

Adult School of Ministry

Summer 2025

Lesson 8 – July 20, 2025

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

The Holy Spirit empowers Christ's followers to proclaim the Gospel.

Scriptures: (1) Acts 17:1-14; (2) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; (3) 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The Lesson Overview: In the city of Thessalonica, Paul experienced a fruitful ministry despite opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts 17 provides a historical account of what happened to Paul and his fellow ministers in Thessalonica and the surrounding area. The first two chapters of 1 Thessalonians describe Paul's account of how the followers of Jesus in Thessalonica received the Gospel and its positive effect on their lives. He also praised them for their witness to other churches. Paul then provided an account of his own ministry among the new Christians in that city.

Historical Background: Paul, Silas, and Timothy's ministry in Thessalonica and Berea took place during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36—18:22), which happened around 49–51 AD. At the beginning of the trip, Paul returned to minister among the churches established on his first missionary journey. Then, through a vision, the Lord showed Paul that He had opened a door for him to minister in Macedonia. As was his custom, Paul and his team first preached in a local synagogue but were eventually rejected and repelled by the Jewish leaders in Thessalonica. However, Paul found a receptive audience among some of the Jews, and especially among the "God-fearers"—Gentiles who worshiped the God of Judaism.

Lesson Outline

1. MINISTRY BEGINS IN THESSALONICA - Acts 17:1-14
 - A. Reception to Gospel Ministry (1–4)
 - B. Opposition to Gospel Ministry (5-14)
2. POWERFUL AND AFFIRMING MINISTRY - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
 - A. Certainty of the Thessalonians' Faith in Christ (1–5)
 - B. The Thessalonians' Faithful Example (6-10)
3. GOD-PLEASING MINISTRY - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
 - A. God-Empowering and God-Honoring Ministry (1–7)
 - B. Godly Affection for God's Children (8-12)

Discussing The Lesson

1. MINISTRY BEGINS IN THESSALONICA (Acts 17:1-14)

A. Reception to Gospel Ministry - Acts 17:1–4

- 1) Upon arriving in Thessalonica, Paul located and proceeded to minister in the synagogue to fellow Jews in the city.
- 2) Luke records that Paul ministered at the synagogue for three Sabbaths (v. 2), which may refer to three consecutive Sabbaths or three separate Sabbaths during Paul's time in Thessalonica.
- 3) It is unlikely this means Paul was in Thessalonica for only three Sabbaths, given that the letter to the church at Thessalonica appears to indicate he spent a significant amount of time serving there (see 1 Thessalonians 2:9).
- 4) Paul "*reasoned*" (discussed) with the Jews from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2), systematically making the case, from what we call the Old Testament, that Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- 5) Paul pointed out the Messiah must die and rise from the dead (v. 3), which Jesus did.
- 6) The text does not identify what passages of Scripture Paul consulted to reason these truths from the Old Testament.
- 7) However, there are other examples of Christians proclaiming the Gospel from the Old Testament in Acts (2:14-41; 8:26-39; 13:16-41).
- 8) Some of the Jewish people Paul reasoned with "*believed*" the message that Jesus is the Messiah (17:4).
- 9) However, the majority of those who believed were God-fearing Gentiles and "*chief women*," who were perhaps wives of prominent men of the city and were probably Gentiles as well (v. 4).
- 10) Those who believed the Gospel "*consorted*" (associated) with Paul and Silas, likely separating from the synagogue and meeting together with Paul and his team.
- 11) Through this process, which relied heavily on the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6), a church was established in Thessalonica.

B. Opposition to Gospel Ministry - Acts 17:5–14

- 1) While some of the Jewish people were persuaded by Paul's message about Jesus being the Messiah, most were unconvinced (v. 5).
- 2) These persons, jealous over the success of Paul and Silas' ministry, went into the marketplace to gather "*lewd fellows of a baser sort*" (v. 5).
- 3) Their purpose was threefold.
 - a. First, they desired to stir up a crowd of people against the newly formed church.
 - b. Second, this mob "*assaulted the house of Jason*," which was likely the church's location in Thessalonica.
 - c. Third, they "*sought to bring them [Paul and Silas] out to the people.*"
- 4) As the context shows, bringing Paul and Silas into the public square was intended to force the authorities to punish them on the charges that they were agitators claiming Jesus was king (vv. 6-7).
- 5) When the non-Christian Jews could not find Paul and Silas, they settled for Jason and some of the Christians meeting in his home.
- 6) In response to these accusations, "*the people and the rulers of the city*" were "*troubled*" (v. 8).

- 7) However, after the authorities spoke with Jason, and with a financial incentive, Paul and Silas were allowed to leave the city, with a warning not to cause any more trouble.
- 8) The officials also released Jason and the others (v. 9), but this was not the end of the Thessalonian-led persecution of Paul.
- 9) News of Paul's fruitful ministry among the Bereans (vv. 10-12) made its way to Thessalonica, and those who had opposed the Gospel there went to Berea to "[stir] up the people" against Paul (v. 13).
- 10) In the face of these threats, the church in Berea sent Paul to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained in the city ministering to the church (v. 14).

2. POWERFUL AND AFFIRMING MINISTRY (1 Thessalonians 1:1–10)

A. Certainty of the Thessalonians' Faith in Christ - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

- 1) Perhaps no longer than a year after his visit to Thessalonica, Paul wrote his first letter to the Christians there.
- 2) He wrote the letter during his eighteen-month stay in Corinth (around 50 AD).
- 3) It was from Corinth that Paul had time to reflect on what had happened during his brief stay in Thessalonica and news of its lasting impact on the city and the surrounding region.
- 4) Reports concerning the young church would have come through Timothy, whom Paul sent to Thessalonica after Paul and his team were driven from the city (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5).
- 5) Later, Timothy reunited with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5), where he told Paul how the Thessalonian church was doing (1 Thessalonians 3:6).
- 6) After a traditional Pauline greeting, Paul launched into his expression of thanksgiving to God for the Thessalonian church (1:1-2).
- 7) Paul emphasized at least three areas of thanksgiving for which he prayed to God when he thought of the Thessalonians.
 - a. First, Paul expressed thanks for their "*work of faith*" (v. 3).
 - b. Second, Paul noted their "*labor of love*."
 - c. Finally, Paul gave thanks for their "*patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*" (v. 3).
 - d. All three of these were evidence that the Thessalonian Christians had turned from paganism to the living God.
- 8) Next, Paul more directly addressed his certainty about the Thessalonian Christians' faith in Christ.
- 9) He noted several reasons why he believed their faith in Christ was genuine (vv. 4-5).
 - a. First, they were loved and called by God. Only God has the power to change hearts and minds, to save what has been in bondage to sin.
 - b. Second, Paul was certain of their faith in Christ because of the Gospel that was preached to them. The Gospel that Paul and others preached was founded on the "*word*" (Scripture).
 - c. Third, the Gospel came to the Thessalonians in displays of "*power*" and "*in the Holy Ghost*."
- 10) The mention of power and the Holy Spirit may refer to miracles wrought through the ministry of Paul and his team.
- 11) If this was the case, then these displays of power confirmed the Gospel message to the preacher and his audience.

- 12) It is also possible that both power and the Holy Spirit reflect the experience of the Thessalonians as they put their faith in Christ.
- 13) There would have been a keen sense of certainty that the Spirit was at work in their lives, taking what was spiritually dead and making it alive in Christ.
- 14) Finally, the Gospel came to the Thessalonians “*in much assurance*” (v. 5).
- 15) The assurance here may refer to the preachers who proclaimed God’s Word with complete confidence in the power of the Gospel to bring about salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike (see Romans 1:16).

B. The Thessalonians’ Faithful Example - 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

- 1) In verse 6, Paul begins where he left off in verses 2 and 3 by noting evidence of the Thessalonian believers’ faith in Christ.
- 2) He emphasized how this evidence served as an example to other Christians.
 - a. First, the church in Thessalonica evidenced trust in Christ by faithfully enduring persecution for their faith with Spirit-enabled joy.
 - i. This was persecution like that suffered by Paul and his team during their time in Thessalonica.
 - ii. Their Spirit-enabled joyful response to persecution became an example to all the believers “*in Macedonia and Achaia*” (modern-day Greece) (v. 7).
 - iii. One way they expressed their joy was through spreading the Gospel message to others wherever they went (v. 8).
 - iv. The Thessalonians also expressed this joy was through their own testimony and the noticeable change in the attitudes and actions of the Thessalonian Christians (v. 8).
- 3) Not only had reports of the Thessalonian Christians’ faith in Christ come to Paul from Timothy, but it was also reported by others throughout Greece.
- 4) Paul specified the report he had received.
 - a. First, unlike those in Thessalonica who opposed the Gospel, those who had believed the Good News received Paul and his message gladly (“*what manner of entering,*” v. 9).
 - b. Second, these Thessalonians had ceased to be idol worshipers and became exclusive servants of the one “*living and true God.*”
 - c. Finally, they looked forward to and anticipated Christ’s return (v. 10).

3. GOD-PLEASING MINISTRY (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

A. God-Empowering and God Honoring Ministry - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-7

- 1) In chapter 2, Paul remarked on his (and Silas and Timothy’s) ministry among the Thessalonians, which the Christians there had witnessed.
- 2) Paul addressed how God helped and empowered them as ministers of the Gospel to proclaim God’s Word faithfully even in the face of great opposition (vv. 1-2).
- 3) Paul and Silas had been jailed in Philippi for their ministry in that city (Acts 16:16-24), but God empowered them to continue as ministers of the Gospel, even when they were prisoners (vv. 25-34).
- 4) They were miraculously released, and rather than shrink back from preaching the Gospel for fear of persecution, they were empowered by God to continue preaching with boldness in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:2).
- 5) Paul also described how he and his companions in Thessalonica proclaimed the Gospel with God-honoring motives.
- 6) Paul recalled they did *not* minister among them by speaking falsely or deceptively; they told the truth (v. 3).

- 7) Nor did they seek to flatter their audience or ask for financial compensation, which would burden the Thessalonians needlessly, which was something traveling preachers and philosophers of the day often did. Instead,
- 8) Paul and his team preached selflessly and were gentle in spirit toward them (vv. 6-7).
- 9) Positively, Paul affirmed their motives for ministering to the Thessalonians were to please God, “*which trieth our hearts*” (v. 4).
- 10) Paul said God examined their hearts, and He was witness to their pure motives as ministers of the Gospel (v. 5).

B. Godly Affection for God’s Children - 1 Thessalonians 2:8–12

- 1) In verse 8, Paul continued to elaborate on how he and his companions ministered among the Thessalonians.
- 2) Paul emphasized his and his companions’ fondness toward the Thessalonians and the eventual church that resulted from their ministry there.
- 3) Paul noted their preaching of “*the gospel of God*” was not just a calculated intellectual exercise or merely the duty of those called to preach.
- 4) Instead, they shared their “*own souls*” (their whole being) with the Thessalonians “*because*” the Thessalonians had become “*dear*” to them (v. 8).
- 5) Their godly affection for the Thessalonians developed during the time they spent with them (v. 9).
- 6) Such affection also manifested in tangible ways, such as the preachers’ not receiving payment for their ministry but toiling and laboring in the Gospel while meeting their own material needs (v. 9).
- 7) In addition, the way they presented the Gospel to the Thessalonians was intended to encourage and comfort them, even as a “*father*” cares for “*his children*” (vv. 11-12).
- 8) The Thessalonian church witnessed this and knew it to be true (v. 10).

Call To Discipleship

All of Christ’s disciples are to be ministers of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. We should look for opportunities to serve and to grow while ministering to others on Christ’s behalf.

Ministry In Action

We need to pray and ask God to call and equip faithful ministers of the Gospel, both vocational and lay.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Lesson 8

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO THESSALONICA

The Apostle Paul's journey that led to his evangelistic ministry in Thessalonica began in the spring of AD 50 from the city of Antioch in Syria, located about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Antioch in Syria was a major center of Christianity in the early Church (Acts 11:20-26).

Following the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-30), Paul, accompanied by Silas, a leader in the church at Jerusalem (vv. 25-27), set out from Antioch in Syria to travel west, overland, to Asia Minor (vv. 40-41).

In his much traveling to preach the Gospel, Paul journeyed by foot on land or on ships by sea. Walking overland, Paul and Silas would have had pack animals (donkeys) to carry their luggage and provisions, and would have done well to travel 30 miles in a day. For protection from robbers, they likely would have traveled in the company of other travelers going the same way they were.

After traveling north, and then west, more than a hundred miles from Antioch, Paul and Silas arrived in Tarsus, in the province of Cilicia, in Asia Minor, the native city of Paul the Apostle (Acts 22:3). They were carrying a letter from the Jerusalem Council addressed specifically to Gentile believers in Christ "*in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia*" (15:23).

As Paul and Silas traveled west across Asia Minor, visiting and encouraging established Christian congregations, they made known to them the contents of the letter from the Jerusalem Council (Acts 16:4-5).

On the northwest coast of Asia Minor, Paul and Silas, now accompanied by Timothy and Luke, traveled by ship from Troas in Asia Minor, a hundred miles across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis, on the coast of Macedonia in Europe. From there they traveled west overland to evangelize Philippi (Acts 16:8-12). Then, From Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled on west, another hundred miles, to evangelize Thessalonica (17:1). Paul and company were now in the chief seaport city of Macedonia, 800 miles west of Antioch in Syria.

LIVING TESTIMONIES

1. Describe and explain the “uproar” caused by the ministry of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4-7).
2. The distance between Thessalonica and Berea was about 45 miles. What motivated the unbelievers from Thessalonica to make this trip (Acts 17:13)?
3. How did the Thessalonian believers’ lifestyle testify to others (1 Thessalonians 1:7-10)?
4. How had Paul been like a mother (2:7) and a father (v. 11) to the Thessalonians?
5. What three words characterize the ministry of Paul and Silas in verse 10? Would people use those words in describing your life as a Christian?