,52; 42:18; 43:29; 44:17; 45:5,7,8,9; 48:9; 50:19-20,24-25. Even his servants feared God 43:23.

⁴⁶ As seen Mk 11:16; Lk 8:16; Heb 9:21; Rev 2:27; 18:12 (all s/w *skeuos*).

⁴⁷ In relation to vessels representing people, see also Rom 9:21-23; 2Tim 2:20-21.

Here, the vessel represents our 'body'⁴⁸. In commenting on this verse, Conybeare & Howson aptly explain, 'a man may be said to *gain possession of his own body* when he subdues those lusts which may tend to destroy his mastery over it' (C&H, p308). Quite simply, Paul's exhortation is to subdue all immoral sexual desires and abstain from all immoral sexual relationships.

Sanctification and honour

Sanctification Gk *hagiasmos* G38 = s/w v3 (see note).

Honour Gk *time* G5092 = has the essential meaning of 'value' and can therefore refer to either 'money / valuables' or 'esteem / dignity' (Str).

'Sanctification' refers to keeping our bodies pure before God. 'Honour' describes the value attached to them. We have been bought with a price so that our bodies can be a dwelling place for God (1Cor 6:19-20). But when we indulge in immoral behaviour, we both defile our bodies (1Cor 6:15-16,18) and devalue them (Rom 1:24).

PURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

We live in a fast-changing society. The Western world is coming out of over 1600 years of Judeo-Christian values, which largely preserved the Biblical model of marriage, families, gender and relationships. The sexual revolution of the 1960s was a cultural and social movement that led to more liberal attitudes towards sex and morality, and this has only become more prevalent as time has gone on and more people reject God and embrace Humanism.

Humanism is '*a belief system based on the principle that people's spiritual and emotional needs can be satisfied without following a god or religion*'.⁴⁹

Humanism emphasises individual freedom and responsibility, human values and compassion, the need for tolerance and cooperation, and it rejects authoritarian beliefs. This doctrine has created a society where there are no absolute morals, and personal tastes and preferences are the most relevant perspective when making decisions and diversity in lifestyle is celebrated.

We are surrounded by a society that is every bit as perverted as the ancient Roman and Greek culture that challenged the Thessalonians, and we must not underestimate the impact that this has on our thinking.

For us, there are some clear Bible instructions. Sexual purity must be observed both physically (Gal 5:19-21) and mentally (Mt 5:27-28). There are no grey areas when it comes to morality. The only way that we will be able to fight the most powerful human lust is with the armour of God (Eph 6:11).

⁴⁸ As per the ESV, NIV and ISV. In contrast, it has been suggested that the 'vessel' referred to here is a specific reference to one's wife because, in considering the marriage relationship, Peter describes the wife as 'the weaker vessel' (1Pet 3:7). A parallel is also drawn with 1Cor 7:2, which is discussing the marriage relationship. This, however, cannot be the case in 1Th 4:4-5 for a few reasons:

1. The Greek word for general sexual immorality is used (i.e. *porneia* = fornication v4), not the word for adultery (*moicheuo*) which relates to marital unfaithfulness.
2. Paul is addressing 'every one of you' - not just the men or husbands.

⁴⁹ dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humanism

5 Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

Not in the lust of concupiscence

NIV: *'not in passionate lust'*. ESV: *'not in the passion of lust'*.

Lust Gk *pathos* G3806 = 'properly suffering, that is, a passion' (Str, Mounce). Only 2 other occ: 'inordinate affection' (Col 3:5), vile 'affections' (Rom 1:26).

Concupiscence Gk *epithumia* G1939 = 'desire, craving, longing, desire for what is forbidden, lust' (Thay)

'Concupiscence' is most often translated 'lust' in Scripture, and speaks of prohibited desires of the flesh. These desires, or lusts, are described as 'worldly' (Tit 2:12), deceitful (Eph 4:22), evil (Col 3:5), hurtful (1Tim 6:9) and youthful (2Tim 2:22).

Having just described 'the works of the flesh' in Galatians 5, headed up by adultery and fornication (v19), Paul writes in v24,

'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections (passions - Gk pathema from pathos) and lusts (s/w epithumia)'

Nobody is saying this is an easy change. It wasn't easy for the Thessalonians to leave behind their old, passionate desires; it isn't easy for us to break long-standing habits. But it must be done, because Paul is very clear: *'They which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God'* (Gal 5:21). This is not because God is a harsh judge, but because these 'lusts' choke the Word and prevent it from developing the fruit of the spirit in a believer's life (Mk 4:19 s/w 'lusts'; Gal 5:22-23).

Even as the Gentiles which know not God

This is an allusion to the OT phrase: *'the heathen that know thee not'* (Psa 79:6; Jer 10:25).

As mentioned, Thessalonica was rife with idolatrous pagan rituals. A few years later, Paul had to address these issues in more detail with the Corinthian ecclesia, another Greco-Roman port city. He says that they 'were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols' and that as such, 'some of you' were 'fornicators, idolaters, and adulterers' (1Cor 12:2; 6:9-11).

As we live in a world that celebrates the fulfilling of every human lust, we need to take great care, to ensure that we don't fall prey. If left to our own devices, we will relapse into the *'old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts'* (Eph 4:22). The action of putting on Christ helps us to *'make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof'* (Rom 13:14, see also 2Tim 2:22; Tit 2:12; Gal 5:16-25).

6 That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

That no man go beyond and defraud his brother

Go beyond Gk *huperbaino* G5233 = 'to step over, beyond, metaph. to transgress' (Thay).

Defraud Gk *pleonekteo* G4122 = 'to be covetous, that is (by impl.) to overreach' (Str). Also rendered 'to make gain' in 2Cor 12:17-18.

The apostle is still exhorting the Thessalonians in matters of sexual misconduct. In v6, he is specifically referring to illicit relationships with others in the ecclesia.

A stark Biblical example of when a man did ‘go beyond and defraud his brother’ was when David stole Uriah’s little ewe lamb, Bathsheba. The poignancy of Nathan’s parable, and the fierce reaction of David to its injustice, illustrate just how reprehensible such behaviour is within God’s ecclesia (see 2Sam 12:1-12).

The consequences of such a breach in trust are also vividly portrayed in the life of David. The happy family of Uriah was shattered, and David’s own family was never the same again. As God foretold through His prophet, the sword would never depart from David’s house, ‘because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah’ (2Sam 12:10-11).

Thus, we see the wisdom behind the instruction of Proverbs to ‘rejoice with the wife of thy youth’ and be faithful to her alone (Prov 5:15-19).

In any matter

i.e. in **this** matter (ESV)

The Lord is the avenger of all such

Avenger Gk *ekdikos* G1558 = ‘carrying out justice, that is, a punisher’ (Str).

As was seen in the life of David (above), God will avenge those who are oppressed in this way. The offender may appear to get away with it initially, but ‘vengeance is Mine’, says God, ‘I will repay’ (Rom 12:19).

‘The Lord’ in this verse appears to be Christ, who is described as ‘Lord’ throughout the chapter (1Th 4:1,6,15,16,17). God has committed all judgment to him (Jn 5:27), and he will return to avenge his bride (Eph 5:25-27; 2Th 1:7-8).

As we also have forewarned you and testified

Roth: ‘even as we before told you and solemnly called you to witness.’ Paul and Silas had already addressed this issue in person with the ecclesia, yet it needed to be restated. Not only were these immoral practices commonplace in society, but they were addictive, so the brothers and sisters would need reminders and support to leave them behind for good. The same is true for us - if bad habits are to be overcome, support and a plan are needed.

7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

God hath not called us unto uncleanness

Uncleanness Gk *akatharsia* G167 = ‘impurity, physically or morally’ (Str). s/w 2:3.

This is listed as a work of the flesh (Gal 5:19) - something we must try to put to death in our lives (Col 3:5), so that it never arises in the ecclesia (Eph 5:3-4).

Called... unto Holiness

Holiness Gk *hagiasmos* G38 = s/w ‘sanctification’ v3 (see note 3:13).

Along with the first century ecclesia, we have been:

- Called out of darkness (1Pet 2:9)
- Called to God’s Kingdom (1Th 2:12)
- Called to a life of holiness (1Pet 1:15)
- Called to glory and excellence of character (2Pet 1:3 LEB)

Importantly, we have not been called for anything we have done, but in accordance with, and for the furtherance of, God's purpose, and in demonstration of His grace towards us (2Tim 1:9).

3 He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God

Despiseth Gk *atheteo* G114 = 'To do away with, to set aside, disregard, reject' (Thay).
'For *despiseth* read *rejecteth*' (Camb Comm).

Why did Paul have to state this? Clearly there was an influence seeking to undermine his teachings. It would have been particularly desirable for some to flout Paul's teaching, because it ran counter to their addictive habits and lusts.

Similar warnings were given in 1Samuel 8:7 and Luke 10:16 – in rejecting God's messengers, Israel had rejected God himself. The same would be true of the Thessalonians if they chose to reject the Word of God spoken through Paul (1Th 2:13). Could it be true of us?

Who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit

Paul had chosen not to stamp his apostolic authority in commencing this epistle (see note 1:1), but here he does add the authoritative backing of the Holy Spirit in this matter of morality. It was imperative that the ecclesia appreciate the authenticity of his message here, for to miss it would imperil the whole fabric of the ecclesia. Having been endowed with the Holy Spirit, Paul's writings were, and are, to be regarded as '*the Word of God*' (2:13), and therefore came to be a part of Scripture (2Pet 3:15-16). It would be the influence of the Word which would, in the words of v3, bring about their 'sanctification' and ours.

A LESSON FOR OUR TIMES

'The Holy Spirit would not have moved Paul to sound this warning against sexual vice unless it were necessary. Moral corruption in the cities of the Empire was so general, and the people so familiar with it, that even the believers felt little shock or surprise any more. Something very similar is true today, especially for those of us who live in or near large cities. Immorality of every sort is practised, and even condoned by the previously "respectable" parts of society... Our young people especially need to ponder the words of Paul here, and be on their guard. An affectionate love of Christ, and a solid Bible knowledge, will provide a shield against the arrows of the enemy. Let us develop an awareness of our own innate weaknesses, and recognise that even we, who think we stand, can all too easily fall.'

(Bro George Booker, *Waiting for His Son*, p92).

AN EXHORTATION TO BROTHERLY LOVE (4:9-10)

Paul's exhortation against immoral relations were by no means to come at the expense of wholesome relationships within the ecclesia. Instead, true love of the brethren would thrive in an ecclesia where purity was upheld, as Paul now goes on to exhort.

9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*

Other translations help in understanding where the emphasis should be placed:

'But we don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another.' (NLT)

Brotherly love... love one another

Brotherly love Gk *philadelphia* G5360 = 'Love of brothers and sisters' (Thay).

This word is made up of two Greek words: *philos* ('friend') and *adelphos* (brethren). *Philos* is closely related to one of the two primary Greek words for love in the New Testament: *phileo* (G5368). The other main word is *agape*, or *agapao* (the verb), which is the second word 'love' that occurs in this verse:

Love Gk *agapao* G25 = 'To love' (Str). See below for explanation.

Phileo describes that feeling of closeness, friendship or 'love' we spontaneously experience towards a person (e.g. Jn 11:36; Mt 10:37).

Agape, on the other hand, is a love which is driven by what one knows to be right, rather than just an innate feeling. It is driven by our appreciation of God and Christ's love towards us (e.g. Rom 5:8; 1Jn 3:1; Jn 15:13) and describes the love we should show towards God (Mt 22:37-38) and each other (v39). This is the type of love that motivates us to obey God's commandments (1Jn 5:3), sacrifice for others (Eph 5:25) and 'love' our enemies (Mt 5:44).

Strong's concordance (entry on *phileo*) summarises the difference:

'The former (phileo) is chiefly of the heart, and the latter (agape) of the head.'

Thus, in this passage, Paul effectively says:

- I don't even need to tell you about how important it is for you to show a *kind affection of brotherly 'phileo' love* towards each other,
- Because God has taught you to show the *self-sacrificing 'agape' love* towards each other, so the former will happen naturally!

Ye yourselves are taught of God

taught of God Gk *theodidaktos* G2312 = 'divinely instructed' (Str). Only occurrence in NT.

There were two ways this could have occurred for the Thessalonians:

1. Through the instruction of spirit-gifted elders such as Paul (2:13; cp 1Cor 2:12-13).
2. Through personal study of God's word (2Tim 3:16-17).

10 *And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;*

Indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in Macedonia

Paul opened his letter by commending the Thessalonians' faith, love and hope (1:3), and the spread of their faith throughout all Macedonia (1:7-8). He now adds to that a commendation of the demonstration of their love abroad as well.

These ecclesias of Macedonia later proved their sincerity and love in donating to the Jerusalem Poor Fund⁵⁰ (see Rom 15:25-26; 2Cor 8:1-5).

But we beseech you, brethren

Beseech Gk *parakaleo* G3870 = s/w 'exhort' v1. This is Paul's second 'exhortation' to the ecclesia in the second half of the epistle.

AN EXHORTATION TO DILIGENCE (4:11-12)

11 *And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;*

ESV: '*and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you*'.

That ye study to be quiet

Study Gk *philotimeomai*, G5389 = 'to be fond of honour' (Thay, Str). Only used 3x in NT: Rom 15:20, 'strived', and 2Cor 5:9, 'labour'.

The word translated 'study' is rendered 'aspire to' (ESV) or 'make it your ambition' (NIV, cp Roth). The sense is to '*make it your goal to live quietly*' (ISV). When we consider the other NT uses of this word, we find that a faithful disciple would:

- 'Aspire' to share the knowledge of the Gospel (Rom 15:20).
- 'Aspire' to be accepted by Christ (2Cor 5:9).
- 'Aspire' to 'be quiet', do his own business, to work with his own hands (1Th 4:11).

Quiet Gk *hesuchazo* G2270 = 'To keep still, that is, refrain from labour, meddlesomeness or speech' (Str).

This Greek word is only used a handful of times and is taken to describe the Sabbath rest (Lk 23:56) and peace after a heated argument (Acts 11:18 cp v2-3; 21:14). It refers not to a spirit of laziness, but rather a quiet dedication. The Thessalonian ecclesia had a problem of 'busybodies' who were 'working not at all' (2Th 3:10-11), and who threatened to undermine ecclesial harmony (1Tim 5:13). This may have arisen from the culture of the place, as there were plenty of people who loitered in the marketplace (Acts 17:5). Paul therefore exhorts to quietness and sobriety and against laziness and troublemaking, as he often does (see 1Tim 2:2; 3:2-3; 2Tim 3:3,6; Tit 1:10-11; 2:2-6).

⁵⁰ A collection for the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem who lived in poverty (largely due to persecution) which Paul took up on his 3rd Missionary Journey. See Acts 24:17, which is parallel to Acts 21:17 (see context of both passages).

To do your own business

Roth: 'to be attending to your own affairs'.

An elitist attitude existed in Greek society: leisure time was encouraged, and manual labour was despised, with slaves being heavily relied upon. As Paul warned Timothy, such circumstances encourage idleness and allow for self-indulgence (1Tim 5:13).

To work with your own hands

Work Gk *ergazomai*, G2038, 'to toil, be engaged in or with' (Str).

As noted above, this was a significant problem in the Thessalonian ecclesia, and Paul had to give another warning against idleness in his second letter to the Thessalonians (2Th 3:6-15).

Paul upheld the principles outlined by God in the garden of Eden: '*in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*' (Gen 3:19). Despite the curse being a curse, God has put it there for the benefit of mankind. Paul himself 'laboured day and night' (1Th 2:9, see also Acts 20:33-35; 18:3; 1Cor 4:12; Eph 4:28), that he might not rely on others to support himself.

MEDITATION POINT: ARE WE IDLE?

How we spend our free time is of the utmost importance. As seen by Paul's exhortation in Timothy (1Tim 5:13), idleness fosters opportunity for sin. We should consider carefully whether we regularly leave ourselves open to temptation by pursuing certain activities. Cp Mt 12:35-37; Col 3:22-24.

12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

Paul now gives two reasons for his instruction in v11: (1) the effect their example would have on others, and (2) the impact of idleness on their own lives.

That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without

honestly Gk *euschemonos* G2156 = 'in a seemly manner, decently' (Thay). LEB: 'decently', YLT 'becomingly'.

Note that while being 'honest' is part of a godly lifestyle, that is not what the Greek word means here. The ESV has, '*that you may walk properly before outsiders*'. Paul is exhorting them to an exemplary 'walk', or way of life (cp 2:12; 4:1). Their way of life would be seen to be decent and orderly if everyone provided for their own family's needs; a stark contrast to the 'disorderly' state of affairs Paul notes in both epistles (1Th 5:14 mg, 2Th 3:6).

Paul later instructs Timothy that elders, who set the pattern for an ecclesia, must '*have a good report of them which are without*' (1Tim 3:7). See also 1Pet 2:12.

That ye may have lack of nothing

Or '*that you will not be dependent on anybody*' (NIV), like Paul and his company (2:10). If the able-bodied members worked with their hands, they would be able to support themselves and their dependents and not become a drain on the generosity of others. Elsewhere Paul explains that those who were destitute through no choice of their own would be supported by their families or the ecclesia (Eph 4:28; 1Tim 5:3-8).

AN EXHORTATION CONCERNING THE RESURRECTION (4:13-18)

It had only been a short time since Paul had left Thessalonica and it appears a question about the fate of those who died before Christ's return had now arisen for the first time. The ecclesia expected the Lord to return imminently (1:10, as did the disciples in Acts 1:6). But now it seems members of the ecclesia had died or were dying (4:14-15) and the question arose as to their fate. Would they be somehow disadvantaged compared to those who were still alive at Christ's return? Paul now writes to alleviate these fears concerning their deceased brothers and sisters, and to provide comfort concerning the resurrection (v18).

It is important to recognise that Paul's focus is on answering this question and not on providing a comprehensive explanation of the events subsequent the Lord's return. As in 1Corinthians 15, he omits some details – such as the Judgement or the possibility that some are ultimately rejected⁵¹, presumably because this doctrine was not a problem for the Thessalonians. Therefore, this section of 1Thessalonians 4 must be harmonised with other sections of Scripture if we are to obtain a complete picture.

13 *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren,

Ignorant Gk *agnoeo* G50 = 'not to know, by implication to ignore' (Str).

A common expression of Paul (see Rom 1:13; 11:25; 1Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2Cor 1:8) which he uses when he wants to correct a principle or idea. The concept of the resurrection of the dead was foreign to the pagan Greek world (Acts 17:18) and new believers took some time to come to terms with it. The same issue occurred with the Corinthians (1Cor 15:12).

Concerning them which are asleep

Them which are asleep Gk *koimao* G2837 = 'to put to sleep, that is to slumber; fig. to de cease' (Str). The associated word *koiman* (put to sleep) is the basis for the Gk *koimeterion* (dormitory/sleeping chamber) = basis for 'cemetery'.

Sleep is a common metaphor for the death state in both Old and New Testaments.⁵² Note that *koimao* is translated as 'dead' in 1 Cor 7:39.

The hope of resurrection does not apply to all mankind, but only those who 'sleep in Jesus' (v14), who are the 'dead in Christ' (v16). Those unenlightened by the Truth will sleep a 'perpetual sleep, and not wake' (Jer 51:39,57), like the beasts that perish (Psa 49:16-20).

There are three meanings of the word 'sleep' in scripture:

1. Natural sleep,
2. The state of death (4:14), and
3. A lack of spiritual vigilance (5:6).

The Gk *koimao*, rendered 'sleep/asleep' in v13,14,15 is used for either natural sleep or death. In contrast, the word 'sleep' in 5:6,7,10 is the Gk *katheudo* G2518 which carries all three meanings.

⁵¹ Cp 1Cor 15:52, which could be read to suggest that we will be resurrected and immortalised without judgement, but other references that speak of the resurrection and judgement of both the righteous and the wicked, such as Dan 12:1-3; Acts 24:15; Mt 25:31-32, 2Cor 5:10, Rom 14:10.

⁵² Deut 31:16; 1Ki 22:40; Psa 13:3; Dan 12:2; Mt 9:24; 27:52; Jn 11:11-14; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1Cor 15:6,20; 2 Pet 3:4

That ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope

Sorrow Gk *lupeo* G3076 = 'to distress, to be sad, grieve' (Str).

Barclay speaks of the hopelessness of the pagan world in these terms:

'In the face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation but with bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection." Theocritus wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope." Catullus wrote, "When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep."⁵³

One of the great hopes of the Gospel is the resurrection of the dead (Jn 6:39,44,54; 11:24-26; Acts 23:6; 26:6-8; 1Cor 15; Tit 1:2). This is the hope of salvation spoken of in Ch 5:8. Those who don't share this hope have good cause to sorrow (Eph 2:12). When we lose a loved one in Christ, we also sorrow (Jn 11:35), but our sorrow is the grief of a temporary loss, not the despair of a permanent loss, because we will see our loved ones again.

14 *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again

ESV: *'For since we believe'*. By using the word 'if', Paul is not questioning their belief that Jesus died and rose again, but is saying that because they believed this, then their resurrection was guaranteed.

Jesus is described as having 'died' whereas those in Christ are described as 'sleeping'. If Christ had not risen, those in Christ would also be dead forever (1Cor 15:16-18). But since God raised him from the dead, having conquered the power of death (Heb 2:14), all those in Christ will also be 'made alive' (1Cor 6:14; 15:22-23) and are therefore described as just 'sleeping'.

Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him

In Gk *dia* G1223 = through, by means of (Thay).

The usual word for 'in' is the Gk *en* G1722. Therefore, the phrase 'sleep in Jesus' is more correctly translated 'sleep **through** Jesus' (ESV, NASB, Diag).

It is still true to say that dead brothers and sisters 'sleep **in** Jesus', because v16 says they are 'dead **in** (en) Christ' (v16); the point being made here in v14 is that God is doing the work, not Christ. The Diaglott translates the verse like this:

*'For since we believe that Jesus died and arose; so also we believe that **God, through Jesus,** will lead forth with him those who fell asleep.'*

God is the source of all life because only He has immortality as an inherent quality (1Tim 6:16). He has offered life to man through the work of Christ:

- Jesus said, *'No man cometh unto the Father, but by (**through**) me'* (Jn 14:6).
- Paul says we *'joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by (**through**) whom we have now received the atonement'* (Rom 5:11).

⁵³ William Barclay, *The Letters to Philipppians, Colossians, Thessalonians*, notes on 1Th 4:13-18, p237

And so 'your life is hid with Christ **in God**. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory' (Col 3:3-4).

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

By the word of the Lord

To comfort the Thessalonians further, Paul explains that his teaching has come directly from Christ and is not his opinion. He takes the same approach in 1Cor 7:10 (contrast v12), 14:37.

Remain unto the coming of the Lord

Coming Gk *parousia* G3952. Note from Themes (p30), that this word relates to the physical in-person presence of the Lord at his return.

THE 'PAROUSIA' OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

'Watch Tower Society publications teach that Jesus Christ began to rule in heaven invisibly as king in October 1914. They assert that the Greek word parousia (translated in most English Bible translations as 'coming' when referring to Christ) is more accurately rendered 'presence,' perceived only by a composite "sign". As such, the Second Coming is considered an invisible presence. Witnesses teach that in 1918, Jesus resurrected those of the 144,000 (the "anointed") who had already died to heavenly life; since 1918, any "anointed" are individually resurrected to heavenly life at the time of their death to serve as kings alongside Christ in his heavenly government' (Jehovah's Witnesses Beliefs, Wikipedia).

The answer to the problem:

- *Parousia* literally means 'presence' so the JW's argue that the Second Coming only requires Christ's 'presence', and not his literal return to the earth. They teach that Christ has already 'come', but that his coming was invisible and he is ruling from heaven now. But *parousia* is used to describe the coming of Titus (2Cor 7:6-7), Stephanos (1Cor 16:17), and Paul (Php 1:26). In 2Cor 10:10 Paul speaks of his 'bodily **presence**' which obviously means his presence was visible, because he was there in person.
- Jesus warned against false prophets who would teach an invisible return of Christ to his 'secret chambers' (Mt 24:26-27). The JW doctrine sounds very much like Christ is now ruling from his 'secret chamber'.
- Jesus will return literally, physically and visibly to the earth. When he ascended to heaven, the angels told the disciples that he would return from heaven the same way they had seen him ascend to heaven (Acts 1:10-11). They watched his ascend to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12). He will return back to the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4).
- When Christ returns, 'every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him' (Rev 1:7). In fact, the nation of Israel will see him and examine the wounds in his hands (Zech 13:6) and mourn for what they did to him (Zech 12:10-14).
- *Parousia* is not the only word in the New Testament used to describe the return of Christ. 'The chief shepherd shall appear (*phaneroo* G5319)' (1Pet 5:4). *Phaneroo* means to visibly appear (2Cor 5:10; Heb 9:26).

Shall not prevent them which are asleep

Prevent Gk *phthano* G5348 = to come before, precede, anticipate (Thay).

'Prevent' here is an old English word from the from Latin *praeventus* = 'come before'. Today we would use the word 'precede'. Paul is saying that the living will have no advantage over the dead when Christ returns. The dead saints are equally precious in the eyes of God (Psa 116:15).

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

For the Lord himself

Christ is in charge of the resurrection because God has given him the power to execute judgement (Jn 5:25-29).

Shall descend from heaven

Like he ascended - Acts 1:9-11

With a shout

Shout Gk *keleuma* G2752 = 'a cry of incitement' (Str), implying authority and urgency.

This shout is '*a stimulating cry, either by which animals are roused and urged on by man, as horses by charioteers, hounds by hunters, etc., or that by which a signal is given to men, e.g. to rowers by the master of a ship, to soldiers by a commander, with a loud summons.*' (Thay). This is the only occurrence of the word. It is a shout that wakes the dead!

With the voice of the archangel

Literally, this is '*with an archangel's voice*' (Diag). We are not told by Paul whose voice it will be, but John tells us it will be Christ's voice.

Then Jesus said: '*Marvel not at this: for **the hour is coming** in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his [Jesus'] **voice**, and shall come forth...*' (Jn 5:28-29). Here, the Lord was speaking of a distant time when those who were literally dead would hear his voice and come from the graves.

Christ's voice also sounds like a trumpet. In Revelation 1:10, John heard a voice behind him on the Lord's day that sounded like a trumpet. The Lord's day (*the day of the Lord*) is the day Christ returns (1Th 5:2). The source of the voice was 'one like the Son of Man' (Rev 1:13), who describes himself as 'he that liveth and was dead' (v18), a characteristic of the Lord (v5).

So, the shout, the voice like an archangel and trumpet sound are three characteristics of Christ's voice.

Notwithstanding this, the only archangel named as such in scripture is Michael (Jude 9). We know that when Christ returns, he comes with angels (Mt 16:27; 25:31) and that Michael is intimately associated with the resurrection (Dan 12:1-2), so it appears he will also be there.

With the trump of God

Trump Gk *salpigx* G4536 = 'a trumpet' (Str).

In 1Corinthians 15:52, Paul says we will be changed from mortality to immortality at 'the last trump', so it appears the **first** trumpet (1Th 4:16) raises the dead and the **last** trumpet immortalises them.

In Israel, there were two different types of trumpets: the silver trumpet and the shophar (ram's horn) trumpet. Each was used on multiple occasions, but significantly, the silver trumpet was blown to gather people together (Num 10:2-3) whereas the shophar trumpet was blown on the Day of Atonement (Lev 25:9 trumpet H7782 = shophar), when sins and debts were forgiven, so the two trumps of the New Testament correlate well with the two trumpets used in Biblical times.

The dead in Christ shall rise first

Shall rise before what? Before the events of v17. Those saints who have fallen asleep will be raised from the dead. Then all, both those who are living and those who have been raised from the dead, will be gathered to Christ.

17 *Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

In this verse, the Apostle is not describing the full process of resurrection and judgement of the ecclesia, acceptance and rejection at the Judgement Seat, or the change to immortality. Instead, he speaks only of the gathering of the accepted saints to Christ. The reason for this is that he is answering the question implied by v13 about whether those who are alive at Christ's coming have some advantage over those that have already died. He is not intending to explain the entire resurrection and judgement process.

We which are alive and remain

i.e. Those of v15 where the same phrase occurs.

Shall be caught up

Caught up Gk *harpazo* G726 = 'to sieze, carry off by force, snatch out or away' (Thay).

The Greek word does not denote any sense of direction, so 'caught up' should more correctly be 'caught away' as it is translated in Acts 8:39. It simply means to 'take' (Jn 6:15) and is used of a wolf snatching away a sheep (Jn 10:12, also s/w v28-29 'pluck'), or pulling someone out of the fire (Jude v23).

DIVINE TRAVEL IN SCRIPTURE

There are a number of examples in scripture of people being *taken* by the spirit and transported from one location to another – **on earth**.

- **'Enoch** was translated (transported) that he should not see death' (Heb 11:5). Note that Enoch did subsequently die (Heb 11:13) but he was transported to another place on earth (Jn 1:18; 3:13) so that he would not see a violent death at the hands of Lamech. Cp Gen 4:23-24 and Jude 14-15.
- **'Elijah** went up by a whirlwind into heaven' (2Ki 2:1; cp 1Ki 18:12). He did not literally ascend to heaven (Jn 3:13) but was relocated elsewhere on earth, from where he subsequently wrote a letter (2Chr 21:12).

- 'The spirit of the Lord caught away **Philip**' (Acts 8:39). After baptising the eunuch on the Jerusalem-Gaza highway, Philip was subsequently found at Azotus (Ashdod), some distance away (Acts 8:40).
- **The saints** will be 'caught up (away) together' (1Th 4:17). In this case, the saints are transported from various locations to the Judgement Seat of Christ, which is most likely at Sinai.

Together

Together Gk *hama* G260 = 'at the same time, together with' (Thay).

This is an important word because it addresses the question that was raised in v13 regarding whether those who are alive at Christ's coming have an advantage over those who have already died. The answer is, no, they don't. 'Whether we wake or sleep we should live **together** with him' (5:10).

With them in the clouds

Clouds Gk *nephele* G3507 = a cloud, from *nephos* G3509 a cloud (as a great shapeless collection of vapour) or a large dense multitude, a throng (Thay).

In the Greek, the definite article is omitted, so, the saints will be taken away '*in clouds*', referring to the fact that they are gathered in groups. The word is used in this sense in New and Old Testaments.

- 'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with **so great a cloud of witnesses**' (Heb 12:1 where the associated word *nephos* is used).
- When Jesus ascended to heaven '**a cloud received him** out of their sight' (Acts 1:9). This cloud appears to have been a group of angels because when Christ entered heaven 'the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven ... and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom' (Dan 7:13-14). When Christ returns to earth he will come with his angels (Mt 16:27, 25:31) which is described as 'coming in the clouds of heaven' (Mt 24:30).
- When the Russian confederacy invades Israel, they come '**like a cloud** to cover the land' (Ezek 38:9,16).
- When Babylon (the Gentile power from the north Jer 4:6-7) attacked Jerusalem in Zedekiah's day, the Prophet wrote: 'Behold, **he shall come up as clouds**, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind' (Jer 4:13).

To meet the Lord

Meet Gk *apantesis* G529 = 'to meet one' (Thay), 'to meet face to face' - It seems the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary (Vine).

The word only occurs in three other places in the New Testament:

- Mt 25:1,6 where (significantly) it is used of the saints meeting the bridegroom.
- Acts 28:15 where the brethren went to meet Paul to welcome him to Rome.

In the air

Air Gk *aer* G109 = the air or atmosphere (Thay).

If we interpret the word 'air' literally, then the verse would mean that the saints are transported in groups through the air to meet the Lord at the Judgement Seat. While this is possible, it seems that the word should be interpreted metaphorically (or symbolically) like the word 'clouds' is.

Symbolically in scripture, the word 'air' refers to the **place of rulership** or government (see proof below). In that case, the verse would mean that the saints are transported to the Judgement Seat in groups to meet the Lord, to join him in the government of the future age. The verse continues *'and so (in the Air) shall we ever be with the Lord'* (1Th 4:17). This is certainly the case because the reward of the righteous is that they will be *'kings and priests: and we shall **reign on the earth**'* (Rev 5:10).

The word 'air' is used of the place of government in Eph 2:2 where we read the following:

Your life before the Truth	Was governed by
In time past ye walked according to	the course of this world
According to	the prince of the power of the air
(According to)	the spirit ... of disobedience

The prince of this verse is Sin, which controls the political powers of the world, causing them to exhibit a spirit of disobedience. In this present age, Sin reigns like a king (Rom 6:12). In the Kingdom Age, the prince of this world (Sin) will be cast out (Jn 12:31). Therefore, in the Kingdom there will be a new power in the 'air' or region of government.

In Eureka (Vol 5, p262), Bro Thomas makes this comment about the symbolic use of the word 'air':

'Now, the political world has its air as well as the natural. Like this, the political air, or firmament, "divides the waters", or peoples who rule, "from the waters", or peoples who are ruled; and whatever constitutes this division is the air or heaven. The governments of the world are in this air and constitute the sun, moon, stars and constellations of the air or heaven.'

As Bro Thomas says, another symbolic word for 'air' in scripture is 'heaven':

- In Deuteronomy 31:30-32:1, Moses spoke to the **whole nation** of Israel in these terms: *'Give ear, O ye **heavens** and I will speak; and hear, O **earth**, the words of my mouth.'* He addressed the rulers of the tribes as 'heavens', and the common people as 'earth.'
- Isaiah speaks to the heavens and earth of his day in 1:2, which is a reference to the people of Jerusalem who he calls the **rulers** of Sodom and **people** of Gomorrah (Isa 1:10).

This concept is developed further in Isaiah 65:17-18 where the Kingdom Age is spoken of as a new heavens and earth - that is a new government and a new population. At the end of the Kingdom Age, the Kingdom 'heavens and earth' will pass away and be replaced by the 'heavens and earth' of the time beyond the millennium (Rev 21:1).

The sun, moon and stars become symbols of the rulers or governments. The king of Babylon was described as a morning star (Isa 14:12), Christ is described as the sun (Mal 4:2), the immortal saints are described as stars (Dan 12:3).

Therefore, when empires fall, there are great disturbances in the political heavens:

- When Babylon fell to Persia, Isaiah said *'the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine'* (Isa 13:10,13).
- When Babylon conquered Egypt, Ezekiel said to Pharaoh *'I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light'* (Ezek 32:7).
- When Rome took Jerusalem in AD70, and overthrew the Jewish leadership, it was said to have *'waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them'* Dan 8:10.

The use of these symbols in scripture suggests that when Christ comes, the saints will be caught away to a position of authority in the 'air' or place of rulership of the Kingdom Age.

So shall we ever be with the Lord

Ever Gk *pantote* G3842 = 'at all times, always' (Thay)

We will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:4). But we will not reign in heaven or in the clouds. Christ's Kingdom will be based on earth because he will rule from David's ancient throne (Lk 1:32-33) in Jerusalem (Mt 5:35).

THE RAPTURE

1 Thessalonians 4 has become famous as the foundation chapter for the church doctrine of the 'Rapture', according to which the dead believers are raised, and then, together with the living believers, caught physically up into heaven, there to dwell for eternity with Christ.

This is how the Encyclopedia Britannica describes the subject⁵⁴:

'In Christianity, the eschatological (concerned with the last things and End-time) belief that both living and dead believers will ascend into heaven to meet Jesus Christ at the Second Coming (Parousia). The belief in the Rapture emerged from the anticipation that Jesus would return to redeem all members of the church.

*'The term **rapture**, however, appears nowhere in the New Testament. In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul wrote that the Lord will come down from heaven and that a trumpet call will precede the rise of "the dead in Christ" (4:16). Thereafter, "we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up**" (in Latin, **rapio**, the standard translation of Paul's original Koine Greek) "together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (4:17). The Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) mention Jesus' return to earth from heaven; e.g., The Gospel According to Mark cites Jesus as foretelling a "'coming in clouds' with great power and glory" (13:26).'*

⁵⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rapture-the>

This doctrine as stated ignores two great facts:

1. That there must be a Judgement before the blessing of immortality can be received and only the faithful receive it (Jn 5:26-29; 2Cor 5:10; 1Pet 4:17-18),
2. That the inheritance of the immortalised saints is on earth and not in heaven (Mt 5:5, Rev 5:10).

In summary:

- Nowhere in this passage does it say the saints are taken to heaven. Instead, it says *'the Lord shall descend from heaven'* (v16). He is coming from heaven to set up a literal Kingdom on the earth (Psa 37:11,22,29; Mt 5:5; Rev 5:10).
- The confusion about heaven is perhaps because the saints are said to be 'caught up', but the word simply means snatched away, without specifying the direction up or down (Acts 8:38 caught away; Jn 10:28-29 pluck).
- Even if the passage is taken literally and the saints meet the Lord in the air, what happens after that? Are they to 'ever be with the Lord' in the air? The air is a Biblical reference to the place of government, not literal air (Eph 2:2).
- The confusion about the air perhaps comes because the verse also speaks of clouds, but clouds is a symbolic word for a multitude (Heb 12:1; Ezek 38:9,16).
- We meet the Lord to be judged (Jn 5:28-29). The reward of the righteous is to be rulers with Christ in the government of the future age (Rev 5:10) on earth.

18 *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

Comfort

This is Paul's conclusion to the question *'concerning them which are asleep'* (v13). The Greek word *parakaleo* is again used (see Themes, p31). Paul began by exhorting them (2:11), he sent Timothy to continue the work (3:2) and was in turn comforted by them (3:7). Now he advises them to encourage one another (as he does in 5:11,14), particularly in light of the recent bereavements the ecclesia appears to have suffered.

With these words

i.e. Comfort one another with these doctrinal truths. Death is but a sleep for the faithful. Christ will return, raise the dead and bestow life to the faithful. Most people in the world have no knowledge of this, but it is a great comfort to the saints because we 'sorrow not, even as others which have no hope' (v13). We do not sorrow as others do because we will not sleep (in death) as others do, therefore we should not sleep (morally) as others do (5:6).

*Then we which are alive
and remain shall be caught up
together with them in the clouds,
to meet the Lord in the air:
and so shall we ever
be with the Lord.*

1 THESSALONIANS 4:17



FURTHER EXHORTATIONS

TO THE ECCLESIA

CHAPTER 5

PAUL'S CONTINUED EXHORTATIONS (1TH 5)

Having just spoken of the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in Ch 4, Paul shifts his focus in Ch 5 to discuss the times and seasons surrounding Christ's second coming and the need for personal readiness. He concludes the letter with practical exhortation addressing many aspects of living the truth to establish, strengthen and settle the newly developed ecclesia as they wait for Christ's coming.

AN EXHORTATION CONCERNING THE RETURN OF CHRIST (5:1-11)

1-2 *But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*

ESV: 'Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.'

These two verses must be read together. Paul is not saying, 'I don't need to write to you about the times and seasons because you already know everything there is to know', but rather that there's no need for him to write about them because 'you already know precisely that nothing precise on the subject can be known - that the Great Day will steal upon the world like a thief in the night!' (Camb Comm.).

A thief *intentionally* doesn't tell you when he's coming. In the same way, Christ had told the Apostles that, 'it is not for you to know the times or the seasons' (Acts 1:7), and though further time periods would be revealed in the book of Revelation regarding events relating to both the ecclesia and the world, still the exact timing of Christ's return would remain undisclosed. His warning at the end of the book is, 'I come as a thief... Surely I come quickly' (Rev 16:15; 22:20).

Paul's exhortation in v1-11, therefore, centres on encouraging them to be constantly prepared for the event rather than being preoccupied with when it would happen.

The times and the seasons

Times Gk *chronos* G5550 = 'denotes a space of time, whether short or long' (Vines). E.g., a 'chronometer' is an instrument that measures the length of time. In this context, the word relates to *how long* it would be before Christ returned.

Seasons Gk *kairos* G2540 = 'a season, a time, a period possessed of certain characteristics' (Vines). Whereas *chronos* could be said to refer to a **quantity** of time, *kairos* refers more to the characteristics or **quality** of the time. (Vines). E.g. the seasons of the year are marked by their characteristics, and not by specific dates. Here, the word relates to the signs or events that would transpire before Christ's advent.

We do not know the day or hour of Christ's return (Mt 24:36, Mk 13:32-37), which could be described as the 'times' here in 1Th 5:1. The 'seasons', or the 'nature' of the times, were not made known in detail by Christ to the apostles (Acts 1:7), but they were gradually revealed through the apostles subsequently (2Th 2:3-12, 2Tim 3:1-7, 4:3-4, Jude v17-18).

In the following verses, Paul repeats what he had told them previously: that Christ would return when he was least expected (v2), and the seasons would be those of complacency and a false sense of security (v3). To avoid being caught out (v4), they would have to be spiritually vigilant (v6) and build each other up (v11).

Yourselves

There are two groups of people in this section - the world and the ecclesia:

- The world are the '**they**' who will say peace and safety v3, '**they**' who will not escape v3, and '**others/they**' who are asleep v6-7 who are appointed to wrath v9.
- In contrast, the ecclesia are the '**ye/you/yourselves/we/us**' - the children of light v5, who are of the day v8 and who are appointed to salvation v9.

The ecclesia knew Christ's coming would be sudden and unexpected (v2), whereas the world took a false comfort in the fact that everything appeared to be stable and secure (v3).

Perfectly

Perfectly Gk *akribos* G199 = 'exactly, accurately' (Thay).

This is an interesting choice of words since no one knows exactly when a thief will come, so the Apostle is telling the ecclesia that they **know accurately** that they **don't know accurately!** Whilst they knew Christ *would* come, they didn't know *when* (Mt 24:36). Therefore, they should always be ready (Mt 24:44).

Day of the Lord

There are many 'days' of the Lord in Scripture, so the context must determine which one is meant. The exact expression '*the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*' is used in 2Peter 3:10 where it is speaking of AD 70, but most other references to 'the day of the Lord' in the New Testament are referring to Christ's second coming (1Cor 1:8, 2Cor 1:14; Php 1:6,10). The greater context of both epistles is speaking about the second coming of Christ (1Th 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:9-10, 23; 2Th 1:7-10; 2:1-3; 3:5) so it makes sense that is also the case here.

A thief in the night

This is not referring to the method of Christ's return, but the uncertainty of the timing. Christ's coming will be sudden and unexpected. This warning is given throughout scripture (Mt 24:43-44; Lk 12:35-40; Rev 16:15). As Paul goes on to say, believers do not have to be caught out as by a thief (v4), if we remain watchful and ready (v4-8).

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

They

That is, those in darkness (the world), as contrasted with faithful believers who are in the light (v4-5). However, the fact that believers are told not to sleep (v6) and not to be drunk (v8) means that it is possible even for those who have the light to walk in darkness (1Jn 1:6).

Sudden destruction will therefore come upon two groups of people: the **ignorant** and the **unfaithful**. Paul refers to these groups in his second epistle as those who **know not** God and those who **obey not** the Gospel (2Th 1:7-9).

This heightens the exhortation for us, as it means there will be many in the world, *and some in the ecclesia*, who will take up this dangerous and self-deceiving refrain.

Peace and Safety

Peace Gk *eirene* G1515 = 'a state of tranquility, harmony and concord' (Thay).

Safety Gk *asphaleia* G803 = 'certainty, security' (Thay) - idea of free from danger.

This is the false sense of security in the world prior to the return of Christ. There appears to be a few ways in which this false assurance will be promoted prior to Christ's return.

Global Application

It will be the policy of Gog to cause craft (priestcraft) to prosper (Dan 8:25), so that between Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church, Europe will become united. Such a union will probably be hailed as evidence of 'peace and safety,' but it will be a deception (2Th 2:9-12; Rev 18:7,23; 19:20) and will result in 'sudden destruction' (1Th 5:3). Thus through 'peace [he] shall destroy many' (Dan 8:25).

Middle East Application

Another example of 'peace and safety' in the last days is the nation of Israel prior to the Gogian invasion. Three times in one chapter we are told the nation will be 'dwelling safely' (Ezek 38:8,11,14) before they are invaded. Gog himself will be attracted by the nation's over-confidence (v11,14) and will invade them, but will meet his own 'sudden destruction' (v21-23) on the mountains of Israel.

Israel's latter-day 'peace and safety' is illusory because it is man's peace, achieved by diplomacy or military means and is not based upon Divine principles. There is no peace to the wicked (Isa 57:20-21; Jn 14:27; Rom 3:10-17). It is only after Christ changes the heart of the nation that they will have true peace and safety in the Kingdom Age (Ezek 34:24-25; 39:25-26).

Ecclesial Application

Whilst the above examples clearly apply to the days immediately preceding the second coming of the Lord, there was also an exhortation to the ecclesia at Thessalonica in the first century because the 'peace and safety' delusion of the world can also affect the ecclesia. In Old Testament times false prophets deceived people by proclaiming peace when destruction was imminent (Jer 6:13-15; 8:1-16; Ezek 13:1-10; Mic 3:5).

This problem has existed from the garden of Eden where the serpent told Eve 'ye shalt not surely die' even if you sin (Gen 3:4). Moses said similar words to the children of Israel before his death: *'it come to pass, when he [an apostate Israelite] heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: Yahweh will not spare him'* (Deut 29:19-20).

The cares of life and a preoccupation with the present can likewise give us a false sense of security and cause us to lose our perspective on the Truth and sense of urgency for Christ's coming (Mt 24:37-39).

Sudden destruction

Sudden Gk *aiaphnidios* G160 = 'unexpected' (Str).

Destruction Gk *olethros* G3639 = 'ruin' (Str).

The word sudden in this verse occurs in only one other place in the New Testament, in Lk 21v34, where it is rendered 'unawares'. This is highly significant because it draws our attention to the section of scripture the apostle is alluding to in his warning in this section.

1 Thessalonians		Olivet Prophecy	
5:1	Times (<i>chronos</i>)	Mt 24:36	Of that day and hour knoweth no man
5:1	Seasons (<i>kairos</i>)	Mt 24:37	Like the days of Noah
5:2	Day of the Lord	Mt 24:50	The Lord shall come in a day
5:2	Thief in the night	Mt 24:43	The thief comes
5:3	Peace and safety	Mt 24:48	My Lord delayeth his coming
5:3	Sudden	Lk 21:34	Unawares (only other occ of s/w in NT)
5:3	Destruction	Mt 24:43	House to be broken up
5:3	They shall not escape	Mt 24:51	Cut him asunder... with the hypocrites
5:5	Children of light	Mt 25:1-13	Wise virgins - oil in lamps
5:6	Let us not sleep	Mt 25:5	The 10 virgins all slumbered and slept
5:6	Watch	Mt 24:42	Watch... ye know not what hour
5:6	Be sober	Mt 24:49	Eat and drink with the drunken

Sudden destruction comes upon those who are unprepared, whether it be the world at Armageddon (Ezek 38:21-23; Dan 11:45; Joel 3:12-14; Zech 14:12-13), or the ecclesia at Judgement (Mt 24:48-51; Lk 12:20-21).

As travail upon a woman

This figure is used many times in scripture (e.g. Isa 13:8; 26:16-18; Jer 6:24) to describe the inevitable bringing to birth. In between the pains, there is a reprieve, only to be replaced by another more severe pain. In the same way, judgement is coming upon the ecclesia and the world, but there will be temporary times of relief during which it may be appealing to believe we are safer than we really are, or that the Lord has delayed his coming (Mt 24:48). As the Apostle will now explain, these are the times to watch (v6).

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Darkness

Darkness is a metaphor for our naturally unenlightened state where we are ignorant of the Word of God (Eph 4:17-18). Once enlightened we have knowledge of the coming of Christ and what we need to do to be prepared. We have no reason to be caught unawares.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: ye are not of the night, nor of darkness.

We are illuminated by the life and example of the Son of God. While we believe in him and follow him, we are the children of light (Jn 3:19-21; 12:35-36,46; 2Cor 6:14; Eph 5:8; 1Jn 2:8-11). We become examples to those around us (Php 2:15).

6 *Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.*

If we are truly 'in the light' we will be spiritually active.

Sleep

When we are asleep, we are not conscious of reality or aware of our surroundings. In spiritual terms, we lose all sense of urgency and become indifferent towards our salvation and the nearness of Christ's return. Staying in the light is how we stay spiritually awake.

Watch

Watch Gk *greḡoreuo* G1127 = 'to keep awake, watch' (Str). Also trans. 'be vigilant'.

Watching is an active state of continual readiness that involves several aspects:

(1) Watching ourselves to ensure personal readiness for the coming of Christ. The parable of the 10 virgins exhorts us to watchfulness by highlighting the need to keep our lamps filled with oil (Mt 25:1-13). This involves daily reading and meditation upon the Word by which we absorb the mind of the spirit and so 'let our light shine' (Mt 5:16). This goes hand in hand with a daily commitment to prayer by which we keep God close and our love for Him strong (Mt 26:41; Mk 13:33-37; 14:38; Lk 21:36; Col 4:2; 1Pet 4:7).

(2) Being watchman to our brothers and sisters, warning them against impending spiritual dangers (Ezek 3:17-21; 33:6-9).

(3) Watching the state of the world and fulfilling Bible prophecy, as a reminder for the need for personal readiness in view of the imminent return of Christ.

In Elpis Israel we are reminded of the importance of watchfulness at the time of the end:

'When Russia makes its grand move for the building-up of its Image-empire, then let the reader know that the end of all things, as at present constituted, is at hand. The long-expected, but stealthy advent of the King of Israel, will be on the eve of becoming a fact; and salvation will be to those who have not only looked for it, but have trimmed their lamps by believing the Gospel of the Kingdom unto the obedience of faith, and the perfection thereof in fruits meet for repentance (Jas. 2:22; Heb. 9:28).' (Bro John Thomas, *Elpis Israel, Preface*).

Sober

Sober Gk *neḗpho* G3525 = 'to abstain from wine' (Str). s/w 1Pet 1:13, 4:7, 5:8.

Literal alcohol can dull our minds so that we don't remain watchful in our actions. Christ also warns of the spiritual drunkenness that can result from having our hearts overcharged with the cares of this life (Lk 21:34-36). A preoccupation with the present distracts us from recognising the urgency of our times and being conscious of our true standing before God. Belshazzar was drunk and failed to watch on the night Babylon fell (Dan 5:1-4,30-31).

There was a great need for the Thessalonian ecclesia to be spiritually sober and vigilant as they lived at the time the Roman Catholic apostasy was developing (2Th 2). Though separated from the Thessalonians by 2000 years, the warning of Scripture is just as clear to us to 'come out of' the Catholic system and not to be intoxicated by her ideologies (Rev 17:2; 18:3-4).

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

We live in the night of the Gentiles because the light of the world has gone away for a time (Jn 9:4-5). During the literal night, our senses are dulled, and it is easy to fall asleep. It is the time when people get drunk (1Th 5:7) and evil prospers (Jn 3:19). As such, it can be easy to forget that one day the sun will arise and illuminate everything (Eph 5:13), so that we are exhorted to *'be careful how you live'* (Eph 5:15 ISV). We need to take on 'the whole armour of God' and live in a state of constant readiness (Eph 6:11-13), so that we are not caught in a drunken or unprepared state, as some will be (Lk 21:34, 12:45-47).

The test of whether we are in the light is determined by how we live, not by what we know about the Scriptures (1Jn 1:5-7; 2:9-11).

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

Paul has likely drawn his thoughts from Isaiah 59:17 where Isaiah prophesies of Christ putting on *'righteousness as a breastplate and an helmet of salvation on his head.'* It is by these that Christ conquered sin.

The breastplate protects the chest - our heart. The helmet protects our head - our mind. The Proverbs say, *'Keep (guard) your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.'* (Prov 4:23 ESV). Paul had encouraged the ecclesia to grow in their faith and love (1Th 3:10-12) because this binds them together with a sense of purpose beyond this life. Likewise, when our mind is fixed on the hope of salvation we have a spiritual defence that enables us to conquer the power of darkness and remain steadfast (Eph 6:11-13). Peter exhorts us to, *'gird up the loins of your mind... and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ'* (1Pet 1:13). Cp Rom 13:11-14.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

God called us to the Truth so that we might be saved, not to destroy us. It is His good pleasure to give us the Kingdom (Lk 12:32).

'What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' Rom 8:31-32. Cp Heb 3:6.

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

Whether we wake or sleep

i.e. whether we are alive or dead when Christ returns. God through Christ has done everything to make our salvation possible; whether we are in life or death when he appears, we have hope of life through him (ch 4:14-17). Cp Rom 8:38-39.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

We can take great comfort in the hope set before us. How often we speak about it reflects how much we appreciate it and causes us to grow stronger and strengthens our brothers and sisters (cp 4:18; Jude v20-21).

AN APPEAL TO RESPECT ECCLESIAL ELDERS (5:12-13)

As the ecclesia was new in the faith, Paul wanted them to become established, strengthened and settled, so he told them to highly esteem the ecclesial elders who had been appointed. The elders were to provide guidance as spiritual fathers and were to set an example for the ecclesia to follow. Paul wanted the brothers and sisters to cooperate with this so the ecclesia would find peace and harmony.

12 *And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;*

It is important to not simply be aware of who these brethren are, but to know them in a personal and brotherly way. In so doing we come to appreciate the sincere concern they have for the ecclesia, and the long hours they invest for its welfare. Paul had led by example in labouring for the ecclesia (2:11; Acts 20:34-35; 1Tim 5:17; cp 1Cor 16:15-16), and could therefore instruct others to do the same. Ecclesial elders are appointed over the ecclesia but are to rule 'in the Lord.' They are therefore to be servants, not lords, and lead by example (1Pet 5:2-3; Jn 13:13-16). They were also to admonish the ecclesia, that is, to caution or reprove with gentleness (cp 2:7; 1Cor 4:14).

They stand in stark contrast to the busybodies in the ecclesia (1Th 4:11; 2Th 3:11).

13 *And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.*

Esteem

Paul is not encouraging hero worship - he flatly opposes that in 1Cor 1:11-13 and 3:3-5 (cp 1Th 1:6, p39). Rather, it is talking about a deep affection and respect. The sense is illustrated by Paul in Philippians 2:3: *'in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.'*

Do we elevate in our minds those who so labour in our midst for our spiritual wellbeing? It takes a thoughtful and mature mind to be thankful for the labour of others in the ecclesia. Cp Heb 13:7,17,24.

Be at peace

When we humbly submit to the guidance of wise and godly ecclesial elders we find peace in ecclesial life.

FINAL EXHORTATIONS (5:14-22)

Paul concludes the letter with practical exhortation addressing many aspects of living the Truth. This was to establish, strengthen and settle the newly developed ecclesia as they waited for Christ's coming and endured persecution (2:14, 3:3-4).

There are many parallels between 1 Thessalonians 5 and Romans 12 where Paul speaks of our responsibilities toward God in view of all he has done for us in Christ (cp 1Th 5:9-10).

Romans 12	1 Thessalonians 5
Not slothful in business... serving the lord v11	Them which labour v12
Be kindly affectioned one to another... in honour preferring one another v10	Esteem them very highly in love v13
Live peaceably with all men v18	Be at peace among yourselves v13
Weep with them that weep v15	Comfort the feebleminded v14
Patient in tribulation v12	Be patient toward all v14
Recompense to no man evil for evil... overcome evil with good v17, 21	See that none render evil for evil unto any, but ever follow that which is good v15
Rejoicing in hope... rejoice with them that do rejoice v12, 15	Rejoice evermore v16
Continuing instant in prayer v12	Pray without ceasing v17
Prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God v2	Prove all things, hold fast that which is good v21
Abhor that which is evil v9	Abstain from all appearance of evil v22

14 *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.*

Now we exhort you, brethren

This commences the final section of 'exhortations' from the missionaries to the ecclesia.

Warn them that are unruly

Unruly Gk *ataktos* G813 = 'disorderly, out of ranks' (Thay).

When writing to the Corinthians Paul said, '*I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you*' (1Cor 4:14). Admonition should be given in a spirit of love, seeking to encourage someone to turn around. A warning was given at first, but Paul had to later write in 2Th 3:6-7 to withdraw from those who did not respond to this warning.

Comfort the feebleminded

Feebleminded Gk *oligopsuchos* G3642 = 'fainthearted' (Str, Thay).

There would have been many brothers and sisters feeling fainthearted because of the persecution the ecclesia had been suffering. This is one of several appeals by Paul for the ecclesia to comfort one another (also 4:18, 5:11). As a spiritual father, Paul had comforted the ecclesia (2:11-12), providing brothers and sisters with encouragement and consolation to continue strong in the Truth.

One way of comforting those who are fainthearted is to inspire them with the vision of what lays before us:

'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you' (Isa 35:3-4).

It is often not till we have been through hard times that we understand another's suffering and appreciate their circumstances. We are then able to comfort them, showing them the goodness we have received of God and our brothers and sisters (2Cor 1:2-7; cp Isa 50:4).

Support the weak

Weak Gk *astheneō* G772 = Lit. 'without strength' - from *a* = 'without,' *sthenoo* = 'strength' (Str)

This is supporting those who cannot support themselves due to spiritual weakness or physical infirmity. This was essential in order for the ecclesia to stay together, and it was one way they could show their labour of love for one another (1:3; 4:9-10; cp 1Cor 9:22).

We impart strength to others by directing them to God and reassuring them of the work He can accomplish in them through His strength (2Cor 4:7; Php 2:13). *'Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ'* (Gal 6:2).

Be patient towards all men

Patient Gk *makrothumeō* G3114 = 'long spirited' (Str). Also trans. 'long suffering'.

Patience is necessary to fulfill the other responsibilities mentioned in this verse. We must bear long with others as we sacrifice for one another in the Truth. This is an attribute which God shows towards us all the time (Ex 34:6-7; 2Pet 3:9) - the least we should do is show the same long-suffering spirit to each other!

15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

This is particularly relevant as the ecclesia was being actively antagonised by the Jews. By not returning evil for evil, we become an example of the believers and show we understand that God is developing our character through these circumstances.

The only way we can overcome a spirit of retaliation is to rise above it and put our trust in God (1Pet 2:19-23). When we realise God's forgiveness and kindness towards us, we can show this spirit to others (Lk 6:35-36).

16 Rejoice evermore.

Rejoice *chairō* Gk 5463 = 'to be full of cheer' (Str) (cp Mt 2:10).

This instruction came from brethren who had suffered immensely in Philippi before they came to Thessalonica and they praised God in these circumstances (Acts 16:22-25; 1Th 2:2). The ecclesia could rejoice, not because of their circumstances, but in the hope set before them and because they could see purpose in their sufferings. We must recognise that trial is the beginning of glory (Mt 5:11-12; Rom 5:3-5).

17 Pray without ceasing.

Paul, Silas and Timothy prayed for the ecclesia continuously (1:2-3; 3:10). The ecclesia prayed without ceasing for Peter when he was imprisoned by Herod (Acts 12:5). Consistency

in prayer is an expression of our faith in God (Lk 18:1-8) and an indicator of the health of our relationship with Him.

The trials the ecclesia faced could either produce a spirit of sincerity in their prayers and cause them to draw closer to God, or they could form a wedge between them and God. It all depended on the response they chose to make, and for them to endure, prayer was essential. The same is true for us.

18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

These words are a big challenge to our faith. If we are truly content with our life and believe that God is at work, then we can express a spirit of thankfulness for the goodness of God in all circumstances (Php 4:11-12). It shows an acceptance and trust in God that He knows what is best for us and is performing a work in us for our eternal wellbeing. We can then be thankful amid adversity (James 1:2-3).

19 Quench not the Spirit.

This can apply equally to the use of the spirit gifts and to the influence of the Spirit Word on our mind.

Had the members of the ecclesia received the spirit gifts, they were to be diligent in using them for the building up of the ecclesia (1Cor 12:4-11; 14:12; Eph 4:11-12). Paul charged Timothy to not neglect the gift that was in him but to stir (*anazōpureō* = 'to rekindle' (Str)) it up (1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6).

We need to rekindle, or to fan into flame, the gift we have in ecclesial service and let the Word become alive in our hearts (Psa 39:3, Jer 20:9). We fuel the fire by daily reading and meditation on the Word.

20 Despise not prophesyings.

Despise *exoutheneō* Gk 1848 = 'to make of no account, despise utterly' (Thay).

Why did Paul need to tell them that? As has been previously noted, it seems there must have been those who *did* despise prophecies, and who tried to extinguish the influence of the Spirit in the ecclesia by discounting prophecies as 'the word of men' (2:13).

This is a warning highly applicable to the last days, as it was in the times before AD 70 (2Pet 3:2-7). We can treat prophecy with contempt when we ignore the warnings it gives and when we lose faith in it. Consequently, we lose our sense of urgency and state of personal readiness for the coming of Christ (Mt 24:48-50). Scripture describes such behaviour as foolishness (Prov 1:7).

Throughout their history, Israel have despised and misused the prophets of God. We see this with Ahab (1Ki 22:7-8) and the generation living during Zedekiah's reign (2Chr 36:11-17). Christ rebuked the nation for this (Mt 23:34-37).

21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Prove Gk *dokimazo* 1381 = 'test, examine' (Thay).

As with v20, it is interesting to ask why Paul needed to specifically encourage the ecclesia to 'prove all things'. Evidently, Paul was concerned that the Jewish slights on his character,

noted throughout Ch 2 (p25) would not stop there. The Jews would go to all means to undermine Paul, even twisting the Truth and writing fraudulent letters (cp 2Th 2:2-3).

The Jews of Berea had been notable for this trait (Acts 17:11) and it is a quality of the righteous (Prov 15:28). The more we confirm the things we believe by a study of the scriptures the stronger our faith and endurance.

22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

i.e. we must 'reject every kind of evil' (NIV), or 'abstain from every form of evil' (RSV). Bro Booker summarises it nicely: 'Avoid every evil you can see'.

As the world around them decayed they would need to remain unaffected by its moral decline (1Pet 2:11-12). We must focus not merely on abstaining from evil but seeking things which are above (Col 2:20-3:3; Gal 5:16,22-25).

CLOSING PRAYER AND CHARGE (5:23-28)

23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The phrase 'spirit, soul and body' is borrowed from Deut 6:5 where it says, 'Thou shalt love Yahweh with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might'. The phrase represents the whole person as it does in 1Th 5:23 where the Apostle says God will sanctify us 'wholly'.

Deut 6:5	1Th 5:23	Explanation
Heart	Spirit	Gk <i>pnemua</i> G4151 = the mind, intellect, disposition or emotions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I had no rest in my spirit (NIV = 'no peace of mind') because I found not Titus' - 2Cor 2:13. • 'Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind' - Php 1:27. • 'A meek and quiet spirit... of great price' - 1Pet 3:4.
Soul	Soul	Gk <i>psuche</i> G5590 = a person's life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted ... our own souls' (our lives NIV, our own selves ESV) - 1Th 2:8. • 'He was nigh unto death, not regarding his life' (<i>psuche</i>) - Php 2:30.
Might	Body	Gk <i>soma</i> G4983 = the physical body, but used here as the source of all our actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'For we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done' (ESV = 'for what he has done in the body') - 2Cor 5:10.

Paul wanted each believer individually to be completely set apart (sanctified) and preserved unblameable (without fault) until the coming of Christ (3:13; Php 1:10). If we have lived in holiness we will be sanctified (2Tim 2:21). This was Christ's prayer for his disciples (Jn 17:15-17; cp 1Pet 1:5; 5:10).

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

The one who called them was not Paul, for he only passed on the call; it was *God*. No matter what happened to the ecclesia, they needed to rest assured that He is faithful, and He would see to their complete sanctification and salvation of v23.

God is committed to our salvation and will perform the good work He has begun until the day of Christ (Php 1:6; 2Th 3:3; 1Pet 4:19). The more we believe this, the greater our confidence in our hope of salvation and the more determined we will be in seeking first the Kingdom of God and remaining faithful to the end.

25 Brethren pray for us.

Paul needed the strength from God to continue faithful, so he asked many ecclesias to pray for him (Rom 15:30; 2Cor 1:11; Col 4:3; 2Th 3:1; Phm v22). This was not just for his benefit, but ultimately for the furtherance of the Truth through him. Likewise, when Christ was in the garden, he needed the strength from his three closest disciples (Mt 26:38-41).

We cannot underestimate the strength we receive from fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

26 Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

This was common for believers to greet one another this way (Rom 16:16; 1Cor 16:20; 2Cor 13:12). It expresses the close bond that exists between the members of God's family.

27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

Charge Gk *horkizo* G3726 = 'to force to take an oath, to adjure (solemnly implore)' (Thay).

This is unusual for Paul to 'charge' or take an oath of an ecclesia to ensure his letter is read out before everyone. Why does he do it?

Clearly, Paul felt it was essential for all the believers to hear what he had written. He wanted all to know:

- His love and appreciation for them,
- His answers to the insinuations made in his absence,
- His desire to come and see them as soon as the Lord permitted,
- The comforting hope set before them,
- His exhortation in remaining watchful and holy in the Truth.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Paul concludes the epistle by referencing once more the grace of God (cp 1:1), desiring a blessing of Divine favour on the ecclesia. This is common to all Paul's writings because he greatly appreciated the transforming power of the grace of God in his life (1Cor 15:10).

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX 1: THE BATTLE OF PHILIPPI

The battle of Philippi (42 BC) was a watershed moment in the history of Rome. The power we so familiarly refer to as 'the Roman Empire' began as a kingdom, ruled by the Kings of Rome from about 753-509 BC. This was followed by the Roman Republic (509-27 BC), in which the people were governed by elected magistrates instead of the monarch. In the later years of the republic, however, ambitious men grew restless under the corrupt aristocracy, with the most notable being Julius Caesar, who took the title of 'Dictator for Life' of Rome in the year 44 BC.

Later that year, an infamous event occurred that has gone down in history as *The Ides of March*. On this day, 15 March 44 BC, the dictator Julius Caesar was assassinated by the senate, led by the two conspirators, Brutus and Cassius.⁵⁵ But when their treacherous act did not bring the popular acclaim they had anticipated, Brutus and Cassius fled to the eastern part of the empire. Here they raised an army with the intention of marching on Rome to banish Caesar's supporters and reinstate the Roman Republic. Back in Rome, Octavian, the great nephew of the deceased dictator, joined forces with Caesar's long-time friend and ally, Mark Antony, and the two marched east to avenge Caesar's blood.

The two armies met on the plains outside the Macedonian town of Philippi. It was not merely the meeting of two armies; it was the convergence of two ideologies. Marching west, with Brutus and Cassius, was the dream of a Roman Republic, where the people of Rome would continue to 'rule themselves' through a corrupt aristocracy of senators. But marching east from Rome herself, was the vision of Roman Imperialism, championed by Octavian and Antony.

As history records, it was Octavian and Antony who emerged triumphant from the Battle of Philippi; an event that shaped the Roman Empire for centuries to come, and that would not be forgotten by its victors. In later years, Octavian, now referred to by the eminent title of Emperor Caesar Augustus, honoured Philippi as the location in which the Roman Empire was born. He constituted Philippi a *Roman Colony* - a town built upon the pattern of Rome, populated by Roman war veterans. Such colonists '*went out with all the pride of Roman citizens, to represent and reproduce the City in the midst of an alien population*' (C&H, p225).

But Philippi was not the only city honoured by the victors. Fortunately for its populace, Thessalonica had backed the right side in the civil war, and was accordingly given the honourable status of a *Liberæ Civitates*, that is, a *Free City* - a status that conveyed important privileges which have been noted on p9.

⁵⁵ https://penelope.uchicago.edu/encyclopaedia_romana/calendar/ides.html

THE CHARACTER OF THE MACEDONIAN CITIES

It is interesting to consider the way in which both Philippi and Thessalonica were honoured as a result of this battle, each in their own way, and how accurately Luke depicts the very different character between the towns:

	Philippi (Acts 16)	Thessalonica (Acts 17)
Type of city	A Roman 'colony' v12.	A 'free city' with a 'peoples' assembly' v5.
Governance	'Praetors' (Latin) = Gk <i>strategos</i> as in v20,22,35,36,38. ⁵⁶	'Politarchs' v6 (also inscription from Thessalonica).
Rights & privileges of Roman citizenship	Paul called upon these in v37-38, as it was a Roman colony where citizenship mattered greatly.	No reference, as it was a Greek city.
Synagogue	None (cp v13), because Rome was hostile to Jews at this time (cp Acts 18:2).	Present v1
Jewish population	Very small. Antisemitic spirit v20.	Large, then and throughout history, as has often been the case in cities noted for trade.
Loyalty to Rome	Staunch patriotism 'being Romans' v21.	Anxious to show themselves 'Caesar's friends' v7-8.
Persecuted by	Pagan masters v19 and Roman authorities v20.	Jewish and Greek mob v5. Cp 1Th 2:14-18; 3:5.

⁵⁶ C&H, p232 note 3. Also p225, n7.