





# THE CITY OF THESSALONICA

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- 1. Brief History of Thessalonica
  - a. Thessalonica was located at the head of the Thermaic Gulf and on the major Roman road (Via Ignatia...the way of the nations), running eastward from Rome. A seaport, it was also very close to a rich, well-watered, coastal plain. These three advantages made Thessalonica the largest, most important commercial and political center in Macedonia.

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- 1. Brief History of Thessalonica (con't)
  - ▣ b. Thessalonica was originally named Therma, derived from the hot springs located in the area. An early historian, Pliny the Elder, refers to Therma and Thessalonica existing together. Most historians believe Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's generals, renamed and built Therma in 315 B.C. after Philip of Macedonia's daughter and Alexander's half-sister and his wife, Thessalonica (Strabo VII Fragment 21). Sometime during the early centuries of the spread of Christianity, Thessalonica came to be nicknamed "the orthodox city" because of its Christian character.

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- 1. Brief History of Thessalonica (con't)
  - c. Thessalonica was a cosmopolitan metropolis, with a population of about 200,000 that was inhabited by people from all over the known world.
    - (1) Barbaric Germanic people from the north.
    - (2) Greeks coming from Achaia to the south and from the islands of the Aegean Sea.
    - (3) Romans from the west (mostly retired soldiers).
    - (4) Finally, Jews came in large numbers from the east; eventually one third of the population was Jewish.

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- 1. Brief History of Thessalonica (con't)
  - d. It was a resort and health center because of the hot springs. It was a commercial center because of its seaport, fertile plains and the proximity of the Ignatian Way.
  - e. As the capital and largest city, Thessalonica was also the central political headquarters of Macedonia. Being a Roman provincial capital and home of many Roman citizens (mostly retired soldiers), it became a free city. Thus the Thessalonian rulers were called "politarchs." This title appears nowhere else in literature but it is preserved by an inscription over the triumphal arch at Thessalonica known as the Vardar Gate.

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- 2. Events Leading to Paul's Coming to Thessalonica
  - a. Many events led Paul to Thessalonica, yet behind all the physical circumstances is the direct, definite call of God. Paul had not originally planned to enter the European continent. But his desire on this second missionary journey was to revisit the churches in Asia Minor that he had established on his first journey and then to turn eastward. Yet, just as the moment arrived to turn northeastward, God started closing the doors. The culmination of this was Paul's Macedonian vision (Acts 16:6 – 10). This caused two things to happen: first, the continent of Europe was evangelized and second, Paul, because of circumstances in Macedonia, began writing his Epistles.

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- 2. Events Leading to Paul's Coming to Thessalonica (con't)
  - b. The physical circumstances that led Paul to Thessalonica were: Paul went to Philippi, a small town with no synagogue. His work there was thwarted by the owners of a prophetic, demonic slave girl and the town council. Paul was beaten and humiliated, yet a church was formed even in the midst of all this. Because of the opposition and physical punishment, Paul was forced to leave, possibly sooner than he had wished.



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- 2. Events Leading to Paul's Coming to Thessalonica (con't)
  - c. Where would he go from there? He came to the largest city in the area, Thessalonica, which did have a synagogue. Paul had made it a pattern to go to the local Jews first. He did this because:
    - (1) of their knowledge of the Old Testament;
    - (2) of the opportunity for teaching and preaching that the synagogue presented;
    - (3) of their position as the chosen people, (Matthew 10:6; 15:24; Romans 1:16 – 17; 9 – 11);
    - (4) Jesus had offered Himself first to them, then to the world—so too, Paul would follow Christ's example.

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- 3. Paul's Companions
  - a. Paul was accompanied by Silas and Timothy in Thessalonica. Luke was with Paul at Philippi and he remained there. We learn this by the "we" and "they" passages of Acts 16 and 17. Luke speaks of "we" at Philippi, but of "they" as traveling to Thessalonica.

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- 3. Paul's Companions (con't)
  - b. Silas, or Silvanus, was the man Paul picked to go with him on the second missionary journey after Barnabas and John Mark went back to Cyprus:
    - (1) He is first mentioned in the Bible in Acts 15:22.
    - (2) He was also a prophet (Acts 15:32).
    - (3) He was a Roman citizen like Paul (Acts 16:37).
    - (4) He and Judas Barsabbas were sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem Church to inspect the situation (Acts 15:22, 30 – 35).
    - (5) Paul praises him in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:19 and mentions him in several letters.
    - (6) Later he is identified with Peter in writing 1<sup>st</sup> Peter (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:12).
    - (7) Both Paul and Peter call him Silvanus while Luke calls him Silas.

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- 3. Paul's Companions (con't)
  - c. Timothy was also a companion and fellow-worker of Paul:
    - (1) Paul met him at Lystra where he was converted on the first missionary journey.
    - (2) Timothy was half Greek (father) and half Jewish (mother).
    - (3) Paul circumcised him so that he could work with Jewish people.
    - (4) Timothy is mentioned in the salutation in: 2 Corinthians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.
    - (5) Paul spoke of him as "my son in the ministry" (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:2; 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).
    - (6) Paul's general tone throughout his letters implies Timothy was younger and timid. Yet Paul has great confidence and trust in him (Acts 19:27; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19).

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- 3. Paul's Companions (con't)
  - d. It is only fitting in the section on Paul's companions that mention is made of the men who came to Thessalonica and accompanied Paul on his later missions. They are Aristarchus (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2) and Secundus (Acts 20:4). Also, Demas could have been from Thessalonica (Philemon 24; 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:10).

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- 4. Paul's Ministry in the City
  - a. Paul's ministry in Thessalonica followed his usual pattern of going to the Jews first and then turning to the Gentiles. Paul preached on three Sabbaths in the synagogue. His message was "Jesus is the Messiah." He used Old Testament Scriptures to show that the Messiah was to be a suffering Messiah (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53), and not a political temporal Messiah. Paul also emphasized the resurrection and offered salvation to all. Jesus was clearly presented as the Messiah promised of old that could save all peoples.
  - b. The response to this message was that some Jews, many devout Gentiles, and many important women accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. An analysis of these groups of converts is very meaningful in understanding Paul's later letters to this church.

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- 4. Paul's Ministry in the City
  - c. Gentiles comprised most of the members of the church, seen by the absence of allusions to the Old Testament in either of the two epistles. The Gentiles readily accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord for several reasons:
    - (1) Their traditional religions were powerless superstition.
    - (2) The gospel was free to all.
    - (3) Christianity contained no Jewish exclusive nationalism.

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- 4. Paul's Ministry in the City (con't)
  - d. Many "chief women" accepted Christianity, because of these women's abilities to make their own religious choices. Women were more free in Macedonia and Asia Minor than in the rest of the Greco-Roman world. Yet the poorer class of women, although free, were still under the sway of superstition and polytheism.



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- 4. Paul's Ministry in the City (con't)
  - e. Many have found a problem in the length of time that Paul stayed at Thessalonica:
    - (1) Acts 17:2 speaks of Paul's reasoning in the synagogue on three Sabbaths while in Thessalonica.
    - (2) 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:7 – 11 tells of Paul's working at his trade. This was tent-making or as some have suggested working with leather.
    - (3) Philippians 4:16 supports the longer residence, when Paul received at least two money gifts from the church at Philippi while in Thessalonica.

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- 4. Paul's Ministry in the City (con't)
  - e. Many have found a problem in the length of time that Paul stayed at Thessalonica:
    - (4) The differing accounts of the converts in Acts 17:4 and 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:9 and 2:4 support this view, the key difference in the accounts being the rejection of idols by the Gentiles. The Gentiles in Acts were Jewish proselytes and had already turned from idols. The context implies Paul may have had a larger ministry among pagan Gentiles than Jews.
    - (5) When a larger ministry might have occurred is uncertain because Paul always went to the Jews first. After they rejected his message, he turned to the Gentiles. When they responded to the gospel in large numbers, the Jews became jealous and started a riot among the rabble of the city.

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- 4. Paul's Ministry in the City (con't)
  - f. Because of a riot Paul left Jason's house and hid with Timothy and Silas or at least they were not present when the mob stormed Jason's house looking for them. The Politarchs made Jason put up a security bond to insure peace. This caused Paul to leave the city by night and go to Berea. Nevertheless, the church continued its witness of Christ in the face of much opposition.

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- Thessalonica (called Thessaloniki, or Salonica, today) stills exists today with a population near 300,000. During World War 2 , The Nazis extracted about 60,000 Jews from the city for execution.

