

Introduction To 1-2 Thessalonians

Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are among the earliest, if not the earliest of his epistles. The only letter which might have been written earlier was that to the Galatians. Of that particular letter there are some who view it as having been written about the time as that to the Romans. However, my personal opinion is that it was dated during the second journey of Paul, not the third — the period in which Romans was written.

Yet, while there is, without dispute, uncertainty regarding the Galatian letter, no such uncertainty exists concerning the Thessalonian epistles; internal evidence from the letters place them, without doubt, to the period of time which we call "the second journey of Paul."

When Paul and Barnabas concluded their first journey together, they sailed immediately to Antioch (Syria) "from which they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled" (Acts 14:26). It had been a fruitful and eventful journey. They, with Mark, had sailed to Cyprus and preached in two principal cities on that island, Salamis and Paphos (Acts 13:4, 6). They had met resistance from a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. This man was smitten with blindness for a season and the proconsul, Serguis Paulus, became a believer (Acts 14:7, 12). From Cyprus they next traveled to Perga in Pamphilia where, for some reason never revealed, Mark left their company and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). The two preachers preached successively in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14; 14:1, 6). Persecutions ensued and Paul was actually stoned and left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:19).

Once the two evangelists returned to Antioch the joy and peace in the church was soon marred by Judaizing teachers who insisted that Gentiles were to keep the law and accept circumcision (Acts 15:1). Understandable the Antioch brethren were disturbed because heretofore, neither of those tenets had been bound upon the brethren. Since Antioch had the distinction of being the center of spreading the word to Gentiles this made "suspect" what message they had heralded throughout the regions where the word had gone forth from them. So, the brethren sent Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to inquire of the apostles and elders regarding this issue (Acts 15:2). The meeting with those brethren is recorded in Galatians 2. Paul and Barnabas were exonerated in their teaching; the Antioch brethren were on sure and certain ground in their doctrine for Paul's teacher was agreed to be true to the revelation which even they had received and so they gave to the two preachers "the right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9).

A difference of opinion about John Mark caused Paul and Barnabas to separate from each other and Paul chose Silas to go with him to visit the churches he had previously founded. In the region of Derbe and Lystra, Paul came in contact with a young disciple named Timothy, who Paul invited to join their company (Acts 16:3). As they attempted to go into other regions of Asia the "Spirit of the Lord" forbade them, and because they were uncertain of their next course of action, they moved westward, coming to the city of Troas. It was there that Paul saw a man in a night vision from Macedonia beckoning to him and saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help

us” (Acts 16:9). So Paul and his company set sail to Macedonia (Europe) and the text indicates, by the so called “we” passages, that a fourth person now joined their ranks, the writer of the book of Acts. Quickly they sailed across the sea to Philippi (Acts 16:11).

Paul preached by a riverside in Philippi and made a number of converts, including a business woman named Lydia. It was in her home that Paul and his fellow travelers stayed while they preached in this city. False charges were made against Paul (along with Silas) were cast into prison, spending a night there and yet, what an eventful night! An earthquake shook the prison doors, loosing them; and the jailor, awakening from sleep, supposing that his prisoners had fled, started to kill himself. Paul stayed him that purpose and preached to him and all his house the gospel of the Lord. Immediately this household was baptized into Christ. The next day they were invited to leave the city and the next city westward was Thessalonica. For some time the preachers remained in the city but unbelieving Jews so oppressed the brethren that it was necessary for them to leave (Acts 17:1). From Thessalonica they journeyed to Berea where the Jews were more noble than the Thessalonians (Acts 17:11). Paul’s persecutors from Thessalonica, having heard he was in Berea, came that far to oppress him there and suppress his preaching. Once more the apostle was forced to flee and traveled alone to Athens. Apparently Luke had remained in Philippi and Timothy and Silas remained in either Thessalonica or Athens, but he had left word for them to join him in Athens. It is a little uncertain whether they “caught up” with Paul in Athens or whether he left before they joined him there. Because of his concern for the Thessalonians, Paul had sent the two men back to inquire about those brethren there and they finally joined him in Corinth — his destination after leaving Athens. While Timothy and Silas’s report to Paul “cheered” him; it also caused him to write this epistle to them because of certain concerns the brethren had. While the letter addressed their concerns, it was apparently misunderstood by some of the brethren and so another letter was needed to clear up their minds about the second coming of Christ. Both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians were written from Corinth in the year A.D. 52 or 53.

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