

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Suffering for the Gospel"

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

Introduction

1. The testimony of our Lord at Thessalonica was started by Paul (Acts 17:1-5). When he went there, he had a divine message to preach (vv. 1, 2).

2. The manner in which Paul ministered the Word there is unusual (vv. 3-11). One can never accuse Paul of fleshly methods. He was a man of God in the truest and highest sense of the term.

3. Paul's effectiveness at Thessalonica was grounded in His trust in the Word (v. 13). That was the core of his thrust. Furthermore, Paul had the highest of goals (v. 12). For him, the exaltation of the Lord was primary and the benefit of his hearers was placed before his own interests.

4. Now, the saints at Thessalonica had come to learn the truth that we enter the kingdom through much tribulation (Acts 14:22). That is the nub of these verses. Study them:

1. The REASON for SUFFERING v. 14.

a. Personally. This is noticed in the word "brethren." Due to their being brethren, that is, of the same family in the Lord, these saints suffered. The world does not move against its own for spiritual reasons. The relationship to God through Christ is a signal for suffering!

b. Corporately. The "churches of God" is a phrase used by Paul in the New Testament. It obviously is not a denomination, but a designation relating to the believers corporately. Thessalonians had "become followers" of these churches. The word "followers" is the same as 1:6. They were mimics! There is a line which connects all true children of God! It was not what they had by birth, for they "became" this (cf. John 1:12). The bulk of these churches were in Judea. Their number is unknown.

c. Spiritually. The churches of God were "in Christ Jesus." This is a technical phrase relating to the position of all believers in this age of grace (2 Cor. 5:17). It comes about through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12, 13; Rom. 6:1-10). Not until Pentecost was this position provided for the children of God. It is one of the unique spiritual realities of this age (John 14:16-20).

2. The REALITY of SUFFERING vv. 14-16.

Paul is careful to note that the Thessalonians were having the same problems their brethren in Judea had. The

churches in Judea got it from the Jews. The Thessalonians who were mainly Gentiles were getting it from their own countrymen or national group. It did not destroy the work in Judea. It would not destroy it in Thessalonica. Now, what did this involve? The details are given:

a. Death. There is no question that outright slaughter is meant. Two groups are mentioned: the Lord Jesus and the prophets. It is difficult to relieve the Jews of their part in the death of Christ (cf. Acts 3:14-15; 7:52). It is a little comfort to know that they were not the only ones (Acts 4:27-28) and that the Romans actually did the execution (Matt. 27:27, 31). The prophets suffered similar treatment (Neh. 9:26; 1 Kings 18:4; 19:10; 2 Chron. 24:20-21; Jer. 2:30; Matt. 23:37). Note it was their "own" prophets. Some were not called to this, and this may be true of us, but it can be expected (Heb. 12:4).

b. Persecution. The verb employed here connotes the act of being driven out. This is precisely what took place at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-5). Other acts of violence may well be included in this, as Paul so aptly knew (2 Cor. 11:16-33).

c. Displeasure. Most who oppose certain others think they do God a service (cf. Paul before his salvation in Acts 9). But Paul tells the truth here: they actually do not please God. So, the Thessalonians are encouraged in this sort of activity which was against them. Their opposers do not in fact please God as they may think.

d. Contrary. The thought here is that the suffering also included that subtle attitude of being opposite. Indeed the term used here means to be face to face, hence opposite. They were being faced with the Ishmaelite spirit. While this may not include violence, it does bring an attitude which is very difficult.

e. Hinderance. This is the final big issue. It is the extension of the previous item. While they oppose "all men," they in fact stand in the way of the Gospel. Here the Gentiles are hindered from hearing the Word which would lead them to be saved! How horrendous. However, this only "fills up" their sin. So in spite of themselves, God fulfills His purpose concerning them (cf. Gen. 15:16; Matt. 23:32).

Conclusion God indicates that wrath is come upon such persons. The full fury of His vengeance may not have been felt at the moment, but it would come to the "uttermost" (fully, cf. John 13:1). This is a warning that sin will not go unpunished. It is a blessing in that God still has a future for the Jews (Jer. 31:31-34). We can expect suffering for the sake of Christ. This is apostolic succession (Acts 21:13).