

Reception And Rejection In Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-15

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The book of Acts records for us how the Good News of Jesus the Messiah spread from city to city across the world. In our study today, we will begin a series on the letters to the church in Thessalonica, but before we dive head first into 1 Thessalonians, it is important for us to look at the background and context of these incredible letters. We find this recorded for us in Acts 17.

The Gospel Comes To Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3)

By the time Paul entered the city of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, he had established a regular pattern of evangelism guided by his God-given mission to bring the Good News of Jesus the Messiah to “the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). “As was his custom”, his first stop was the Jewish Synagogue to reason, explain and prove two specific claims to his audience, made up of Jews and “devout Greeks”, or God-Fearers, who were Gentiles that had embraced much of the Jewish religious life and practice.

First, Paul labored to show that the Old Testament “Scriptures” revealed that the Jewish Messiah (“Christ”) must suffer, die and rise from the dead¹. This would have been a foreign and offensive idea to Jew’s who were not willing to honestly evaluate Paul’s arguments. The typical Jewish expectation of the Messiah was one of conquest and victory, not one of suffering and death! Yet, for those willing to look and evaluate Paul’s claims and the supporting Scriptures, God’s truth was there and life changing.

Once Paul had made the case for the suffering, death and resurrection of the Messiah, his second claim was that Jesus of Nazareth, was actually the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament. And that Jesus the Messiah had suffered and raised from the dead so that God could forgive Jew and Gentile alike.

To prove the necessity of the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah, Paul used the Old Testament scriptures, to support his claim that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah, he almost certainly used his own testimony. We can read his conversion story in Acts 9:1-22, 22:1-21, 26:9-21; Galatians 1:11-24. Paul’s arguments invoked two primary and radically opposite responses.

Reception (Acts 17:4)

First we read that a group was persuaded by the truth of Paul’s message. This group was made up of some Jews, but a larger number of God-fearers and leading women believe also. Though Paul’s message was delivered in a Synagogue, built upon the Old Testaments (Jewish) Scriptures, and was a distinctly Jewish themed message, the majority of these new converts were not Jews but rather Gentiles. The good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah was good news for all who would believe, and in Thessalonica, that initial group of believers was primarily made up of Gentiles.

Rejection (Acts 17:5-14)

The second response was one that Paul was very familiar with. The Jews were jealous of the response Paul had received, and led by their leaders, the Jews rejected Paul’s radical message of a Messiah who would suffer and die. They did not stop there though, these opponents of the gospel incited a mob and attempted to capture Paul, and get him convicted of treason!

¹ Some possible passages that Paul would have used: Psalm 16:10-11; Psalm 22; Psalm 71:20; Isaiah 53, Daniel 12:2

Thankfully they were unable to, and Paul was smuggled out of Thessalonica and into the nearby city of Berea where he once again preached the gospel with incredible results.

Paul had been run out of Thessalonica, but that was not enough for these opponents of the gospel. These Jewish leaders actually followed Paul into Berea causing trouble and trying to put a stop to his preaching, resulting in Paul needing to flee once again. Having fled the city, Paul later sent Timothy back to “establish and exhort you in your faith...to learn about your faith” (1 Thess 3:1,5) Upon hearing Timothy’s report, Paul penned his first letter to the church at Thessalonica.

I think it is instructive for us to see these varied responses to the gospel. It helps us to have a realistic expectation of what we might expect in our gospel efforts. We see that some hearts receive the truth and some reject it. We see one of the differences between the groups being a willingness to be persuaded, we might call this being open minded or reasonable. There was no doubt that Paul desired that all might be persuaded, but he realized that no matter what reasons he might give, or how persuasive he might be, that there were some people who simply would not receive the life changing truth of the gospel. I’m sure for most of us we can put a face to that type of person. A friend or family member who is simply closed off to reason and all of our arguments regardless of their presentation. I would encourage you all who have someone like this in your life. Let us be faithful to pray and trust the power of God to work as He wills, and let us remember that the mighty evangelist and Apostle Paul was once the leading Pharisee Saul, who had heard all arguments for Jesus the Messiah, and viciously rejected them, making it his life's mission to stamp out the very gospel that he later devoted his life to spreading. May we be reminded that God calls us to be faithful and make disciples and to trust Him with the outcomes. When we have this perspective firmly in our minds, we can labor for our Lord all the more freely and additionally we will guard our own hearts from pride and self-reliance in our evangelistic efforts. Let us pray for and be aware of gospel opportunities this week.

GRACE NEWS AND NEEDS

- **Grace Family Desert Trip To Ocotillo: Feb 23-25.** Join families from Grace for a great weekend in the desert! Saturday night dinner provided. Sign up @ Men’s Ministry kiosk on the patio.
- **VOM Needs for February: Band-Aids**
- **Grace Financial Update: -11,324.33 below the 2024 combined weekly need of \$57,272.**