

1&2 THESSALONIANS
FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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J.K. MCKEE

MESSIANIC
APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

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Front cover image is of the Mediterranean Sea adjacent to modern Thessalonika

Back cover image is of the remnants of an ancient wall in modern Thessalonika

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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
Ara: Aramaic	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	KJV: King James Version
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	LXX: Septuagint
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	m. Mishnah
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: New International Version (1984)
GNT: Greek New Testament	NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
Heb: Hebrew	NT: New Testament
	orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world

OT: Old Testament
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant (2011)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

INTRODUCTION

For many Bible readers, or even just readers of the Pauline Epistles, encountering the letters of 1&2 Thessalonians is a bit of a conundrum.¹ When reading through much larger letters like Romans or 1&2 Corinthians, or a letter with a great deal of emotion and urgency like Galatians, or a letter with great majesty like Ephesians – there are some people who see 1&2 Thessalonians and just wonder, “*Huh?*” At the very most, too many Bible readers’ experience with encountering 1&2 Thessalonians is in single verse quotations here and there. They know about things like, “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...” (1 Thessalonians 4:16), “...who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God...” (2 Thessalonians 2:4), or “the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). But how much do they know about things like, “For we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, more than once – and *yet* Satan hindered us” (1 Thessalonians 2:18), or “Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone” (1 Thessalonians 3:1)? While the end-times or eschatology are undeniably a major feature of these two letters, understanding some of the issues, of the early Messianic movement in reaching out into the Mediterranean world, is also a major feature that all Bible readers need to know about.

Depending on how one dates the Epistle to the Galatians, the Epistle of 1 Thessalonians is often regarded as “the oldest extant piece of Christian literature” (Collins, *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*).² Many expositors on the Apostolic Scriptures (myself included) date Galatians as the earliest of the Pauline letters composed, before the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council.³ But even if Galatians is the first Pauline letter written, then given the chronology of the Book of Acts and Paul’s visit to Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-9, the letter of 1 Thessalonians could still easily be the second oldest piece of Messianic literature, to then be quickly followed by 2 Thessalonians. The need, for reviewing 1&2 Thessalonians, makes these letters very important for us to understand and contemplate some of the thoughts and viewpoints of the early Believers, and the challenges that they faced. While there are various themes encountered in 1&2 Thessalonians viewed as being a bit general by many laypersons, Robert K. Jewett astutely informs us how, “In the last decade or so [1990s into the 2000s] these two small letters have become some of the most hotly debated documents in the NT...[T]hey reflect the earliest accessible stage of Paul’s pastoral and missionary endeavors and provide our earliest glimpse into a nascent Pauline congregation.”⁴

A further summary on the importance of 1&2 Thessalonians is offered by J.W. Simpson, Jr., who says, “Despite their brevity and their relative lack of significantly developed theological themes compared to the other letters in the Pauline corpus, the two letters to the Thessalonian Christians have become the object of much recent scholarly examination, particularly in the areas of rhetorical criticism,...sociological

¹ Please note that in spite of the common reference to 1&2 Thessalonians as “the Book of 1 or 2 Thessalonians,” I am going to purposefully refer to these texts as either the First/Second Epistle(s) to the Thessalonians or Paul’s first/second letter(s) to the Thessalonians, and not use this reference. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant to its original audience first, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

² Raymond F. Collins, “The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2115.

³ Consult the author’s entry on the Epistle to the Galatians in his workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, and his commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁴ Robert K. Jewett, “1 and 2 Thessalonians,” in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1413.

analysis...and the early development of Pauline theology.”⁵ While Bible readers in general wonder about what role the letters of 1&2 Thessalonians play within the New Testament, it might be said that a certain number of Messianic Bible readers might even forget about 1&2 Thessalonians even being present within the Apostolic Scriptures. Yet, all can be easily reminded of the significant prophetic aspects of 1&2 Thessalonians, and what these letters teach Messiah followers about the future resurrection of the dead, the Second Coming, the rise of the antimessiah/antichrist, and sure judgment upon evil. A particular “bonus” to all of this is that an examination, of the text of 1&2 Thessalonians on the whole, invites readers into a charged atmosphere in First Century Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, where the early Believers were at growing odds with their pagan neighbors and the local Jewish synagogue. One group thought the Messiah followers a nuisance as they proclaimed a King and Lord other than Caesar, and another group thought that they would incur Rome’s anger upon them as a minority group within the Empire.

Much is present in 1&2 Thessalonians that will surely enrich your understanding of Paul’s First Century ministry, and how the good news of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) can be particularly subversive to those in positions of political or religious power.

PAUL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE THESSALONICANS

The Apostle Paul visited the city of Thessalonica during his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:40-18:23). Paul began his early ministry in Thessalonica at the local synagogue (Acts 17:1-9), after he had to leave Philippi (Acts 16:6-40). There was a Jewish presence in the city, but later the group of new Messiah followers became predominantly non-Jewish (Acts 17:4; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9).⁶ The leaders of the local synagogue became rather hostile to Paul, and brought charges against him before the city leaders of Thessalonica, on the trumped up accusation of him and his company being Messianic agitators (Acts 17:6-7). This likely had something to do with how the Emperor Claudius had once expelled all of the Jews from Rome, “Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (Suetonius *Life of Claudius* 25.2).⁷ This was none other than a problem caused in Rome, by the proclamation of the Christ or the Messiah having arrived, and it stirred up a significant amount of trouble in the Roman Jewish community. With the Jews having been forced to leave the city of Rome, this definitely played a role in how Paul and his gospel proclamation were received in Thessalonica. Ben Witherington III notes, “There was no reason Jews in Thessalonike might not feel the wrath of the emperor as well if they were caught disturbing the Pax Romana.”⁸ If Paul was caught to be an insurrectionist against the Roman Empire, there would have been consequences for the Thessalonian Jewish community.

Paul had stayed in Thessalonica just long enough, to see a growing fellowship of Messiah followers emerge. The core of the Thessalonian assembly was made up of God-fearers (Acts 17:4), who had likely been associated with the local Jewish synagogue for some time. Various expositors, like Leon Morris and Donald Guthrie, think that these people were truly attracted to the One God of Israel, but they were not too interested in a narrow-minded ethnic exclusivity present in much of Judaism.⁹ What was the jealousy that arose against Paul from the Thessalonian Jews (Acts 17:5)? Was it caused by the gospel he preached, as it was a rather inclusive message for all who would turn to Yeshua for salvation? Or, was it just that Paul was a better teacher of the Scriptures than they (Acts 17:2)? While there were surely a variety of social and spiritual factors at work in Thessalonica—and jealousy in general is a bane on all human beings of all generations—ultimately it might just be the nature of Paul’s preaching that worried the Thessalonian Jews. Witherington observes, “Jews were already in a somewhat precarious or even marginalized position after various proclamations and actions of

⁵ J.W. Simpson, Jr., “Thessalonians, Letters to the,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 932.

⁶ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 585-586; Simpson, “Thessalonians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 934.

⁷ Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 202.

⁸ Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 9.

⁹ Leon Morris, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 18; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 585.

Claudius since A.D. 41. They could hardly afford to lose what local support they had among local Gentiles, especially among the social elite, whether men or women.”¹⁰ The difficult part of Paul’s message declared in Thessalonica, as inclusive as it may have been for people looking to Yeshua for redemption—is tied to the accusation, “they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Yeshua” (Acts 17:7).

The record of Paul’s visit to Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-9 is brief. Even though it states that Paul and Silas stayed in Thessalonica for three Sabbaths (Acts 17:2), or the equivalent of around two weeks, it is likely that they were in Thessalonica a bit longer. D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo think, “A stay of two to four months is not at all unlikely,”¹¹ even though the impression that one gets from the Acts 17:1-9 record is that more than two weeks, but perhaps less than two months—a month¹² to six weeks or so—is the time Paul spent in the city. A stay for Paul in Thessalonica of longer than two weeks would be necessary, to account for how the Philippian Believers, whom he had just left, sent an offering to him twice (Philippians 4:16). In the estimation of I. Howard Marshall, “it is unlikely that he remained much longer in the town”¹³ than a period of three weeks. There must have been a point when Paul stopped attending synagogue functions, he sought new Believers from among the local pagan Thessalonians, and then he was forced to leave the city. Paul had to leave the city in order to protect his Thessalonian friends who had received Yeshua, who had paid bond for him (Acts 17:9), given the charges of him being an instigator against Caesar. Morris describes how “It is clear from the Epistles that, while Paul had given a good deal of teaching, there was much he had not been able to say.”¹⁴

Having left Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul traveled on to Berea, where he was received far more favorably by the local Jewish synagogue, as they were told about the Messiah of Israel. As is commonly quoted at many Bible studies, “they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11), as those in the Berean synagogue examined the Tanach Scriptures to carefully check Paul’s teachings and gospel proclamation. While Paul experienced ministry success in Berea (Acts 17:12), the Jewish leaders from Thessalonica actually followed him and stirred up trouble (Acts 17:13). This forced Paul to move on to Athens (Acts 17:14-15). Paul’s ministry work in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) was relatively fruitless, and from there he moved on to Corinth (Acts 18:1-17), where he spent a year-and-a-half.¹⁵

Looking at what is said in the account of Paul’s visit to Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1-15), and the surrounding events, F.F. Bruce concludes that “The outline of events, gathered from 1 Thessalonians, agrees so well with the fuller record of Acts 16:6-18:5 that the record, though it is substantially later than 1 Thessalonians, may confidently be accepted as providing a historical framework within which the data of 1 Thessalonians can be read with greater understanding.”¹⁶ To this, also needs to be factored the thoughts of Marshall on Paul visiting Thessalonica again. Even though the Thessalonians would be told, “Satan hindered us” (1 Thessalonians 2:18) from visiting, the possibility could be present that Paul did visit the Thessalonians in person again:

“We hear nothing more of Thessalonica directly from Acts. After Paul’s lengthy stays in Corinth and Ephesus, however, he departed for Macedonia, and after encouraging the disciples there, he went on south to Greece (Ac. 20:1f.). After three months there, presumably in Corinth, he returned north to Macedonia and sailed from Philippi to Troas, and so made his way to Jerusalem for his last visit (Ac. 20:3-6). It can be taken for granted that on both of these journeys through Macedonia he would have visited Thessalonica. This is confirmed by the fact that a number of Christians accompanied Paul from various churches to Jerusalem, and

¹⁰ Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 39.

¹¹ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 533.

¹² Morris, 17.

¹³ I. Howard Marshall, *New Century Bible Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 5.

¹⁴ Morris, 17.

¹⁵ Cf. F.F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians*, Vol 45 (Waco TX: Word Books, 1982), pp xxii-xxvi for a further summary of the Acts 17:1-9 account, and its relationship to the background of 1&2 Thessalonians.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxi.

two names of Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus, are listed, along with the representative from Berea [Acts 20:4]...¹⁷

While visiting Thessalonica again remains within a window of possibilities to have taken place later in the Book of Acts, what is more important is the need—after having to leave the city of Thessalonica—for Paul to have remained in contact with the new Believers. Morris makes the point, especially in view of the synagogue leaders in Thessalonica opposing Paul, of how they must have “urged that he had no real love for his converts...and that he had never been motivated by any genuine concern for them, but only by the desire for personal profit. At that period there were many wandering preachers, both of philosophy and religion. They made a living by imposing on the credulity of those whom they could persuade to listen to them. It was easy to impugn Paul’s sincerity, and to class him with these familiar wandering charlatans.”¹⁸ By making the point of composing not only one, but two letters, for the Thessalonian Believers—this would have certainly assured them that even though physically gone, Paul was quite concerned for their well being and spiritual development. It is easy for some traveling teacher to come to town and then go; it is not as easy for a teacher to take the specific time to write some specific instruction for the needs of a localized group of Messiah followers.

1 Thessalonians

The assembly of Thessalonian Believers, which had been put together, was relatively young and unestablished, only a few months or so, when Paul had to write to them. Paul had dispatched Timothy to them to find out about their development (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2), and so this letter was composed as a response to Timothy’s report. Paul wrote the Thessalonians, as mostly new Believers who were to various degrees still maturing in their Messianic faith, about the persecution that they were facing (1 Thessalonians 3:3-5). Paul’s letter deals with some practical instructions for proper living in regard to sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12), and he wanted to clarify for them some misconceptions regarding the Messiah’s return (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The under-development of the Thessalonians’ faith and grasp of key theological concepts is evident by Paul having to give some basic instruction on matters like the future resurrection of the dead. What would happen to those who had died? Would they not be present for the arrival of the Messiah, as some of the Thessalonian Believers had presumably died after Paul left them?

Yet, while there were issues facing the Thessalonian Believers, the Apostle Paul expresses a deep level of affection for them (1 Thessalonians 2:8; 3:12). A reader witnesses this depicted as “a nursing *mother* [who] tenderly cares for her own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7), and “a father [with]...his own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:11). The Apostle Paul clearly desired to go back and visit the Thessalonians in person, but as he says, “But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and *yet* Satan hindered us” (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18). The thought of 1 Thessalonians 1:7, “so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia,” gives us the tenor of how Paul and the Thessalonians had a generally good relationship, in spite of Paul being forced out of the city. 1&2 Thessalonians, taken together, do have a pastoral quality to them.

There is an important array of ancient Christian testimony, which confirms genuine Pauline authorship of the Epistle of 1 Thessalonians, as well as its usage:

“And then shall appear the signs of the truth; first, the sign of an out-spreading in heaven; then the sign of the sound of the trumpet; and the third, the resurrection of the dead” (*Didache* 16:6; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16).¹⁹

“For it is not my desire that ye should please men, Out God, even as also ye do please Him. For neither shall I ever hereafter have such an opportunity of attaining to God; nor will ye, if ye shall now be silent, ever be entitled to the honor of a better work. For if ye are silent concerning me, I shall become God’s; but

¹⁷ Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 3.

¹⁸ Morris, 21.

¹⁹ *BibleWorks 8.0: Ante-Nicene Fathers*. MS Windows Vista/7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2009-2010. DVD-ROM.

if ye show your love to my flesh, I shall again have to run my race” (Ignatius *Letter to the Romans* 2.1; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:4).²⁰

“And pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men; for there is hope of the repentance, that they may attain to God. For ‘cannot he that falls arise again, and he that goes astray return?’ Permit them, then, to be in instructed by you. Be ye therefore the ministers of God, and the mouth of Christ. For thus saith the Lord, ‘If ye take forth the precious from the vile, ye shall be as my mouth’” (Ignatius *Letter to the Ephesians* 10:1; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17).²¹

“How will you instruct the elect of the Lord, if you yourselves have not instruction? Instruct each other therefore, and be at peace among yourselves, that I also, standing joyful before your Father, may give an account of you all to your Lord” (Hermas *Vision* 3.9.10; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:13).²²

There are good, ancient Christian attestations as to the usefulness of the Epistle of 1 Thessalonians in formulating doctrine and theology. (Also to be considered can be Tertullian *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 24; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.6.1).²³ A largely liberal resource like *ABD* does inform us how, “Scholars universally affirm that Paul is the actual writer of the letter.”²⁴ *IDB*, another liberal resource, further concludes, “The authenticity of this letter [1 Thessalonians] is no longer seriously challenged and scarcely requires to be discussed. It is, in fact, quite impossible to account for it as a pseudonymous work of a later period.”²⁵

There are some, though, seeing 1 Thessalonians 1:1, “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the [assembly] of the Thessalonians,” who think that 1 Thessalonians was composed by Paul and his associates together.²⁶ Certainly, that Silvanus/Silas and Timothy played a role in the contents and message of 1 Thessalonians cannot be dismissed. In Witherington’s estimation, “Paul believes that what he is saying also speaks for Silas and Timothy.”²⁷ The main issue for us, as it regards 1 Thessalonians’ composition, is that Pauline authorship—even if there may have been co-authors of the letter alongside him—is treated as authentically Pauline by just about every expositor.

2 Thessalonians

Traditionally among conservative New Testament interpreters, it has been held that the Epistle of 2 Thessalonians was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians, probably by a matter of a few weeks. There were various voices in Thessalonica, advocating that the Day of the Lord had already taken place or was in the process of taking place (2 Thessalonians 2:2), likely due to some kind of forged letter in Paul’s name. Much of the situation and misunderstanding also probably arose from those who took statements made in 1 Thessalonians the wrong way. The Apostle Paul, receiving word of this, had to write the Thessalonians a second letter to assure them that this was not the case, and clarify what he meant from the first letter.

There is a group of liberal examiners, arising from mid-Nineteenth Century critical scholarship, who deny Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians. While it includes many, it does not include all liberals, though. Conservative, evangelical theologians tend to fully accept genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, although many are not unopposed to the idea of co-authors like Silas or Timothy playing a role in its composition. While 2 Thessalonians is commonly categorized in the Deutero-Pauline list, almost all Messianic teachers that I know of and have interacted with are agreed that 2 Thessalonians is genuinely Pauline (myself included). This does not mean that we should be unaware of the main arguments levied in favor of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Cf. Gene L. Green, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 55.

²⁴ Edgar M. Krentz, “Thessalonians, First and Second Epistles to the,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:515.

²⁵ F.W. Beare, “Thessalonians, First Letter to the,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:621.

²⁶ Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 4; Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, xxxii.

²⁷ Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 10.

pseudepigraphal origin for 2 Thessalonians, because you will often encounter them in a study Bible, theological encyclopedia, or in various commentaries.

While various proposals have been issued against Pauline authorship for 2 Thessalonians,²⁸ there are four main reasons proposed, to deny Pauline authorship of this letter, that we should be aware of:

1. The writing style of 2 Thessalonians is presumed to be different than 1 Thessalonians, with the language being more rigid, including a less-than-warm or familiar tone to it.
2. The material of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 is presumed to have a different eschatological emphasis than 1 Thessalonians.
3. There were additional letters of Paul in circulation (2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:17), necessitating 2 Thessalonians to have been written by a student or admirer of Paul, in order for enough time to have passed for the Pauline Epistles to be used as authoritative for the *ekklēsia*.
4. There is too short an amount of time for the traditional view of 2 Thessalonians being written by the Apostle Paul, to follow 1 Thessalonians.

Those, who think that the Epistle of 2 Thessalonians is Deutero-Pauline, lean toward it being written in the late First Century, between 75-90 C.E., with Believers enduring some difficulties. A leader in the Body of Messiah thought that the material in 1 Thessalonians was useful to adapt for his own circumstances.

Are the claims, against genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, really that significant? Arguing that the material of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, that additional letters of Paul were circulating, and that the traditional view of Paul writing 1&2 Thessalonians together—proves post-Pauline authorship—are all reasons that involve an interpreter's theological presuppositions. Can the Apostle Paul, for example, amend some of his thoughts issued in his first letter, by issuing a second letter? Gordon D. Fee's observations on the authorship of 2 Thessalonians are really worth noting:

“When one reads the literature by those who argue that Paul is not the author of this letter, one is struck by the ‘thinness’ of the argumentation as such, especially since there is hardly a single argument that does not take some form of subjectivity on the part of its proponent(s). And at the end of the day, it becomes quite clear that had this letter not contained the material in 2:1-12, this view would not have arisen at all. Indeed, the most often-recurring argument against Pauline authorship is a very subjective one, that this letter lacks the ‘warmth’ of the first one. But one may rightly wonder how this is an objective argument at all.”²⁹

Merrill C. Tenney notes that none of the arguments against Pauline authorship are really valid, “for the two letters deal with two different aspects of the same general subject, and bear so many resemblances to each other that they are clearly related” (*NIDB*).³⁰

Can a change of circumstances necessitate a less-than-familiar tone between the author and his audience? Of all the claims offered by advocates of pseudonymity for 2 Thessalonians, it is the writing style of the second epistle, more than anything else, which needs to be evaluated. In the view of Carson and Moo, “the wide variety of conclusions that scholars have reached using...analyses, combined with the need to reckon with the possible influence that Paul's co-authors or an amanuensis might have had on the Greek of the letter, have tended to diminish the number and effectiveness of such arguments.”³¹ If 1&2 Thessalonians, as the traditional position advocates, were written close together in time, an overlap of content³²—with some clarifications and additions—should not be too surprising. And, an overlap of content or style between 1&2 Thessalonians can definitely be used to affirm genuine Pauline authorship of the two letters:

²⁸ Cf. Krentz, “Thessalonians, First and Second Epistles to the,” in *ABD*, 6:519-521.

²⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 238.

³⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, “Thessalonians, Letters to the,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 1009.

³¹ Carson and Moo, 537.

³² Morris, pp 30-31.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN 1&2 THESSALONIANS ³³	
1 THESSALONIANS	2 THESSALONIANS
Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the [assembly] of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah: Grace to you and peace (1:1).	Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the [assembly] of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah (1:1).
...your work of faith [<i>tou ergou tēs pisteōs</i> , τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως]...(1:3).	...the work of faith [<i>ergon pisteōs</i> , ἔργον πίστεως] with power... (1:11).
...faith and labor of love and steadfastness [endurance, NIV; <i>hupomonē</i> , ὑπομονή]... (1:3).	...because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows <i>ever</i> greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the [assemblies] of God for your perseverance [<i>hupomonē</i> , ὑπομονή]... (1:3-4).
...brethren beloved by God... (1:4).	...brethren beloved by the Lord... (2:13).
For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, <i>how</i> working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God (2:9).	nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we <i>kept</i> working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you (3:8).
Finally then... (4:1).	Finally, brethren... (3:1).
...who do not know God (4:5).	...who do not know God... (1:8).
The grace of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah be with you (5:28).	The grace of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah be with you all (3:18).

Within the text of 2 Thessalonians itself, we see how the Apostle Paul claims to be the author of the letter, along with Silvanus/Silas and Timothy as co-senders (2 Thessalonians 1:1). The Epistle of 2 Thessalonians was well-known to some of the main leaders of the emerging Christianity of the Second Century:

“I have written these things unto you on the day before the ninth of the Kalends of September. Fare ye well to the end, in the patience of Jesus Christ” (Ignatius *Letter to the Romans* 10:3; cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:5).

³⁴

³³ This chart has been adapted from Carson and Moo, 538.

³⁴ [BibleWorks 8.0: Ante-Nicene Fathers](#).

“But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, in the midst of whom the blessed Paul labored, and who are commended in the beginning of his Epistle. For he boasts of you in all those Churches which alone then knew the Lord; but we [of Smyrna] had not yet known Him. I am deeply grieved, therefore, brethren, for him (Valens) and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be ye then moderate in regard to this matter, and ‘do not count such as enemies,’ but call them back as suffering and straying members, that ye may save your whole body. For by so acting ye shall edify yourselves” (Polycarp *Letter to the Philippians* 11:3-4; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 3:15).³⁵

“And again, in the Second to the Thessalonians, speaking of Antichrist, he says, ‘And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus Christ shall slay with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy him with the presence of his coming; [even him] whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders’ [2 Thessalonians 2:8]. Now in these [sentences] the order of the words is this: ‘And then shall be revealed that wicked, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the presence of His coming.’ For he does not mean that the coming of the Lord is after the working of Satan; but the coming of the wicked one, whom we also call Antichrist. If, then, one does not attend to the [proper] reading [of the passage], and if he do not exhibit the intervals of breathing as they occur, there shall be not only incongruities, but also, when reading, he will utter blasphemy, as if the advent of the Lord could take place according to the working of Satan” (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.7.2).³⁶

With these Second Century Christian quotations or allusions to 2 Thessalonians in view, a liberal resource like *IDB* actually concludes, “There is no weakness in the external attestation, which is, if anything, better than that of 1 Thessalonians.”³⁷ This is confirmed by a conservative like Guthrie, “The external evidence is, if anything, rather stronger [for 2 Thessalonians] than for 1 Thessalonians.”³⁸ More recent conservative voices, such as Carson and Moo, further describe how “No responsible early church authority ever questioned Paul’s authorship of 2 Thessalonians.”³⁹ And in the view of Gene L. Green, “The ancient church was unanimous in its acceptance of this book as an authentic work of the apostle Paul.”⁴⁰

Even with ancient testimony present in favor of genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, what do liberals do, exactly, with this letter? Some liberals think that 2 Thessalonians “may have been written by someone among [Paul’s] co-workers or disciples who employed the authority of Paul to address a situation in which Christians were undergoing intense persecution” (*EDB*),⁴¹ and that this was likely a second generation piece after the death of the Apostle. Abraham Smith, writing in *NIB*, thinks, “Whatever one’s conclusions about the debate, the force of this commentary’s examination suggests that the more crucial matters are the difference in what occasioned the two letters and their common testament to the continuing influence of Paul’s apocalyptic gospel.”⁴² In his estimation, “the writer of 2 Thessalonians crafts a letter to encourage the believers not to veer from [Paul’s] truth or traditions (2:15).”⁴³ While it is appreciable that liberals want to often respect the message of 2 Thessalonians, viewing it as an ancient application of the Apostle Paul’s teachings, not all liberals think the weight of evidence is that strong against this letter being a product of the Apostle. About half a century ago, the *IDB* summarized,

“We are left with a measure of uncertainty, but it cannot be claimed that the case for rejection is strong enough to justify us in denying the traditional attribution of the letter to Paul, especially as no plausible

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ [BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers.](#)

³⁷ F.W. Beare, “Thessalonians, Second Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 4:625.

³⁸ Guthrie, 593.

³⁹ Carson and Moo, 536.

⁴⁰ Green, 59.

⁴¹ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Thessalonians, Second,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1300; cf. Krentz, “Thessalonians, First and Second Epistles to the,” in *ABD*, 6:522.

⁴² Abraham Smith, “The Second Letter to the Thessalonians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al. *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11:683.

⁴³ Ibid., 11:741.

occasion for its publication has yet been indicated. If the letter is pseudonymous, it is an outright forgery, intended to represent Paul as teaching an apocalyptic doctrine which is not his, but the product of the forger's imagination...On the whole, the difficulties in the way of accepting the letter are less serious than those which are raised by the attempt to account for it as pseudonymous writing of a later period."⁴⁴

Far more recently (2003), the widely liberal *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, still had to note,

"A substantial minority of biblical scholars continues to maintain the traditional view that the apostle himself wrote this second letter. For these scholars, the similarities between the two missives result because they were written to the same community within a relatively short time and deal with the same issue: eschatological hope."⁴⁵

Wanting to service the needs of a wide array of readers of 2 Thessalonians, Marshall describes,

"When we examine all the arguments, then, it emerges that neither singly nor cumulatively do they suffice to disprove Pauline authorship. That 2 Th. contains some unusual features in style and theology is not to be denied, but that these features point to pseudonymous authorship is quite another matter. The later we set the date of the letter, the more difficult it becomes to explain its unopposed acceptance into the Pauline corpus; indeed, it is hard to envisage how an alleged Pauline letter addressed to a particular church could have escaped detection as a forgery."⁴⁶

Marshall's own basic conclusion is, weighing in the evidence of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, that "Since defenders of Pauline authorship would agree that traditional material is being used—indeed material that comes from the tradition of Jesus' apocalyptic teaching and that also lies behind 1 Th. 4:13-18—again there is no real basis...for challenging Pauline authorship."⁴⁷

While there are many out there in the world of theology who would deny genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, the author of the letter demonstrates too intimate a knowledge of his audience for pseudepigraphy to really be a possibility (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). As obvious as it may be, the word of 2 Thessalonians 3:17 needs to be seriously considered, where it is said, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write." Would a pseudepigrapher from a generation or so after Paul, really make the point to write this? Or, would this be a definite sign of Pauline authorship for 2 Thessalonians? Witherington states, "It would take a cheeky forger to warn *against* forging in the midst of his copying of a genuine Pauline letter while at the same time protesting vigorously at the end of the document that this was from the hand of Paul."⁴⁸ Green insists, "The inclusion of the postscript in no way advances the argument against authenticity."⁴⁹

It is true that there are various "we" expressions present all throughout in 1&2 Thessalonians, but along with it are some notable first person singular references as well (1 Thessalonians 2:18; 3:5; 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:5; 3:17). While it is not outside the realm of possibilities for Silas or Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) to have played a role in the letters' composition, Carson and Moo advise, "The first person plural may, then, be no more than a literary device, an 'authorial plural' appropriate to the parenetic form of the letters. Perhaps, however, a mediating solution is the best. Paul's mention of Silas and Timothy, because of their close associations with the Thessalonians, must be taken seriously. But Paul is the primary author."⁵⁰ To assert genuine Pauline authorship of 1&2 Thessalonians, does not mean that Paul would not incorporate the advice and council of trusted companions like Silas or Timothy. Fee concludes, "The three of them are simply

⁴⁴ Beare, "Thessalonians, Second Letter to the," in *IDB*, 4:626.

⁴⁵ Raymond F. Collins, "The Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 2123.

⁴⁶ Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁸ Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 13.

⁴⁹ Green, 61.

⁵⁰ Carson and Moo, 535.

Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, xxxiii thinks that there were some various Pauline additions to these letters, after the letters were proofed after primary completion, stating "that [there] are Paul's personal additions, whether inserted by him orally as the letters were being dictated or appended—possibly in his own hand—when they were being read over after completion."

listed as co-authors, jointly speaking into the situation in Thessalonica, even though the letter itself is dictated by Paul.”⁵¹

In our examination of 1&2 Thessalonians, **this commentary accepts genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians**, but we will be engaging with some commentators who deny it (Keck, Smith). It is notable, though, that a liberal leaning commentator like Jewett (in *ECB*), with whom we will also be engaging, does actually affirm Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, and that the second letter was written shortly after the first.⁵²

WHERE WAS PAUL WHEN HE WROTE THESE LETTERS?

Paul’s location when writing 1&2 Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians in particular, is associated with his further travels after leaving Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1-15). Luke’s record in Acts records how after leaving Berea, Paul continued on to Athens (Acts 17:16-34), but he did not have that much success in proclaiming the message of Yeshua and His resurrection. After this, Paul traveled to Corinth, where he became friends with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2), Jewish Believers from Rome who had been forced out of the city by the Edict of Claudius. A group of Messiah followers was formed from the local Corinthian synagogue, although it was later forced out (Acts 18:4-8). Paul was able to spend a year-and-a-half in Corinth (Acts 18:11), although the Lord had told him to be bold in speaking out while there (Acts 18:9-10). During the tenure of Gallio, Paul was brought before him on charges levied by the local Jewish religious leaders (Acts 18:11-17), and following this set out to sea back to Syria (Acts 18:18ff).

The internal evidence from the letter of 1 Thessalonians suggests that both of the letters would have been written during the extended time Paul spent in Corinth. We see that “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy” (1 Thessalonians 1:1) are all present when 1 Thessalonians is composed, meaning that they all had to eventually “catch up” given Paul’s forced departures from both Thessalonica and Berea. Paul’s desire himself was to return to Thessalonica, although he was prevented (1 Thessalonians 2:18), a good indication that it would not have been geographically difficult for him to make a quick return journey. Paul remaining in Corinth would also easily facilitate the composition of his second letter, written a short time after the first.

WHEN DID PAUL WRITE THESE LETTERS?

The time of Paul writing 1&2 Thessalonians, per Paul’s further travels after leaving Thessalonica and Berea, is tied to the year-and-a-half when Paul stayed in Corinth (Acts 18:1-22). In 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, we see how while at Athens, Timothy had been sent to Thessalonica “to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.” Enough time has presumably passed for Paul to have gone on to Corinth, which is the last place between Macedonia and Achaia where Paul would stay until going back east toward Asia Minor.

It is easily understood why the dating of the letter of 1 Thessalonians is often tied to the ascension of the proconsul Gallio into power,⁵³ as Paul had to go before him in Corinth to answer charges (Acts 18:12-17). “An inscription discovered in Delphi in 1909 contains a letter from Claudius to Gallio, before whom Paul was arraigned in Corinth; it dates the proconsulship of Gallio to the twelfth year of Claudius’s tribunicial power and before the latter’s twenty-seventh acclamation in August, A.D. 52...Just when Paul appeared before him is not stated, but Acts 18:12-18 implies that Gallio’s succession took place near the end of Paul’s eighteen-month stay in Corinth” (*ISBE*).⁵⁴ This would make a broad time for Paul’s year-and-a-half in Corinth, somewhere between 50-52 C.E. In the estimation of Bruce,

“[S]ince proconsuls normally entered on their tour of duty on 1 July, it would follow that Gallio arrived in Achaia as proconsul on 1 July A.D. 51 or (less probably) 1 July, A.D. 52. It would follow further that Paul’s

⁵¹ Fee, 4.

⁵² For a general support of Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, consult the useful analyses of Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 28-45; Green, pp 59-64; Carson and Moo, pp 536-542.

⁵³ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 587-588; Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, xxxv.

⁵⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, “Thessalonians, First Epistle to the,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:833.

eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11-17) lasted from the late summer of A.D. 50 to the spring of A.D. 52 or (less probably) from the late summer of A.D. 51 to the spring of A.D. 53, so that the later part of A.D. 50 or (less probably) A.D. 51 would be the date of 1 Thessalonians.”⁵⁵

When it comes to reading the letters of 1&2 Thessalonians together, the wide background issues present of the Jewish Synagogue and the early Messianic movement, present within the First Century Roman Empire—with which both had tension and conflicts—remains the case whether these letters are dated to 50-52 or 53 C.E.

It is important to be aware of how, in the scope of 1&2 Thessalonians examination, that there are a number of commentators who feel that the letter of 2 Thessalonians was written *before* the letter of 1 Thessalonians.⁵⁶ Although personally unconvinced of this proposal, Marshall describes how “A number of scholars have found it difficult to see why Paul should send a letter so similar to 1 Thessalonians to the same church soon after the first letter...One solution to this problem is to argue that the two letters were written in the reverse order, with 2 Thessalonians being the earlier communication.”⁵⁷ The order of the Pauline Epistles as appears in most Bibles is provided entirely by ancient Christian convention, which has placed the letters in the order of their length, and not necessarily by any sort of chronology. The only main reason, why 1 Thessalonians is listed before 2 Thessalonians, is because 1 Thessalonians is longer than 2 Thessalonians. The conclusion that 2 Thessalonians could have been written *before* 1 Thessalonians is often drawn from a comparison of theological themes that seem to be relatively new in 2 Thessalonians, and may be understood more firmly in 1 Thessalonians.⁵⁸ Such a view naturally would have to hold that 1&2 Thessalonians together were genuinely Pauline.

Among the commentators we will be examining in our study of 1&2 Thessalonians, Charles A. Wanamaker (in *NIGTC*) represents the position that 2 Thessalonians was written *before* 1 Thessalonians.⁵⁹ He offers a series of reasons as to why 2 Thessalonians might have been written before 1 Thessalonians, including:

1. Persecution is treated as a present reality in 2 Thessalonians 1:4-7, but in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 it is past
2. Disorder in the assembly is treated as a new development in 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15, but a known situation is present in 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12
3. The authenticating signature should be a part of Paul’s first written letter (2 Thessalonians 3:17), not his second
4. Paul has no need to instruct his audience on the time of the end (1 Thessalonians 5:1), as instruction already appears in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
5. The expression “now concerning” (1 Thessalonians 4:9, 13; 5:1) appears to introduce answers to questions previously asked

There is nothing particularly wrong, theologically, with proposing that 2 Thessalonians was written before 1 Thessalonians, as such a view does try to rightly defend genuine Pauline authorship of both letters, and tries to properly weigh the contents of the two letters. In the estimation of Carson and Moo, “Since the usual order of the letters is based on nothing more than tradition and historical/literary reasoning, a reversal of the order meets with no theological problems.”⁶⁰ At the same time, there are conservative examiners who remain unconvinced of the evidence offered for 2 Thessalonians being written before 1 Thessalonians.

The word of 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of *mouth* or by letter from us,” seems to imply that a letter had already been

⁵⁵ Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, xxxv.

⁵⁶ Cf. J.C. Hurd, “Thessalonians, Second Letter to the,” in Keith Crim, ed., *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 901.

⁵⁷ Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 25.

⁵⁸ Hurd, “Thessalonians, Second Letter to the,” in *IDBSup*, 901; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 599-602; J.W. Simpson, Jr., “Thessalonians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 937; Carson and Moo, pp 543-544.

⁵⁹ Charles A. Wanamaker, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp 38-39.

⁶⁰ Carson and Moo, 544.

written from Paul to the Thessalonians—which would have presumably been 1 Thessalonians.⁶¹ At the same time, as it concerns issues like the persecution of the Thessalonian Believers, there is no reason why it could not have occurred in various stages, or “waves,” so to speak. The issue of the letter sent in Paul’s name (2 Thessalonians 2:2), and the Apostle’s need to provide an authoritative signature (2 Thessalonians 3:17), might make better sense in light of 2 Thessalonians being the second piece of correspondence, and some kind of forgery circulating in Thessalonica in response to the contents of 1 Thessalonians. While the reasons of proposing 2 Thessalonians being written before 1 Thessalonians can be commendable on some level, it is better for readers to interpret the two letters in their canonical order. Green explains how,

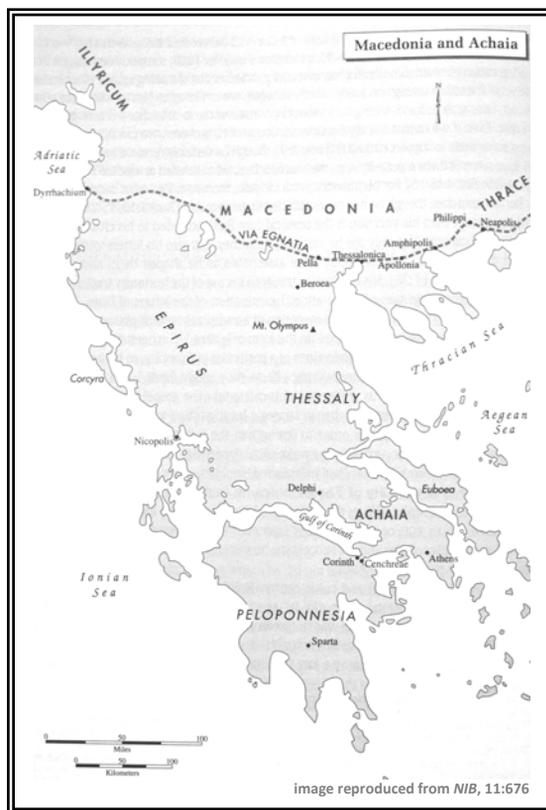
“2 Thessalonians touches on a number of the same problems [present in 1 Thessalonians], which had gone from bad to worse, such as the persecutions the [Thessalonians] had endured and the refusal of some members to work, while at the same time answering a threat to the stability of the church, the entrance of a novel and erroneous teaching concerning the day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2.2.). 2 Thessalonians comes from the period in the relationship between the community and the apostle when Paul was convinced of the ‘perseverance and faith’ of the Thessalonians in the midst of their persecutions (2 Thess. 1.4). But when Timothy was sent to Thessalonica, doubts about their ability to endure caused no end of anxiety (1 Thess. 3.1-5), and therefore it is difficult to imagine that 2 Thessalonians was the letter Timothy carried with him on his mission. Although the traditional order of the letters in the canon was due originally to their relative size, this order best explains the historical phenomena here observed.”⁶²

This commentary accepts the traditional view that 1 Thessalonians was written before 2 Thessalonians, although we would agree that if 2 Thessalonians were composed first, it presents no major theological conflicts.

WHO WAS THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THESE LETTERS?

Thessalonica was a major city in the First Century Roman Empire, and so when reviewing the record of Paul’s visit in Acts 17:1-9 and the testimony of 1&2 Thessalonians, it should not be surprising that a community of Messianic Believers was formed there. The population estimates of First Century Thessalonica and its environs, range anywhere from 65,000 to 80,000 to 100,000.

The ancient city of Thessalonica, *Thessalonikē* (Θεσσαλονίκη), was founded (or perhaps even “rebuilt”) by Cassander, an officer of Alexander the Great who took control of Greece in 332 B.C.E. The city was originally called Therme (Therma), but renamed Thessalonica (meaning “victory of Thessaly”) after Cassander’s wife, who was the step-sister of Alexander, founded between 316-315 B.C.E. The city of Thessalonica was to serve as a port for all of Macedonia. The Romans invaded in 168-167 B.C.E., and Thessalonica was subsequently integrated into a rearranged Macedonia as a senatorial province. In Roman times, Thessalonica was situated along the Via Egnatia, a highway that stretched from the Adriatic Sea to the Aegean Sea. Thessalonica had served as a base for



⁶¹ Morris, pp 37-41 offers some reasons as to why he rejects 2 Thessalonians being written before 1 Thessalonians.

⁶² Green, pp 68-69.