

## **“Ye Turned Unto God From Idols ...”**

“For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Wherever Paul went, he always sought out Jews first to preach to them because of the history of the Jews and that through them God’s Son came into the world. Thus, God ordered the gospel should first be offered to Jews. When Jews in Antioch of Pisidia reject it, Paul said, “It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you” (Acts 13:41). In searching out Jewish communities, sometimes there were synagogues, indicating a sizable presence of Jews in that area. Paul found synagogues in Salamis, Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Corinth, and Ephesus. Sometimes there was a Jewish presence, but not large enough to have a synagogue (apparently the case in Philippi of Macedonia) and sometimes there were no Jews at all. But in Thessalonica there was a synagogue in which Paul preached. There were a few convinced by Paul’s preaching, but the bulk of Paul’s converts were Gentiles (Acts 17:2-4) — some of them had been proselytes to the Jews’ religion, but the greater part it seems were pagan. We conclude this from Paul’s statement of them that they had “turned from idols to serve a living and true God.”

Gentile pagans were as devoted to their gods as the Jews were to their worshipping Jehovah. Witness the riot in Ephesus where worshippers of the goddess Diana clamored for two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:34). To these pagans Paul sometimes acknowledged their devotion and religious fervor (he told the Athenians that he perceived they were very religious, Acts 17:22). But he also pointed out that their idols were “vain things,” that there were “no gods made with hands” (Acts 14:15; 19:26). Truth does not change and Isaiah’s piercing, sarcastic words of the vanity of idols still is as true now as it was in his day. He ridiculed the heathen who would cut down a tree and from the wood thereof, would burn some to be warm, burn some to cook food, and from some of it make an idol and then prostrate themselves before it, crying, “Save me, for thou art my god” (Isa. 44:15-17). How foolish.

These in Thessalonica demonstrated both sincerity and open-mindedness regarding their gods. Through Paul’s preaching they came to see the futility of worshipping idols, but to their credit they did not become atheists. These witnessed the miracles Paul worked among them and believed the message he preached. They turned to the living God.

They also “waited for His Son from heaven.” They believed in a heavenly reward and while they lacked full understanding of a future resurrection (cp. 1 Thess. 4:13-18), they believed in the return of Jesus for such was His promise: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:2-3). The Thessalonians were

examples in their spreading the gospel to their world; they were examples in their confidence that Jesus would fulfill His word.

The Thessalonians, in their faith in Jesus' return, recognized Jesus as their Deliverer: their deliverance from the guilt of sins. It was to this end that Jesus came. An angel told Joseph before Jesus' birth, "Call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). Jesus accomplished this by providing Himself as a sacrifice for sins; an appropriate and more than adequate sacrifice. Jesus' blood is God's cleansing power from sin committed in both the past and present, providing we walk in the light (1 John 1:7). But Jesus not only delivers us from the guilt of our sins; He delivers us from the "wrath to come." This is clear reference to the future separation Jesus warned of in Matthew 25. The world, all the living and the dead, will be summoned before His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10). Once assembled, a great separation will take place: the righteous on His right and the wicked on His left. Those on the right will hear His welcomed words, "Come ye blessed of my Father ..." and the wicked will hear His terror-striking command, "Depart from me, ye cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." As Jesus recounts that unfolding scene, He concluded, "... and these shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt. 25:46). Let us, like these Thessalonians, wait for Jesus!

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