

# THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

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In a special introduction to an epistle, there are six points which merit observation: first, its authenticity; secondly, the circumstances of the particular church to which the epistle was written; thirdly, the occasion of the epistle; fourthly, its contents; fifthly, its date; sixthly, its distinctive peculiarities. Any difficulties or controversial questions arising from the epistle are discussed in separate dissertations.

## I. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE EPISTLE

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is one of those epistles of Paul whose genuineness has been almost universally acknowledged. It has only recently been questioned by Baur, and even his objections have not been adopted by all the disciples of his school.<sup>1</sup> The external evidence in its favor is very strong. It is true that the allusions to it in the apostolic fathers, given by Kirchhofer, are obscure and doubtful;<sup>2</sup> but it is directly attested by Irenæus, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Tertullian.

Thus Irenæus (A.D. 178) writes: "And on account of this the apostle, explaining himself, has set forth the perfect and spiritual man of salvation, saying thus in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians: 'And may the God of peace sanctify you wholly, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved without complaint until the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ' " (1 Thess. 5:23).<sup>3</sup> And again, "The apostle thus speaks, 'When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them' " (1 Thess. 5:3).<sup>4</sup>

Clemens Alexandrinus (A.D. 190) observes, "This St. Paul clearly signified, saying, 'When we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ, we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children' " (1 Thess. 2:7).<sup>5</sup> And again, "'Bear all things,' says the apostle, 'and retain what is good' " (1 Thess. 5:21).<sup>6</sup>

And Tertullian (A.D. 200) thus writes: "What these times are, learn with the Thessalonians; for we read, 'After what manner ye were turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to expect His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus' " (1 Thess. 1:9,10).<sup>7</sup> And

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1 Hilgenfeld, for example, maintains the genuineness of First Thessalonians.

2 Clemens, *Ep. ad Corinth*, c. 38; Ignatius, *ad Polycarp*, c. 1; *ad Ephes.* c. 10; Polycarp, *ad Philipp.* c. 2 and 4.

3 *Adv. hoeres.* v. 6, 1. Et propter hoc apostolus seipsum exponens, explanavit perfectum et spiritualem salutis hominem, in prima epistola ad Thessalonicenses dicens sic: "Deut autem pacis sanctificet vos perfectos, et integer vester spiritus, et anima, et corpus sine querela in adventum Domini Jesu Christi servetur."

4 *Adv. hoeres.* v. 30, 2. Hoc et apostolus ait: "Cum dixerint, pax, et munitio, tunc subitaneus illis superveniet interitus."

5 *Poedagog.* i. c. 5. (**Note:** we have omitted the following Greek.)

6 *Strom.* i. c. 11. (**Note:** we have omitted the following Greek.)

7 *De resurrect. carn.* c. 24. Quae haec tempora, cum Thessalonicensibus disce. Legimus enim: Qualiter conversi sitis ad idolis ad serviendum vivo et vero Deo, et ad expectandum e coelis filium ejus, quem suscitavit e mortuis, Jesum."

again, "And therefore the majesty of the Holy Spirit, which discerns such senses, suggests in this very Epistle to the Thessalonians: 'But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night' " (1 Thess. 5:1,2).<sup>8</sup>

And over and above these direct quotations, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians is contained in the catalogue of Marcion (A.D. 130), in the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170), and in the Syriac (A.D. 160) and Latin (A.D. 170) versions.

The internal evidence is equally strong. The character of Paul is impressed on this Epistle: his anxiety about his converts (3:1,2); his earnest desires for their spiritual good (3:8-11); his almost womanly tenderness (2:7); his joy when he hears from Timothy of the steadfastness of their faith (3:6,7); and his sympathy with them in their distress (4:13,18).

So also the style of this Epistle is undoubtedly Pauline. We have examples of Pauline digressions and expansions (1:2-6, 5:2-6), of climax (1:5,8, 2:8), of delicate allusions (5:6), of a play upon words (2:4, 4:9), and of numerous Pauline expressions and modes of thought (1:6, 2:2,19, 5:23).<sup>9</sup>

The language employed regarding the advent (4:15-17, 5:4) is also, as Paley remarks, a strong internal proof of genuineness; for whatever construction such language may bear, it is colored with the possibility of the immediate coming of the Lord, and would not have been employed by a forger of the second century, when the lapse of time had disappointed such an anticipation.<sup>10</sup> In short, as Professor Jowett well remarks: "It has been objected against the genuineness of this Epistle, that it contains only a single statement of doctrine. But liveliness, personality, similar traits of disposition, are far more difficult to invent than statements of doctrine. A later age might have supplied these, but it could hardly have caught the very likeness and portrait of the apostle." "Such intricate similarities of language, such lively traits of character, it is not within the power of any forger to invent, and, least of all, of a forger of the second century."<sup>11</sup>

The objections urged by Baur are not formidable, and are all of a subjective and arbitrary nature; the external evidence is left untouched. The following is a summary of his objections: 1. In the collection of the Pauline Epistles there is none which is so devoid of individuality and doctrinal statements. It consists entirely of instructions, admonitions, and wishes, with only one doctrinal statement on the advent of Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-18). 2. The Epistle betrays a dependence on the Acts of the Apostles and on the other epistles of Paul, especially on the two Epistles to the Corinthians.<sup>12</sup> 3. There is internal evidence that the Epistle belongs to a later age; for when mention is made of wrath having come upon the Jews to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2:16), there is an evident allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem. 4. The Epistle itself evidently professes to have been composed only a few months after Paul's first visit to Thessalonica, yet it contains a description of the church--that their faith was spread abroad in every place, and that they had a

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8 *De resurrect. carn.* c. 24. Et ideo majestas Spiritus sancti perspicax ejusmodi sensuum, et in ipsa ad Thessalonicenses epistola suggerit: "De temporibus autem et temporum spatiis, fratres, non est necessitas scribendi vobis. Ipsi enim certissime seitis, quod dies Domini, quasi fur nocti, ita adveniet."

9 The internal evidences are well stated by Professor Jowett in his *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles*, vol. i. pp. 27-29.

10 Paley's *Horae Paulinae* on 1 Thessalonians, No. I.

11 Jowett's *St. Paul's Epistles*, vol. i. pp. 28, 29.

12 The resemblances between First Thessalonians and the Epistle to the Corinthians, as stated by Baur, are the following:--1:5 as compared with 1 Cor. 2:4; 1:6 with 1 Cor. 11:1; 2:4-10 with 1 Cor. 2:4, 4:3,4, 9:15,16, 2 Cor. 2:17, 5:11, 11:9.--Baur's *Apostel Paulus*, vol. ii. pp. 95, 96.

regular church government--which is only suited to a later date. 5. The Epistle, in common with the Second Epistle, is far too apocalyptic in its tone to induce us to regard it as the composition of the Apostle Paul.<sup>13</sup>

The mere statement of these objections is sufficient to prove their weakness. Their arbitrary nature renders them difficult to answer. As De Wette remarks: "Such objections rest on mere subjective considerations, to which other similar considerations might easily be opposed."<sup>14</sup> [1] The comparative absence of dogmatic statement is easily explained by considering the circumstances of the church to which the apostle wrote. [2] The agreement with the Acts of the Apostles, so far from being an objection, is an argument in favor of the genuineness of this Epistle, this agreement being of an undesigned nature, and there being several apparent discrepancies between the history and the Epistle.<sup>15</sup> The similarity of expressions with those found in the Epistles to the Corinthians is in conformity with the style of Paul, who has his favorite expressions; and besides, is really not so strong as the verbal similarity between the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, both of which are regarded by Baur as indisputably authentic. [3] It would hardly have struck anyone that there is a direct allusion in 1 Thess. 2:16 to the destruction of Jerusalem. But even supposing this were the case, the condition of the Jewish nation led many among the Jews themselves to anticipate the Jewish war and its fatal issue. [4] It is admitted that the strong probability is that this Epistle was composed only a few months after Paul's visit to Thessalonica. But the circumstances mentioned in the Epistle, which would seem to indicate a later date, may easily be accounted for by admitting an interval of six months between the visit and writing of the Epistle. [5] And as to the last objection, the apocalyptic nature of the two Epistles, it is not permissible to judge *à priori* whether such statements are inconsistent with Paul's style and manner. And we see evident reasons in the disturbed state of the Thessalonian Church why Paul in his epistles to it should especially dwell on the kingdom of Christ and the doctrine of the advent.<sup>16</sup>

The points of agreement with the Acts of the Apostles are circumstantial and undoubted. Of these the three following are mentioned by Paley:<sup>17</sup> --1. In the Acts we learn that Paul, accompanied by Silas and Timothy, came to Philippi, where Paul and Silas were scourged, thrown into prison, and had their feet made fast in the stocks. In the Epistle, written in the name of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, there is an allusion to this treatment at Philippi: "Even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God with much contention" (1 Thess. 2:2). 2. In the Acts we learn that a similar treatment befell Paul and Silas at Thessalonica: "The Jews which believed not set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason (where Paul and Silas lodged), and sought to bring them out to the people" (Acts 17:5). In the Epistle there is the following reference: "When we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know" (1 Thess. 3:4). 3. In the Acts we are informed that Silas and

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13 Baur's *Apostel Paulus*, vol. ii. pp. 94-107. Baur does not make any regular statement of his objections, but those given above are what he chiefly insists upon.

14 De Wette's *Einleitung*, p. 279.

15 As, for example, the different statements regarding the movements of Silas and Timothy, the duration of Paul's residence at Thessalonica, and the composition of the Thessalonian Church. These apparent discrepancies are afterwards discussed.

16 The objections of Baur are ably discussed and answered in Lünemann's *Briefe an die Thessalonicher*, pp. 10-15; Jowett on *St. Paul's Epistles*, vol. i. pp. 18-27; Davidson's *Introduction*, vol. ii. pp. 455-460 (old edition), vol. i. pp. 21-25 (new edition); and by Lightfoot in the article "The Epistles to the Thessalonians" in Smith's *Dictionary*.

17 Paley's *Horae Paulinae* on 1 Thessalonians, No. III.

Timothy joined the apostle at Corinth: "And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia (to Corinth), Paul was pressed in the spirit" (Acts 18:5). The Epistle is written in the joint name of these three persons, and speaks of their conjunct ministry at Thessalonica as a recent occurrence: "We, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire" (1 Thess. 2:17).

There can be no question as to the harmony on these points between the Epistle and the history. And yet the allusions in the Epistle to these historical occurrences are quite incidental and perfectly natural, and do not in the least degree favor the supposition of Baur--that the writer of the Epistle took his materials from the Acts.

The apparent discrepancies between the Acts and the Epistle are not difficult to reconcile, and yet are of such a nature as to render all idea of collusion impossible. Some of these will be referred to when we consider the circumstances of the church at Thessalonica. One only is mentioned at present as having given rise to a diversity of opinion.

In the Acts we are informed that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were together at Berea, but that there they separated. Paul went to Athens, and Silas and Timothy remained behind. Paul sent a message from Athens requesting them to join him there, and we are informed that he waited for them (Acts 17:14-16). But it would seem from the history that they did not join him until he came to Corinth (Acts 18:5). In the Epistle to the Thessalonians, however, we read: "Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith" (1 Thess. 3:1,2).

From this it is inferred that Timothy actually joined Paul at Athens, but was sent back by him to Thessalonica to inquire into the state of the converts in that city. Hence De Wette and Meyer assert that there is a real discrepancy between the Epistle and Luke's narrative, and that all attempts to reconcile it are unavailing: that Luke was ignorant that Timothy joined the apostle at Athens.<sup>18</sup> Most critics (Michaelis, Paley, Bleek, Neander, Ewald, Jowett, Ellicott, Davidson) admit that Timothy did actually join Paul at Athens. Paley, so far from seeing in this a discrepancy, regards it as an undesigned coincidence. He supposes that Timothy's visit to Athens is indicated in the history by the command of Paul that Silas and Timothy should join him at Athens, by Paul waiting for them there, and by the fact that his departure from Athens was not in any sort hastened or abrupt. "The Epistle discloses a fact which is not preserved in the history; but which makes what is said in the history more significant, probable, and consistent."<sup>19</sup>

But be this as it may, the mere omission by Luke of Timothy's visit to Athens and return to Thessalonica cannot be considered a discrepancy, as the circumstance had no bearing upon his narrative. If Timothy had remained with the apostle at Athens, and thus had not rejoined him at Corinth, the case would have been different. But, after all, it is a mere assumption that Timothy was sent by the apostle from Athens to Thessalonica. No such assertion is made in the Epistle. Accordingly others (Hug, Hensen, Burton, Reuss, Wieseler, Alford) suppose that Timothy was sent by Paul to Thessalonica from Berea and not from Athens, and that he and Silas went direct from Macedonia to Corinth.<sup>20</sup> If Paul had given this direction before he left Berea, and if circumstances had prevented Silas and Timothy joining him at Athens, he might

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18 Meyer's *Apostelgeschichte*, p. 346; De Wette's *Apostelgeschichte*, p. 134.

19 Paley's *Horae Paulinae* on 1 Thessalonians, No. IV.

20 See especially Reuss' *Geschichte N.T.*, p. 68. He very pertinently asks: "To what purpose so many journeys?"

well say, "We thought it good to be left at Athens alone." Or it may be supposed that Paul sent a message from Athens to Berea, that Timothy should go to Thessalonica. In either case there is a perfect harmony between the Epistle and the history.

## II. THE CHURCH OF THESSALONICA

Thessalonica was a large maritime and commercial city, situated on the slope of a hill at the northern end of the Thermaic Gulf, now called the Gulf of Saloniki. Its former name was Thermae. It was rebuilt by Cassander, who called it Thessalonica after his wife, the sister of Alexander the Great,<sup>21</sup> -- Thessalonica herself having received her name on account of the victory of her father Philip over the Thessalonians on the day of her birth.

Under the Macedonians, Thessalonica flourished as their most important seaport; and its prosperity greatly increased when the country was attached to the Roman empire. It was first made the capital of the second of the four districts into which Macedonia was divided; and afterwards, when the province of Macedonia was formed, it became the metropolis and the residence of the Roman proconsul. It received the privilege of a free city, and was governed by its own magistrates (πολιτάρχαι, Acts 17:6). Strabo, in the first century, mentions it as the most populous city in Macedonia.<sup>22</sup>

Its inhabitants were chiefly Greeks, with a mixture of Romans, and a large colony of Jews who had settled there on account of trade. Such was the condition of the city when Paul visited it and announced in the synagogue Jesus as the Christ. Since that time Thessalonica has had few reverses. Until the founding of Constantinople, it was the most important city of Achaia, Macedonia, Thrace, and Illyricum. After the empire became Christian, it became an important episcopate and received the designation of "the orthodox city." For centuries it stood as a strong bulwark of Christendom against the encroachments of the Mahometans. It was finally captured by the Turks under Amurath II in 1430; and at present it is considered the second city of European Turkey, having a population of 70,000. The greater part of its population is composed of Greek Christians, with a large proportion of Jews, who are estimated at the lowest at 10,000.<sup>23</sup> Its modern name is Saloniki, an evident corruption of the ancient Thessalonica.

An account of the origin of the church in Thessalonica is given in Acts 17. Paul and his fellow-laborers Silas and Timothy, being driven out of Philippi, came to Thessalonica. Here was the principal synagogue of the country, and Paul, according to his custom, entered into it and taught. For three Sabbaths he preached to the Jews and the devout persons who came to worship, testifying that Jesus was the Christ. The result of his preaching is thus related by the sacred historian: "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17:1-4). We are afterwards informed that the Jews excited the rabble to raise a tumult against the Christian preachers, in consequence of which Paul and Silas were forced to leave the city secretly by night for Berea.

From the narrative of the Acts, it would at first sight appear that the apostle remained only three weeks in Thessalonica, and that the tumult which expelled him from the city took place

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<sup>21</sup> Strabo, vii., *Frag.* 24.

<sup>22</sup> Strabo, vii. 7, 4.

<sup>23</sup> According to some authorities, they amount to 35,000, or nearly one half of the population.--Conybeare and Howson's *St. Paul*, vol. i. p. 383, note.

immediately after the third Sabbath. But this account has to be supplemented by what we read in the Epistle. We find that a large and flourishing church (chiefly composed of Gentile converts) was formed (1 Thess. 1:8), that Paul worked for his own support (1 Thess. 2:9), and that the Philippians sent twice to supply his necessities (Phil. 4:16), the distance between the two cities being a hundred miles; so that Paul must have remained a longer time at Thessalonica. Olshausen, indeed, refers the repeated contributions of the Philippians not to the first sojourn of Paul in Thessalonica, but to the second, which occurred after his departure from Ephesus (Acts 20:1).<sup>24</sup> But such a view is excluded by the apostle's own words, when he says that it was "in the beginning of the gospel" (Phil. 4:10)--that is, at the introduction of Christianity into Macedonia--that the Philippians contributed to his support.

The probability is that the three Sabbaths mentioned in the Acts relate to Paul's preaching in the synagogue. That afterwards, finding the Jews obstinate, he, according to his usual custom in other cities, desisted and turned to the Gentiles. And that it was his increasing success among the Gentiles that excited the envy of the Jews (*ζηλώσαντες*, Acts 17:5), and led to the tumult. Still, though not necessarily limited to three weeks, it is evident both from the spirit of the Epistle and from the history that Paul's residence at Thessalonica was comparatively short, and that he was constrained to leave in a somewhat imperfect condition the church which he had established.

It would appear from both Epistles that Paul, when at Thessalonica, dwelt much on the kingdom of Christ and His coming as Judge of the world. The burden of his preaching was that they should wait for the Son of God from heaven, that the day of the Lord shall come suddenly and unexpectedly, and that the Lord Himself shall be revealed from heaven; and he dwelt upon the hindrance which prevented the advent of Christ (2 Thess. 2:5). It would seem that certain expressions of his were either misinterpreted or willfully perverted, as if he taught that Jesus was a rival monarch to Caesar: "These men do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (Acts 17:7).<sup>25</sup>

From the Epistle, it is evident that the Church of Thessalonica was chiefly composed of Gentile Christians. They are represented as those who turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9)--a description applicable to converted Gentiles but not to converted Jews. And in both Epistles to the Thessalonians there is not a single quotation from, and hardly an allusion to, the Old Testament.

Now when we turn to the Acts, we find an apparent discrepancy, and a real agreement. We are informed [that] as the result of Paul's three Sabbaths' preaching in the synagogue, that "some of the Jews believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17:4). If we adopt the reading approved by Lachmann, *τῶν τε σεβομένων καὶ Ἑλλήνων πολὺ πλῆθος* (and of the devout persons and of Greeks a great multitude), there is a perfect harmony. But, admitting the correctness of the received text, it is evident from the narrative that Paul's success was limited among the Jews but great among the devout Greeks, that is, among those religious Gentiles who, without being proselytes, attended the Jewish synagogue and were formerly idolaters. And if we admit that Paul remained longer than the three weeks preaching to the Gentiles with much success (1 Thess. 1:5), we can easily perceive how the church would be composed chiefly of Gentile converts.

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<sup>24</sup> Olshausen *On the Thessalonians*, p. 394, Clark's translation.

<sup>25</sup> There is in this an undesigned coincidence between the history and the Epistle, not alluded to by Paley.

It is also to be observed, that there are indications in the Epistle that the church increased during Paul's absence (1 Thess. 1:7,8)--perhaps by the labors of Timothy, who appears to have been left for a time behind (Acts 17:10), and who a second time visited the city at the request of the apostle (1 Thess. 3:1,2).

### III. THE OCCASION OF THE EPISTLE

It would appear that the persecution excited against the Christians at the instigation of the Jews, which had arisen during Paul's presence, continued in his absence (1 Thess. 2:14); and besides, Paul feared that by reason of the shortness of his residence his converts were only partially instructed in the nature of Christianity. He was therefore filled with anxiety on their account, lest they should fall from the faith. Twice he had attempted to visit them but had been prevented. He had therefore sent Timothy, who labored with him in founding the church at Thessalonica, to ascertain their state, "to establish and comfort them concerning their faith" (1 Thess. 3:2).

Timothy had now rejoined the apostle at Corinth, and the information which he brought was the occasion of this Epistle. That information was, upon the whole, satisfactory. Believers, in spite of persecution, continued steadfast in their faith and in their attachment to Paul, their spiritual father (1 Thess. 3:6,7), so that they became examples to all that believe in Thessalonica and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:7). Their faith was everywhere spread abroad, and their love to one another abounded. The information, however, was not wholly satisfactory. The knowledge of the Thessalonians was defective, and the apostle required to supply that which was lacking in their faith (1 Thess. 3:10).

There were those among them who had not ceased from the prevalent vices of their heathen neighbors (1 Thess. 4:1-7), and in consequence of certain fanatical views concerning the advent of Christ, some had become disorderly and neglected to work for their own support (1 Thess. 4:11,12). It would also appear that some of the converts had died, and the Thessalonians were distressed about the fate of their deceased friends, especially lest they should not participate in the blessings to be bestowed at the coming of the Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 4:13).<sup>26</sup>

The general design of this Epistle, then, was to confirm the Thessalonians in the Christian faith, to exhort them to relinquish those vices in which they still indulged, to comfort them in the sufferings to which they were exposed, to console them under the loss of their friends, and to exhort them to make further progress in every department of the Christian character.

### IV. THE CONTENTS OF THE EPISTLE

The Epistle is divided into two distinct parts. The first part, comprehending the first three chapters, may be termed *historical*, and contains an account of the apostle's anxiety for the Thessalonians. The second part, including the two last chapters, is *practical*, and contains various admonitions and exhortations concerning their Christian conduct.

In the first part the apostle commences with thanking God for all the grace bestowed upon the Thessalonians in their reception of the gospel (1:1-10). He then reminds them of his labors

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<sup>26</sup> The occasion of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians is well stated by Lunemann in his *Commentary*, pp. 3-5.

among them, and of his conduct when in Thessalonica, and thanks God for the steadfastness of their faith in spite of the persecution to which they were exposed (2:1-16). He expresses his great anxiety on their behalf, his repeated attempts to come to them, the reason why he sent Timothy, and the great joy which he experienced at the information which was brought to him (2:17-3:13). In the second part Paul exhorts them to continue in holiness, to avoid the vices of the Gentiles, to abound in Christian love, and instead of being led away by excitement to be diligent in the performance of their earthly duties (4:1-12). He then comforts them concerning the fate of their deceased friends, and exhorts them to be watchful and prepared for the coming of Christ (4:13-5:11). Then follow several exhortations, adapted to the circumstances of the Thessalonians, to cultivate the virtues of Christianity; and the Epistle concludes--after a solemn charge that it be publicly read--with the apostolic blessing (5:12-28).

## V. THE DATE OF THE EPISTLE

There is little dubiety [doubt] as to the time when this Epistle was written. When Paul and his associates Silas and Timothy left Thessalonica, they came to Berea. Here Paul left them, with directions to Timothy to return to Thessalonica, and proceeded alone to Athens. He alludes to his solitary residence at Athens in the Epistle (1 Thess. 3:1). From Athens he went to Corinth, where Silas and Timothy rejoined him (Acts 18:5). Now, as the Epistle is written in the names of Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1), it is evident that it was not composed until they all met together at Corinth; and it must have been written there, as this is the last time that we read of Silas being in company with Paul.

It is also evident that some time must have elapsed between the introduction of Christianity and the writing of this Epistle. The faith of the Thessalonians was spread abroad in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:8); Paul had made two attempts to visit them (1 Thess. 2:17,18); and it would seem that some of the members of the church had died (1 Thess. 4:13).<sup>27</sup> But still the interval could not be long. The circumstance of Paul's visit to Thessalonica was fresh upon his memory (1 Thess. 2:17); his anxiety for the spiritual welfare of his converts was great; and as the information brought by Timothy was the direct occasion of the Epistle, it would probably be written shortly after that evangelist's return. Besides, the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was also written during the same residence at Corinth (2 Thess. 1:1), and some time must be allowed for the growth of those opinions which are combated in that Epistle. We may therefore fix the date of the composition of this Epistle toward the close the year 52 or at the beginning of 53, that is, during the early part of Paul's residence of a year and a half at Corinth (Acts 18:11).

Other dates have been assigned to the Epistle but they do not require any refutation, as the arguments in favor of the above date are so convincing that it is now almost universally adopted. Michaelis and Benson suppose that the Epistle was written during the latter part of Paul's residence at Corinth and after he had made several excursions from that city.<sup>28</sup> Schrader fixes the date during the apostle's journey to Macedonia and Greece, after his departure from Ephesus (Acts 20:1-3).<sup>29</sup> And Köhler and Whiston<sup>30</sup> suppose that it was among the last of Paul's epistles and was not written until after his release from his Roman imprisonment, at a period beyond the history contained in the Acts of the Apostles.

<sup>27</sup> Bleek's *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. i. p. 411.

<sup>28</sup> Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. vi. pp. 23-25.

<sup>29</sup> Schrader's *Apostel Paulus*, vol. i. pp. 90 and 164.

<sup>30</sup> Köhler's *Versuch über die Abfassungszeit der apostolischen Schriften*, p. 112 et seq.; and Whiston's *Primitive Christianity Revived*, vol. iii. pp. 46, 47.

It follows that the *place* of writing was Corinth. In our Bible, at the end of this Epistle, there is the following note: "The First Epistle unto the Thessalonians was written from Athens." But this is an evident mistake, arising from a careless inference drawn from the words, "We thought it good to be left at Athens alone." Paul speaks of his sojourn at Athens as a past event; and it was not at Athens but at Corinth that he was joined by Silas and Timothy. These subscriptions at the end of the epistles are of no authority, as not belonging to the original text; and although perhaps in general correct, yet occasionally, as in the present instance, they are erroneous.

## VI. THE PECULIARITIES OF THE EPISTLE

The great distinctive peculiarity of this Epistle consists in its being the first of Paul's extant epistles.<sup>31</sup> Whether it is the first epistle he ever wrote may be doubtful, but it is certain that it is the first which has come down to us--perhaps the earliest of all the books of the New Testament. The priority of this Epistle is now a point which is generally admitted by all those who allow its genuineness.<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to compare this Epistle with those of Paul's later years.<sup>33</sup> About three years intervened between these Epistles to the Thessalonians and the Epistle to the Galatians, the next in the series, and at least ten between them and the epistles of the captivity. The great outlines of the gospel--the kingdom of Christ, the atoning death of Christ, the reign of Christ in heaven, the resurrection of believers, and the second advent of Christ--are contained in all the epistles. Nor is there any development of doctrine, properly so called. Still it is true that, compared with the other epistles (for example, Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians), there is an absence of doctrinal statement in this Epistle to the Thessalonians. Indeed, what is considered the peculiar Pauline doctrine, that of justification by faith, is not even mentioned. There is no contrast between faith and works, no statement of the peculiar provinces of the law and the gospel.

The reasons for this are obvious enough. The circumstances of the churches to which the apostle wrote were the occasion of his doctrinal statements. It was chiefly the opposition of the Judaizing teachers that caused him to assert the doctrine of justification. But when he wrote the Epistle to the Thessalonians, such an opposition, though it had already arisen, was not so strong as it afterwards became, and does not seem to have affected the churches of Macedonia. The opponents of Paul at Thessalonica were not Jewish Christians but unconverted Jews. It was "the Jews who believed not" (οἱ ἀπειθοῦντες Ἰουδαῖοι) who were the instigators of the tumult against the apostle (Acts 18:5), and who forbade him to preach to the Gentiles that they might be saved (1 Thess. 2:16). Hence the circumstances of the Thessalonian church did not require that the apostle should dwell upon the doctrine of justification in opposition to the Judaizing Christians, but rather on the doctrine of the second advent for the consolation of the persecuted believers.

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31 The inner essential peculiarity consists in the reference to the second advent. This is reserved as the subject of a separate dissertation.

32 The order of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians is afterwards discussed.

33 See this comparison carried out by Professor Lightfoot, in his able article on the First Epistle to the Thessalonians in Smith's *Biblical Dictionary*. He notices three points of difference between this Epistle and Paul's later letters:--1. In the general *style* of these earlier letters there is greater simplicity and less exuberance of language. 2. The *antagonism to St. Paul* is not the same. Here the opposition comes from the unconverted Jews; afterwards Paul's opponents are Jewish Christians. 3. The *doctrinal teaching* of the apostle does not bear quite the same aspect as in the later epistles.

The observation of Baur, that this Epistle to the Thessalonians is the least doctrinal of all the Pauline Epistles,<sup>34</sup> is perfectly correct; and the state of the Thessalonian church accounts for this peculiarity. The Epistle which it most resembles is that addressed to the sister church of Macedonia--the church of Philippi. In both we have an insight into the heart of Paul. In both there is more of commendation than of blame. The churches of Macedonia were perhaps the fairest examples of the Pauline churches. Their charity and liberality abounded (2 Cor. 8:1-5); and once and again they are held forth as examples of faith and love to the churches of Achaia (1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Cor. 9:1-4).

Paton J. Gloag, *Introduction to the Pauline Epistles* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.

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<sup>34</sup> In der ganzen Sammlung der paulinischen Briefe gibt es keinen, welcher allen andern in Hinsicht der Eigenthümlichkeit und Gewichtigkeit des Inhalts so sehr nachsteht wie 1 Thess.; mit Ausnahme der iv. 13-18 enthaltenen Vorstellung tritt nicht einmal irgend eine dogmatische Idee mit besonderer Bedeutung hervor.-- *Apostel Paulus*, vol. ii. p. 94.