

"Getting Started at Thessalonica"

Acts 17:1-5

Introduction

1. Thessalonica was founded near the old city of Therma. Xerxes (480 B.C.) rested here on his march to battle in Greece. Cassander, one of the successors of Alexander the Great, named it after his wife, Thessalonike.
2. The city was located on the Egnatian Way, a prominent military road. Rome captured the area, but the city became a "free city" in the Roman Civil War of the B.C. 40's. Hence, unlike Philippi which was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), Thessalonica remained a Greek city and enjoyed a large Jewish population. Today it is called Salonika.
3. The founding of the church occurred during Paul's second missionary journey (51-53 A.D.). The Jerusalem Council had already taken place (50 A.D.; Acts 15). The events associated with the establishment of the church are recorded through Luke (Acts 17). Check out the details:

1. THE PERSONS INVOLVED v. 1.

The text merely states that "they" are the designated people. Other texts, however, identify these as Paul (15:36), Silas, who replaced Barnabas (15:40), and Timothy (16:1-5). This was the Gospel team employed by the Spirit of God for this ministry. Silas was a Roman citizen like Paul (Acts 16:37). He was also named in the Jerusalem letter (Acts 15:27) and in a sense represented the Jerusalem church as Paul did the church from Antioch. Timothy replaced Mark as a younger member of the group.

2. THE PRACTICE NOTED vv. 1, 2.

Paul stopped enroute at Amphipolis (33 miles from Philippi) and Apollonia (30 miles from Amphipolis). Thessalonica was another 37 miles along the way. This may give some indication as to whether Paul walked or rode a horse in his journeys. If these were nightly stops, the latter is most probable.

There is considerable discussion about the phrase "three sabbath days." It is possible that Paul was in the

city for a mere three weeks. On the other hand, the extent of the work accomplished seems to imply a longer period of time (cf. 1 Thess. 1:8). In any case, Paul started the work in the synagogue, albeit he was the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:8). This may well have a bearing on the impact of Romans 1:16, 17 for the present! In any case, it is clear from the text that this was Paul's habit (the perfect tense verb affirms this with vigor!).

3. THE PREACHING OUTLINED vv. 2, 3.

a. It was Scripture sourced.

The verb "reasoned" is an important explanation of the methodology of the apostle. It affirms mental stimulus. Nothing of the passive sort of listening. It has the idea of selection and distinguishing ideas in the mind. It has been used of conversation and in relation to the exchange of concepts through question and answers (cf. v. 17). It may well mean simple discourse. The point is: Paul really came to grips with the issues in his message! Primary to the whole, however, is the fact that he used the Scriptures. It is the only useful tool the Spirit of God employs (Eph. 6:17; Rom. 10:17; Isa. 55:11; Heb. 4:12).

b. It was Savior related.

The two verbs used here assign two specific characteristics of Paul's methodology: 1) "opening" means he actually got to the root of the Word. It relates to exposition. It is the same word used elsewhere for this sort of thing (Luke 24:32, 45, and Acts 16:14). Hence, the facts of the Gospel were clearly presented. But more than this, 2) the verb "alleging" suggests putting the Scriptures alongside of the conclusions he draws from them. This is the idea of propounding or the concept of interpretation. He not only quoted the Word, but he employed it for its proper use! It is the use of Scripture to support Scripture (analogy of Scripture principle). In so doing, certain facts were taught:

1) Death of Christ The necessity for the Messiah to suffer is patent and an important issue for Paul. This certainly affirms Old Testament prophetic teaching (Isa. 53, cf. with 1 Pet. 1:11). This is marked elsewhere in Acts (3:18; 26:23).

2) Resurrection of Christ Strangely, some do not see the vital importance of the resurrection. But the fact remains: Christ must rise from the dead (1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

3) Identification of Christ There was no hedging on Paul's part. He claimed that "Jesus" was in fact the "Messiah." While others might guess and question, Paul made the specific statement (Acts 9:20). This was the intent of John's Gospel also (John 20:30, 31).

Conclusion The end result of this tremendous ministry by Paul and his associates is recorded: a. Some believed and consorted with Paul and Silas. The verb "believed" is an aorist passive showing that it was the Holy Spirit Who made the event come to pass in their lives. The verb "consort" had the idea of assigning by lot. It is as if these were divinely-given to Paul by God as trophies of His grace. This is the manner by which salvation comes to anyone: the Holy Spirit and as an assigned lot by God. b. One devout Greek is probably known (Secudus in Acts 20:4). It is exciting to realize that religiously devout people can be won and were! The same is true today! Of these there was a "great multitude." c. Finally, there were a number of first rank women of the city who were saved. At Philippi women took a stand for Christ, and here they did also. As a corollary to all of this, the Jews became jealous and stirred up persecution (v. 5). Gospel ministry has its problems along with its blessings. So be it.