

(Bible used = NIV 1984 translation)

Background

Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia (now within Greece), a busy sea port and important trade centre being at the junction of two major highways. This made it a strategic base for the gospel as it moved west towards Rome and east towards the heart of Asia.

Read Acts 16: 6 – 10. God calls Paul to go to Macedonia.

Read Acts 17: 1 – 15. The new Christians at Thessalonica faced particularly vehement hostility.

Paul was only in Thessalonica for three weeks before he was ejected. As soon as he could thereafter, he sent Timothy back to see how these very new Christians were fairing. Paul almost certainly wrote both letters to the Thessalonians from Corinth, the first when Timothy returned from Thessalonica to Corinth bringing news and a first report (and the church's questions); and the second letter when he received a second report, to further clarify their questions. This is around AD50/51. First Thessalonians is almost certainly the earliest written of all Paul's canonical letters.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1: 1 – 10

Question 1. When Paul, with Silas and Timothy, visited Thessalonica, Paul was clearly the leader and would have led the teaching and discipleship making. What role do you imagine Silas and Timothy had at that time?

- a. How important might it have been for the Thessalonians that Paul was accompanied by Silas and Timothy?
- b. What sort of difference might this have made when Timothy returned to Thessalonica without Paul?
- c. Do you see any parallels with our church structures and discipleship making today?
- d. Would there be a message to draw from this for the role of individual church members today?

Question 2. In verses 2–3 Paul lists three characteristics or attributes. What are they? Paul uses these extensively throughout his many letters, and some Christian leaders say that they form the backbone of the Christian relationship with Jesus. Do you agree, or can you think of others more important?

Question 3. In verse 5 several things are being detailed. What do you understand is being recorded here?

Question 4. Verses 7-8. The church in Thessalonica is only a few months old when Paul writes this letter. These new believers have exchanged the worship of idols (as pagans) (no doubt there were some Jews) to the worshipping of Jesus. These verses record an amazing transformation. What clues do we have as to why this might be?

Question 5. The Thessalonian church described by Paul appears to be 'a model church'. How does St James church compare? Where, if anywhere, does St James fall short of the Thessalonian example?

A thought to take into the week ahead

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one, any day;

I'd rather one would walk with me than merely show the way.

The eye's a better pupil, more willing than the ear;

Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear.

St James Church, Taunton – Roger Fenton – 2018