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PASSAGE: _____ 1 Thessalonians 2: 13-20 _____

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Step 6 of the Exegetical Process Notebook

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

“13- For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. 14- For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: 15- Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: 16- Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

17- But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. 18- Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. 19- For what is our hope, joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20- For ye are our glory and joy.”

CULTURAL CONTEXT

In the first century, Thessaloniki was the most populated city in Macedonia. With Ephesus and Corinth, it participated in the deposit of the maritime trade of the Aegean Sea. Paul implants Christianity in these three important cities and geographically well placed to ensure a rapid spread of the gospel. They soon join him in Corinth and Timothy can reassure Paul about

the Thessalonians' faith and love. However, some questions require clarification and problems remain to be resolved.

Thessaloniki was reconstructed according to researchers by Cassandra before Jesus Christ. He gave the name of his wife, half-sister of Alexander the Great. From the time of the Macedonians as well as the Romans, it was an important city. The latter made it the capital of the province of Macedonia and made this city a free city. Paul's first visit to Thessalonica, probably in the early summer of 50 C.E., is recorded in Acts 17:1-9. It is the city in which he and his companions Silas and Timothy stay sometime after they departed from Philippi, during the second missionary journey.

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is believed to be the very earliest Epistle of Paul available and perhaps considered the oldest book in the New Testament. According to Comfort, "Written in AD 51, these two epistles reflect a period in the early church that was only 20 years after the time of Jesus Christ's ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Among the earliest of the New Testament writings, they capture the excitement and anticipation the earliest Christians had for what they expected to be the imminent return of Christ. At the same time, the two epistles present the earliest and most basic proclamations of the apostles' teachings. As such, 1 and 2 Thessalonians should be read not only for what they teach about Christ's return (known as his Parousia) but also for what they teach about the most fundamental Christian truths—truths that will help us have the kind of spiritual lives that please Christ now and will honor him when he comes again to be glorified in and among his holy people."¹ It was in Corinth, during his second missionary journey, that Paul wrote the epistles to the Thessalonians around AD 50-51. J-C.

According to comfort, "Several ancient scribes must have thought Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy

¹ Philip Comfort, Peter Davids, Harold W. Hoehner, "*Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*", Cornerstone Biblical Commentary New Testament, Paul's Letters, 9th Edition, (Tyndale House Publishers, (2008), 10.

rejoined Paul in Athens and there wrote the first epistle to the Thessalonians because the subscription in several ancient manuscripts (A B1 1739* 0278) indicates that Athens was the place of writing. But this epistle was most likely written from Corinth (so Codex 81).”²

We have many things to learn from the life of the Apostle Paul. His story is marked by his redemption in Jesus Christ and attests to the fact that no one is beyond the reach of God's saving grace. The beginning of his life was marked by his religious zeal, his brutal violence, and his intractable persecution of the early Church. Fortunately, the last years of his life were quite different, as he lived for Christ and the advancement of his Kingdom. Paul's birth name was Saul. He was born in Tarsus, Cilicia, in the extreme southeast of the modern Turkish province of Tarsus, around 1-5 AD. He was a Hebrew from the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5-6). His parents were Pharisees. His home language was probably Aramaic, derived from Hebrew, the official language of Judea. Saul and his family were Roman citizens but considered Jerusalem their holy city (Acts 22:22-29). According to Bockmuehl, “The letter's Pauline authorship is not normally in doubt; but the integrity and authenticity of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 continue to be heavily disputed, even among scholars who are not usually given to hypotheses of compilation or interpolation. While our main interest here is to ask about the historical locus of the passage, if indeed it is authentic, in the current state of Pauline scholarship even that working assumption requires a certain amount of justification.”³

Paul and companions passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and came to Thessalonica, where the synagogue of the Jews was. According to his custom, Paul entered unto them, and for three sabbaths he conversed with them according to the Scriptures; he explained

² Phillip Comfort, “*Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*”, (2008), 12.

³ Markus Bockmuehl, “*1Thessalonians 2:14-16 and the church in the Jerusalem*”, Tyndale Bulletin, “January 1, 2001), 3.

and demonstrated that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead: this Jesus, whom I am announcing to you, he said, is Christ. Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. This young church is growing in faith, but the apostle faces uncontrollable moments to continue to support his church. What seems significant in this chapter is Paul's concern. Paul had reason to worry. His adversaries seem to have taken advantage of his hasty departure to discredit him. They express reservations about the purity of his motives (Verse 2. 3-16). Some brethren seem to doubt the gravity of the sin of the flesh (Verses 4.3-7; 5.23). Others fear that deceased believers will be excluded from the blessings that come with the coming of Jesus Christ (verse 4:13-18). Still others deem it useless to work since the return of Jesus Christ is imminent (Verse 4.11; 5.1-11). It was a responsibility for Paul to return that he was the pastor of this church, but being restrained he sends this letter for the spiritual comfort of the Thessalonians.

In verses 13-16 Paul now enters a new subject. He reminds the Thessalonians how they had received revelation from God and what the consequences were for them. It was a matter of gratitude for him. He began his letter by thanking God for them and he continues to do so here. With his fellow workers he could continually give thanks that the Thessalonians had received the gospel they had preached to them, not as a mere human message, but as the word of God. At the end of verses 19-20, he speaks of the crown of glory which is made to think of an authority, as well as the distinction which honors a conqueror. God finds his pleasure in rewarding, in honoring us, those who remain faithful. He will reward all that has been done for him, but not according to the standards of this world. but the fidelity with which one will accomplish what he has entrusted to his beloved.