



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

The Coming of the Gospel

The apostle Paul, on his second missionary journey, had wanted to go to Ephesus. But the Holy Spirit blocked him, sending him to Macedonia instead. Within a short time, the apostle found himself in Thessalonica, reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue. Immediately he faced entrenched and vicious opposition, and had to flee the city. But he was able to leave men like Silas and Timothy behind to continue follow-up teaching so that the congregation could be established and not driven away from the foundational teachings of Jesus Christ. As Paul writes this letter to the brethren in Thessalonica, the scenes of his early work flashed before him, and he remembered some of the keys to his reception there.

- **Compliments** — The apostle notes their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in Christ. Backing the sincerity of his compliments is his Holy Spirit inspired statement is that this letter is written “in the presence of our God and Father.” He proceeds, “knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you” (1 Thessalonians 1:4). Paul is recalling the vision he had seen in Troas of a man from Macedonia, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:10). The vision was obviously from God; Thessalonica was the second place the preachers came to in Macedonia, so that those who became Christians there were known beforehand by God. Thus they were “His choice.”
- **In power** — Jesus had informed the apostles in His presence in Samaria that the fields in which they would work were prepared by other people and forces. When the Holy Spirit blocked Paul from going into Ephesus, it was because He had prepared the fields in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. To get the testimony that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead to the point where that claim was believable, the apostles were able to perform miracles in Jesus’s name. Thus Paul states, “for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). While the details are not given, the power would be the miracles of casting out evil spirits, delivering the message in languages they had never learned, healing the sick and paralyzed, and the curing of all sorts of human maladies. There were also prophetic powers, as Paul illustrated in his epistle to the Corinthian Christians, speaking of the power of prophecy, when “an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters [your assembly] he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you” (1 Corinthians 14:24,25). That’s some power!
- **In the Holy Spirit** — The apostle Paul would never claim that such power emanated from him on the basis of his own abilities. “For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me,” he plainly stated to the Roman brethren, “resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:18,19). That preaching “round about” included Thessalonica. Jesus originally promised the apostles “power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). Hence the apostles possessed all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as the ability to pass on the gifts of the Spirit through the laying on of their hands.

With this exhibition of power — coming through the actions of the Holy Spirit — the gospel came to Thessalonica, and the “word” which had the power to save and to cause the individual saints to be born from above was confirmed. Thus the congregation in Thessalonica was established and strengthened.

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