

MEET THE THESSALONIANS

Monday, October 13

Reading: Acts 17:1-15

Acts 17:6 *But when they did not find [Paul and Silas], 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."*

On Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey, he visited Thessalonica after he and Silas had been beaten and thrown in prison in Philippi. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. It boasted a population of 200,000 people and was a "free city" meaning that it was allowed to govern itself. It had an important harbor and was situated on the Egnatian Way, the major road connecting East and West. It was one of the wealthiest and most thriving trade centers in the Roman Empire. It was also a hot spot for many pagan religions and temples.

When Paul arrived, he spent three weeks preaching in the Jewish synagogue. Some Jews and many God-fearing Gentiles accepted Christ. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up a mob and assaulted the house where they were staying. Paul and his companions had to be smuggled out of the city by night for their own safety. These Jews followed them to Berea and again forced Paul to flee the city, leaving Silas and Timothy behind.

While Paul was alone in Athens, he became concerned with the welfare of the young church in Thessalonica. He had only been there for maybe a month and feared the persecution that forced him to flee would strangle their new faith. He sent Timothy back "to strengthen and encourage you in your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

Paul travelled from Athens to Corinth, a discouraged man. Having been chased out of city after city in Macedonia and having limited success in Athens, he later wrote the Corinthians, "I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). But his spirits were revived when Timothy arrived with good news from Thessalonica (Acts 18:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:6). Paul wrote this letter to encourage them and correct some misunderstandings among the believers. This is one of the first letters that Paul wrote.

Two themes stand out in this first letter to the Thessalonians.

(1) Suffering and persecution are mentioned often. In fact, Paul will use twelve different Greek words to describe it. After being ripped away from them by Jewish rabble-rousers, Paul knew that these same people would continue to persecute the new Christians. Paul wanted to commend them for their faithfulness and encourage them to continue to stand.

(2) The coming of the Lord is the other major theme of this letter. Each major section ends with a reference to Christ's return. It is a reason for hope and comfort in the midst of hard times.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 serves as a mini-outline for the rest of letter.

"How you turned to God from idols"	2:1 - 3:13
"To serve the living and true God"	4:1-12
"To wait for His Son from heaven"	4:13-18
"Who rescues us from the coming wrath"	5:1-11