

Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

Sounding Forth



The Second Coming
of Christ

Many of the saints in the first century were very excited about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Within one generation, they took the good news of salvation through the Messiah to the ends of the world, as Paul described in his letter to the Colossians: the gospel, said he, "was proclaimed in all creation under heaven" (Colossians 1:23). It was "in all the world constantly bearing fruit and increasing" (Colossians 1:6). In spite of the fires of persecution from the Jews, and the black cloud of the impending doom of tyranny from the Roman government, these early Christians were excited about the eternal things connected with Christ, and in their excitement publicly and privately preached and taught the word of God with great success. And so it was in Thessalonica.

- ▼ **The word sounded forth** — The apostle Paul was complimentary in his remarks concerning the congregation in Thessalonica. He had noted that they received God's word in much joy in spite of the tremendous persecution that came upon them from the hands of the local Jews, and the maintenance of their faith was an example to all the brethren in that part of the world. "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you," he superadds, "not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything" (1 Thessalonians 1:8). What an apt and descriptive phrase — *the word has sounded forth from you*. It creates a picture such as a man standing on a prominent peak with an Old Testament *shofar* (a big horn used like a trumpet to call Israel to the tent of meeting or to go forth in battle) and blasting away with a sound that could be heard all over the countryside. The gospel, then, and news of the attendant suffering connected with the gospel, spread "every place," so much so that there was nothing the apostle Paul could add.

- ▼ **Report of their reception** — News spread more slowly in those days than at the present, but it still spread. People talk about the things that are interesting to them, whether it be a tractor pulling contest or a beauty contest. Children of the new covenant are interested in the activities of the local congregations and the distribution of the gospel. Thus Paul writes, "For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). It is recorded in the book of Acts, when Paul first preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica, that "some of [the Jews] were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great number of God-fearing Greeks and a number of leading women" (Acts 17:4). Even after Paul was run out of town by the unbelieving Jews, the gospel continued to work and convert a large number of idol worshippers out of the contacts of those non-idol-worshiping God-fearing Greeks. The news of this positive reception of Paul and those who traveled with him was disseminated "every place."

One of the challenges for the spread of the gospel in the twenty-first century is getting it heard. First of all, the forces of darkness have created massive confusion about the way of salvation, so that much teaching and persuasion on an individual basis must take place. Secondly, the airwaves and social media are jammed with nonsense from the world itself, so that there is such a cacophony that the truth from God's word has very little space in which to compete. This is why it is imperative that the saints of today, while it is still called "today," be very zealous about the Bible studies in prospects' homes. By following a good "track to run on," the word of the gospel and follow up teaching can be distributed, saints will develop conviction, the lost will be reached, and once again, the word of the Lord will *sound forth*. May each of us raise his *spiritual shofar*, and sound the blast that will be heard around the world!

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