

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON SIX = *The Church in Thessalonica*

Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (1/26/11)

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Thessalonica. Let's study together

Discussion:

I. *The Geography of Thessalonica*

The city of Thessalonica was located in Macedonia.

The city was the most populated in all of Macedonia.

* The city is known now as Salonika and has about 375,000 people living there.

The city was built on the slope of a large hill.

* It was built in a series of semi-circular terraces above the shoreline.

* It gave travelers the impression of a large amphitheater as you come in from the Aegean Sea.

The southwest part of the city bordered Mount Olympus.

The east-west highway of Via Egnatia ran through the city.

The city served as a main artery to the city of Rome and the rest of the Roman empire.

Strabo the geographer in referred to the port city as the "Metropolis of Macedonia."

II. *The History of Thessalonica*

Thessalonica was a very old and ancient city with a lot of rich history

* It was originally called Therma until it was changed in 315 BC (named after Thessalonike).

Thessalonica was home for many of the Caesar's heirs and other royal family members.

* It was the boyhood home of Alexander the Great.

* It is actually referred to as the "Mother of Macedonia" in Roman writings.

There were many significant historical events that took place before, during, and after NT times.

* The orator Cicero stayed here and delivered speeches on occasion.

* With the rise of the Roman Civil War (49-31 BC) Thessalonica backed Antony and Octavian.

The "Gate of Axous" was erected nearby to commemorate victory at the Battle of Philippi (42 BC)

III. *The Beginning of the Church in Thessalonica*

Thessalonica was a wealthy city and had a Roman, Greek and Jewish population.

* After 42 BC, Thessalonica enjoyed liberty as a free city with a large population.

Paul's first visit to Thessalonica was after his travels to Philippi (probably around 50 AD).

* He had some difficult times and Acts records those stories (**Acts 16-17**).

Paul and Silas went to the synagogues for three straight Sabbath days teaching (**Acts 17:1-9**).

* In Thessalonica, some proselyte Greeks and the chief women believed Paul's preaching.

* The Jews caused an uproar in the city and assaulted some of the believers.

The household of Jason was persecuted in hopes of bringing out Paul and Silas.

The brethren that were arrested were given bond under one condition: Paul must leave.

This particular event happened during a political charged time for the Jews and the Romans.

IV. The Work of the Church in Thessalonica

The establishment of the church in Thessalonica was very significant for all of Macedonia.

* Thessalonica facilitated the spreading of the faith to all of the region (**I Thessalonians 1:8**).

The letters of Paul to the Thessalonians is evidence of the their faith and love.

Aristachus and Secundus were believers from Thessalonica that labored with Paul (**Acts 20:4, 27:2**).

After Paul departed from the region he sent Timothy to Thessalonica to preach.

* I & II Thessalonians were written in Corinth and sent by Timothy to the church.

Paul may have revisited Thessalonica several times during his missions.

He mentions his intention to visit them to the Corinthians (**I Corinthians 16:5**).

* Obviously, Paul felt the work was successful and needed to be visited often.

V. The Letters to the Church in Thessalonica

The following outline could be used for I Thessalonians:

- I. Commendation for the Faithfulness of the Church (1:1-10)
- II. Counseling for Persecution Against the Church (2:1-20)
- III. Concern for the Future of the Church (3:1-4:12)
- IV. Caution Surrounding the Lord's Second Coming (4:13-5:11)
- V. Concluding Exhortations to the Church (5:12-28)

The following outline could be used for II Thessalonians:

- I. God Will Bring Judgment & Glory (1:1-12)
- II. God Will Approve Christ's Return & Satan's Defeat (2:1-12)
- III. God Will Reward the Committed Disciples (2:13-17)
- IV. God Will Remain Faithful (3:1-5)
- V. God Will Discipline His People (3:6-15)
- VI. Concluding Remarks & Greetings (3:16-18)

Anyone have a favorite verse from I or II Thessalonians they want to share?

VI. The Dilemmas of the Church in Thessalonica

The church suffered persecution by the Jews and Greeks (**Acts 19:29, 20:4, I Thessalonians 2:14**).

The city officials did not like the Lord's church (**Acts 17:6-8**).

There were various religious cults within the city (**I Thessalonians 3:5**).

The congregation was made of diverse people (**I Thessalonians 2:14, Acts 17:4, I Thessalonians 1:9**).

The people were confused about the end times (**I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, II Thessalonians 1:3-2:12**).

Some brethren were expected signs to usher in the Lord's return (**I Thessalonians 4:18, 5:9-11**).

VII. The Maturity of the Church in Thessalonica

The church is not said to have battled conflict or heresy.

The brethren readily accepted the teachings of Paul.

The congregation was not afraid to ask tough questions and live with the answers.

The faith of the church is admonished (**I Thessalonians 5:12-28, II Thessalonians 3:16-18**).

The love of the brothers and sisters is exemplary (**I Thessalonians 1:1-10**).

Conclusion: God clearly blessed the church in Thessalonica. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will study about the churches in Galatia.