

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

I. The Importance and Date of the Epistle:

- ⇒ The letter is especially important as a witness to the earliest content of the Gospel Message being preached.
- ⇒ It was written between the year 48-53 AD. We can say with confidence that we have before us a document that was written between 19 and 24 years, after the ascension of our Lord. It was written from Corinth.
- ⇒ Paul had established the Thessalonian church on his 2nd missionary journey. He was expelled from Thessalonica. From this city he went to Berea and to Athens. The epistle alludes to Paul's life at Thessalonica (chap. 2). At Athens, he had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to help the Christians amid their persecutions (3:1-3). In Acts 18:5 it is recorded that Silas and Timothy rejoined the apostle at Corinth.
- ⇒ Paul was converted more than 14 years before the writing of the Epistles. Peter and John in Jerusalem, having fully heard the gospel, which Paul preached, had no corrections to offer (Gal 1:11--2:10, especially 2:6-10).

II. Circumstances of the Founding of the Church:

For the founding of the church we have two sources of information, the Book of **Acts 17** and the **Epistle** itself.

- ⇒ Here we are told that Paul, after leaving Philippi, began his next siege against entrenched paganism in the great market center of Thessalonica. He went first into the synagogues of the Jews, and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. Some of them, "were persuaded, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few."
- ⇒ This naturally excited the jealousy of the Jews who found themselves losing the prestige that came from having a large number of Greeks, including some of the nobility, coming to them for instruction.
- ⇒ Accordingly, they raised a mob of the worst men in town and brought the leading members of the church before the magistrate.
- ⇒ These brethren, Jason and certain others, who seem to have been men of some possessions, were compelled to give bond to preserve the peace. The intense feeling against Paul made it necessary for him, for the sake of these brethren as well as for his personal safety, to flee from the city.

III. Conditions in the Thessalonian Church as Indicated in the Letter:

- ⇒ Plainly, affairs on the whole are in a very good state, especially when one takes into account the fact that **most of the members had been out of heathenism for only a few months**. They were so notably devoted to God that they were known all over Macedonia as examples to the church <1 Thes 1:7>.
- ⇒ In particular the **Christian grace of hospitality toward all believers** flourished among them: a grace which they doubtless had many opportunities to exercise in this market town to which Christians from all parts of the area would come on business errands <4:9-10>.
- ⇒ Some persons were **whispering dark suspicions** against Paul. Perhaps, they were the unbelieving husbands of the rich ladies who had become members of the church. It was in answer to these criticisms that he felt called upon to say that he was not a fanatic nor a moral leper, nor a deceiver <1 Thes 2:3>.
- ⇒ When he is so careful to remind them that he was not found at any time wearing a cloak of covetousness, but rather went to the extreme of laboring night and day that he might not be chargeable to any of them. Paul's peculiar sensitiveness on this point at Corinth <1 Cor 9:14-15> was possibly in part the result of his immediately preceding experiences at Thessalonica. Greece was infested at this time with wandering philosophers and religious teachers who made their way, living on the gullibility of the unwary.
- ⇒ We can see plain evidence that the church was in danger of the chronic heathen vice of adultery and impurity <1 Thes 4:3-8>.
- ⇒ The humble members also, in particular, were in danger of being intoxicated by their new spiritual life and were spending their time in religious meetings to the neglect of their daily labor <4:10-12>.
- ⇒ Moreover, some who had lost friends since their baptism were mourning lest at the second coming of Christ these who had fallen asleep would not share in the common glory <4:13-18>.
- ⇒ There was the danger of social cliques among the members <5:13,15,20,26-27>.

It is to the above conditions that Paul pours forth this amazingly essential and practical Epistle.

IV. Luke's Eyewitness Account in Acts Chapter 17:

Acts 17:1--Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and **for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures**,

3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "**This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.**"

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

5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming **envious**, **took some of the evil men from the marketplace**, and **gathering a mob**, **set all the city in an uproar** and **attacked the house of Jason**, and sought to bring them out to the people.

6 But when they did not find them, **they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city**, crying out, "**These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.**"

7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all **acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar**, saying there is **another king-- Jesus.**"

8 And they **troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city** when they heard these things.

9 So when they had taken **security from Jason** and the rest, they let them go.

10 Then the brethren immediately **sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea**. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were **more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica**, in that they **received the word with all readiness**, and **searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**.

12 Therefore **many of them believed**, and also **not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men**.

13 But when the **Jews from Thessalonica** learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, **they came there also and stirred up the crowds**.

14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both **Silas and Timothy remained there**.

15 **So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens**; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, **his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols**.

17 Therefore he **reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers**, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

18 Then certain **Epicurean and Stoic** philosophers encountered him. And some said, "**What does this babbler want to say?**" Others said, "**He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,**" **because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection**.

19 And they took him and brought him to the **Areopagus (Mar's Hill)**, saying, "**May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?**"

20 "For you are bringing **some strange things to our ears**. Therefore we want to know what these things mean."

21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners **who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing**.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things **you are very religious**;

23 "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Therefore, **the One whom you worship without knowing**, Him I proclaim to you:

24 "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, **does not dwell in temples made with hands**.

25 "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, **since He gives to all life, breath, and all things**.

26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

27 "**so that they should seek the Lord**, in the hope **that they might grope for Him and find Him**, though He is **not far from each one of us**;

28 "**for in Him we live and move and have our being**, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'