

1-2  
THESSALONIANS

JEFFREY A. D. WEIMA



*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*

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14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For my wife Bernice:  
“How can I thank God enough for you?”  
Τίνα εὐχαριστίαν δύναμαι τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι περὶ σοῦ;  
(1 Thess. 3:9)

For my children Rebekah, Allison, Naomi, and Samuel:  
For my sons-in-law Luke and Jeffrey:  
For my grandsons Leo and Graham:  
“I pray always about you that our God may make you worthy  
of his calling.”  
Προσεύχομαι πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἵνα ὑμᾶς ἀξιώσῃ τῆς κλήσεως ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν.  
(2 Thess. 1:11)

For my son David:  
“I do not grieve like the rest who do not have hope.”  
Οὐ λυποῦμαι καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα.  
(1 Thess. 4:13)



# Contents

*Series Preface ix*  
*Author's Preface xi*  
*Abbreviations xiii*  
*Transliteration xx*  
*Map xxii*

Introduction to 1–2 Thessalonians 1

## 1 Thessalonians

- I. Letter Opening (1:1) 63
- II. Thanksgiving (1:2–10) 73
  - Excursus 1: Is 1 Thessalonians 1:9b–10 Pre-Pauline? 115*
- III. Defense of Apostolic Actions and Absence (2:1–3:13) 119
  - A. Defense of Past Actions in Thessalonica (2:1–16) 120
    - Excursus 2: Textual Reading of 1 Thessalonians 2:7 180*
  - B. Defense of Present Absence from Thessalonica (2:17–3:10) 188
  - C. Transitional Prayers (3:11–13) 232
- IV. Exhortations to the Thessalonians (4:1–5:22) 245
  - A. Increasing in Conduct That Pleases God (4:1–12) 246
  - B. Comfort concerning Deceased Christians at Christ's Return (4:13–18) 303
  - C. Comfort concerning Living Christians at Christ's Return (5:1–11) 338
  - D. Exhortations on Congregational Life and Worship (5:12–22) 376
- V. Letter Closing (5:23–28) 413

## 2 Thessalonians

- I. Letter Opening (1:1–2) 435
- II. Thanksgiving (1:3–12) 441
- III. Comfort concerning the Day of the Lord (2:1–17) 489

*Excursus 3: The Restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7* 567  
IV. Exhortations about the Rebellious Idlers (3:1–15) 578  
V. Letter Closing (3:16–18) 631

*Works Cited* 641

*Index of Subjects* 668

*Index of Authors* 676

*Index of Greek Words* 684

*Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Writings* 685

## Series Preface

The chief concern of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) is to provide, within the framework of informed evangelical thought, commentaries that blend scholarly depth with readability, exegetical detail with sensitivity to the whole, and attention to critical problems with theological awareness. We hope thereby to attract the interest of a fairly wide audience, from the scholar who is looking for a thoughtful and independent examination of the text to the motivated lay Christian who craves a solid but accessible exposition.

Nevertheless, a major purpose is to address the needs of pastors and others involved in the preaching and exposition of the Scriptures as the uniquely inspired Word of God. This consideration affects directly the parameters of the series. For example, serious biblical expositors cannot afford to depend on a superficial treatment that avoids the difficult questions, but neither are they interested in encyclopedic commentaries that seek to cover every conceivable issue that may arise. Our aim, therefore, is to focus on those problems that have a direct bearing on the meaning of the text (although selected technical details are treated in the additional notes).

Similarly, a special effort is made to avoid treating exegetical questions for their own sake, that is, in relative isolation from the thrust of the argument as a whole. This effort may involve (at the discretion of the individual contributors) abandoning the verse-by-verse approach in favor of an exposition that focuses on the paragraph as the main unit of thought. In all cases, however, the commentaries will stress the development of the argument and explicitly relate each passage to what precedes and follows it so as to identify its function in context as clearly as possible.

We believe, moreover, that a responsible exegetical commentary must take fully into account the latest scholarly research, regardless of its source. The attempt to do this in the context of a conservative theological tradition presents certain challenges, and in the past the results have not always been commendable. In some cases, evangelicals appear to make use of critical scholarship not for the purpose of genuine interaction but only to dismiss it. In other cases, the interaction glides over into assimilation, theological distinctives are ignored or suppressed, and the end product cannot be differentiated from works that arise from a fundamentally different starting point.

The contributors to this series attempt to avoid these pitfalls. On the one hand, they do not consider traditional opinions to be sacrosanct, and they

are certainly committed to doing justice to the biblical text whether or not it supports such opinions. On the other hand, they will not quickly abandon a long-standing view, if there is persuasive evidence in its favor, for the sake of fashionable theories. What is more important, the contributors share a belief in the trustworthiness and essential unity of Scripture. They also consider that the historic formulations of Christian doctrine, such as the ecumenical creeds and many of the documents originating in the sixteenth-century Reformation, arose from a legitimate reading of Scripture, thus providing a proper framework for its further interpretation. No doubt the use of such a starting point sometimes results in the imposition of a foreign construct on the text, but we deny that it must necessarily do so or that the writers who claim to approach the text without prejudices are invulnerable to the same danger.

Accordingly, we do not consider theological assumptions—from which, in any case, no commentator is free—to be obstacles to biblical interpretation. On the contrary, an exegete who hopes to understand the apostle Paul in a theological vacuum might just as easily try to interpret Aristotle without regard for the philosophical framework of his whole work or without having recourse to those subsequent philosophical categories that make possible a meaningful contextualization of his thought. It must be emphasized, however, that the contributors to the present series come from a variety of theological traditions and that they do not all have identical views with regard to the proper implementation of these general principles. In the end, all that really matters is whether the series succeeds in representing the original text accurately, clearly, and meaningfully to the contemporary reader.

Shading has been used to assist the reader in locating salient sections of the treatment of each passage: introductory comments and concluding summaries. Textual variants in the Greek text are signaled in the author's translation by means of half-brackets around the relevant word or phrase (e.g., "Gerasenes"), thereby alerting the reader to turn to the additional notes at the end of each exegetical unit for a discussion of the textual problem. The documentation uses the author-date method, in which the basic reference consists of the author's surname + year + page number(s): Fitzmyer 1992: 58. The only exceptions to this system are well-known reference works (e.g., BDAG, LSJ, *TDNT*). Full publication data and a complete set of indexes can be found at the end of the volume.

Robert Yarbrough  
Robert H. Stein

## Author's Preface

The completion of this major commentary on 1–2 Thessalonians is accompanied by a combination of competing emotions. The joy of finishing the volume is balanced somewhat by the sober realization that I began this project almost twenty years ago. I started off with a sense of idealism typical of someone fresh out of graduate school and one who had the vain ambition to write the definitive commentary on 1–2 Thessalonians. So instead of beginning the commentary proper, I first undertook exhaustive research of everything that had ever been printed on these two letters. This led to the publication of *An Annotated Bibliography of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) with Stanley E. Porter. After completing this extensive research, I then began to write the commentary—only to let my progress be interrupted frequently by the publishing of several journal articles and book chapters on various issues related to the Thessalonian correspondence. I also benefited greatly during this time from the feedback of students in my elective course on 1–2 Thessalonians taught annually at Calvin Theological Seminary. My understanding of these letters was further enhanced by participating in and later cochairing the five-year seminar titled “The Thessalonian Correspondence” held during the annual meetings of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (SNTS). The Baker commentary was also briefly put on hold for the writing of a much shorter and more user-friendly commentary on the same letters published by Zondervan in their *Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (2002).

The unintended consequence of all these delays has been the opportunity to gain a more mature understanding of 1–2 Thessalonians. There have been many occasions when ideas and truths in Paul’s correspondence to the Thessalonians that I had underplayed or missed completely during my initial interpretation of the letters suddenly became visible and compelling after the benefit of simply interacting with the text for a longer period of time. The passing years were also effective in shattering the naive idealism and vain ambition with which I began the project. I am now painfully aware of the shortcomings of what I have written and the issues in the text that I have not explained as convincingly as one would like. Nevertheless, I am very thankful to God both for the opportunity to write a commentary on a small portion of his Word and also for the diverse ways that he has been at work in my life and academic career such that this writing project has finally reached its conclusion. Additionally, I pray that God will use this commentary to give its readers a clearer understanding of what God was saying through the apostle Paul to the Christ-followers who

lived in Thessalonica in the first century AD and how these ancient letters continue to communicate God's will for Christ-followers today.

I would like to acknowledge the help of others in the completion of this commentary. James (Jim) Kinney, editorial director of Baker Academic and Brazos Press, dealt graciously with my delays and was encouraging in moving the project along. Robert (Bob) Yarbrough, series editor, not only offered helpful revisions but also endorsed the volume despite its excessive length. Wells Turner did an excellent job of editing the commentary, thereby saving me from many errors and enhancing its overall quality. I am also thankful to Calvin Theological Seminary, both its administrators and its board of trustees, for granting a couple of sabbaticals and even a publication leave, all of which were very helpful in the research and writing of the commentary. Finally and most important, I want to thank my wife, Bernice: Thank you, dear, for your unflagging encouragement, self-sacrificial support, and continued love!

# Abbreviations

## Bibliographic and General

§/§§	section/sections
//	textual parallels
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , edited by D. N. Freedman et al., 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
AD	<i>anno Domini</i> , in the year of the Lord
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase, Part 2: <i>Principat</i> (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–)
<i>Anth. Pal.</i>	<i>Epigrammatum anthologia Palatina</i> , edited by F. Dübner, P. Waltz, et al. (Paris: Firmin-Didot; et al., 1864–)
ASV	American Standard Version
BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , by W. Bauer, F. W. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979)
BC	before Christ
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , by F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised by R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
ca.	<i>circa</i> , around
CEV	Contemporary English Version
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
DPL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993)
ed.	edition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
Eng.	English Bible versification when this differs from the MT or LXX
esp.	especially
ESV	English Standard Version
ET	English translation
et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and others
frg(s).	fragment(s)
GNT	Good News Translation / Today's English Version
Grimm- Thayer	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's "Clavis Novi Testamenti,"</i> translated, revised, and enlarged by J. H. Thayer (New York: American Book, 1889; plus reprints)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , edited by G. W. Bromiley, fully revised, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88)
ISV	International Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version

## Abbreviations

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Knox Version	<i>The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals</i> , trans. R. Knox (1946–50)
lit.	literally
LSJ	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , by H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, 9th ed. with rev. supplement (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996)
LXX	Septuagint
ⲙ	majority text
mg.	marginal reading
MHT	<i>A Grammar of New Testament Greek</i> , by J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard, and N. Turner, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908, 1928, 1963, 1976)
MM	<i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources</i> , by J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976)
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text (Hebrew Bible)
n(n)	note(s)
NA <sup>27</sup>	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , edited by Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993)
NA <sup>28</sup>	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , edited by Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012)
NAB	New American Bible (1986, unless otherwise indicated)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation
<i>NewDocs</i>	<i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i> , edited by G. H. R. Horsley and S. R. Llewelyn (North Ryde, NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1976–)
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , edited by C. Brown, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–85)
NIV	New International Version (2011, unless otherwise indicated)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
no(s).	number(s)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
ⲡ	papyrus
par.	parallel
PG	<i>Patrologia graeca</i> , edited by J.-P. Migne, 162 vols. (Paris, 1857–86)
Phillips	<i>The New Testament in Modern English</i> , by J. B. Phillips (New York: Macmillan, 1958)
REB	Revised English Bible
rev.	revised
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
Str-B	<i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> , by H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, 6 vols. (Munich: Kessinger, 1922–61)
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

TLG	Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: A Digital Library of Greek Literature (Irvine: University of California, 2001–; <a href="http://www.tlg.uci.edu/">http://www.tlg.uci.edu/</a> )
TNIV	Today’s New International Version
UBS <sup>4</sup>	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> , edited by B. Aland et al., 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1994)
v./vv.	verse/verses
v.l.	<i>varia lectio</i> , variant reading
W-H	<i>The New Testament in the Original Greek</i> , the text revised by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort (Cambridge et al.: Macmillan, 1881; 2nd ed., 1896)
x	number of times a form occurs

## Hebrew Bible

Gen.	Genesis	Neh.	Nehemiah	Hosea	Hosea
Exod.	Exodus	Esther	Esther	Joel	Joel
Lev.	Leviticus	Job	Job	Amos	Amos
Num.	Numbers	Ps(s).	Psalms(s)	Obad.	Obadiah
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Prov.	Proverbs	Jon.	Jonah
Josh.	Joshua	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Mic.	Micah
Judg.	Judges	Song	Song of Songs	Nah.	Nahum
Ruth	Ruth	Isa.	Isaiah	Hab.	Habakkuk
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Jer.	Jeremiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Hag.	Haggai
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Zech.	Zechariah
Ezra	Ezra	Dan.	Daniel	Mal.	Malachi

## Greek Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon
Mark	Mark	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Luke	Luke	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
John	John	Col.	Colossians	1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Acts	Acts	1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians	1–3 John	1–3 John
Rom.	Romans	1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy	Jude	Jude
1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Rev.	Revelation

## Other Jewish and Christian Writings

’Abot R. Nat.	’Abot of Rabbi Nathan	Ascens.	John Chrysostom, <i>On the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ</i>
Add. Esth.	Additions to Esther	As. Mos.	Assumption of Moses
An.	Tertullian, <i>De anima (The Soul)</i>	Autol.	Theophilus of Antioch, <i>To Autolytus</i>
Antichr.	Hippolytus, <i>On the Antichrist</i>	Bar.	Baruch
1 Apol.	Justin Martyr, <i>First Apology</i>	2 Bar.	2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)
2 Apol.	Justin Martyr, <i>Second Apology</i>	3 Bar.	3 Baruch (Greek Apocalypse)
Ap. Const.	Apostolic Constitutions	4 Bar.	4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremiou, Things Omitted from Jeremiah)
Apoc. Ab.	Apocalypse of Abraham	Barn.	Epistle of Barnabas
Apoc. Mos.	Apocalypse of Moses		
Apoc. Zeph.	Apocalypse of Zephaniah		
Ascen. Isa.	Ascension of Isaiah		

## Abbreviations

<i>Cat. Lect.</i>	Cyril of Jerusalem, <i>Catechetical Lectures</i>	Midr. Ps.	Midrash on Psalms
<i>Cels.</i>	Origen, <i>Against Celsus</i>	Midr. Tanḥ.	Midrash Tanḥuma
<i>City</i>	Augustine, <i>The City of God</i>	<i>Or.</i>	Tertullian, <i>De oratione (Prayer)</i>
1–2 Clem.	1–2 Clement	<i>Or.</i>	Tatian, <i>Oration to the Greeks</i>
<i>Comm. Dan.</i>	Hippolytus of Rome, <i>Commentary on Daniel</i>	<i>Paed.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paedagogus (Christ the Educator)</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>	Pesiq. Rab.	Pesiqta Rabbati
Did.	Didache	<i>Phil.</i>	Polycarp, <i>To the Philippians</i>
1 En.	1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)	Pr. Man.	Prayer of Manasseh
2 En.	2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)	Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
<i>Ep.</i>	Augustine, <i>Epistles/Letters</i>	<i>Quis div.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Quis dives salvetur (Salvation of the Rich)</i>
<i>Ep. Apos.</i>	Epistle of the Apostles	<i>Res.</i>	Tertullian, <i>The Resurrection of the Flesh</i>
<i>Ep. Olymp.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Epistles/Letters to Olympias</i>	<i>Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Romans</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Ephesians</i>	Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
1 Esd.	1 Esdras (in the Apocrypha)	<i>Sim.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Similitudes</i>
2 Esd.	2 Esdras (4 Ezra)	Sir.	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah	<i>Smyrn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i>	<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromata</i>
<i>Hom. 1 Thess.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on 1 Thessalonians</i>	T. Ab.	Testament of Abraham
<i>Hom. 2 Thess.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on 2 Thessalonians</i>	T. Asher	Testament of Asher
<i>Inst.</i>	Lactantius, <i>The Divine Institutes</i>	T. Benj.	Testament of Benjamin
Jdt.	Judith	T. Dan	Testament of Dan
Jos. Asen.	Joseph and Aseneth	T. Gad	Testament of Gad
Jub.	Jubilees	T. Isaac	Testament of Isaac
L.A.B.	Liber antiquitatum biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)	T. Job	Testament of Job
<i>Leg.</i>	Athenagoras, <i>Legatio pro Christianis (A Plea for the Christians)</i>	T. Jos.	Testament of Joseph
Lit. James	Divine Liturgy of James	T. Jud.	Testament of Judah
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees	T. Levi	Testament of Levi
<i>Magn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Magnesians</i>	T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali
<i>Marc.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Against Marcion</i>	T. Reu.	Testament of Reuben
Mart. Isa.	Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 1–5	T. Sim.	Testament of Simeon
Mart. Pol.	Martyrdom of Polycarp	Tob.	Tobit
		<i>Ux.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Ad uxorem (To His Wife)</i>
		<i>Vis.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Vision(s)</i>
		<i>Wis.</i>	Wisdom of Solomon

## Rabbinic Tractates

These abbreviations below are used for the names of the tractates in the Mishnah (when preceded by *m.*), Tosefta (*t.*), Babylonian Talmud (*b.*), and Palestinian/Jerusalem Talmud (*y.*).

'Abot	'Abot
B. Bat.	Baba Batra
Hag.	Ḥagigah
Pesaḥ.	Pesaḥim

## Qumran / Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts

CD	<i>Damascus Document</i> , from the Cairo Genizah	1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i> [former numbers bracketed]
Hev	text from Nahal Hever	1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>
Mas	text from Masada	1QpHab	<i>Pesher Habakkuk</i>
papMur	papyrus from Murabba'at	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>
1Q27	<i>1QMysteries</i>	4Q416	<i>4QSapiential Work A<sup>b</sup></i>

## Papyri, Inscriptions, and Coins

BGU	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen [later Staatlichen] Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden</i> (Berlin, 1895–)
CIG	<i>Corpus inscriptionum graecarum</i> , edited by A. Boeckh et al., 4 vols. (Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlag, 1977)
CIJ	<i>Corpus inscriptionum judaicarum</i> , compiled by J.-B. Frey (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Christiana, 1936–); reprinted as <i>Corpus of Jewish Inscriptions: Jewish Inscriptions from the Third Century B.C. to the Seventh Century A.D.</i> (New York: Ktav, 1975)
CIL	<i>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum</i> (Berlin: Reimer, 1862–)
IG	<i>Inscriptiones graecae</i> , editio minor (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1924–)
ILS	<i>Inscriptiones latinae selectae</i> , edited by H. Dessau, 3 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1882–1916; plus various reprints)
IT	<i>Inscriptiones graecae</i> , vol. 10: <i>Inscriptiones Thessalonicae et vicinae</i> , edited by C. Edson (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972)
OGIS	<i>Oriens graeci inscriptiones selectae</i> , edited by W. Dittenberger, 2 vols. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1903–5)
P.Cair. Zen.	<i>Zenon Papyri: Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire</i> , edited by C. C. Edgar (Cairo, 1925–40)
P.Col.	<i>Columbia Papyri</i> (New York et al., 1929–)
P.Eleph.	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Museen in Berlin: Griechische Urkunden</i> , Sonderheft: <i>Elephantine-Papyri</i> , edited by O. Rubensohn (Berlin, 1907–)
P.Freib.	<i>Mitteilungen aus der Freiburger Papyrussammlung</i> (Heidelberg et al., 1914–)
P.Giess.	<i>Griechische Papyri im Museum des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins zu Giessen</i> , edited by O. Eger, E. Kornemann, and P. M. Meyer (Leipzig-Berlin, 1910–12)
PGM	<i>Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> , edited by K. Preisendanz (Berlin, 1928–)
P.Grenf. II	<i>New Classical Fragments and Other Greek and Latin Papyri</i> , edited by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt (Oxford, 1897)
P.Lond.	<i>Greek Papyri in the British Museum</i> (London, 1893–)
P.Lond. Lit.	<i>Catalogue of the Literary Papyri in the British Museum</i> , edited by H. J. M. Milne (London, 1927)
P.Oslo	<i>Papyri Osloenses</i> (Oslo, 1925–36)
P.Oxy.	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> , published by the Egypt Exploration Society in <i>Graeco-Roman Memoirs</i> (London, 1898–)
PSI	<i>Papyri greci e latini</i> , edited by G. Vitelli, M. Norsa, et al. (Florence: Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana, 1912–)
P.Tebt.	<i>The Tebtunis Papyri</i> , edited by B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt, et al. (London et al., 1902–)

## Abbreviations

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P.Wisc.	<i>The Wisconsin Papyri</i> , edited by P. J. Sijpesteijn (Leiden, 1967; Zutphen, 1977)
RIC	<i>The Roman Imperial Coinage</i> , by H. Mattingly, E. A. Sydenham, et al., multiple editions, 10 vols. (London: Spink, 1926–2007)
SB	<i>Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten</i> , edited by F. Preisigke et al., vols. 1– (Strassburg: Trübner; et al., 1915–)
SEG	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum graecum</i> (Leiden: Brill; et al., 1923–)
UPZ	<i>Urkunden der Ptolemäerzeit (ältere Funde)</i> , edited by U. Wilcken (Berlin, 1927–)

## Josephus

Ag. Ap.	<i>Against Apion</i>
Ant.	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
J.W.	<i>Jewish War</i>

## Philo

Abraham	<i>Life of Abraham</i>	Migration	<i>Migration of Abraham</i>
Alleg. Interp.	<i>Allegorical Interpretation</i>	Names	<i>Change of Names</i>
Dreams	<i>Dreams</i>	Rewards	<i>Rewards and Punishments</i>
Embassy	<i>Embassy to Gaius</i>	Sacrifices	<i>Sacrifices of Cain and Abel</i>
Flaccus	<i>Against Flaccus</i>	Spec. Laws	<i>Special Laws</i>
Flight	<i>Flight and Finding</i>	Virtues	<i>Virtues</i>
Good Person	<i>That Every Good Person Is Free</i>		

## Classical Writers

Aem.	Plutarch, <i>Aemilius Paullus</i>	Demon.	Isocrates, <i>To Demonicus (Oration 1)</i>
Age	Cicero, <i>Old Age (De senectute)</i>	Dio Cassius	Dio Cassius, <i>Roman History</i>
Alex.	Dio Chrysostom, <i>To the People of Alexandria (Or. 32)</i>	Diodorus Siculus	Diodorus of Sicily, <i>Library of History</i>
Ant.	Plutarch, <i>Antony</i>	Disc.	Epictetus, <i>Discourses</i>
Apol.	Plato, <i>Apologia of Socrates</i>	Div.	Cicero, <i>Divination</i>
Ass	Lucian of Samosata, <i>The Ass</i>	Duties	Cicero, <i>On Duties (De officiis)</i>
Att.	Cicero, <i>Letters to Atticus</i>	El.	Sophocles, <i>Elektra</i>
Busybody	Plutarch, <i>On Being a Busybody (De curiositate)</i>	Ep.	Julian, <i>Epistles</i>
Cael.	Cicero, <i>Pro Caelio</i>	Ep.	Seneca, <i>Moral Epistles</i>
Cat. Maj.	Plutarch, <i>Cato Major (Cato the Elder)</i>	Flatterer	Plutarch, <i>How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend (Mor. 4)</i>
Catullus	Catullus, <i>Poetry of Catullus</i>	Font.	Cicero, <i>Pro Fonteio</i>
Char.	Theophrastus, <i>Characters</i>	Frat. amor.	Plutarch, <i>De fraterno amore (Brotherly Love)</i>
Cho.	Aeschylus, <i>Choephoroi (Libation-Bearers)</i>	Geogr.	Strabo, <i>Geography</i>
Claud.	Suetonius, <i>The Life of Claudius</i>	Hell.	Xenophon, <i>Hellenica</i>
Con. Apoll.	Plutarch, <i>A Letter of Condolence to Apollonius</i>	Herodotus	Herodotus, <i>History of the Persian Wars</i>
Cyr.	Xenophon, <i>Cyropaedia</i>	Hist.	various authors, <i>Histories</i>
Demetr.	Plutarch, <i>Demetrius</i>	Icar.	Lucian of Samosata, <i>Icaromenippus</i>
		Id.	Theocritus, <i>Idylls</i>

<i>Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Iliad</i>	<i>Pis.</i>	Cicero, <i>Against Piso</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutes of Oratory</i>	<i>Pol.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>
<i>Laws</i>	Ulpian, <i>Comparison of Mosaic and Roman Laws</i>	<i>Polyb.</i>	Seneca, <i>To Polybius on Consolation</i>
<i>Lives</i>	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>	<i>Pontic Ep.</i>	Ovid, <i>Pontic Epistles</i>
<i>Livy</i>	Livy (Titus Livius), <i>History of Rome</i>	<i>Prot.</i>	Plato, <i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	Seneca, <i>Consolation to Marcia</i>	<i>Rep.</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
<i>Med.</i>	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i>	<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetoric</i>
<i>Misc.</i>	Aelian, <i>Miscellaneous Stories</i>	<i>Rom. Ant.</i>	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <i>Roman Antiquities</i>
<i>Mor.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i>	<i>Sat.</i>	various authors, <i>Satires</i>
<i>Nat.</i>	Pliny the Elder, <i>Natural History</i>	<i>Siege</i>	Aeneas Tacitus, <i>How to Survive under Siege</i>
<i>Nic. Eth.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	<i>Symp.</i>	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>
<i>Or.</i>	various authors, <i>Orations</i>	Thucydides	Thucydides, <i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i>
<i>Per.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Life of Pericles</i>	<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	Philostratus, <i>Life of Apollonius of Tyana</i>
<i>Phileb.</i>	Plato, <i>Philebus</i>		
<i>4 Philip.</i>	Demosthenes, <i>4 Philippic</i>		

# Transliteration

## Hebrew

א	'	בֿ	ā	<i>qāmeṣ</i>
ב	<i>b</i>	בֿ	<i>a</i>	<i>pataḥ</i>
ג	<i>g</i>	הֿ	<i>a</i>	furtive <i>pataḥ</i>
ד	<i>d</i>	בֿ	<i>e</i>	<i>sēgól</i>
ה	<i>h</i>	בֿ	<i>ē</i>	<i>šērē</i>
ו	<i>w</i>	בֿ	<i>i</i>	short <i>ḥîreq</i>
ז	<i>z</i>	בֿ	<i>ī</i>	long <i>ḥîreq</i> written defectively
ח	<i>ḥ</i>	בֿ	<i>o</i>	<i>qāmeṣ ḥāṭûp</i>
ט	<i>ṭ</i>	בוֹ	<i>ô</i>	<i>ḥôlem</i> written fully
י	<i>y</i>	בֿ	<i>ō</i>	<i>ḥôlem</i> written defectively
כ/כּ	<i>k</i>	בוֹ	<i>û</i>	<i>šûreq</i>
ל	<i>l</i>	בֿ	<i>u</i>	short <i>qibbûṣ</i>
מ/מּ	<i>m</i>	בֿ	<i>û</i>	long <i>qibbûṣ</i> written defectively
נ/נּ	<i>n</i>	בהֿ	<i>â</i>	final <i>qāmeṣ hē</i> <sup>7</sup> (בהֿ = <i>āh</i> )
ס	<i>s</i>	בֿי	<i>ê</i>	<i>sēgól yôd</i> (*בֿי = <i>éy</i> )
ע	<i>‘</i>	בֿי	<i>ê</i>	<i>šērē yôd</i> (*בֿי = <i>éy</i> )
פ/פּ	<i>p</i>	בֿי	<i>î</i>	<i>ḥîreq yôd</i> (*בֿי = <i>îy</i> )
צ/צּ	<i>ṣ</i>	בֿ	<i>ă</i>	<i>ḥāṭêp pataḥ</i>
ק	<i>q</i>	בֿ	<i>ē</i>	<i>ḥāṭêp sēgól</i>
ר	<i>r</i>	בֿ	<i>ō</i>	<i>ḥāṭêp qāmeṣ</i>
שׁ	<i>ś</i>	בֿ	<i>ě</i>	vocal <i>šewā</i> <sup>7</sup>
שׂ	<i>š</i>			
ת	<i>t</i>			

## Notes on the Transliteration of Hebrew

1. Accents are not shown in transliteration.
2. Silent *šewā*<sup>7</sup> is not indicated in transliteration.
3. The spirant forms פּ ת כּ ד כּ גּ בּ are usually not specially indicated in transliteration.

4. *Dāgēs forte* is indicated by doubling the consonant. Euphonic *dāgēs* and *dāgēs lene* are not indicated in transliteration.
5. *Maqqēp* is represented by a hyphen.

## Greek

α	<i>a</i>	ξ	<i>x</i>
β	<i>b</i>	ο	<i>o</i>
γ	<i>g/n</i>	π	<i>p</i>
δ	<i>d</i>	ρ	<i>r</i>
ε	<i>e</i>	σ/ς	<i>s</i>
ζ	<i>z</i>	τ	<i>t</i>
η	<i>ē</i>	υ	<i>y/u</i>
θ	<i>th</i>	φ	<i>ph</i>
ι	<i>i</i>	χ	<i>ch</i>
κ	<i>k</i>	ψ	<i>ps</i>
λ	<i>l</i>	ω	<i>ō</i>
μ	<i>m</i>	ϛ	<i>h</i>
ν	<i>n</i>		

## Notes on the Transliteration of Greek

1. Accents, lenis (smooth breathing), and *iota* subscript are not shown in transliteration.
2. The transliteration of asper (rough breathing) precedes a vowel or diphthong (e.g., ἄ = *ha*; αἶ = *hai*) and follows ρ (i.e., ῥ = *rh*).
3. *Gamma* is transliterated *n* only when it precedes γ, κ, ξ, or χ.
4. *Upsilon* is transliterated *u* only when it is part of a diphthong (i.e., αυ, ευ, ου, υι).



Jeffrey A. D. Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians  
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# Introduction to 1–2 Thessalonians

## The City of Thessalonica

### *A Strategic Location*

If the three most important factors affecting the value of real estate are “location, location, location,” then Thessalonica was destined to be a prosperous and leading city. Two geographical factors resulted in Thessalonica becoming what its first-century BC native poet Antipater called “the mother of all Macedonia” (*Anth. Pal.* 4.428) and what a local inscription identified as “the metropolis [“mother city”], first of Macedonia” (*CIG* 1.1969). That these descriptions were not merely the exaggerated claim of overly proud native citizens is confirmed by Strabo, the historian and geographer (64 BC–ca. AD 24), who similarly referred to Thessalonica as the “metropolis of Macedonia” (*Geogr.* 7 frg. 21).

The first of these two geographical advantages involved the city’s access to the sea: Thessalonica enjoyed a natural harbor that was perhaps the best in the entire Aegean Sea. This factor led to the creation of the city by Cassander, the king of Macedonia, in 316–315 BC. The capital city of his father-in-law, Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, was located in nearby Pella: though situated inland, it had access to the Aegean Sea by means of the Loudias River. This river, however, suffered heavy silting, thereby forcing Cassander to establish a new port and town to serve as the center of his reign over the region of Macedonia. The king forcibly joined together the populations of twenty-six villages in the area and situated them on the existing town of Therme, naming the new city Thessalonica, after his wife<sup>1</sup> (Strabo, *Geogr.* 7 frgs. 21, 24; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Rom. Ant.* 1.49.4). This location on the most innermost part of the Thermaic Gulf was chosen because of the site’s deep anchorage and excellent protection from dangerous southeast winds.<sup>2</sup> The advantages of this favorably situated harbor were noted by ancient authors (Herodotus 7.121; Livy 44.10), and the port of Thessalonica continues to be a busy and profitable one still today. Vacalopoulos (1972: 3) reports: “Thessaloniki is the

1. Cassander’s wife was born on the day her father, Philip II, won an important battle in Thessaly, the region south of Macedonia, and was consequently named Thessalonike, which means “Thessalian Victory.” She was the younger stepsister of Alexander the Great.

2. Although the Thermaic Gulf opens southeastward to the Aegean Sea, the inlet at Thessalonica opens almost at a right angle southwestward to the gulf, thereby giving the harbor shelter from the prevailing southeast winds.

only sea-board city of contemporary Greece that has never, from its foundation (316 BC) till today, lost its commercial importance.”

The second of the geographical advantages benefiting Thessalonica involves the city’s access to major land travel routes. The city was situated on or near<sup>3</sup> the Via Egnatia—the major east-west highway built by the Romans in the second century BC. This highway connected Thessalonica with the other major cities not only in Macedonia but also far beyond. Going west on this route some 260 miles from Thessalonica would bring one to the port of Dyrrachium on the Adriatic Sea, which could then be crossed by boat to the shore of Italy, where the Via Appia would lead directly into Rome. Going east on this route some 430 miles from Thessalonica would bring one to Byzantium, on the edge of the Black Sea, or even earlier to the Hellespont, which would allow access into Asia Minor. Thessalonica also was located on the intersection of the Via Egnatia with the major road north along the Axios River through the Balkans to the Danube region.

The benefits of Thessalonica’s location with respect to both sea and land were key factors ensuring the prosperity and numerical growth of the city. As Green (2002: 6) observes: “The great success of Thessalonica was due in grand part to the union of land and sea, road and port, which facilitated commerce between Macedonia and the entire Roman Empire. No other place in all Macedonia offered the strategic advantages of Thessalonica.” Additional geographical factors ensuring the success of the city were its favorable climate conditions, fertile plains nourished by abundant rivers, rich mineral deposits (gold, silver, iron, copper, lead), and vast forests to provide timber for building. Fearing a Macedonian revival (Livy 45.29), the Romans under General Aemilius Paullus imposed restrictions on the Thessalonians and others in Macedonia over the use of these natural resources after his victory at Pydna in 168 BC. This and the 300 million sesterces that this victory brought into the Roman treasury (Pliny the Elder [*Nat.* 33.17; Livy 45.40.1] gives the amount as 120 million sesterces) suggest the wealth that the region around Thessalonica could potentially produce. These geographical advantages were not lost on writers in the ancient world, as evidenced by the succinct comment of Miletius: “So long as nature does not change, Thessalonica will remain wealthy and fortunate” (cited by Lightfoot 1893: 255).

The city’s prosperity not surprisingly attracted new inhabitants: in the years just before Paul’s arrival, Thessalonica was “more populous than any of the rest” of the Macedonian cities (Strabo, *Geogr.* 7.7.4; see also Lucian, *Ass* 46.5, who, in the second century AD, refers to Thessalonica as “the largest city in Macedonia”). The exact size of the city’s population is difficult to determine with certainty. If one uses the length of the city walls to determine the total living area and factors in the typical rates of population density for ancient cities, the population of Thessalonica can be calculated to have been from

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3. There is evidence that the Via Egnatia did not pass directly through the city but rather was located nearby to the north: Vickers 1972: 157n4; Makaronas 1951: 387–88.

65,000 to 100,000 people (J. Hill 1990: 45–49; Riesner 1998: 314). This would rank Thessalonica among the top ten largest cities in the Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup>

### *A Favored Political Status*

Thessalonica enjoyed a favored relationship with Rome—a relationship that it deliberately fostered in the hopes of political and financial gain. After the fall of Macedonia as an independent kingdom in the battle at Pydna in 168 BC, the victorious Romans followed the strategy of divide and conquer, splitting the region into four “districts” (μερίδες, *merides*; see Acts 16:12), with Thessalonica as the capital of the second district (Livy 44.32; 45.29.9; Diodorus Siculus 31.8.6–9; Strabo, *Geogr.* 7 frg. 47). The following years of Roman rule witnessed sporadic rebellions, finally suppressed in 146 BC, at which time the Romans expanded the boundaries of the region and reorganized Macedonia as a province, with Thessalonica alone elevated to the privileged status of capital city and as the home base of Rome’s representative, the governor.

Rome’s choice of Thessalonica as provincial capital was based not solely on the city’s size and wealth but also on its loyalty to the Roman Empire rather than to local leaders heading up the rebellions. One inscription records how the Thessalonians honor Metellus, the Roman praetor who quelled the insurrection, identifying him as the city’s “savior and benefactor” (*IT* 134). Several other inscriptions honor “Roman benefactors” (Ῥωμαῖοι εὐεργέται, *Rhōmaioi euergetai*), individuals who financed local cultural institutions (e.g., the gymnasium and its activities), helped protect the city from hostile neighbors and anti-Roman invaders, promoted the interests of Thessalonica in Rome, or provided aid in other ways. These honorific inscriptions reveal that a pro-Roman attitude existed in Thessalonica and that at least some of its leading citizens were willing not merely to endure but also eagerly to embrace Roman rule in order to enjoy more fully the benefits that this relationship brought (see esp. Hendrix 1984; also Green 2002: 16–17). This positive view of Rome was enhanced by Thessalonica’s need for the empire’s help in fending off the frequent raids by the barbarian tribes in northern Macedonia (Papagianopoulos 1982: 36). Thus Cicero, the famous Roman statesman who spent six months in Thessalonica in exile in 58 BC, referred to Macedonia as “a loyal province, friend to the Roman people” (*Font.* 44).

The close relationship between Thessalonica and Rome can also be seen in the key role that the city played in the empire’s civil wars, even though all too often this role involved initially backing the losing side. The city supported Pompey in his quest for power against Julius Caesar. Before his inglorious

4. Keener (2014: 2537): “Thessalonica was not one of the giant cities, such as Rome (with as many as a million inhabitants on a frequent estimate) and Alexandria (sometimes estimated at six hundred thousand), but with Smyrna it followed close after the second tier of cities (Carthage and Antioch, each with some half million, and Ephesus, with four hundred thousand, on the highest estimates), with more than two hundred thousand inhabitants on the highest estimates. More conservative estimates run from forty thousand to sixty-five thousand, but these figures remain substantial.”

defeat at Pharsalus in 48 BC, Pompey prepared for battle by gathering in Thessalonica with the two consuls and over two hundred senators, turning the city into a kind of second Rome, where the “true” Senate was now held (Dio Cassius 41.18.4–6; 41.43.1–5). Some six years later Thessalonica was again at the center of the Roman internal wars, when the armies of Brutus and Cassius, the two leaders responsible for the assassination of Julius Caesar, faced off in battle on the plains of nearby Philippi against the armies of Marc Antony and Octavian (who later became Caesar Augustus), the two avengers of Caesar’s murder. Thessalonica initially supported Brutus and Cassius but, between the two battles on the Philippian plains, switched their allegiance to Marc Antony and Octavian, causing Brutus to promise his soldiers the right to plunder Thessalonica following their anticipated victory (Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.118; Plutarch, *Brutus* 46.1). Fortunately for Thessalonica, that victory never came: both Brutus and Cassius went down to defeat at the hands of Marc Antony and, to a lesser extent, Octavian. A triumphal arch celebrating the two victors was built at the Vardar Gate, one of the major gates of the city wall, and commemorative medals were circulated with the inscription “for the freedom of the people of Thessaloniki” (Papagiannopoulos 1982: 39). A coin series was produced, presenting on one side a veiled female head with the inscription OMONIA (concord, harmony, like-mindedness) and on the other side a galloping free horse with the inscription ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝ[ΙΚΗΣ]/ΡΩΜ[ΗΣ] (Thessalonica/Rome), thereby celebrating how the victory of Antony and Octavian had restored concord between the two cities (Hendrix 1984: 162–65).

The city and the province came under the control of Marc Antony, who in 42 BC rewarded its citizens for their support by granting Thessalonica the status of a “free city” (*civitas libera*; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 4.17 [10]).<sup>5</sup> This favored classification meant that the inhabitants enjoyed a measure of autonomy over local affairs, the right to mint their own coins, freedom from military occupation within the city walls, and certain tax concessions. Hendrix (1984: 251) notes that this privileged status was “granted only to people and cities which had displayed remarkable loyalty to the interests of the Roman people.” Nine years later the city found itself again backing the losing side in Rome’s internal wars as Marc Antony fell at the hands of Octavian in the battle at Actium in 31 BC. Nevertheless, the city quickly either erased the name of Antony from inscriptions honoring the defeated general (a standard way of effecting *damnatio memoriae*—erasing the memory of someone formally esteemed who was now dishonored) or replaced his name with Octavian (*IT* 6, 83, 109), thereby ensuring good relations with Rome and maintaining their favored status as a free city.

During this time period the city’s intimate relationship with Rome was fostered further with the establishment of a new cult of Roma and the Roman benefactors (Edson [1940: 133] dates its founding to 41 BC, while Hendrix

5. Evidence of Thessalonica’s “freedom” is found in one inscription (*IT* 6) and in a series of coins issued by the city inscribed ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΕΩΝ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑΣ (Freedom of the Thessalonians).

[1987: 22] dates this new cult to 95 BC or earlier). Several inscriptions are addressed to “the gods and the Roman benefactors” (*IT* 4), “the priest of the gods . . . and of the priest of Roma and the Roman benefactors” (*IT* 133, 226), “of both Roma and the Roman benefactors” (*IT* 128), and “Roma and Romans” (*IT* 32). Once the cult to honor the goddess Roma and the Roman benefactors was established, it was natural to extend such honors to the most powerful and most important Roman benefactor, the emperor. A temple in honor of Caesar was built near the end of the first century BC, and a priesthood to service this temple was established: an important inscription refers to “the temple of Caesar” and to a person with the title “priest and *agōnothetēs* [games superintendent] of the Emperor Caesar Augustus son [of god]” as well as to the “priest of the gods . . . and priest of Roma and the Roman benefactors” (*IT* 31). This inscription, along with others (*IT* 32, 132, 133), also suggests the preeminence of officials connected with the imperial cult over other priesthoods.<sup>6</sup>

Further evidence of Thessalonica’s aggressive pursuit of fostering good relations with Rome lies in a recent rediscovery of an archaic temple that the city had moved from its original location and reassembled in the most important location in town, where all the key sanctuaries were situated, including the Serapeion. The temple was first discovered in 1936 during the erection of a two-story building in the heart of the modern city, in Antigonidon Square. However, this finding soon disappeared due to the invasion and destruction of the Nazi occupation and the subsequent postwar urban development. The temple was rediscovered in 2000 when the two-story building located on top of it was demolished as part of a redevelopment project. It then became clear that this archaic temple dates back to the late sixth century BC but had been rebuilt as an Ionic-style temple on top of a Roman base. A statue of the goddess Roma and other imperial statues were also discovered here, but nothing dating to the pre-Roman period.<sup>7</sup> The presence of architectural marks to ensure the accurate reassembling of the temple confirmed that the temple had originally been built and located somewhere else in the late archaic period and then moved into the heart of Thessalonica during the Roman period. Its original location was likely Aineia (suburb of modern-day Michaniona), located about twelve miles south of Thessalonica, and the temple was dedicated to Aphrodite (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Rom. Ant.* 1.49.4). According to tradition, this goddess of love was the mother of Aeneas, who was the founder not only of Rome but also of the Julian line from whom Julius Caesar descended. It

6. “In every extant instance in which the ‘priest and agonothete of the Emperor’ is mentioned, he is listed first in what appears to be a strict observance of protocol. The Emperor’s priest and agonothete assumes priority, the priest of ‘the gods’ is cited next, followed by the priest of Roma and Roman benefactors” (Hendrix 1984: 312).

7. Most of these recent findings are now exhibited in the lobby of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. Controversy continues over what to do with the temple base located in Antigonidon Square. For a website dedicated to saving the Aphrodite temple from development, see <http://www.templeofvenus.gr/>.

seems likely, then, that the Thessalonians, at great effort and expense, moved a temple that could be linked with Julius Caesar to a prime location in their city and turned it into a temple for imperial worship in order to demonstrate in a dramatic way their allegiance to Caesar's adoptive son, Octavian (later known as Augustus), even though they had supported Octavian's rival, Marc Antony, during Rome's civil war.

Coinage from the city reveals that Julius Caesar and Octavian received divine honors. In one series minted about 27 BC, the laureate head of Julius Caesar appears with the inscription "God." The reverse side of coins from this series has the image of Octavian, and though they do not have the similar inscription "God" or "son of god," his divinity is implied by his pairing with the divine Julius and by the title *Sebastos* or "Augustus" often found. A statue of Augustus discovered in Thessalonica depicts the emperor in a divine posture.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the *Prima Porta* exemplar where Augustus is in full military garb, the Thessalonian statue of him omits these symbols of power and instead conveys the emperor as a man not of war but of peace.

The good relations that existed between Macedonia, including its leading city of Thessalonica, and Rome can also be seen in the so-called Augustan Settlement of 27 BC, when the emperor regulated the governance of the provinces, classifying them as either senatorial or imperial. Senatorial provinces were those considered to be peaceful and loyal to Rome and so were placed under the control of the Senate, governed by proconsuls (governors) who held office for only a one-year term. Imperial provinces were those typically located on the boundaries of the empire and whose commitment to Rome was considered weak or questionable. They were placed under the direct control of the emperor, who appointed procurators or prefects with military authority to hold office and govern these areas as long as the emperor desired. That Augustus designated Macedonia as a senatorial province (Dio Cassius 53.12.4) therefore is significant. It also suggests that the act of the subsequent emperor, Tiberius, in reclassifying Macedonia as an imperial province in AD 15 and placing this region under his direct control (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.76.4), would have been viewed with alarm by those in Macedonia and Thessalonica who were concerned with maintaining good relations with Rome. Pro-Roman sensibilities in the region and capital city were encouraged, however, when Claudius in AD 44 annulled the decision of his predecessor and restored Macedonia's status as a senatorial province and Thessalonica as the dwelling place of the governor (Dio Cassius 60.24.1).

This historical survey makes clear that Thessalonica enjoyed a favored relationship with Rome and engaged in a variety of activities to strengthen that relationship, thereby securing political and financial benefits from the empire. As De Vos (1999: 125) states: "In light of this history, the city [Thessalonica] seems to have developed an attitude of strong dependence on Roman, and

8. Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki, No. 1065, [http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/4/eh430.jsp?obj\\_id=8164](http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/4/eh430.jsp?obj_id=8164).

especially, Imperial, benefaction.” What this historical survey also makes clear is how important Thessalonica’s favored status would have been to both its city leaders and citizens, and how they would naturally be upset and deal aggressively with anyone or any group within the community whom they feared might jeopardize their favored status. Especially with the memory still fresh in their mind of the loss of their senatorial status under Tiberius and its recovery just six years earlier under Claudius, it is understandable why the crowd and city leaders “were disturbed” (Acts 17:8) on hearing about the anti-Roman charges brought against Paul and Silas as well as about those local citizens who had embraced their teachings (Riesner 1998: 357).

### *A Unique Governmental Structure*

The special status that Thessalonica had as a free city meant, among other things, that it enjoyed a degree of autonomy over local affairs: instead of reorganizing their city governance according to Roman practices, they were permitted to keep their existing civic structure. This local governmental structure was composed of the following three main offices,<sup>9</sup> the first and last of which are explicitly mentioned in Acts 17:1–10, with its description of Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica: (a) the citizen assembly; (b) the council; and (c) the politarchs or city officials.

a. *The citizen assembly.* The lowest level of city governance involved the *dēmos* (δῆμος, citizen assembly), whose existence is attested in local inscriptions (IT 6, 136). The *dēmos* pattern of government (from which we get the word “democracy”) originated in Athens in the fifth century BC and subsequently spread from there throughout the Hellenistic cities. In a free city like Thessalonica, which was allowed to follow its traditional democratic traditions, the *dēmos* consisted of “a convocation of citizens called together for the purpose of transacting official business” (BDAG 223). This administrative body handled such city matters as financial affairs, festivals, issues connected to the various local cults, and certain judicial concerns (R. Evans 1968: 13). The mob in Thessalonica, enraged over the charges made against Paul and Silas, originally planned to bring the pair before this citizen assembly (Acts 17:5).

b. *The council.* The higher level of city governance involved the *boulē* (βουλή, council), whose existence is also attested in local inscriptions (IT 5, 6, 7, 14, 133, 137). The origin of this administrative body similarly goes back to the birth of democracy in Athens and was instituted in order to function as an

9. Additional city offices or administrators were commonly found in cities in that day. Inscriptions from Thessalonica refer to the “treasurer of the city” (ταμίας τῆς πόλεως; IT 31, 50, 133); the “treasurer of the Romans” (ταμίας Ῥωμαίων; IT 29, 135); the “marketplace ruler” (ἀγορανόμος; IT 7, 26), who regulated the commercial activity in the agora, or forum; the “gymnasiarch” (γυμνασίαρχος; IT 4, 133, 135, 201), who supervised the training and educational activities that took place in the gymnasium; the “agonothete” (ἀγωνοθέτης; IT 132, 226), who was in charge of the athletic and musical competitions; the “ephebarch” (ἐφῆβαρχος; IT 133, 135; IG 10.1.4), who supervised the training of young men of citizen status; and the city “architect” (ἀρχιτέκτων; IT 31, 128, 133), who oversaw building projects (see also Green 2002: 22–24).

executive branch of the citizen assembly, making the governing process more efficient by filtering problems before they were brought to the lower body (Plutarch, *Solon* 19). This meant that the duties of the council overlapped with those of the citizen assembly, which is natural given that the former body was intended to be a preparatory institution for the latter. The close interaction of these two administrative bodies in Thessalonica can be seen in certain inscriptions where both the citizen assembly and the council are listed together as cosponsors of a proclamation (R. Evans 1968: 217n100; Green 2002: 22). Yet it was also natural for the council to exert undue influence in controlling not only what issues were brought before the citizen assembly but also what decisions about these issues ought to be adopted.

c. *The politarchs (city officials)*. Although the citizen assembly and council are administrative bodies typical of a classical Greek civic structure that can be found in virtually any Hellenistic city, the office of politarch (πολιτάρχης, *politarchēs*, city official) is distinctive and rare, thus justifying our heading of this larger introductory section as “A Unique Governmental Structure.” It is often claimed that the term “politarch” does not occur in any extant Greek writing other than its twofold reference in Acts 17:6 and 17:8. Consequently, many biblical scholars prior to the late nineteenth century and some even in the early twentieth century questioned the historical accuracy of these two references in the Acts account. The claim about the term not occurring in any literary source other than Acts, however, is incorrect: the word does occur in the fourth-century BC Greek writer on the art of war, Aeneas Tacitus (*Siege* 26.12).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, while literary evidence for the existence of this city office may be weak, with only one other occurrence apart from Acts, inscriptional evidence has become increasingly impressive, as more and more references to politarchs have been discovered. Although at the close of the nineteenth century, nineteen inscriptions attested to the office of politarch (Burton 1898), there are currently as many as seventy known nonliterary references to these unique city officials (Horsley 1994: 422; Riesner 1998: 355). Twenty-eight of these inscriptions (40 percent) are from Thessalonica, while the majority of the remaining attestations are from various communities in Macedonia (Amphipolis, Lete, Derriopus, Pella, Edessa). The few inscriptions with the term “politarch” coming from outside the borders of Macedonia were found in the nearby regions of Thrace and Thessaly, as well as in the farther province of Bithynia in Asia Minor.

Up to the 1970s the dominant view was that the office of politarch was introduced into Macedonia by the Romans, either after their key victory at Pydna in 168 BC or when they reorganized Macedonia as a province in 146 BC (see esp. Schuler 1960). But although the vast majority of inscriptions date from the Roman period, it has become clear in recent decades that the office of politarch existed already before the Roman takeover of Macedonia.

10. The form πολιτάρχος differs slightly in the suffix (-αρχος instead of -αρχης), which is merely a variation of dialect (Horsley 1982: 34).

In addition to the early citation from Aeneas Tacitus, there is, for example, one inscription from Amphipolis that dates between 179 and 171 BC (Helly 1977: 531–44; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981).<sup>11</sup>

The inscriptions as a whole reveal several important facts about the office of politarch (see Burton 1898; Schuler 1960; Horsley 1982; 1994). In the province of Macedonia, this position was widespread, although not found in Roman colonies like Philippi (Acts, therefore, accurately employs a different title [στρατηγοί, *stratēgoi*] for the city leaders of Philippi: 16:20, 22, 35, 36, 38). The politarchs came from the wealthier families, and their number varied from city to city and from time to time. In Thessalonica at the end of the first century BC, there were five individuals who served as politarchs; that number varied from three to seven during the following two centuries. The politarchs, who could simultaneously hold other civic offices, functioned as the chief administrative and executive officers of their respective cities or communities. They served a one-year term, but the same person could hold office more than once. The politarchs had authority to convene meetings of the *boulē*, or council; introduce motions to that body; and confirm its decisions. For example, clay seals mentioning politarchs discovered at Pella suggest that a decree passed by the council would be ratified by the politarchs, who set their seal on the papyrus copy of the decision before it was stored in the city archives. They also had authority to deal with judicial matters, which is indicated by the action of the angry crowd in Thessalonica who failed to find Paul and Silas and instead grabbed their host Jason and some other Christians and brought them to the politarchs (Acts 17:6–9).

That the politarchs had ultimate local responsibility for maintaining peace and order (Gschnitzer 1973: 491) explains why these city officials in Thessalonica were “disturbed” (Acts 17:8) at the anti-Roman charges brought against Paul, Silas, Jason, and the other new believers. Although in theory the politarchs existed to serve and implement the will of the council and the citizen assembly, in reality they were all too aware that real power resided in Rome. Even in a large city like Thessalonica, the politarchs would have had a vested interest in any movement—even a relatively small one—within their city whose beliefs and actions might negatively attract the attention of Rome (see the appeal of the *grammateus* in Ephesus during the riot in that city: Acts 19:38–40) and perhaps ultimately lead to the loss not only of the city’s advantageous “free status” but also of the privileged leadership position that they as city officials enjoyed.

### *A Religiously Pluralistic Environment*

Athens was not the only place where Paul preached the gospel in a city that was “full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Thessalonica, as the “mother / mother city of

11. Additional key evidence for the pre-Roman existence of the office of politarch is provided by Gauthier and Hatzopoulos (1993) in their commentary on the gymnasiarchal law of “Béroia” (Berea).

all Macedonia” and one of the leading cities in the Roman Empire, also had a significant number of pagan cults and temples to diverse deities that competed for its citizens’ attention and participation. Numismatic, inscriptional, and other archaeological evidence reveal that over twenty-five gods, heroes, and personifications of virtues were worshiped in Thessalonica (see the overview of Tzanavari 2003), thereby justifying the heading of this section “A Religiously Pluralistic Environment.”<sup>12</sup> In these diverse sources, the specific gods mentioned most frequently include Dionysus, the gods of Egypt—especially Serapis and Isis but also Osiris, Harpocrates, and Anubis—and Cabirus, who served as the patron deity of Thessalonica. Also important in Thessalonica was the imperial cult—the worship of Roma as a personification of the Roman state and of individual emperors as gods. Other less commonly attested deities include Zeus Hypsistos (the “most high” Zeus), Hera, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite Epitexidia (the Aphrodite “giving success”), Demeter and her daughter (Persephone), Hermes Kerdoos (the “profitable” Hermes), Poseidon (connected with the important harbor at Thessalonica), Cybele (the Phrygian mother goddess), Asklepios (god of healing) and his daughter (Hygieia, Health), Nike (Victory), the Dioscuri, Heracles, Tyche (Fortune), and Nemesis (Retribution). Judaism and the likely presence of a local synagogue should also be added to this religious potpourri.

Since citizens were expected to participate in the local religious practices and festivals and sometimes were even given funds from civic leaders to ensure such participation, it is reasonable to assume that in their pre-Christian life the members of the Thessalonian church not only were very familiar with the various cults of their city but also had themselves actively participated in many of them. This assumption becomes a certainty in light of Paul’s words to his Thessalonian readers concerning “how you turned to God from idols in order to serve a living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). A detailed study of that religiously pluralistic environment will yield a deeper understanding and appreciation of how traumatic an event it must have been for the predominantly Gentile congregation in Thessalonica, who had been immersed in the religious institutions of their city, to abruptly sever these ties and commit themselves solely to “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).

In sharp contrast to other leading cities of the ancient world connected with NT writings, such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Philippi—where the large amount of material brought to light over one hundred years of archaeological work has resulted in a clear picture of local worship practices—we know significantly less about religion in Thessalonica. Over sixty years ago Charles Edson (1948: 153) noted: “Yet few ancient cities of equal importance [to Thessalonica] have been the subject of so little investigation in modern times. Up to now, the inscriptions found in Salonica have all been chance discoveries.” Sadly, the situation today is only slightly improved, as archaeological work

12. Thessalonica, of course, was not unique in this regard: all major cities in the ancient world had a religiously pluralistic environment.

in the modern city of Thessalonica, the second largest city in the country, has been limited to only the Roman forum and the third-century AD monuments connected with Galerius. Any conclusions we reach about religion in Thessalonica, therefore, must be of a provisional nature, contingent on what future discoveries may become available. Our survey will focus on those cults for which the evidence is most abundant and reliable.

a. *Dionysus cult*. Dionysus was worshiped in the surrounding Macedonian towns of Amphipolis, Vergina, Pella, Berea, and Dion (Tzanavari 2003: 210–12), and so also not surprisingly in Thessalonica. In fact, Dionysus ranks among the oldest of the deities worshiped in Thessalonica, dating to the very founding of the city. An altar found at the Golden (or Vardar) Gate, the western entrance to the city, honors a prominent city leader during the third century BC. This dedication was given by “the tribe Dionysus,” one of the three tribes formed by the general Cassander at the time of the forced relocation and unification of the surrounding villages used to create the city of Thessalonica (Edson 1948: 160; R. Evans 1968: 71). That in this Hellenistic period Dionysus was one of the more popular gods worshiped in Thessalonica is indicated by the coinage, on which Dionysus appears beginning already in 187 BC (Gaebler 1935: nos. 1, 9, 15). Further evidence of devotion to Dionysus during this early period of the city’s history exists in a brief inscription on a large base found not in its original location but as part of a Roman wall, near the Serapeion in the western part of the city. The inscription—“The city, to Dionysus, from the city leaders, Aristandros, son of Aristonos, Antmachos, son of Aristoxenos” (IT 28)—testifies to the presence of a state cult of the god.

Although during the Roman period the image of Dionysus disappears from the coinage of Thessalonica, this popular god does not vanish from the life of the city. In 1887 a large marble altar was found in the foundation of a home located near the Kassandreotic (Kalamari) Gate, on the east side of the city. The inscription on this altar reveals that it was erected in AD 132 in honor of someone who served not only as “priest of Dionysus” but also as *hydroscopus*—another official and likely higher post connected with the cult of Dionysus (IT 503). Further epigraphic evidence for the existence of a Dionysus cult in Thessalonica during the Roman period exists in two marble monuments located in or very near the Church of the Panagia Acheiropoietos (the mosque Eski Cuma under Turkish rule), in the eastern part of the city. The first monument is a funerary altar dated to AD 209, erected in honor of someone who had been priest of at least two *thiasoi*, religious associations of Dionysus (IT 506). The second monument contains a relief of a standing draped woman, and its two sides record a donation by a “priestess Evia of *Prinophoros*”—a priestess of Dionysus.<sup>13</sup> The rest of this inscription testifies to the existence of two *thiasoi*, religious associations dedicated to Dionysus (IT 260). Although it is impossible to determine with certainty, the evidence

13. The term *Prinophoros* (Πρινοφόρος), “Oak-Bearer,” refers to Dionysus since cult epithets of this deity that have to do with plants are very common. See Edson 1948: 168; Tzanavari 2003: 213.

suggests that these two religious associations were not private groups but connected with the city cult of Dionysus (see argument forwarded by Edson 1948: 177–78; but Steimle [2008: 182–83] and Nigdelis [2010: 15n7] reject this view). Additionally, a gravestone discovered in 1904, during the demolition of the eastern city wall to the north of the Kassandreotic (Kalamari) Gate, dates to around AD 200 and commemorates a certain Makedon who was a member of “the *thiasos* of Asiani.” Even though the god of the Asiani is not named, there is compelling evidence that the unspoken deity in view is Dionysus. Individuals who moved to Thessalonica from Asia apparently formed a religious association composed initially or primarily of members from their own province and devoted to one of the most popular gods of their homeland, Dionysus. Finally, Dionysus is among the deities on the pillars of the double portico of *Las Incantadas*, removed from the monument in 1864 and now in the Louvre,<sup>14</sup> and a second-century AD statuette of Dionysus crowned with an ivy wreath was found in the Roman forum (Tzanavari 2003: 213–14). Throughout both the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the popularity of the worship of Dionysus is evident in the plethora of personal names derived from the god: Dionysas, Dionysia, Dionysianos, Dionysis, Dionysodots, Bacchides, Bacchios, Bacchis, and Bachylos (Tzanavari 2003: 212).

Perhaps the most intriguing evidence for the worship of Dionysus in Thessalonica lies in a small herm—a statue in the form of a square stone pillar surmounted by a head—of Dionysus discovered in the crypt of the city’s Serapeion. The presence of a herm of Dionysus in a building devoted to the Egyptian gods is surprising, but it can be explained by Dionysus’s identification with the Egyptian god Osiris, an identification found already in the classical period with Herodotus (“Now Osiris in the tongue of Hellas is Dionysus” [2.144]). This linking of Dionysus with Osiris is likely due to the fact that, according to some traditions, both deities suffered dismemberment of their male sex organ, which makes the absence of the phallus in the herm of Dionysus significant. As Hendrix (1987: 9) observes: “The legendary reconstitution of the gods may have been ritually enacted by their devotees (note the suggestive absence of the herm’s phallus), and would have affirmed the deities’ powers of renewal and regeneration.” There is no information about the worship practices and rites of the Dionysus cult at Thessalonica, though one can safely assume that features of Dionysus worship—processions in which imposing effigies of Dionysus along with his symbol, the phallus, were carried; ecstatic dances to the accompaniment of flutes and drums; excess of drinking wine and feasting at banquets; and so forth—were practiced there too.

14. The four portico two-sided Caryatids were part of a Corinthian colonnade located at the entrance to the ancient agora. Along with Dionysus, the other figures depicted in these second-century BC sculptures include the Maenad, Ariadne, Leda, Ganymede, one of the Dioscuri, the Aura, and Nike. Before their removal, these eight figures belonging to “*Las Incantadas*” were the symbol of Thessalonica, and only after their removal in 1864 did the White Tower rise to prominence as the city’s symbol.

b. *Egyptian cult*. The gods of Egypt—especially Serapis and Isis but also Osiris, Harpocrates, and Anubis—received so much attention and devotion from the citizens of Thessalonica that outside Egypt in the Greek world, this city became the second most important center of the cult, after the island of Delos (Tzanavari 2003: 241). In 1939 the popularity of these Egyptian gods became clear with the discovery, in the western part of the city, of the so-called Serapis temple along with thirty-five inscriptions, and an additional thirty-four inscriptions dealing with Egyptian deities were subsequently found.<sup>15</sup> The building is technically neither a temple nor explicitly identified with Serapis, but a small assembly hall where Serapis, after whom the building is now conveniently named, and other Egyptian gods were worshiped (Fraikin 1974; Hendrix 1987: 6–9; Koester 2007: 46–49).

This Serapeion, as it is commonly called, consisted of a small entrance hall, which leads to a larger hall (36' x 26') with a far north wall containing a niche where a statue of one of the Egyptian gods would have been located. In front of the niche was a stone step or bench, which may have functioned as a sacred table for the cult's rituals. Situated directly below the entrance hall of the Serapeion was a modest-sized underground room or crypt (13' x 5'). Access to this crypt was not possible from the main building above but rather by means of a long underground passageway (32' x 3'), entered at the bottom of a flight of steps that started outside the assembly hall. The entrance to this passageway was discovered sealed at the top with marble slabs, thereby preserving it and the crypt in their original state, including various statues and inscriptions. One of these finds included the herm of Dionysus already discussed above, which stood in a niche in the crypt's east wall.

There is evidence that, like the cult of Dionysus, the worship of the Egyptian gods in Thessalonica took place throughout both Hellenistic and Roman periods. That the gods of Egypt migrated north to Macedonia very early is indicated by the presence of the Serapeion, whose original construction is dated to the late third century BC (Edson 1948: 181; Fraikin 1974: 4). Further evidence lies in a small stela found in the Serapeion that records a decree of the Macedonian king Philip V dated to 186 BC. In this recorded document the king forbids using funds from the temple for anything not connected with the Serapis cult and lays down specific penalties for the noncompliance with his command. Still additional support for Thessalonian participation in the Egyptian cult during the Hellenistic period exists in a votive relief to Osiris that was found in the Serapeion and dates to the late second century BC (*IT* 107).<sup>16</sup>

15. *IT* 3, 15, 16, 37, 51, 53, 59, 61, 73, 75–123, 221–22, 244, 254–59. The remains of the Serapis temple and its underground crypt are no longer visible today since they are covered by a street (junction of Vardari Square and Dioiketerion Street) and a private house. A model of the building was made and is now housed in the city's archaeological museum.

16. The inscription on this votive reveals that it was given by Demetrios in honor of his parents, who are depicted in the relief as standing on each side of an altar: the father Alexander is on the right, pouring out a libation; the mother, Nikaia, is on the left; and standing above them both in the middle is either the son and giver of the votive, Demetrios, or the god Osiris portrayed in a

The gods of Egypt continued to be venerated by the Thessalonians in the Roman period. An important inscription from the Serapeion dating to the first century AD testifies to the crucial role that this Thessalonian sanctuary played in the spread of the Egyptian cult to the city of Opus, located on the southern coast of mainland Greece (*IT* 255). This inscription records how the god Serapis appeared twice in a dream to Xenainetos, apparently a city official from Opus, while he was visiting Thessalonica and staying in the local Serapeion or one of the other sacred buildings connected with the Egyptian cult. It was common for a person to spend the night in the temple while waiting for the deity to convey a message, vision, or healing. The god informed Xenainetos that under his pillow he would find a letter that he should take back to his home city of Opus: it contained instructions to his political rival there to initiate the worship of both Serapis and Isis. This inscription suggests that the Egyptian cult in Thessalonica did not play merely a minor role in the religious milieu of that city but rather functioned as “a significant center for the propagation of the religion” (Hendrix 1987: 11). Other important finds from the Serapeion include larger than life-size heads of Isis and Serapis, a statuette of Harpocrates, a statue of Isis or a priestess of the goddess, and a cylindrical votive altar (see images in Tzanavari 2003: 245–48 [figs. 42–46]).

One of the reasons for the rising popularity of the Egyptian gods was the conviction that these deities were less distant and removed than the traditional Greco-Roman gods, and thus more attentive to the individual needs of their devotees. For example, one votive relief of stone discovered in the Serapeion and dating to the second or third century AD depicts two human ears and has a brief inscription: “According to a vow, Phouphikia to Isis for hearing” (*IT* 100). The ears represent those of Isis: this woman has made a vow to honor the Egyptian goddess for hearing her unstated request, which may have to do with healing. Another votive relief also discovered in the Serapeion and dating to the same time period involves the imprint of two feet with a brief inscription: “Venetia Prima. [Given] according to a command” (*IT* 120). The feet represent those of an unnamed god from the Egyptian cult who is claimed to have appeared to a female devotee named Venetia Prima and commanded her to offer this votive relief to commemorate the divine manifestation.

Several brief inscriptions that include the name of the devotee(s) and end simply with the word “thanksgiving” ([εὐ]χαριστήριον, [*eu*]charistērion) are dedicated to various Egyptian gods: “To Serapis, Isis, Anubis, and the gods of the same temple” (*IT* 78); “To Isis and Harpocrates” (*IT* 81); “To Serapis, Isis, Harpocrates, and the gods of the same temple and same altar” (*IT* 85); “To Eros, Isis, Serapis, and Harpocrates” (*IT* 87); “To Isis” (*IT* 96, 101). Instead of an expression of “thanksgiving,” some inscriptions from the Serapeion consist

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thoroughly hellenized style. On the arm of the father hangs a money purse, which may indicate that he was a patron of this Egyptian cult. Surprisingly, it is not the devotee, Demetrios, who is identified as the “initiate” but the god Osiris. This may indicate a belief that the god Osiris himself is the “initiate” in the cult who oversees the ongoing devotions of his human followers after they have died.

of a “vow” or “prayer” (εὐχή, *euchē*) whose contents are not spelled out and are also directed to the Egyptian gods: “To Sarapis, Isis, Anubis, and the gods of the same temple” (*IT* 80); “To the great gods” (*IT* 51). These inscriptions imply that devotees viewed their relationship with the various gods as one that could be summarized as *quid pro quo*: “Do this for me, and I’ll do that for you.” Although the dedications of thanksgivings no doubt were motivated by genuine gratitude for past blessings, they also were given with the implied expectation of receiving future answers from the gods to their subsequent requests (Green 2002: 33–34).

Thessalonian involvement with the Egyptian gods also is clear from the presence of three different religious associations dedicated to the financial support and activities of the cult (Tzanavari 2003: 249–50). We learn about one of these associations from a stela that contains a relief of Anubis found not in the Serapeion but outside the ancient city walls. This relief, located at the top of the narrow stela, consists of a pediment under which is the image of the dog-headed Anubis, who is robed and encircled by a wreath. The eighteen-line inscription under the relief dates to the first half of the second century AD (*IT* 58). The relief is dedicated to “Aulus Papius Chilon, who provided the meeting place [οἶκος, *oikos*]”—likely a small building where members of the voluntary association met for religious and social functions. Thirteen other members of this association who dedicated the stela to him identify themselves with two terms: “the bearers of sacred objects” (ἱεραφόροι, *hieraphoroi*) and “dining companions” (συνκλίται, *synklitai*). The first term reveals that the association’s members perform a special role in the city cult of the Egyptian gods—a role that involves the bearing of sacred cult objects. The second term reveals that these individuals have formed themselves into a private club or association for the purposes of dining fellowship. Edson (1948: 188) summarizes the interpretation of this inscription as follows: “Outside the city walls of Thessalonica in the suburbs to the northwest Aulus Papius Chilon built an *oikos* for his fellow *hieraphoroi* where they could meet together at stated intervals presided over by their *archon*, perform rites to Anubis and dine together as friends united in their common interest and common duty as functionaries in the public cult of the Egyptian gods.” That several of the listed names of the association members typically belong to slaves and freedpersons, whereas some of the offerings were quite lavish and expensive, has indicated to some that the Egyptian gods appealed to Thessalonians of varying social and economic backgrounds (Hendrix 1987: 15; Tzanavari 2003: 250; Koester 2007: 54).

c. *Cabirus cult*. The Cabirus cult is widely recognized as the most important center of worship in Thessalonica. Edson (1948: 188), for example, states, “From the Flavian period at the latest, Cabirus was the chief, the tutelary deity of Thessalonica.” Robert Jewett (1986: 127) refers to “the ubiquity of evidence concerning the Cabiric cult in Thessalonica, indicating it was not only the most distinctive but also the most important factor in the religious environment.”

But while compelling evidence exists as to the importance of the Cabirus cult among the various deities worshiped in Thessalonica, there is frustratingly little data to provide clarity about the myth connected with this god and the ritual practices and beliefs associated with his cult. For answers to these questions, some scholars have been tempted to look to information about the Cabiri (plural) worshiped in other places, such as Thebes, Delos, Imbros, Lemnos, and especially Samothrace (Witt 1977), which was apparently the center of this cult and the place from where it was introduced to Thessalonica (Edson 1948: 188–89). The problem with this, however, is that in sharp distinction from the two/twin Cabiri worshiped on the island of Samothrace, where they were also known as “the great gods,” the Thessalonians venerated only a single Cabirus. Therefore information about the plural Cabiri worshiped in other places may be relevant in supplementing our understanding of the Cabirus cult in Thessalonica but must be used with great caution.

The date when the Cabirus cult was initiated in Thessalonica cannot be determined on the basis of the evidence currently available. Yet the Cabiri were known in Larisa, the capital of nearby Thessaly, by about 200 BC, and were also widespread in the northern Aegean: these facts suggest that it may well have been established in Thessalonica before the start of the common era (Hemberg 1950: 9). Early devotion to Cabirus in Thessalonica is further suggested by a series of coins the city issued in the late first century BC that contain the image of the Dioskouroi (or Dioskuri), twin gods often identified with the two Cabiri (Hendrix 1987: 24). Also highly suggestive are two inscriptions found in Samothrace: one lists pilgrims from Thessalonica who visited the Cabiri cult between 37 BC and AD 43; the other is a dedication to the Cabiri from a number of initiates from Thessalonica. These inscriptions cause Edson (1948: 190) to conclude that “by the reign of Augustus at the latest members of the city’s upper classes were showing interest in the cult of the Samothracian gods,” that is, the Cabiri.

The most compelling proof for the Thessalonian devotion to the singular Cabirus, however, lies in the numismatic evidence. Searchers have discovered some one hundred coins on which Cabirus is portrayed in the following conventional manner. He is clean-shaven and wearing the *chitōn*, or short tunic, and the *chlamys*, or billowing cloak—standard attire for youths and young men and thus a symbol of the god’s eternal youthfulness. Resting on his shoulder and held in his left hand is a hammer or mallet, which resembles that carried by Hephaistos, Greek god of metalworks and patron of craftsmen, and thus serves as a symbol of the god’s productivity. Held in his right hand is a *rhyton*, or drinking horn, which perhaps is influenced by another popular Thessalonian deity, Dionysus, and a likely symbol of the god’s conviviality. On the imperial coinage minted in Thessalonica, that is, coinage whose obverse contains an image of the current emperor or other members of the imperial family, Cabirus appears on the reverse side far more frequently than any other god (Touratsoglou 1988: 24–81). Hendrix (1987: 25) thus speaks of the “ubiquitous presence” of Cabirus in the coinage of Roman Thessalonica

and how this “indicates his importance as the city’s chief deity.” Witt (1977: 78) goes even further and states: “Thessalonike, on numismatic evidence, was addicted to the cult of what may perhaps be termed Kabeiric monotheism.”

Inscriptional evidence for the Cabirus cult, in sharp contrast to the coinage, is surprisingly almost nonexistent: among the several hundred inscriptions discovered in Thessalonica, only one explicitly mentions the name of this enigmatic deity. Yet though it numbers as only one inscription, and though it dates rather late, to the first part of the third century AD, it nevertheless is important in confirming the evidence of the coins concerning Cabirus as the key god of Thessalonica. A marble altar found in 1927 refers to Cabirus as “the most holy and ancestral god” (*IT* 199). The adjective “ancestral” (πάτριος, *patrios*) conveys not only the importance of the Cabirus cult but also its longevity and the enduring status of Cabirus as a key god of the city.

Monumental evidence for the Cabirus cult exists in a marble pilaster capital discovered in the octagonal building that was part of Emperor Galerius’s (AD 305–311) palace in Thessalonica. The relief in the capital portrays Cabirus in exactly the same way that the god is conventionally depicted on the coinage: a young, clean-shaven individual who wears a short tunic and holds a hammer in his left hand and a drinking horn in his right hand. Although the function of this octagonal building is not clear, there is good reason to believe that it served as a throne room for the emperor. The presence of a Cabirus relief in such a key location within the palace complex attests to the ongoing importance that this god still played in Thessalonica in the early fourth century AD. Further evidence of the enduring veneration of Cabirus may exist in the later Christian veneration of Saint Demetrius—a young man from a senatorial family in Thessalonica who was martyred about AD 306 during the persecutions under Diocletian or Galerius. There are compelling reasons to believe that the young god Cabirus, who was the patron deity of Thessalonica, influenced the iconography and hagiography of the young man Demetrius, who in later times became the patron saint of Thessalonica (so Edson 1948: 203; Hemberg 1950: 210; Witt 1977: 79; Koester 2007: 40).

In addition to the inscriptional and monumental evidence for the Cabirus cult at Thessalonica, there is also literary evidence, which must be used cautiously due to its late date and authorship by Christians concerned with repudiating pagan beliefs and practices. The fullest account of the myth connected with Cabirus is given by Clement of Alexandria in chapter 2 of his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, composed AD 180–190. Clement is actually describing the Corybantes, whom he says “are also called by the name Cabiri, and the ceremony itself they announce as the Cabiric mystery.” His account describes three brothers, one of whom—Cabirus, though he is not named as such—is killed by the other two. To hide their murderous act and ward off any evil consequences, the two brothers wrapped the body of Cabirus in purple cloth, crowned his head, and carried the corpse on a brass shield to the base of Mount Olympus, where it was consecrated and buried. Clement also reports that the two brothers got possession of a box that contained the

phallus of Dionysus, which they took to Tuscany, where they used the box and its contents for the purposes of worship. The same legend is recounted by Firmicus Maternus in his mid-fourth-century work, *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, but with an important additional comment that links this story with the Cabirus worshiped in Thessalonica: “This [the murdered brother] is the same person whom the Macedonians worship in their fatuous superstition. This is the Cabirus, the bloody one to whom the Thessalonians once offered prayers with bloody hands.” Lactantius, another Christian apologist in the early fourth century, writes that Cabirus enjoyed the same position of preeminence among the Macedonians as Isis had among the Egyptians and Athena among the Athenians (*Inst.* 1.15.8).

These three pieces of literary evidence (Clement, Firmicus Maternus, Lactantius) certainly confirm the importance of the Cabirus cult in Thessalonica, but do they shed any light on the myth and cultic worship of this deity? On the one hand, it is intriguing to consider a possible connection between Cabirus, to “whom the Thessalonians once offered prayers with bloody hands,” and the murder and dismemberment of Dionysus, especially in light of the herm of Dionysus with the removable phallus found in the crypt of the Serapeion. On the other hand, Firmicus’s charge of blood sacrifice was a common one that Christian apologists raised against their pagan opponents and thus may not reflect a unique cultic practice of Cabirus in Thessalonica. Unfortunately, how the Thessalonian citizens venerated their city’s patron deity cannot yet be known. Thus Hendrix (1987: 25–26) concludes his survey of this cult: “The Kabiros temple at Thessalonica has not been found, and until new material or literary evidence is discovered, the nature of the Thessalonian cult ritual and its ‘legend’ cannot be determined more precisely.”

d. *Imperial cult.* The imperial cult—the worship of Roma as a personification of the Roman state and of individual emperors as gods—played an important role in the religiously pluralistic environment of Thessalonica. This is because the imperial cult here, as elsewhere in the ancient world, was not merely an expression of religious devotion but also one of political allegiance and economic dependence. As Mellor (1975: 16) summarizes: “For the Greeks such cults [worship accorded Roma and similar divinities] were political and diplomatic acts, sometimes sincere, sometimes not. . . . It [worship of Roma] was a cult based on political, rather than religious experience.”

In our earlier discussion of Thessalonica’s favored political status, we noticed how the city’s veneration of Rome and its emperors was a natural outgrowth of the city’s political and financial need to honor “Roman benefactors” (Ῥωμαῖοι εὐεργέται, *Rōmaioi euergetai*). These are individuals who financed local cultural institutions (e.g., the gymnasium and its activities), helped protect the city from hostile neighbors and anti-Roman invaders, promoted the interests of Thessalonica in Rome, or provided aid in other ways. The city’s well-being and success “depended on its ability to attract and sustain influential Romans’ commitments and favors” and an “institution developed by the Thessalonians to attract and regularize such commitment as honors for

their ‘Roman benefactors’” (Hendrix 1984: 253). So great was Thessalonica’s desire to honor those Roman individuals whose good works benefited the city that a new cult and priesthood was established in the first century BC to honor not just the human benefactors but also the goddess Roma and the unnamed “gods.”

A temple in honor of Caesar was built near the end of the first century BC, and a priesthood to service this temple was established: an important inscription refers to “the temple of Caesar,” the “priest and *agōnothetēs* [games superintendent] of Emperor Caesar Augustus son [of god],” and the “priest of the gods . . . and priest of Roma and the Roman benefactors” (IT 31). This inscription, along with others (IT 32, 132, 133), also suggests that officials connected with the imperial cult were preeminent over other priesthoods: “In every extant instance in which the ‘priest and agonothete of the Emperor’ is mentioned, he is listed first in what appears to be a strict observance of protocol. The Emperor’s priest and agonothete assumes priority, the priest of ‘the gods’ is cited next, followed by the priest of Roma and Roman benefactors” (Hendrix 1984: 312). Coinage from the city reveals that Julius Caesar and his adoptive son, Octavian (Augustus), received divine honors. In one series minted about 27 BC, the laureate head Julius Caesar appears with the inscription “God.” The reverse sides of coins from this series have the image of Octavian (Augustus), and though they do not have the similar inscription “God” or “son of god,” his divinity is implied by his pairing with the divine Julius and by the oft-found title *Sebastos*, or “Augustus.” It is also significant that in one standard series of coins the head of Zeus was replaced with that of Augustus (Hendrix 1984: 179, 188; Donfried 1997: 218; Green 2002: 40; S. Kim 2008: 5). A statue of Augustus, found in 1939 just north of the Serapeion, depicts the emperor in a divine posture: he is slightly larger than life-sized, semi-naked, and a voluminous robe wraps around his waist and over his left arm; his right arm is raised with closed fist and finger pointed upward as he strides forward.<sup>17</sup> It is “one of the best examples of the imperial propaganda statues—and is, indeed, one of the first of the series—that the Romans erected in various nerve-centres of their boundless empire” (Vokotopoulou 1996: 85). Another statue—this one headless but likely that of Claudius—was discovered close to that of Augustus; it also portrays this later emperor in a divine pose (Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki, no. 2467).

Hendrix’s thesis that the Thessalonians’ practice of honoring the Roman emperors must be understood as an “innovative expansion of traditional honors to Romans and other foreign benefactors” (1984: 337) causes him to reject such labels as “imperial cult” and “emperor worship.” As further support he appeals to the fact that neither Augustus nor any of his successors (with the exception of Nero) was designated as a god by the Thessalonians: “Be they magistrates, important Romans or emperors, it was the norm at Thessalonica

17. Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki, no. 1065, [http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/4/eh430.jsp?obj\\_id=8164](http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/4/eh430.jsp?obj_id=8164).

to honor Romans as humans” (Hendrix 1986: 307). Several factors, however, suggest that the attention paid to the Roman emperors in Thessalonica went beyond benefaction to worship. The building of a temple dedicated to Caesar, the establishment of a priesthood to the goddess Roma, the divine titles found in the coinage, and the widespread bestowal of divine honors to the Roman emperors in other nearby places “all point to the presence of genuine religious sentiments” (Green 2002: 42). Furthermore, the distinction between honoring the emperors and worshiping them is not so great. As Ferguson (2009: 206) explains in his discussion of the imperial cult: “Sacrifices offered for or in honor of a person could easily become sacrifices to him.”

e. *Judaism*. The clearest evidence that Judaism existed as one of the religious options in Roman Thessalonica lies in the Acts account of Paul’s mission-founding activity in that city, which identifies not only the existence of a synagogue community but also one whose membership included both Jews and God-fearers, some of whom were women from leading families (Acts 17:1–9). Many scholars, of course, quickly dismiss this account on the grounds that Acts qualifies only as a “secondary source” and is historically unreliable. This objection, however, fails on two grounds. First, there exists a “primary source” that confirms the presence of Jews in Thessalonica who were involved in Paul’s hasty departure from the city: the apostle himself in 1 Thess. 2:14–15 refers to “the Jews . . . who drove us out.” Although there were other times and places where Paul faced opposition from Jews (Gal. 5:11; 2 Cor. 11:24–26; see also Acts 13:44–51; 14:2, 19; 17:5–9, 13–14; 18:12–18), this brief clause makes best sense in its context if Paul is referring to a situation that his readers knew all too well: the role that certain Jews in Thessalonica had in driving the missionaries out of town.<sup>18</sup> Second, Riesner (1998: 366–67) has shown that of the twenty-five individual pieces of information in the Lukan account of Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica, nineteen are directly or indirectly confirmed by 1 Thessalonians, thereby demonstrating the historical reliability of that account.

Evidence outside the biblical record for the presence of a Jewish community in Thessalonica is admittedly sparse and at times inferential but by no means nonexistent (contra Koester 2007: 56, who asserts: “The archaeological record is silent about ‘Judaism’ in Thessalonike”). It is possible that Jews would have come to Thessalonica very early to pursue business opportunities in this rapidly growing harbor town. Vacalopoulos (1972: 9) writes in this regard: “Not only did foreign religions penetrate into Thessaloniki at a very early date but also various peoples resident in the East must have settled there on a temporary or even a permanent basis, attracted by the commerce of Thessaloniki which became more vigorous year by year—and the first of all surely were the Jews.” This possibility gains support from Philo’s recording of a letter from Herod Agrippa (AD 37–44) to the emperor Caligula, which observes that Jewish

18. Malherbe (2000: 175) observes: “It is only extreme skepticism about what Acts has to offer and the hypothesis that Paul did not write 2:13–16 that raise serious doubts that Paul here refers to his expulsion by Jews, probably engineered in the way Acts describes.”

communities can be found among most of the provinces of Rome, including that of Macedonia (*Embassy* 281). Some scholars dismiss this testimony of Philo, claiming that it comes from “a completely apologetic document,” which “suggests that his comments should be seen as over-generalization and treated cautiously” (De Vos 1999: 131–32; Ascough 2003: 192–93). But Jews lived throughout the Roman Empire, and it is entirely reasonable to expect them also to be living in Macedonia, just as Philo records, and in the largest city of that province, Thessalonica (so also Jewett 1986: 119–20). For example, a late second- or early third-century AD inscription from Stobi (*CIJ* 694), located some seventy-five miles northwest of Thessalonica, and a synagogue excavated there testify to the presence of a significant number of Jews (Hengel 1966; Schürer 1973–87: 3/1.67–68; Levine 2000: 270–73). This not only supports Philo’s claim about the presence of Jews in Macedonia but, given Stobi’s location relatively close to Thessalonica as an inland city of considerably less importance than that coastal capital, suggests that a Jewish community also existed in Thessalonica (J. Hill 1990: 53, 55–56).

The most important evidence for the presence of a significant number of Jews in Thessalonica lies in an inscription found on a sarcophagus that dates to the late second or early third century AD (*SEG* 44:556). The tomb belonged to a couple whose multiple names include a Jewish one for each: Marcus Aurelius Jacob, who was called Eutychios (“Lucky”), and his wife, Anna, who has the pet name Asyncriton (“Incomparable”). The inscription warns that any person who violates this tomb by placing within it another body will be punished with a fine of 75,000 denarii payable “to the synagogues” (ταῖς συναγωγαῖς, *tais synagogais*). The use of the plural “synagogues” is significant, for it “implies that in the third century there were several Jewish communities in Thessalonica” (Levinskaya 1996: 156).

Five other tomb inscriptions from Thessalonica are of possible relevance. One dating from the second century AD reads: “In memory of Abraham and his wife Theodote” (*CIJ* 693 = *IG* 10/2:633). This tomb contains no distinctively Jewish symbols other than the two names and hence may be a Jewish Christian epitaph. Another tomb has the symbol of the menorah and the phrase “The Lord is with us” (Κύριος μεθ’ ἡμῶν, *Kyrios meth’ hēmōn*; *CIJ* 693b)—a phrase that occurs elsewhere in Christian inscriptions. A third tomb has the inscription on its marble door: “Benjamin, the one also called Domitios” (Βενιαμῆς ὁ καὶ Δομεῖτιος, *Beniamēs ho kai Domeitios*; *CIJ* 693c). A fourth tomb, unfortunately now lost and dating to AD 155, was erected in honor of Phoebe (Φοίβη, *Phoibē*) by her mother, Paraskeue (Παρασκευή, *Paraskeuē*; *IG* 10/2:449). A fifth tomb, likewise lost and of uncertain date, may also be of Jewish origin (*IG* 10/2:632.1). Even if some or all of these sarcophagi belonged to Jewish Christians, they do testify to the presence of ethnic Jews in Thessalonica by the second and third centuries AD—ethnic Jews whose families in the city may possibly be traced back to earlier times.

Additional epigraphic evidence for the existence of a Jewish community in Thessalonica stems from a bilingual—Greek and Hebrew—inscription (*CIJ*

693a). It is often referred to as the “Samaritan inscription” because it contains the text of Numbers 6:22–27 taken from the Samaritan Pentateuch rather than the LXX. The text is variously dated as early as the fourth and as late as the sixth century AD and may refer to an actual synagogue building.

It is true that none of the epigraphic and archaeological evidence cited above dates back to the first century, other than the testimony of Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians and Acts. But as Riesner (1998: 347) asserts: “By no means, however, does the lack hitherto of any evidence from outside the New Testament constitute a reason for doubting the existence of a synagogue during the period of Paul’s arrival in Thessalonica.” An argument from silence is never particularly persuasive, especially because the city of Thessalonica has never been subjected to any kind of systematic excavation.<sup>19</sup> The Jews who lived in Thessalonica and the larger region of Macedonia, for whom we do have evidence dating to the second and third centuries, did not suddenly appear out of nowhere but, in light of the testimony of both Paul and Acts, more plausibly are descendants of those Jews who lived in these places from the first century or even earlier.

f. *Summary.* The above survey has provided only a glimpse into the religiously pluralistic environment of Thessalonica. Hopefully, there will be future archaeological discoveries that provide a clearer picture of this city’s religious life at the time of Paul. Nevertheless, enough can be known to make it obvious that the conversion of the Thessalonian Christians is described in Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians in deceptively simple terms: “how you turned to God from idols” (1:9). For in a place where over twenty-five gods, heroes, or personifications of virtues were being worshiped, there was nothing simple about turning to God from idols. In fact, in a society where cultic activities were intimately connected with political, economic, and social interests, it is to be expected that there would be significant opposition to both Paul and his Thessalonian converts. The Christians’ total renunciation of their former pagan religious practices evoked feelings of resentment and anger in their non-Christian family members and friends. The exclusivity of these

19. The danger of arguing from silence is well illustrated by Paul Perdrizet, a classical scholar from France, who in 1894 was examining the importance of the Egyptian gods in Macedonia during the Roman period. He observed that numismatic evidence in Macedonia demonstrating the popularity of Isis and Serapis was virtually nonexistent. Though a coin from nearby Stobi in northern Macedonia contained the image of Serapis, coins from Thessalonica did not honor these two key Egyptian gods, nor was there any evidence indicating that their cult was important enough for the state to honor them with a municipal priest. Such evidence led Perdrizet (1894: 419) to conclude: “It does not appear that the cult of the Alexandrian divinities was ever widespread in Macedonia” (“Il ne semble pas que le culte des divinités alexandrines ait jamais été fort répandu en Macédoine”; my translation). The great error of this conclusion, which seemed perfectly logical in that day, became clear shortly after the 1917 fire in Thessalonica, when a Serapis temple was discovered along with what ultimately numbered sixty-nine inscriptions to various Egyptian deities. As a result of this now-rich collection of inscriptional evidence, a conclusion completely opposite that forwarded by Perdrizet is reached today: the Egyptian gods were extremely popular in Thessalonica and elsewhere in Macedonia.

Christians—their seemingly arrogant refusal to participate in the worship of any god but their own—deeply wounded public sensibilities and even led to charges that they were “atheists” (Barclay 1993: 515). Citizens of Thessalonica worried whether the Greek gods, whose home on Mount Olympus they could see a mere fifty miles away to the southwest, might punish the whole city for the sacrilegious actions of a few by sending disease, famine, or other natural disasters. Turning to God from idols also meant a rejection of the imperial cult, thereby jeopardizing Thessalonica’s favored political and economic status as a free city. The conversion of the Thessalonian Christians involved a truly radical break with the religious setting of Thessalonica—a break that naturally incurred the resentment and anger of their “fellow citizens” (1 Thess. 2:14). Such resentment and anger led not only to Paul preaching the gospel to the Thessalonians “in spite of strong opposition” (2:2), but also to the Thessalonian believers accepting that gospel “in spite of severe suffering” (1:6). Little wonder that the apostle worried about his “baby” converts in Thessalonica whom he had to leave far sooner than he wanted and who were left alone to face significant opposition to their fledgling faith.

## The Church of Thessalonica

### *Sources*

Our reconstruction of the historical events surrounding the founding and ongoing nurturing of the Thessalonian church by Paul makes use of two main sources: Paul’s letters, particularly 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and the book of Acts, particularly the account of 17:1–9. Two objections are sometimes made against using the latter source for the establishment of the Thessalonian church as recorded in Acts. The first is a methodological objection by those who not only make a sharp distinction between a primary source (what Paul wrote himself: his letters) and a secondary source (what others wrote about Paul: Acts) but also assume that Acts is so theologically motivated that its recorded historical events cannot be trusted (the so-called Knox school: John Knox 1950; Donald Riddle 1940; John Hurd 1967; 1968; Robert Jewett 1979; Gerd Lüdemann 1984). While the distinction itself between primary and secondary sources is not problematic, the presupposition about the relative historical reliability of each type is. The absolute priority of statements by Paul himself over those of the writer of Acts is negated by the possibility that autobiographical accounts might have gaps or be biased, whereas a third-person account might actually be more objective (see Hemer 1989: 244; Riesner 1998: 29–30). I am not claiming that the apostle’s own voice is not to be trusted; rather, I am highlighting the illogical nature or fallacy of assuming that Acts as a secondary source is necessarily unreliable.

A second objection stems from the seemingly stereotyped nature of the account in Acts 17:1–9, which has suggested to some that it does not reflect the actual historical situation. This suspicion is increased by a number of claimed conflicts between the Acts account and the Thessalonian Letters,

such as these: Acts implies that Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica lasted three Sabbaths, whereas his letters suggest a longer stay; Acts presents the church as consisting predominantly of Jewish Christians, whereas 1 Thess. 1:9 indicates a Gentile Christian audience. Thus Richard (1995: 5) states: “Careful analysis of the Lukan passage and of 1 Thessalonians shows on the one hand that the former is thoroughly Lukan in theme, pattern, and concern, and on the other that these features conflict with Paul’s composition.” Koester (1982: 108) boldly claims that “all the individual events of Paul’s activity in this city [Thessalonica] are legendary.”

It ought to be acknowledged, in response, that Luke selected, omitted, and arranged the events in his description of Paul’s mission-founding visit to Thessalonica to better fit the larger interests and themes at work in his book as a whole.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the account of Acts 17:1–9 agrees in a number of significant and even impressive ways with information derived from the Thessalonian Letters and other ancient sources about Thessalonica. To cite but one example to illustrate this important fact, Luke identifies the city leaders of Thessalonica twice with the distinctive term “politarchs” (Acts 17:6, 8)—a rare city office, whose existence, though questioned in the past, has now been verified by some seventy inscriptions discovered thus far (see the more extensive discussion of “politarch” above under “The City of Thessalonica”). Since Luke proves himself reliable in technical details like this, he is likely to be trustworthy in other details as well. Riesner (1998: 366–67) lists eighteen additional pieces of information derived from the brief account of Acts 17:1–9 that can be verified either directly or indirectly by 1 Thessalonians. As a result, the observation made some time ago by Bruce (1979: 339) remains just as compelling today: “The account of Paul’s movements which can be gathered from 1 Thessalonians agrees so well with the fuller record of Acts xvi.6–xviii.5 that that record, though it is substantially later than 1 Thessalonians, may confidently be accepted as providing a historical framework within which the references in 1 Thessalonians can be read with greater understanding.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Philippi to Thessalonica*

Paul, still in the early phase of his second missionary journey, first arrived in Thessalonica after his ministry in Philippi, a place where both 1 Thessalonians and Acts agree he had suffered and been shamefully treated (1 Thess.

20. As Keener (2014: 2532–33) notes: “Luke’s brevity in reporting about the church in Thessalonica is more likely due to his interest and his space and subject constraints than to a lack of available information; the testimony about the Thessalonian church was apparently widespread, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia (even if 1 Thess 1:7–9 is hyperbolic). Certainly, if Luke or his ‘we’ source was in Philippi at this time, he would have had access to some further information, and if his ideal target audience is partly in Achaia and Macedonia, they would have had some knowledge about this church. Luke apparently presupposed such knowledge, mentioning one ‘Jason’ (Acts 17:5) without explanation, as if this person was already familiar to the ideal audience that he takes for granted.”

21. On the broad question of the historicity of Acts as a whole, see Keener’s magisterial Acts commentary (2012: 166–220).

2:2; Acts 16:16–40). The apostle’s traveling companions included Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy, which explains why both are included as cosenders of Paul’s later letters to the Thessalonian church (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). Luke explicitly refers to Silas’s presence with Paul during the establishment of the new church in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4, 10). Timothy, by contrast, is not mentioned in the Acts account, likely because he was not targeted by the mob action against the Christian movement. Nevertheless, Timothy’s presence during the mission-founding visit to Thessalonica is clearly implied in the Acts account from the surrounding context (16:1–3; 17:14–15). The band of three missionaries apparently left Luke behind in Philippi, since the first of the “we” sections in Acts stops here (16:10–18) and the second one begins again in the same city (20:5).

The most natural route from Philippi to Thessalonica in terms of both shortest distance and ease of travel would be to follow the Via Egnatia (Egnatian Way)—the major east-west highway constructed by the Romans in the second century BC. Following this important imperial road from Philippi to Thessalonica would take the traveler through two other key cities, exactly as the account of Acts indicates: “They passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia” (17:1a). The total distance of such a trip is 92 miles, made up of three stages of 30 miles (Amphipolis), 27 miles (Apollonia), and 35 miles (Thessalonica). Some have concluded that Paul and his companions thus took three days to complete their journey and that they must have had the use of mules or horses, since these distances are too far for a typical day of walking (Hemer 1989: 115; followed by Barrett 1998: 808; D. Peterson 2009: 477; Keener 2014: 2535). Although it is impossible to know for sure, the lists of trials that Paul has endured during his years of ministry such as being hungry, thirsty, in rags, and homeless (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27) suggest that he did not enjoy the luxury of traveling by animal instead of foot. If so, it would have taken him and his companions some five or six days to reach Thessalonica.

### *Converts from Judaism*

Paul begins his ministry in Thessalonica by going first to the local synagogue. The observation in Acts that Thessalonica was a place “where there was a synagogue” (17:1b) implies that this was not the case in the preceding two cities just mentioned, Amphipolis and Apollonia, and that the apostle did not evangelize these communities because they lacked the presence of Jews. The existence of a synagogue in Thessalonica has been questioned by some scholars who see this simply as a Lukan invention. Yet, as noted above, the Jews who lived in Thessalonica and the larger region of Macedonia for whom we do have evidence dating to the second and third centuries (see the fuller discussion of this evidence above under “A Religiously Pluralistic Environment”) did not suddenly appear out of nowhere but more plausibly are descendants of Jews who lived in these places from the first century or even earlier. Furthermore, Paul’s reference to Thessalonian Jews “who drove us out”

(1 Thess. 2:14–15) presupposes not only the existence of a Jewish community but also Paul’s missionary activity in their midst.

Paul went to the synagogue “as was his custom” (Acts 17:2). During his first missionary journey, the apostle often began his ministry in a given town in the synagogue (13:5, 14; 14:1) and he continues that pattern in Thessalonica (see also 17:10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). This might appear to be at odds with Paul’s own statements about his calling to evangelize the Gentiles (Gal. 1:16; 2:7–8; Rom. 1:5, 13–16; 15:9–12, 15–21). Such a calling, however, does not preclude a ministry also to Jews. Thus the apostle speaks clearly about becoming a Jew and living as one under the law in order to win over Jews (1 Cor. 9:20). Also, Paul’s list of trials as a missionary includes receiving the Jewish punishment of forty lashes minus one (cf. Deut. 25:3) and having suffered in this way no fewer than five times (2 Cor. 11:24)—punishments that presuppose an active ministry among his fellow Jews.

Paul’s ministry in the synagogue of Thessalonica took place “on three Sabbaths,” a phrase that could be understood to describe the length of his entire stay in the city (Lake 1911: 64–66; Lüdemann 1984: 177). Yet the Acts account does not require this conclusion but instead allows for a post-synagogue ministry. A longer stay is even demanded by several considerations. First, the Thessalonian church was composed primarily of Gentiles who had “turned to God from idols” (1 Thess. 1:9) and some time would have been needed for these members to be evangelized. Second, Paul stayed in Thessalonica long enough for the Philippians to send him financial aid on more than one occasion (Phil. 4:15–16).<sup>22</sup> Third, the apostle lived among the Thessalonian believers for a period of time that allowed him to become established in his trade (1 Thess. 2:9) and thereby provide them with a model of self-sufficient work to imitate (2 Thess. 3:7–9). Fourth, Paul uses the imperfect tense several times to refer to his preaching ministry among the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Thess. 2:5; 3:10) in order to stress the repetitive nature of his speaking on specific subjects, which in turn is suggestive of a longer stay in their midst. Fifth, a three-week ministry does not likely provide sufficient time for Paul to appoint and train leaders in the church (1 Thess. 5:12–13), unless this happened under Timothy’s subsequent ministry in their midst (1 Thess. 3:1–5). But while Paul clearly ministered in Thessalonica for more than three weeks, his stay was likely not much longer than that given that he was “driven out” of town earlier than he wished (1 Thess. 2:15), with the result that he was “orphaned” from his Thessalonian converts (2:17) and they were “lacking” instruction in certain areas of their newfound faith (3:10).

Paul is quickly given the opportunity to address the synagogue community. Not only was this the right of all male Jews over eighteen years old, but local Jews would also have been eager to hear from a fellow countryman who might

22. The phrase in Phil. 4:16 καὶ ἄπαξ καὶ δις (*kai hapax kai dis*) indicates at least two times when the Philippian church sent financial aid to Paul while he was in Thessalonica but could also refer to still additional occasions (“several times”: BDAG 252).

have news from Jerusalem and elsewhere. Furthermore, Paul had excellent credentials, having graduated from the “Harvard” school of Judaism: he had studied at the feet of the renowned Jewish teacher Gamaliel, “a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people” (Acts 5:34; 22:3). But while access to the *bēma*, or speaker’s platform, was easy for Paul, winning over his hearers was significantly more difficult in light of his message: “explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ’” (17:3). The idea of a suffering and dying (implied from the following words) Messiah was not a common expectation among first-century Jews, and there was no anticipation of a resurrection of an individual *within* history—Jews (other than the Sadducees) looked forward only to a universal resurrection at the *end* of history. Yet this was not Paul’s first time to preach the difficult message of a messiah who suffered, was killed, and then raised to life again, and it would not be his last. The apostle had previously delivered just such a sermon to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:16–41). Many years later, Paul preached the same message to the Jewish king Agrippa II and his sister, Bernice, along with the Roman governor Festus, claiming: “I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22–23 NIV). In his message to the Jews in Thessalonica, Paul no doubt discussed OT texts such as Pss. 2:7; 16:10–11; 110:1; and Isa. 53 (see the texts cited by Paul in Antioch of Pisidia [Acts 13:16–41] as well as by Peter in Jerusalem [Acts 2:14–40]).

Despite the difficult content of his message, Paul’s three-Sabbath preaching in the synagogue wins over a significant number of converts. The apostle’s success, however, is due not so much to his rhetorical skill as to the working of the Holy Spirit. As Paul himself stresses in his opening thanksgiving, his gospel preaching in Thessalonica involved not just words but also the power of the Holy Spirit, who made that proclaimed word effective in the lives of the Thessalonian believers (see comment on 1 Thess. 1:5a). The account in Acts similarly emphasizes God’s role in causing the Thessalonian converts to respond positively to Paul’s preaching, placing in the passive voice the verbs “they were persuaded and were joined to” (Acts 17:4a, ἐπεισθησαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν, *epeisthēsan kai proseklērōthēsan*), a use of the “divine passive” (BDF §130.1; Porter 1992: 65; Wallace 1996: 437–38).

Acts breaks down these converts from Judaism into three groups, listing them from the more general to the specific. First, it states that “some of them were persuaded and were joined to Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4a). Among this group was Jason (which is the Greek form of the Jewish “Joshua”: see Josephus, *Ant.* 12.239), who was wealthy, as evident from his ability both to house the three missionaries (Keener [2014: 2549] notes the explicit reference to Jason’s “house” in Acts 17:5) as well as to post bond for them when they later got into trouble. The Thessalonian church likely also gathered for worship at Jason’s

house, since this agrees with Paul’s pattern elsewhere of finding a convert who is wealthy enough to own a home (most people in that day did not, since this was a privilege enjoyed by only the wealthy) and thereby provide the group of new Christians with a place to meet communally (cf. Lydia in Philippi [Acts 16:15, 40]; Gaius in Corinth [Rom. 16:23]; Philemon in Colossae [Philem. 2]; Nympha in Hierapolis [Col. 4:15]). This Jason was also with Paul (unless this is a different Jason) when he wrote to the Romans from either Corinth or its eastern port Cenchreae (Rom. 16:21; for a fuller discussion of Jason, see Morgan–Gillman 1990). Another Jewish convert from Thessalonica, though he might have become a believer at a later time, was Aristarchus,<sup>23</sup> who traveled with Paul on his third missionary journey to Ephesus (Acts 19:29) and Corinth (20:4), his prison journey to Rome (27:2), and who stayed with Paul during his Roman imprisonment (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24).

The second and larger group among the converts from Judaism involved “a great many of the devout Greeks” (Acts 17:4b). These “devout” ones (σεβόμενοι, *sebomenoi*), often translated as “God-fearers,” refer to “former polytheists who accepted the ethical monotheism of Israel and attended the synagogue, but who did not oblige themselves to keep the whole Mosaic law; in particular, the males did not submit to circumcision” (BDAG 918). These members of the Thessalonian church, therefore, underwent a kind of double conversion: they first were converted from paganism to Judaism, attracted by its antiquity, morality, and other features; they now were being converted from Judaism to Christianity on the basis of Paul’s explanation of the OT.

The third and most significant—not in size but in importance—group of converts from Judaism included “not a few of the leading [lit., “first”] women” (Acts 17:4c). It is possible to render this phrase as “not a few women/wives of leading [men]”—a meaning made certain by the Western text.<sup>24</sup> The difference is moot, however, for either sense shows Luke’s audience that Christianity was appealing to all classes of society, including those who enjoyed power and prestige (Acts 13:7, 12, 50; 17:34; 19:47; 28:7).

### *Converts from Paganism*

The account in Acts indicates that the Thessalonian church, though made up of some Jews, consisted of more members who were Greek. In a number of ways, Paul’s two Letters to the Thessalonians also indicate that the apostle won

23. Aristarchus, along with Mark the cousin of Barnabas and Jesus who is called Justus, is explicitly identified by Paul as belonging to the “men of the circumcision” (Col. 4:10–11). Schnabel (2012: 705) observes: “There is the intriguing possibility that this Aristarchus might be identical with the ‘Aristarchos son of Aristarchos’ mentioned as a politarch in several inscriptions.”

24. In Acts 17:4, Codex Bezae (D) changes γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων and καὶ γυναῖκες τῶν πρώτων. The shift from the genitive γυναικῶν to the nominative γυναῖκες can now be read only as “wives of the leading men.” Codex Bezae, along with other key MSS (P<sup>74</sup> A 33 pc lat bo), also adds the conjunction καὶ earlier in the sentence between “devout” and “Greeks,” which creates four (rather than three) groups of converts: Jews, Greeks who are “devout” or “God-fearers,” *pagan Greeks*, and wives of leading men.

converts from paganism and that these members, in fact, formed the majority of the Thessalonian church. The strongest evidence of this stems from Paul's statement that his readers "had turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9)—something that could never be said about Jews. In both letters further indications of the predominantly Gentile background of the congregation in Thessalonica include the absence of any explicit OT quotations as well as his exhortations against the common Gentile—since the Jewish Torah prohibited such conduct—problem of sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3–8). It appears, therefore, that after three weeks of preaching in the synagogue, Paul and his coworkers engaged in a post-synagogue ministry, a missionary pattern that was later followed also in Corinth (Acts 18:7), Ephesus (19:9), and likely elsewhere as well.

It is commonly held that Paul won converts from paganism by preaching in the marketplaces and on street corners, in company with other wandering philosophers, teachers, and miracle workers, who were all competing for the same audience. But while there is evidence that the apostle did evangelize at times in such public settings (Acts 17:17), such evidence is remarkably rare: Acts, despite its interest in portraying the public acceptance of Christianity, hardly ever records the apostle as ministering in public venues. A more likely setting for Paul's evangelistic ministry, both in Thessalonica and elsewhere, was in the semiprivate setting of a workshop (see Hock 1979; 1980: 26–49, 52–59; Malherbe 1987: 7–20). The apostle thus closely links his work and his preaching in 1 Thess. 2:9: "Working night and day, . . . we preached to you the gospel of God." Although the precise relationship between the actions of working and preaching is open to debate (see comments on 2:9 for a fuller discussion of this issue), a good case can be made that they happened contemporaneously: "*while* working night and day, . . . we preached to you the gospel of God." In other words, Paul presented the gospel to fellow workers and customers while laboring in the workshop. This scenario is supported by some ancient sources that depict the workshop as one of the conventional settings for intellectual discourse and instruction (Hock 1979: 444–45). A century after Paul, Celsus, an enemy of Christianity, complains how in Christian families the children are not being taught at home as they should be tutored, but are going "to the wool-dresser's shop, or to the cobblers or the washer-woman's shop" to be instructed in the faith there (Origen, *Cels.* 3.55). A modern analogy would be the barbershop in America in the 1950s and 1960s: people went to the barber not just to get a haircut but also to catch up on the latest news and engage in discussion and debate with others gathered there.

We can plausibly reconstruct, therefore, Paul's post-synagogue ministry in Thessalonica. The apostle was working in a local leather workshop, making or repairing tents, as well as producing a range of leather and woven goods (W. Michaelis, *TDNT* 7:393–94; P. W. Barnett, *DPL* 926). This shop might well be owned—following the analogy of the Jewish couple in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1–3)—by his host, Jason, a wealthy Jew just converted to the Christian faith during Paul's three weeks of preaching in the synagogue.

The apostle’s work not only allowed Paul to support himself, thereby freeing the church from the burden of providing for his daily needs (1 Thess. 2:9); it also provided a model of self-sufficient work for believers to follow (2 Thess. 3:7–9), especially a small and rebellious group within the congregation who were guilty of idleness. In addition, Paul’s work allowed him the opportunity to evangelize. During the long hours at his workbench, “working night and day,” he “preached the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:9) to fellow workers, customers, and others who heard about the Jewish leatherworker who had recently arrived in town with new and provocative ideas. Some who participated in these workshop discussions accepted Paul’s words “not as the words of men but as what it truly is, the word of God” (2:13) and so “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1:9). These new believers would need further instruction about their newfound faith and so either returned to the workshop or met Paul and his fellow missionaries elsewhere for one-on-one discipleship (2:11: “we exhorted *each one of you*”—the Greek is emphatic). These converts from paganism soon constituted the majority of believers in the Thessalonian church.

Numbered among these earliest Gentile members of the congregation may have been Secundus (a name of Latin origin meaning “Second”). The date of his conversion, however, is unknown since we meet him only some seven years after the founding of the church, when he, along with the Jewish Christian Aristarchus, represented the Thessalonian congregation in the delivery of the collection to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). The name Secundus ranks among the most frequently attested ones in inscriptions from Thessalonica; over 80 percent of these occurrences have the *cognomen* (surname or family name) of Roman citizens (see Riesner 1998: 351n79 for list of inscriptions), suggesting that the Secundus mentioned in Acts was also a Roman citizen. His role in representing the Thessalonian church in the collection clearly indicates his importance within the congregation and may also suggest that he was among those earliest Gentiles who became believers during Paul’s mission-founding visit (Riesner 1998: 351). Another less probable member among the first Gentile converts at Thessalonica was Demas (likely a shortened form of Demetrios: BDAG 222; BDF §125.1), who was one of Paul’s “fellow workers” (Philem. 24; Col. 4:14) but later deserted the apostle and went to Thessalonica (2 Tim. 4:10), suggesting that this city may have been his hometown.

### *Opposition to Paul’s Ministry*

Paul’s success in winning some converts from Judaism and even more from paganism not surprisingly caused a negative reaction from both the Jewish and the larger pagan communities. The apostle testifies to the opposition that he, as well as his converts, faced during the founding of the Thessalonian church: Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, needed “courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition” (1 Thess. 2:2), and the Christians in that city also “received the word in much affliction” (1:6), with the result that “you indeed suffered . . . from your own fellow citizens” (2:14).

Although there is uncertainty over the precise meaning of “fellow citizens” (συμφυλέται, *symphyletai*), there are good grounds for understanding this term not in an ethnic sense (i.e., it has in view only the Gentile citizens of the city) but a geographical sense of referring to all the inhabitants of Thessalonica: the vast majority of them would have been Gentiles, but some would have been Jews (see further the comments on these verses below). This sense agrees with Acts 17:5–9, which claims that local Jews and Greeks were both involved in the events that ultimately led to Paul’s forced departure from Thessalonica.

Opposition to the fledgling Jesus movement during the first three-plus weeks of Paul’s ministry was spontaneous and unorganized. This changed when the success of the apostle in securing converts from the synagogue caused the remaining Jews to pursue a planned course of action: “But the Jews were jealous, and taking some bad characters from the marketplace, they formed a mob and started a riot in the city” (Acts 17:5a). The loss of even a few synagogue members naturally would have aroused the jealousy and anger of Jewish leaders; how much more intense these hostile feelings must have been toward the apostle for stealing both a great number of God-fearers and several women from rich and powerful families!<sup>25</sup> The Jewish leaders, therefore, came up with a strategy for removing Paul from their city. Jewish involvement in the apostle’s exodus from Thessalonica cannot be dismissed as a Lukan creation, since Paul himself claims that it was “the Jews who . . . drove us out” (1 Thess. 2:14–15).

The plan involved hiring “some bad characters from the marketplace” (τῶν ἀγοραίων ἄνδρας τινὰς πονηροῦς, *tōn agoraion andras tinas ponērous*)—a phrase that, with the addition of the adjective “bad,” refers not in a neutral sense to common day laborers or marketplace traders but in a pejorative sense to louts, loafers, and lowlifes, those who hang around public spaces with nothing to do but get into trouble (Acts 17:5; Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1015 [1047]; Plato, *Prot.* 347C; Theophrastus, *Char.* 6.2; Herodotus 2.141; Xenophon, *Hell.* 6.2.23). These good-for-nothing men were nevertheless good at something: they were able to help the Jews form a crowd and get their Gentile fellow citizens to join them in a riot based on trumped-up charges against Paul and Silas. The historical plausibility of this scenario is supported by Plutarch, who describes a similar situation of “men who were of low birth and had lately been slaves but who were hanging around the marketplace [*agoraious*—the same term used in Luke’s account] and able to gather a mob and force all issues by means of solicitations and shouting” (*Aem.* 38.4).

25. Schnabel (2012: 706) suggests that Jewish opposition to Paul’s ministry stemmed not just from their negative self-interest over lost members but also from a more noble religious reason: “The motivation of the Jews who oppose the missionaries is described, as in Pisidian Antioch, with reference to ‘jealousy,’ a term that probably refers not only to their jealousy over the conversion of Jews and of a large number of Gentiles including God-fearers, but also to their ‘zeal’ for the traditional understanding of the Mosaic law.” However, the use of the verb ζηλόω (*zēloō*), as well as its cognate ζήλος (*zēlos*) elsewhere in Acts (5:17; 7:9; 13:45; 17:5) always has the sense of “to have intense negative feelings over another’s achievements or success, *be filled w. jealousy, envy*” (BDAG 427.2).

The agitated mob “attacked the house of Jason,” who was providing housing for the missionaries. The original plan was to bring the pair to the “citizens assembly” (δημος, *dēmos*), the lowest level of city governance, which handled such matters as financial affairs, festivals, issues connected to the various local cults, and certain judicial concerns (R. Evans 1968: 13). However, when they could not find Paul and Silas, the plan changed: they seized Jason and a few other converts and brought them instead to a higher power—the “city authorities” (politarchs). This distinctive and ancient office consisted of three to seven individuals serving multiple one-year terms and having ultimate local responsibility for maintaining peace and order (for a fuller introduction to the ancient and rare political office of politarchs, see the section “A Unique Governmental Structure” above).

The angry crowd lodged two charges against Paul and Silas, both of which were political and anti-Roman and thus very serious; such charges were cleverly intended to ensure the missionaries’ arrest, severe punishment, and almost certain expulsion from the city. The first charge accused them of disturbing the peace: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here” (Acts 17:6). The gravity of this charge becomes clearer when one recognizes that the Romans actively and aggressively promoted themselves as providing “peace and security” (1 Thess. 5:3), and they did so through various public media. The minting of coins, the building of public monuments, the engraving of official proclamations, and the dissemination of literary works all served the common purpose of shaping public opinion and convincing the populace about the peace and security that Roman rule supplied (Weima 2012). The charge of disturbing the peace, therefore, accuses Paul and Silas of undermining the main benefit that Rome supposedly provided. Furthermore, that Thessalonica had a lengthy and close relationship with Rome (see the section “A Favored Political Status” above) would cause both the crowd and the city officials to be especially alarmed at such a charge (Acts 17:8).<sup>26</sup> It is ironic, of course, that Paul and Silas are accused of disturbing the peace by an angry mob that is guilty of the very thing with which they are charging the two missionaries.

The second charge has proved hard thus far to identify: “and they all are acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king—Jesus” (Acts 17:7).<sup>27</sup> Four possibilities have been proposed:

26. Most commentators fail to appreciate the gravity of the first charge, with some thereby asserting that the second charge is the more serious of the two (e.g., Witherington 1998: 507; Bock 2007: 552). Notice, however, the observation of Schnabel (2012: 707), who correctly states, “This charge is much more serious than translations such as ‘these men who have upset the world’ (NASB) or even ‘these men who have turned the world upside down’ (RSV, ESV, cf. NRSV) suggest.”

27. Fitzmyer (1998: 596) claims that there are two charges here, bringing the total number of accusations against Paul and Silas to three: disturbing the peace, acting against the decrees of Caesar, and claiming that Jesus is another king. The grammar works against this possibility, however, since the supposed third charge involves not an independent clause but an adverbial participle that is dependent upon, and thus closely connected with, the second charge.

a. *Treason.* The traditional answer is that Paul and Silas’s claims about the kingship of Jesus were interpreted as an attempt to overthrow the current emperor, Claudius, and that they were therefore accused of breaking the Roman law of treason (*maiestas*). The major weakness of this interpretation is that treason was forbidden by general public law, and so there was no need for a specific decree by Caesar to make it illegal (Sherwin-White 1963: 103; Judge 1971: 2).

b. *Jewish messianic agitation.* Another possibility is that the accusation refers to an imperial edict dealing with Jewish messianic agitation (Erhardt 1969: 96; Hemer 1989: 167; D. Peterson 2009: 482). Claudius issued a decree in AD 49, just a year or so prior to Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica, in which Jews were banished from Rome because of their rioting over a certain Christus, that is, Christ (Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4). A few years earlier, in AD 41, Claudius also wrote a letter to Alexandria (P.Lond. 1912) in which he banned the importation of Jewish agitators into the city. There may have existed, therefore, an official decree by the emperor against any kind of Jewish disturbance over the Messiah—a decree that Paul and Silas are accused of disobeying. This possibility is undermined, however, in that the actual charge against the missionaries does not include any claim that Jesus is “Christ” or “messiah.” Additionally, the attack against Paul and Silas was instigated by local Jews, and it is unlikely that they would have brought a specific charge of messianic agitation, since such a charge might well cause a negative reaction against not merely the two missionaries but also their own Jewish community as a whole.

c. *Oath of loyalty to Caesar.* Yet a third possibility is that “the decrees of Caesar” have in view the oath of loyalty to Caesar that many Roman and non-Roman citizens made, even those living far from the imperial city (Jewett 1986: 125; Manus 1990: 34; De Vos 1999: 156–57; Witherington 2006: 7; Furnish 2007: 28; this view was first forwarded by Judge 1971: 5–6, who ultimately rejects it). One example of such an oath comes from Paphlagonia, a province located in north Anatolia, along the Black Sea, and dates to 3 BC: “I swear . . . that I will support Caesar Augustus, his children and descendants throughout my life in word, deed and thought, . . . that in whatsoever concerns them I will spare neither body nor soul nor life nor children, . . . that whenever I see or hear of anything being said, planned or done against them I will report it, . . . and whomsoever they regard as enemies I will attack and pursue with arms and the sword by land and by sea” (Judge 1971: 6). As attractive as this explanation is, it suffers from two weaknesses (Judge 1971: 6–7). First, the extant documents dealing with these loyalty oaths do not provide any grounds for describing such texts with the term used to accuse the apostles, namely, “decrees.” Second, there is evidence that the violation of these loyalty oaths fell under the jurisdiction not of the local authorities (such as the politarchs in Thessalonica) but the emperor himself.

d. *Prediction of a change of ruler.* The most convincing explanation of “the decrees of Caesar” is that they refer to imperial edicts against predictions about the emperor, especially those dealing with his health, death,

and successor (Judge 1971; followed by Bruce 1982: xxiv; Donfried 1985: 342–44; Hemer 1989: 167; Witherington 1998: 508; Riesner 1998: 356–57; Green 2002: 50). In AD 11 the seventy-four-year-old Augustus responded to widespread questions about his health and heir by passing an imperial edict that forbade astrologers, diviners, prophets, and all others from predicting anyone’s death, especially that of the emperor (Dio Cassius 56.25.5–6). This prohibition was reaffirmed and extended by Tiberius in AD 16 (Dio Cassius 57.15.8, who refers to this decree as a “dogma” [δόγμα, *dogma*], the same term used in the second charge of Acts 17:7), and the ban continued to be in effect as late as the third century (Ulpian, *Laws* 15.2). A similar situation exists in our modern age, where the health of a given nation’s leader is often kept secret to maintain political peace and guard against civil uprising. Paul’s eschatological preaching in Thessalonica about a resurrected “Lord” who will soon reappear on earth as a universal king and judge could have been interpreted as a prediction about a change of ruler and thus a violation of “the decrees of Caesar.”

The clarification of the second charge brought against Paul and Silas, their “saying that there is another king—Jesus” (Acts 17:7b), agrees with the apostle’s claim in his letter that he preached during his mission-founding visit in Thessalonica about the “kingdom” (1 Thess. 2:12). As Donfried (1987: 188) observes:

Paul’s categorical statement in 1 Thess. 2:12 that he did speak to the Thessalonians about the kingdom during his presence in the city should help us understand the relative accuracy of the Acts 17 account, not only with regard to Paul’s use of king/kingdom language but also with regard to the fact that this language may well have served as a catalyst for the animosity he and his co-workers aroused in Thessalonica.

The seriousness of the two charges brought against Paul and Silas, along with the presence of an angry mob, naturally caused both the citizens and the city officials—the politarchs—to become “disturbed” (Acts 17:8). It made no difference that the nascent Christian movement involved only a small percentage of the overall population of a large provincial capital city like Thessalonica. The anti-Roman nature of the two charges leveled against the church’s founders would cause local citizens and authorities to fear that the presence of such a movement, however small, within their city might cost them their privileged status as a free city as well as their favorable (and thus profitable) relationship with Rome. This fear would have been exacerbated because in recent times they had lost some administrative privileges under Tiberius and did not get them back until six years earlier than Paul’s visit, through the personal favor of Claudius himself (Riesner 1998: 357).

Consequently, the city officials took immediate yet moderate (given the seriousness of the charges) action: they did not cave in to the crowd’s desire for punishment (L. Johnson 1992: 307) but instead settled for “taking bail from

Jason and the others” and then “released them” (Acts 17:9).<sup>28</sup> The expression “taking bail” (λαβόντες τὸ ἱκανόν, *labontes to hikanon*; Moule [1959: 192] identifies this phrase as a Latinism from *cum satis accepissent*) refers to the act of taking a security deposit or posting bond (BDAG 472.1), which in this context likely guaranteed that the infant church would maintain the peace and that the perceived troublemakers, Paul and Silas, would leave town and not return. This legal action, which is a well-attested practice (OGIS 484.50–51; 629.100–101; Sherwin-White 1963: 95–96), may well be lying behind Paul’s veiled reference to how “Satan has hindered” his ongoing efforts to return to the believers in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18; so Ramsay 1920: 230–31; Bruce 1982: 55; Williams 1992: 55; Schnabel 2012: 709n20). That Timothy was not implicated along with Paul and Silas would explain why he was later chosen to go back to Thessalonica and strengthen the believers there (1 Thess. 3:1–5).

### *Thessalonica to Berea*

Just as Paul several years earlier had been sent by the believers from Jerusalem to his hometown of Tarsus so he would not be a catalyst for trouble upon the Judean believers (Acts 9:30), now also he, along with Silas (and Timothy, unless he joins them later), on the very night when the security deposit was paid (“immediately at night”), was sent by “the brothers” from Thessalonica to Berea in order to protect Jason and the other converts (17:10). In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle confirms that he did not want to leave the newly founded congregation but was forced for some reason to depart from Thessalonica (2:15, 17–20). Paul was certainly willing to appear before the city officials and face the charges brought against him, as his recent actions in Philippi clearly demonstrated (1 Thess. 2:2; Acts 16:19–39). Nevertheless, the apostle’s sudden departure was later used against him: non-Christians in Thessalonica raised questions about his integrity, accusing him of being interested only in winning other people’s money and praise, as well as fleeing town at the first sign of trouble (1 Thess. 2:1–16).

Berea is located about forty-five miles southwest of Thessalonica, a distance that would have taken Paul, Silas, and Timothy at least two days of walking. In contrast to the previous cities where the apostle recently traveled and ministered (Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica), Berea was situated not on the Via Egnatia but just south of this major east-west highway. This suggests that Berea was not part of Paul’s original itinerary but that he ended up there out of the need to avoid the political charges awaiting him in Thessalonica. Cicero reminds Piso, the Roman statesman, how in his attempt to avoid the complaints against him from angry citizens in Thessalonica, “you fled to Berea, a town *out of the way*” (*Pis.* 89). Yet Berea was an important city: it was a former capital

28. Keener 2014: 2558: “A fine constituted ‘a relatively lenient penalty’ in Roman justice and could be consistent with the view that the authorities treated the Christian gatherings merely as unauthorized associations with political interests. That is, it might be advisable to ban such meetings, but harsh punishments, such as executing leaders, would be unnecessary.”

of one of the four districts of Macedonia before the Romans restructured the province in 148 BC, had a sizable population (Lucian [Ass 34] describes the city as “great and heavily populated”), and housed the provincial council (κοινόν, *koinon*) of Macedonia (Thessalonica, as a free city, did not belong to the council).

Berea also had a Jewish community among whom Paul, in keeping with his typical mission strategy, preached in its local synagogue (Acts 17:10). In contrast to the hostility of the Jews in Thessalonica, the apostle received a warmer welcome from his countrymen in Berea: “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (17:11). Whereas Paul only had weekly access to the Thessalonian Jews (three Sabbaths), he seems to have interacted each day with the Berean Jews, who tested the apostle’s claims against the teaching of Scripture “daily.” Paul’s preaching passed the test, as “many of them believed” (17:12a). In addition to these Jewish converts, there were also “not a few Greek women and men of high standing” (17:12b). Although the term “devout” (σεβόμενοι, *sebomenoi*) is not used as earlier for Thessalonica (17:4), these Greek converts are “God-fearers”—pagans who were attracted to Judaism but were not full converts, since they did not submit to the whole Mosaic law, especially the law pertaining to circumcision. One of these Greek converts likely included Sopater, the son of Pyrrhus (probably identical with the Sosipater of Rom. 16:21; so Bruce 1982: xxv; Hemer 1989: 236), who seven years later represented the Berean church and their contribution to the relief fund by accompanying Paul on the return leg of his third missionary journey when he delivered this financial offering to the believers in Judea (Acts 20:4).

### *Berea to Athens*

The success of Paul and his coworkers in Berea caused the Jews of Thessalonica to act yet again against the Christian missionaries. The depth of these Jews’ jealousy or zealotry is indicated by their willingness to travel two days by foot to implement the same strategy that worked so well in their home city: “they stirred up and incited the crowds” (Acts 17:13b). The decision of the city authorities in Thessalonica would not be binding in Berea, and so there was a need for the Thessalonian Jews to again start a series of events that would hopefully lead to the expulsion of Paul from the city. Acts, with its abridged account of Paul’s ministry in Berea, does not spell out what these events involved, but the reference to the “crowds” indicates that the Thessalonian Jews were able to arouse the anger of the larger pagan community against the apostle. Although there is no mention of the involvement of any city authorities in Berea, the analogous situation here to what occurred in Thessalonica, along with the strong attestation of the office of politarchs in Berea, suggests that these officials may have been drawn into the conflict to stop the disturbances in this city as well (Horsley 1994: 425).

The strategy of the Thessalonian Jews was once more successful, causing Paul yet again to be involuntarily sent out of town for the well-being of the new converts in Berea. This time, however, not only did Timothy escape any

charges or official sanction, but so did Silas, which allowed these two coworkers of the apostle to remain behind and minister to the infant church of Berea. Paul alone is escorted by some of the Christians all the way to Athens, over two hundred miles to the south. The exact itinerary of this trip is not spelled out but almost certainly involved travel by sea. Not only does the statement that Paul was sent “as far as the sea” (Acts 17:14) imply a boat journey to Athens, but this conclusion is also supported by the difficulty of going south by land through the Olympic Mountains.<sup>29</sup> As Hemer (1989: 116) notes: “The implication of sea-travel is at once the most convenient way of reaching Athens with the favouring ‘Etesian’ winds of the summer sailing-season and also removed Paul to a different jurisdiction remote from nearer land-routes where opponents might be expecting him.” The closest port to Berea was Pydna, but another possible departure point was Dion, which had a major port (the city was one of the first two Roman colonies established in Macedonia and possessed the privileged *ius Italicum* status) and was connected directly by road to Berea. Once Paul arrived in Athens, his escorts returned to Berea with a command from the apostle that Silas and Timothy should rejoin him “as soon as possible” (Acts 17:15). A command like this concerning the movement of his fellow workers is found frequently in Paul’s Letters (1 Cor. 16:10–11; Phil. 2:19; Col. 4:10; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:21; Titus 3:12–13).

### *Athens to Corinth*

Although Acts does not again refer to Silas and Timothy until they together are reunited with Paul when he later moves on to Corinth (Acts 18:5), there are clues from the apostle’s words in 1 Thess. 3:1–5 that they returned to Paul earlier during his stay in Athens.<sup>30</sup> This understanding is supported by his command to come “as soon as possible” (Acts 17:15). It gains further strength from Paul’s own words to the Thessalonians that he was willing to be left in Athens “alone” (1 Thess. 3:1), which implies that at one point, before sending Timothy back to Thessalonica, the apostle was not by himself in Athens but that his coworkers were with him once again. Their reunion with Paul was short: the apostle sent both back to Macedonia, though to different churches. Timothy was sent to Thessalonica in order to strengthen the faith of that young church in the midst of their afflictions (1 Thess. 3:1–5). The

29. Codex Bezae, with occasional support from other Western witnesses, envisions travel by land with an addition: “and he passed by Thessaly, for he was prevented from proclaiming the word to them.” This addition was likely intended to explain why nothing is mentioned in Acts about Paul’s journey from Berea to Athens (B. Metzger 1994: 403–4). The Byzantine MSS also suggest land travel to Athens by using *ὡς* (as) instead of *ἐως* (as far as, until), thus making Acts 17:14 read: “as [if it were] to the sea,” i.e., those pursuing Paul were tricked into thinking that the apostle was escaping by sea when in reality he went by a land route (B. Metzger 1994: 404).

30. Many have found it difficult to reconcile the movements of Paul, Silas, and Timothy as recorded in Acts 17:1–15 and 18:5 with the apostle’s words in 1 Thess. 3:1–5 (e.g., Best 1977: 131–32; Marxsen 1979: 13–14; Lüdemann 1984: 14). Yet if the “we” of 1 Thess. 3:1–5 is properly read as a literary plural (i.e., it refers to Paul alone), then it is possible to interpret this text in a way that essentially agrees with the testimony of Acts (Donfried 1991).

apostle worried about these young Christians from whom he was orphaned (2:17). He wanted to revisit them himself but was prevented from doing so (2:18), perhaps because of the bond that Jason and the other believers had to post guaranteeing that he would not return and further disturb the peace. This likely explains why Timothy was chosen for this mission over Silas: he, unlike Paul and Silas, was not caught up in the legal judgment of the city authorities in Thessalonica and thus was able to return for a second visit, whereas such a return by the other two missionaries would have proved too dangerous to either themselves or the local believers. The exact itinerary and purpose of Silas’s trip to Macedonia is not clear, though a good possibility is that he revisited the Philippian church, where he received further gifts of financial support for Paul’s ministry (Phil. 1:4; 4:16; 2 Cor. 11:8–9).

After a largely frustrating ministry in Athens, Paul arrived in Corinth “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3), no exaggeration in light of the opposition, punishments, and forced or hasty departures he endured in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. The apostle began what would be a much longer stay in Corinth—eighteen months—than his previous stops. During this time both Silas and Timothy return to Paul from their trip to Macedonia (Acts 18:5), bringing with them financial support from the churches in that province (2 Cor. 11:8–9), which apparently allows the apostle to curtail his day job as a tentmaker and begin a full-time preaching ministry in Corinth. This return of Silas and Timothy corresponds to the return of Timothy that is reported by Paul in 1 Thess. 3:6: “But Timothy has now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love and that you have a good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, just as we also long to see you.” Paul’s description of Timothy’s report as “good news” (for the significance of Paul’s verb choice here, see comments on 3:6) reveals the depth of the apostle’s concern about the infant Thessalonian church he was forced to leave and also his relief at Timothy’s positive account. The two specific things that Paul singles out in the report as giving him great comfort are “your faith and love,” that is, the faith *in God and Christ* that the believers still had even in the face of great opposition (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14–16; 3:1–5) and the love *that they had for Paul* despite the accusations made against his integrity by those outside the church (2:1–20).

As affirming and upbeat as Timothy’s report was, however, it nevertheless also included several issues of concern in the church—issues that caused Paul to pray most earnestly and repeatedly that God would allow him to return to Thessalonica and “complete the things that are lacking in your faith” (1 Thess. 3:10). These issues of concern included the need for holiness in sexual conduct (4:1–8), brotherly and sisterly love within the community of faith (4:9–12), the fate of both deceased and living believers at the return of Christ (4:13–18; 5:1–11), the treatment of church leaders (5:12–13) and troubled congregational members (5:14–18), and the gift of prophecy (5:19–22). Since the apostle was not able to address these issues in person, he did it instead by sending a letter.

That letter is 1 Thessalonians, which Paul wrote in either late AD 50 or early 51 during his eighteen-month stay in Corinth.<sup>31</sup>

A short time later Paul received an alarming report that the Thessalonian church was badly shaken by a false claim, likely via a prophecy, that “the day of the Lord has come” (2 Thess. 2:2). He also learned that the problem of the “rebellious idlers”—a small group within the congregation who ever since the founding of the church had refused to work (1 Thess. 5:14; see also 4:11–12)—had become worse. The apostle wrote a second letter to the Thessalonian church to address these two issues (2 Thess. 2:1–17; 3:1–15) and also to commend them for their faith despite ongoing and even intensified persecution (1:3–12). It is impossible to determine with certainty the date of this letter and where it was written. Yet Silas and Timothy were still with Paul (1:1), and the major subjects addressed in the second letter are ones also taken up in the first letter—these facts strongly suggest that only a short time had passed between the two letters and that both were written from the same place.<sup>32</sup>

### *Later Visits to Thessalonica*

Neither Paul’s Letters nor Acts explicitly identify any later visits of Paul to Thessalonica. Nevertheless, it is clear that the apostle did have ongoing contact with these Macedonian Christians. About five years later on his third missionary journey, he probably revisited them on two occasions: he would have traveled through Thessalonica on the westward part of this journey through Macedonia, on his way to Corinth in Achaia/Greece (Acts 19:21; 20:1–2) and again on the eastward return leg of this same trip (20:3–6). Other contact between Paul and the Thessalonian church took place through their participation in the collection that Paul was gathering for the needy Christians

31. This date of 50–51 is determined by three pieces of information. First, Timothy’s return from Thessalonica and report to Paul in 1 Thess. 3:6 is equated to the return of Timothy and Silas to Paul in Corinth recorded in Acts 18:5, which means that Paul must have written 1 Thessalonians during his eighteen-month stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11). Second, during Paul’s eighteen-month stay in Corinth, he appeared before Gallio, the proconsul or governor of Achaia (Acts 18:12–17). Third, an inscription discovered in Delphi, which records a letter of the emperor Claudius (the so-called Delphic Inscription), dates the start of Gallio’s one-year term as proconsul to either July 51 or 52. For objections to this traditional view of the dating of 1 Thessalonians as well as an evaluation of these objections, see Marshall 1983: 20–23; Jewett 1986: 49–60; Malherbe 2000: 71–74.

32. A small group of scholars have picked up a very old view (found already in Hugo Grotius’s discussion of the antichrist in 1640) and have argued that the order of the two Thessalonian Letters should be reversed: West 1914: 66–74; J. Weiss 1937: 286–91; Bristol 1943–44; Manson 1953: 428–47; Gregson 1966; Buck and Taylor 1969: 140–45; R. Thurston 1973; Hurd 1984: 73–89; Wanamaker 1990: 37–45; Trudinger 1995: 31–35. There is, of course, no a priori reason against this possibility since the current sequence may well be due to length rather than date. Nevertheless, the vast majority of scholars have not found the arguments convincing, and the traditional ordering makes the best sense of several issues. For the counterarguments typically made to defend the traditional ordering of the letters, see Rongy 1909; Thompson 1944–45; Best 1977: 42–45; Bruce 1982: xli–xlii; Jewett 1986: 26–30; Morris 1991: 26–30; D. Martin 1995: 30–33; Malherbe 2000: 361–64; Green 2002: 64–69; Foster 2012: 161–62.

in Palestine (2 Cor. 8:1–5; 9:4; Rom. 15:26; see also Acts 20:4, which refers to Aristarchus and Secundus, both representatives from Thessalonica in the delivery of the collection). The Thessalonian church may also have continued to support Paul financially in his ministry (2 Cor. 11:9, though this may refer just to the Philippian church: Phil. 4:15–16).

## The Authorship of 1 and 2 Thessalonians

### *1 Thessalonians*

#### THE LETTER AS A WHOLE

First Thessalonians belongs to the category of letters that the academic community unanimously judges to be unquestionably Pauline. As Jewett (1986: 3) reports, “No one in the current scholarly debate doubts its authenticity.”<sup>33</sup>

#### INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The internal evidence for the Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians lies in the two references to the apostle as the writer of the letter: one in the letter opening (1:1) and the other in the letter body (2:18). Although the inclusion of Silas and Timothy as cosenders (1:1) raises the question whether Paul is the only author lying behind the letter (on this issue, see comments on 1:1), there is no question that Paul is at least one of the authors. Further internal evidence for the Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians lies in the vocabulary, grammatical constructions, and literary style, all of which are typical of the apostle’s writings.

#### EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

The external evidence confirms that 1 Thessalonians was accepted very early as a genuine letter of Paul. It is true that this evidence is not as widespread as for some of the other NT writings (perhaps because its contents were not as controversial as some of the other canonical documents that required comment by the church fathers), but it nevertheless agrees with the compelling internal evidence. There are a number of possible allusions to 1 Thessalonians in early Christian documents: compare (1) Did. (mid-to-late first century) 16.6 (“first the sign of the appearance in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet”) with 1 Thess. 4:16; (2) Ignatius (early second century), *Rom.* 2.1

33. There has been no scholarly objection to the Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians since the nineteenth century except for the recent monograph of Crüsemann (2010). The first to question its authenticity was apparently Schrader (1836: 23ff.), whose position was picked up and developed by Baur (1845: 480–85; 1855: 141–68), who succeeded in convincing a few others (e.g., Holsten 1877). The objections raised, however, were quickly and easily refuted (see Grimm 1850; Lipsius 1854; Hilgenfeld 1862: 225–64; Lünemann 1885: 10–15; Soden 1885; Milligan 1908: lxxii–lxxvi; Frame 1912: 37–38; Rigaux 1956: 120–24) with the result that over a century of scholarship has now passed without any significant challenge to Paul’s authorship of 1 Thessalonians. As Fee (2009: 4) pragmatically puts it: “Such denial [of the Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians] faces enormous historical difficulties—so much so that one wonders, ‘Why bother?’”

(“For I do not want you to be pleasing people but to please God”) with 2:4; (3) Ignatius, *Eph.* 10.1 (“Pray without ceasing”) with 5:17; (4) Shepherd of Hermas, *Vis.* 3.9.10 (“Therefore, discipline one another and be at peace with one another”) with 5:13; and (5) Barn. (late first or early second century) 21.6 (“Be God-taught”) with 4:9. Clearer and more important evidence is that 1 Thessalonians was included in Marcion’s canon (ca. 140; so Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.15), the Muratorian Canon (ca. 170),<sup>34</sup> as well as in the Syriac, Vulgate, and Old Latin versions. Irenaeus (ca. 180) is the first writer to explicitly quote by name from 1 Thessalonians, citing 5:23 as the words of the “apostle” (*Haer.* 5.6.1). Milligan (1908: lxxiii) observes that there is no need to cite references to 1 Thessalonians from any later church fathers since “the very existence of 2 Thessalonians, whatever its exact date, implies the recognition of the Pauline authorship of the First Epistle at a very early period in the history of the Church—a recognition moreover which it continued uninterruptedly to enjoy until the middle of last century.”

The internal and external evidence surveyed above led Kümmel (1977: 185) to conclude in the sixteenth edition of his influential *Introduction to the New Testament* that “there can be no justifiable doubt that all of 1 Thess is of Pauline origin.”<sup>35</sup>

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2:13–16

Although over one hundred years of scholarship have passed without any significant challenge to the Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians as a whole, the same cannot be said about every passage within the letter. Scholars have singled out various sections of 1 Thessalonians as not coming from the hand of Paul,<sup>36</sup> but only one passage has attracted significant support as a later interpolation: 2:13–16.<sup>37</sup> Questions about the Pauline authorship of 2:13–16 had been raised already in the nineteenth century by Baur and others (see historical survey by Baarda 1985; Jewett 1986: 37), but the discussion was significantly advanced in the late twentieth century by Pearson (1971), who presented three major arguments—theological, historical, and form-critical—to substantiate the conclusion that 2:13–16 was a post-Pauline interpolation, inserted sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. A fourth argument, based on linguistic observations, was added by D. Schmidt (1983); the result is that a number of contemporary scholars reject the Pauline authorship of

34. Although some have argued that this important fragment should be dated later, to the fourth century (Sundberg 1973; Hahneman 1992), support still remains for its traditional second-century date (Ferguson 1982; C. Hill 1995).

35. Challenges in the mid-and-late twentieth century to the integrity of 1 Thessalonians, however, forced Kümmel to nuance this conclusion in the seventeenth edition of his introduction (1973: 224–26).

36. For a survey of scholarship on this issue, see Clemen (1894) for the nineteenth-century situation and Collins (1984: 96–135) for the twentieth-century situation.

37. The only other passage to be seriously considered as a later interpolation is 1 Thess. 5:1–11. See the arguments forwarded by Friedrich (1973), which have not won scholarly support (Rigaux 1974–75; Plevnik 1979; Marshall 1983: 12–13; Wanamaker 1990: 33).

2:13–16 (e.g., Eckart 1961; Boers 1975–76; Koester 1979: esp. 38; Gager 1983: 255–56; Beck 1985: 42–44; Richard 1995: 17–18, 119–27). Nevertheless, a careful evaluation of each of these arguments reveals that they are not as compelling as their proponents claim (see esp. Wanamaker 1990: 29–33; Weatherly 1991; Schlueter 1994: 25–38; Still 1999: 24–45).

#### THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

It is claimed that 2:13–16 involves “some basic incompatibilities” with “Paul’s thought as expressed elsewhere in his epistles” (Pearson 1971: 85). For example, there is an apparent theological contradiction with Rom. 9–11, where Paul not only speaks positively of the Jews and their role in salvation history but also holds out hope for their future salvation. Some have found Paul’s negative judgment about the Jews in 1 Thess. 2:13–16 not merely contradictory but also anti-Semitic (e.g., Best 1977: 122: “It must be allowed that 1 Th. 2.16c shows Paul holding an unacceptable anti-Semitic position”). Another example involves a claimed contradiction between 2:15, which blames Jews for “killing the Lord Jesus,” and 1 Cor. 2:8, which ascribes the crucifixion of Christ “to the rulers of this age.”

Neither example, however, is as problematic as it is claimed to be. Paul’s positive statements about the Jews in Rom. 9–11 must not overshadow the negative statements he makes in the same passage about his own people (9:3 implies that Jews are under a curse; 9:22, “vessels of wrath made for destruction”; 11:3, “they have killed your prophets”; 11:7–10; 11:28, “enemies of God”). It is also important to recognize that Paul’s hope for the Jews’ *future* is set against their *present* state of condemnation—a presupposition that underlies the whole discussion of Rom. 9–11. Furthermore, in 1 Thess. 2:14–16 Paul is speaking not about all Jews but about only a limited group of Jews, those responsible for the death of Jesus (Davies 1977–78: 8; Gilliard 1989). That Paul is thinking only about some Jews is also implied in the contrast of 2:14 between “fellow citizens” and “Jews”: just as not all the “fellow citizens” are persecuting the Thessalonian believers, so also not all the Jews are responsible for killing Jesus. Actually, Paul’s reference to the persecutors in 2:14 with the term τῶν Ἰουδαίων (*tōn Ioudaiōn*) likely does not have an ethnic sense but a geographical meaning: the churches of Judea are persecuted by the “Judeans,” a variety of peoples in this region and not the Jews alone (Bruce 1982: 46; Weatherly 1991: 84–86). Finally, the prepositional phrase εἰς τέλος (*eis telos*) in 2:16 is best rendered as “until the end”: God’s wrath rests upon Israel only until the final days of judgment. This would leave open the possibility for the future salvation of Israel afterward, in agreement with Paul’s words in Rom. 11:25–32 (Munck 1967: 64, 137; Donfried 1984: 252).

The second example of a claimed contradiction between 1 Thess. 2:15 and 1 Cor. 2:8 over who is responsible for Jesus’s death is more imaginary than real. The expression “rulers of this age” may well refer broadly to political officials in Judea, among whom the Jewish leaders are just one subset of this larger group. Also, both of Paul’s statements agree with all four Gospels and Acts,

which identify Romans and Jews alike as having a hand in the killing of Jesus (e.g., Mark 10:33–34 par.; Luke 22:2–4; Acts 4:27–28; see Weatherly 1991: 83).

#### HISTORICAL ARGUMENT

Two references in 1 Thess. 2:13–16, it is claimed, refer to historical events that date after Paul’s lifetime, thereby making it impossible for this passage to have come from the hand of the apostle. The first is the aorist verb ἔφθασεν (*ephthasen*) in 2:16c, which refers to a major event in the past: the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. As Pearson (1971: 82–83) explains it:

The aorist ἔφθασεν must be taken as referring to an event that is now past, and the phrase εἰς τέλος underscores the finality of the “wrath” that has occurred. It need only be inquired further what event in the first century was of such magnitude as to lend itself to such apocalyptic theologizing. The interpretation suggested by Baur and others is still valid: I Thessalonians 2:16c refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The second problematic reference is the comparison made in 2:14 between the suffering endured by the Thessalonian believers with the suffering endured by the Judean believers. The historical problem here, according to Pearson (1971: 87), is that “there was no significant persecution of Christians before the war,” that is, prior to the first Jewish revolt of AD 66–70.

With regard to the first reference, Pearson is correct to assert that the verb *ephthasen* refers to a past event. Therefore we must reject proposals for reading this verb as a “prophetic” aorist, which has a future event in view (Dobschütz 1909: 115–16; Frame 1912: 114), or with a weaker sense of “has drawn near” or “is coming” (e.g., Clark 1940; Rigaux 1956: 452; Best 1977: 120; Marshall 1983: 80–81; Weatherly 1996: 91–92). Yet it does not logically follow that the only past event to which the text possibly refers is the destruction of Jerusalem. Jewett (1986: 37) rightly judges there to be “an unmistakable quality of retrospection in Pearson’s argument. From the perspective of those who know about the Jewish-Roman war, it is surely the most appropriate choice. But to someone who lived before that catastrophe, several of the other events could easily have appeared to be a final form of divine wrath.” Indeed, the apostle may be referring to any of several other significant calamities the Jewish people had to endure in the years immediately preceding Paul’s writing of 1 Thessalonians (see comments on 2:16). Furthermore, instead of a specific event, Paul may have more generally viewed the Jews’ rejection of either the gospel or Jesus as God’s Messiah as wrathful (Gaventa 1998: 38; Holmes 1998: 86). The important point for the authorship of 2:13–16 is that the presence of the aorist verb *ephthasen* does not require a date after AD 70.

With regard to the second reference, Pearson is wrong to claim that there is no evidence for any kind of suffering endured by the Judean churches before AD 70. In 2:14 Paul’s reference to the opposition experienced by Jewish Christians in Judea could refer to the early 30s AD—a period when he himself persecuted the believers in Jerusalem and the surrounding area (Gal. 1:13, 22–23; 1 Cor.

15:9; Phil. 3:6; see Acts 8:3; 9:21; 22:4; 26:9–11). The apostle may instead be thinking of the early 40s AD—a period when Herod Agrippa I (AD 41–44) killed James the brother of John and attempted to do the same to Peter (Acts 12:1–19). The best option is that Paul has in view the late 40s and very early 50s—a period that witnessed a rising Zealot movement in Palestine (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.105–6; see Jewett 1970–71, esp. 205–7; Reicke 1984). These Jewish nationalists were especially active during the governorship of Tiberius Julius Alexander (AD 46–48) and his successor, Ventidius Cumanus (48–52). They engaged in a militant program of purging Israel from all Gentile influence in the belief that such action would hasten, if not actually inaugurate, the messianic age. Such Zealot activity would have naturally included some degree of opposition to the Jewish Christian churches in Judea (see comments on 2:14 below). There is, therefore, corroborating evidence dating prior to the writing of 1 Thessalonians that supports Paul’s claim in 2:14 that Judean Christians suffered at the hands of their fellow Jews.

#### FORM-CRITICAL ARGUMENT

The presence of a second thanksgiving in 2:13 is claimed to be an anomaly in Paul’s Letters. It is further observed that if 2:13, along with 2:14–16, were deleted from the text, this would result in a smoother transition from 2:12 to the apostolic parousia that begins at 2:17 than if this questionable section were kept as part of the original letter. These literary considerations led Pearson (1971: 91) to state: “The conclusion, therefore, which form-critical analysis suggests is this: vv. 13–16 do not belong to Paul’s original letter at all, but represent a later interpolation into the text” (so also Boers 1975–76: 151–52).

Several factors undermine the persuasiveness of these claims. First, the presence of a second thanksgiving is not unparalleled in Paul’s Letters, since a similar phenomenon occurs in 2 Thess. 2:13–14. Although many scholars reject this parallel on the assumption that 2 Thessalonians does not come from the hand of the apostle, compelling reasons exist for maintaining the Pauline authorship of this letter (see discussion below).

Second, the claimed thanksgiving in 1 Thess. 2:13 differs formally in significant ways from the typical form of Paul’s other thanksgivings,<sup>38</sup> thereby suggesting that the apostle did not intend this verse to be understood as a thanksgiving formula. If 2:13 should not be formally classified as a thanksgiving, then the claimed anomaly of a double thanksgiving disappears.

Third, even if 2:13 would be classified as a second thanksgiving, Paul does not have a rigid epistolary pattern that would preclude the possibility of his including a second thanksgiving. The apostle constantly adapts his epistolary conventions so that they better serve his persuasive purposes and better fit the specific historical context. Just as Paul strategically omits the thanksgiving in Galatians because of the particular problems faced in those churches, so he

38. On the form of a Pauline thanksgiving and the five distinct units that typically make up this epistolary convention, see the comments on 1:2–10 under “Literary Analysis.”

can add a second thanksgiving in 1 Thessalonians if that matches the context of that congregation and the apostle's purpose in the letter (Still 1999: 29–30).

Fourth, the shift from defending the integrity of Paul's past "visit" (*eisodos*) or mission-founding activity in Thessalonica (in 2:1–12) to the Thessalonians' response to that past visit (in 2:13–16) is not a problem but an expected move for the careful reader of the letter. This shift follows exactly the same pattern foreshadowed twice in the thanksgiving section, where the apostle similarly begins with his conduct during the mission-founding visit to Thessalonica (1:5 and 1:9a) and then moves to the response of the Thessalonians to that visit (1:6–8 and 1:9b–10). In fact, at 2:13 the transition from Paul's past visit (2:1–12) to the Thessalonians' response to that visit (2:13–16) is signaled already in the immediately preceding clause of 2:12b, where the purpose of the apostle's fatherlike conduct is "in order that *you* may lead a life worthy of God."

Fifth, the opening words of 2:13 ("and because of this") almost certainly look *back* to the material of 2:1–12, thereby in an integral way connecting the content of the disputed verses of 2:13–16 with the preceding discussion (see further discussion in comments on these verses).

Sixth, if 2:13–16, with its shift away from Paul and his fellow workers to the Thessalonian believers (note the predominance of the second and third persons in these verses), is original to the letter, then the first-person pronoun "we" in 2:17—emphasized both by its mere presence (since the subject is already expressed in the main verb) and its location at the head of the sentence—fits well as a literary marker, setting the subsequent verses apart from the preceding material. Conversely, if 2:13–16 were removed from the letter, the emphatic "we" in 2:17 makes less sense (Weatherly 1991: 81).

#### LINGUISTIC ARGUMENT

Daryl Schmidt (1983) supplemented the three arguments of Pearson with an additional one based on a number of claimed linguistic problems. For example, the opening of 2:13 has two unusual features: the conjunction "and" (*καί, kai*) that opens the verse occurs nowhere else in Thessalonians to join two "matrix sentences" (i.e., independent clauses) and no other undisputed letter of Paul uses the fuller expression "and because of this" (*καὶ διὰ τοῦτο, kai dia touto*). Another example involves "embedding," that is, the subordination of clauses: 2:14–16 has, according to Schmidt's calculation, seven levels of embedding compared to a maximum of five for any other section of 2:2–3:10. Yet another perceived problem is the non-Pauline way that the noun "Lord" is separated from "Jesus" by the participle "killing" in 2:15. These and a few other examples lead D. Schmidt (1983: 276) to conclude, "The linguistic evidence suggests that it [2:13–16] did not come from the same author as the rest of the letter but is rather built around a conflation of Pauline expressions."

A number of scholars have evaluated D. Schmidt's linguistic argument and not found his conclusion convincing (e.g., Jewett 1986: 40–41; Wanamaker 1990: 32–33; Weatherly 1991: 91–98; Schlueter 1994: 34–36; Still 1999: 32–35). A general weakness involves the diverse syntactical style of Paul exhibited in

his various letters such that the linguistic variations in 1 Thess. 2:13–16 are not so unique as to demand non-Pauline authorship. Also, there is the possibility that Paul is borrowing from traditional material in 2:13–16 (Schippers 1966; Steck 1967: 274–77; Michel 1967; Hyldahl 1972–73: 238–54; Donfried 1984: 247–50; Malherbe 2000: 169, 174–75), which would explain some of the unique linguistic features of these verses. More specifically, the unusual features cited by D. Schmidt are not so persuasive when examined more closely. There are over thirty examples (see list in Weatherly 1991: 92) among the undisputed letters of Paul where the conjunction “and” introduces and joins matrix sentences, including 1 Thess. 1:6. The fuller expression “and because of this” does occur elsewhere in Paul’s writings, in 2 Thess. 2:11. Daryl Schmidt dismisses this parallel text by assuming that 2 Thessalonians is pseudepigraphical, but this assumption is itself not free from criticism. The presence of seven levels of embedding in 2:13–16 becomes less significant once it is recognized that Phil. 1:12–15 has seven such levels, Phil. 1:27–30 has eight, and Rom. 4:16–17 has nine. Similarly, the separation of “Lord” and “Jesus” by a verbal form in 1 Thess. 2:15 can hardly be called “un-Pauline” when there are several instances where Paul separates a noun from an attributive adjective with an intervening verb (1 Cor. 7:7, 12; 10:4; 12:24; 2 Cor. 7:5; Phil. 2:20). Furthermore, this unusual word order likely stems from Paul’s deliberate attempt to emphasize “the Lord” and thereby stress the heinous nature of the action: the Jesus whom the Jews killed was no mere human being but was, in fact, the Lord (Hendriksen 1955: 71; Best 1977: 115; Williams 1992: 47, 115).

#### CONCLUSION

Our survey of the four arguments sometimes used to prove that Paul did not write 1 Thess. 2:13–16 has shown them, both individually and collectively, to be unpersuasive. An additional flaw with the claim that this passage is a later interpolation is the universal textual support that it enjoys: unlike the so-called floating doxology of Rom. 16:25–27 or the command of 1 Cor. 14:34–35 for women to be silent—two passages that appear in different locations in different manuscripts—this disputed passage is found in every extant manuscript of 1 Thessalonians. There are compelling reasons, therefore, for including 2:13–16 as part of the original text of the letter.

### 2 *Thessalonians*

The majority opinion within biblical scholarship has always been that the author of 2 Thessalonians is Paul; that opinion, despite facing a strong challenge in recent decades, is still the widespread view held today<sup>39</sup> (for a historical

39. It is true that, after the Pastoral Letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) and Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians is the most disputed Pauline letter in terms of its authorship and that it “is generally not included among the seven-letter Pauline canon-within-a-canon accepted by modern critical orthodoxy” (Carson and Moo 2005: 536). But when one surveys the whole field of NT scholarship, it is also true that, as Malherbe (2000: 364) states: “The majority of scholars still hold to the genuineness of 2 Thessalonians.” Foster (2012: 153–54) similarly makes the case that

survey of this issue, see Frame 1912: 39–43; Rigaux 1956: 124–52; Trilling 1972: 11–45; Jewett 1986: 3–18; Wanamaker 1990: 17–28). No one in the early church doubted the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. The external evidence that Paul penned this letter is actually both earlier and more extensive than that of 1 Thessalonians. Several early church fathers allude to 2 Thessalonians: Ignatius (ca. 35–108) in *Rom.* 10.3 possibly alludes to 2 Thess. 3:5; Polycarp (69–155) in *Phil.* 11.3–4 alludes to 1:4 and 3:15; and Justin (ca. 100–165) in *Dial.* 32.12 and 110.6 alludes to 2:3–4. Still others in the early church not only quote the letter but also explicitly attribute the citation to Paul or “the apostle”: Irenaeus (130–202) in *Haer.* 3.7.2 cites 2:8; Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) in *Strom.* 5.3 cites 3:1–2; and Tertullian (ca. 160–225) in *An.* 57 cites 2:4 and in *Marc.* 5.16 cites 1:6–9; 2:3–4, 9–12; 3:10. Second Thessalonians is also included as a Pauline letter in both Marcion’s canon (ca. 140) and in the Muratorian Canon (ca. 170).

No one, therefore, questioned the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians for almost two millennia until perceived internal difficulties became an issue. J. E. C. Schmidt in 1801 argued that the eschatology of 2 Thess. 2:1–12 contradicted that of 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11 and that consequently the former passage was an interpolation (by a Montanist pseudepigrapher) into an authentic letter of the apostle. In 1903 a more influential challenge to Pauline authorship was raised by Wrede, who stressed the literary dependence of 2 Thessalonians upon 1 Thessalonians, concluding that a pseudonymous author of the second letter was mimicking Paul’s language and style in the first letter. Nevertheless, the number of scholars who found such arguments convincing was still relatively few. In 1972 the situation changed significantly, however, with the monograph of Trilling, who marshaled various arguments that cumulatively seem to prove that 2 Thessalonians is not a genuine letter of Paul.<sup>40</sup> The impact of Trilling’s work is seen in the increasing number—though not the majority—of contemporary scholars who reject the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians (J. A. Bailey 1978–79; Krodel 1978; Marxsen 1982; D. Schmidt 1983; Laub 1985; Hughes 1989: 75–95; D. Schmidt 1990; Laub 1990; Menken 1994; Richard 1995; Verhoef 1997; Gaventa 1998; Collins 1988; Holland 1990; B. Thurston 1995; Légasse 1999; Esler 2000; Furnish 2007; McKinnish Bridges 2008).

Four major arguments are typically used to reach the conclusion that 2 Thessalonians could not have come from the hand of Paul: (1) the colder,

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“the supposed consensus [that 2 Thessalonians is non-Pauline] simply does not exist.” At the end of his article, Foster also presents an appendix showing the results of his survey of those attending the British New Testament Conference in Nottingham in 2011. Of the 109 respondents (70 percent of those attending), 63 answered “yes” to the question whether Paul authored 2 Thessalonians, 13 answered “no,” and 35 answered “uncertain.”

40. Jewett (1986: 3): “A substantial shift in critical opinion among leading New Testament scholars has been visible since the publication of Wolfgang Trilling’s monograph contesting its [2 Thessalonians] authenticity in 1972.” This shift in scholarly opinion concerning the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians during the 1970s and 1980s (i.e., after the work of Trilling) is also noted by Marshall (1983: 29) and Goulder (1992: 96n2).

authoritarian tone of 2 Thessalonians; (2) the authenticating comment of 3:17; (3) the eschatological differences between the two Thessalonian Letters; and (4) the literary dependence of 2 Thessalonians on 1 Thessalonians.<sup>41</sup> An evaluation of these arguments, however, shows them to be less persuasive than is often asserted (see esp. Marshall 1983: 28–45; Wanamaker 1990: 17–28; Still 1999: 46–55; Malherbe 2000: 364–74; Foster 2012).

#### THE COLDER, AUTHORITARIAN TONE OF 2 THESSALONIANS

Many commentators have drawn a sharp contrast between the claimed detached, formal tone of 2 Thessalonians and the warm, personal character of 1 Thessalonians. Illustrations of this difference in tone include the following: the obligation to give thanks (“We *ought* to give thanks,” 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13) instead of the expected statement of thanksgiving (“We give thanks,” 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13); the use of the strong verb “we command” to introduce the exhortations in 2 Thess. 3:6–15 instead of the softer, more user-friendly “we appeal” in 1 Thess. 4:1 and 5:14; the heavy-handed appeal to tradition in 2 Thess. 2:15 and 3:6 in contrast to the warm family metaphors of infants, nursing mother, and father in 1 Thess. 2:7a, 7b, 11. In light of such differences, J. A. Bailey (1978–79: 137) states: “II Thessalonians is entirely lacking in the personal warmth which is so distinctive an element of I Thessalonians.” Even Jewett (1986: 17), who maintains the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, comments: “Yet the tone of 2 Thessalonians is substantially different from that of 1 Thessalonians, implying a more irritable relation between writer and audience.” Several scholars claim that Paul would not have written two letters to the same church within a short period of time that differ so much in tone from each other.

There are two points to this argument, and both are vulnerable to strong criticism. The first point involves the claim that 2 Thessalonians exhibits a colder, authoritarian tone. This claim not only exaggerates the differences with the first letter but also fails to see the warm, affectionate tone actually found in the second letter. For example, the expression “We ought to give thanks” (1:3) actually involves a *more* affectionate tone: Paul is so impressed with the faith of the Thessalonians, which is not merely “increasing” but “increasing [so] *abundantly*” (note the prefix *hyper* added to the verb) in the midst of intensified persecution that the apostle feels obligated—not as a duty but as a joy—to give thanks to God for them. The parenthetical phrase “as it is fitting” (1:3) refers to the propriety of Paul in giving thanks to God for them, thereby adding emphasis to his overall commendation of the Thessalonian Christians. Their amazing faith additionally causes Paul, along with Silas and Timothy (note the emphatic “we ourselves”), to “boast of you in the churches of God”

41. The perennial way in which these four arguments have continued to play a key role in the ongoing debate over the authorship of 2 Thessalonians is seen in that Hollmann already in 1904 summarized the key reasons against the authenticity of this letter by citing exactly the same four arguments (1904: 38).

(1:4), again stressing the affectionate nature of the relationship between the apostle and his readers. Paul uses the vocative “brothers” to refer to the Thessalonian congregation at a higher rate per verse (7 occurrences in 47 verses) than in any other of his letters except for 1 Thessalonians (14 occurrences in 89 verses), so the rates virtually match. In light of these examples from 2 Thessalonians that reflect the warm relationship that existed between Paul and the church in Thessalonica (see also 2 Thess. 1:11–12; 2:13–14, 16–17; 3:3–5), the words of Marshall (1983: 34) spoken already thirty years ago ought finally to be accepted: “It is surely time that the myth of the cold tone of the letter was exploded.”<sup>42</sup>

The second point involves an illogical conclusion based on the first (and as we have argued above, exaggerated) point: even if one grants that the tone of 2 Thessalonians is colder and more authoritarian than 1 Thessalonians, this difference can be plausibly explained other than by concluding that the second letter is pseudonymous. Paul was willing and ready to adapt his tone to fit better the specific historical context that he is addressing. Writing to the Corinthian church, the apostle wonders whether he needs to come to them either with a rod of discipline or a spirit of gentleness (1 Cor. 4:21). Writing to the Galatian churches, he exclaims: “How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!” (Gal. 4:19–20). Writing to the Thessalonian church, where some members have foolishly believed a false prophecy about the day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1–17) and where the problem of the rebellious idlers has become worse instead of better (3:6–15), Paul fittingly writes in a firmer and more serious tone.<sup>43</sup>

### THE AUTHENTICATING COMMENT OF 2 THESS. 3:17

A second argument frequently made to establish the non-Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians involves the authenticating comment of 3:17: “The greeting is in my own hand, that of Paul, which is a sign in every letter; this is the way I write.” Elsewhere Paul also makes reference to writing “in my own hand” (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18a; Philem. 19), which implies that to this point he was using a secretary (Rom. 16:22) but now takes up the pen himself to write personally to his readers. This is the only statement, however, that includes a note emphasizing that the closing autograph “is a sign in every letter; this is the way I write.” Several scholars see in this emphatic authenticating comment evidence that Paul is not the author. Collins (1988: 223), for example, states: “The modern reader has the impression that

42. Malherbe (2000: 351) makes an important additional observation: “Furthermore, it cannot be stressed too strongly that the readers of 2 Thessalonians had also read 1 Thessalonians not too long before. . . . He [Paul] could assume that they had responded positively to his effort to cultivate a cordial relationship with them (see 1 Thess 3:6–9), and that there was no need to repeat his earlier effort to that end.”

43. Menken (1994: 31), who argues that Paul did not write 2 Thessalonians, concedes: “The difference in tone *per se* is not a sufficient reason to deny Pauline authorship to 2 Thessalonians, but in combination with other factors, it has some weight.”

the author of 2 Thessalonians, as Hamlet’s queen, protests too much.” Esler (2000: 1219) similarly states: “The self-conscious (and unique) way in which the author draws attention to the practice in 3:17 by saying that ‘This is my mark’ (*sēmeion*, sign) is itself suspicious” (see also, e.g., J. A. Bailey 1978–79: 138; Krodel 1978: 84–86; Trilling 1980: 158; Menken 1994: 35–36; Richard 1995: 394–95; Furnish 2007: 132–33). Some find additional evidence in the phrase “a letter as though from us” (2 Thess. 2:2), which is interpreted to refer to a forged Pauline letter, whose existence during the apostle’s lifetime is considered to be improbable.

This second argument, however, suffers from several weaknesses. First, the claim that the author of 2 Thessalonians in 3:17 “protests too much” overstates the case, since there are other closing autographs where Paul similarly makes an emphatic statement (e.g., Gal. 6:11: “See with what large letters I write to you in my own hand!”). Second, the authenticating comment of 3:17 is exactly the kind of statement that Paul should make if he has suspected that a forged letter in his name (2 Thess. 2:2) was circulating in the Thessalonian congregation (as J. Hill [1990: 5] rhetorically asks: “How else would the real author have approached such a misunderstanding?”). Third, the author of 2 Thessalonians gives evidence of being familiar with no Pauline letter other than 1 Thessalonians, which strikingly does *not* contain a reference to Paul’s closing autograph statement (Foster 2012: 165–67). Fourth and most important, there are compelling reasons to see 3:17 as stressing not the authenticity of the letter (as is commonly asserted) but the presence and authority of Paul (see comments on 3:17 for explanation and evidence supporting this interpretation). The apostle feels the need to emphasize his authority in light of the rebellious idlers, whom he anticipates will not all obey his command to be engaged in self-sufficient work (note the first-class condition in 3:14, which assumes the truth of the protasis: “But if anyone does not obey our command in this letter”). If this interpretation about the authoritative rather than authenticating function of 3:17 is correct, the key evidence in the second argument for postulating the non-Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians is no longer relevant.

### THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO LETTERS

Several commentators have questioned the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians on the grounds that the eschatological events presented in 2 Thess. 2:1–12 differ from that found in 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11. The observation of J. A. Bailey (1978–79) is blunt, succinct, and typical of this third argument frequently made as to why Paul cannot be the author of 2 Thessalonians: “These two eschatologies [of 1 Thess. and 2 Thess.] are contradictory. Either the end will come suddenly and without warning like a thief in the night (I Thessalonians) or it will be preceded by a series of apocalyptic events which warn of its coming (II Thessalonians)” (so also, e.g., Krodel 1978: 74–77; Hughes 1989: 80–83; Koester 1990; Menken 1994: 28–30; Furnish 2007: 134).

This argument, however, misrepresents Paul’s teaching in the first letter in a way that creates a contradiction with what the apostle writes in the second letter. For *unbelievers*, Jesus’s return and the final judgment connected with the day of the Lord will indeed “come suddenly and without warning, like a thief in the night.” For *believers*, however, the situation is completely different. The Christians in Thessalonica are not merely knowledgeable of the future events that will take place on the day of the Lord—these things are what they “know well” (1 Thess. 5:2). Furthermore, their status of being “sons of light and sons of the day” (5:5) means that they “are not in darkness with the result that the day [of the Lord] would surprise you like a thief” (5:4). Since the Thessalonian congregation already knows well what is going to happen, Paul exhorts them to live ready and steady lives (5:6–8)—lives that not only are ready for the imminent return of Jesus but lives that also are steady and not easily shaken or fearful about the day of the Lord. Paul comforts his readers, in the midst of their eschatological anxiety, by appealing to the electing work of God by which their salvation on the day of the Lord is guaranteed: “For God did not destine us for wrath but for the obtaining of salvation” (5:9).

Paul makes the same main points in the second letter (2 Thess. 2:1–17). Here too he reminds his readers that they already “know well” the future events surrounding the day of the Lord from his repeated instruction about these things to them (note the imperfect tense in the rhetorical question of 2:5, which expects an affirmative response: “You remember, don’t you, that, when I was with you, I was *repeatedly* saying these things to you?”). As a result of his repeated instruction and their knowledge about end-time matters, Paul again calls them to live ready and steady lives, whereby they are “not easily shaken from your mind or alarmed” about a false claim that the day of the Lord has come (2:2). Here too he comforts his readers by appealing to the electing work of God, which ensures their salvation on the day of the Lord: “because God chose you as firstfruits for salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13).

A proper interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11 and 2 Thess. 2:1–17, therefore, reveals that the two letters share a common basic eschatological perspective. What differences may exist are minor and stem not from a hand other than that of Paul but from the apostle’s need to address the specific problem that has arisen since the writing of the first letter: someone has claimed, likely by means of a prophetic utterance claiming the authority of Paul, that the day of the Lord has come (see fuller discussion in the comments on 2 Thess. 2:2). Even Menken (1994: 29–30), who argues against Pauline authorship, concedes: “Paul is able to express his ideas in various ways, dependent upon the situation of audiences and of himself, and when it comes to a description of what will happen at God’s final intervention in human history, it is only to be expected that a variety of ideas and images will be used. This means that, as far as eschatology is concerned, it is *possible* that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians.”

## THE LITERARY DEPENDENCE OF 2 THESSALONIANS ON 1 THESSALONIANS

The most persuasive argument against the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians, according to proponents of this position, is that the letter betrays a striking dependence on 1 Thessalonians with regard to its structure, vocabulary, and phrases while at the same time differing in its thought or theology. This argument was first forwarded by Wrede in 1903 and later supplemented in a forceful way by Trilling in 1972, whose work marked a decided shift in convincing many that 2 Thessalonians was not written by Paul but by a later forger. Furnish (2007: 132) is illustrative of the post-Trilling shift when he writes: “The most important literary argument is that this letter appears, in certain respects, to have been written in imitation of 1 Thessalonians. The structural similarities and numerous instances of correspondence in wording . . . are best explained if a later author has used the earlier Pauline letter as a model. This would also account for the fact that correspondence in wording is not always matched by correspondence in thought” (see also, e.g., Krodol 1978: 77–80; J. A. Bailey 1978–79: 132–36; Marxsen 1982: 18–28; Menken 1994: 36–40; Richard 1995: 20–29).

A detailed evaluation of the claims of Wrede and Trilling have already been made by others who ultimately reach the conclusion that, though there is clearly a close relationship between the two letters, the evidence does not require the literary dependency of 2 Thessalonians on 1 Thessalonians such that Paul cannot be its author (see esp. Frame 1912: 45–54; Marshall 1983: 28–45; Wanamaker 1990: 19–28). Therefore, there is no need nor is there sufficient space to rehearse here all the details of that evaluation. Nevertheless, three general comments are warranted.

First, there is a highly *subjective* aspect to the argument: whereas the close parallels between the two letters appear to some to be clear evidence of forgery (e.g., J. A. Bailey 1978–79: 136: “It is impossible to conceive of a man as creative as Paul drawing upon his own previous letter in such an unimaginative way”), the same parallels appear to others to be perfectly understandable and even expected when the same author writes two letters to the same church within a very short time and covers the same major topics.

Second, there is a *paradoxical* aspect to the argument: on the one hand, the author of 2 Thessalonians is faulted for being too much like Paul in the first letter in terms of structure, vocabulary, and phrases; on the other hand, the author of 2 Thessalonians is simultaneously faulted for being too different from Paul in the first letter in terms of theology. It is simpler and more convincing to conclude that the similarities of 2 Thessalonians with 1 Thessalonians, which are not as great as typically claimed (see the helpful chart and comments in Malherbe 2000: 356–58), stem from the letters being written by the same author, Paul—and that the differences in 2 Thessalonians, which are also not as great as typically claimed, are all due to the slightly changed and specific situation that has arisen in the Thessalonian church since the writing of 1 Thessalonians.

Third, there is an *illogical* aspect to the argument: the presence of close parallels in 2 Thessalonians only to 1 Thessalonians but to no other Pauline letter means it is highly unreasonable to believe that it was written by someone after Paul's lifetime who had access only to his first letter and none of his other later letters. As Fee (2009: 240) puts it: "What is perhaps the most significant feature of all regarding this letter is the fact that its author has a thoroughgoing acquaintance with, and use of, language and terms from the first letter, but knew next to nothing, if anything at all, of the Paul of the later letters. As many have pointed out before, this phenomenon in itself calls the theory of pseudepigraphy for 2 Thessalonians into an extremely high level of suspicion, while at the same time it makes it nearly impossible that someone with knowledge of the whole corpus wrote it at a later time" (so also Marshall 1983: 43).

#### ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our survey and evaluation of the four arguments commonly used to establish the pseudepigraphic character of 2 Thessalonians has shown that none of them taken individually is convincing. It is telling that even proponents of the non-Pauline authorship of this letter concede the weakness of the arguments when viewed in isolation from each other. Menken (1994: 27–43) is more candid than most about this weakness: regarding the first argument, based on the colder, authoritarian tone of 2 Thessalonians, he states: "The difference of tone *per se* is not a sufficient reason to deny Pauline authorship to 2 Thessalonians" (31); for the third argument, on the eschatological differences between the two letters, he states: "I believe that this difference alone is not a sufficient argument" (29); for the fourth argument, on the literary dependence of 2 Thessalonians on 1 Thessalonians, he states: "There are of course several points of agreement which are not very impressive when taken in isolation" (38).

Yet despite these concessions, Menken and others who deny that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians follow the lead emphasized already by Wrede and Trilling and stress the *cumulative force* of the four arguments. Krodol (1978: 77), for example, states: "If these items are viewed separately, in isolation from each other, one might be tempted to dismiss them. Viewed together they become a strong argument for assuming the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians." There is, however, a major flaw in such reasoning. As Jewett (1986: 14) rightly observes, "The degree of plausibility with which the general conclusion can be advanced decreases with each new piece of marginal evidence." Wanamaker (1990: 23) makes the same point more bluntly, stating that "a series of weak arguments based on marginal evidence does not add up to a strong case" (so also Marshall 1983: 34; Green 2002: 63; Fee 2009: 238).

The assertion that 2 Thessalonians stems from the hand of an author other than Paul also faces a number of additional problems. First, there is the difficulty in providing a convincing alternative explanation for the historical context (*Sitz im Leben*) from which the letter was written, especially given the highly specific subjects taken up in the document (increased persecution, eschatological confusion over a claim that the day of the Lord

had come, church members who are rebelliously idle). Donfried (1993b: 132) reflects the skepticism of many: “It is difficult to imagine a setting where a letter specifically addressed to the Thessalonians by Paul would be relevant and convincing to a non-Thessalonian church some thirty or more years after the Apostle’s death” (so also Still 1999: 58; Malherbe 2000: 373–74; Witherington 2006: 11).

Second, there is also a problem—an Achilles’ heel (Marshall 1983: 44)—in dating the letter to a post-Pauline period and after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. The problem stems from the fact that 2 Thess. 2:4, “*the temple of the God,*” almost certainly refers to the temple in Jerusalem (see comments on 2:4). If 2 Thessalonians were written after the temple’s destruction in AD 70, it is hard to believe that the imitator or forger would have written about future events to take place that require the temple to still be standing (2 Thess. 2:3–4) rather than predict an upcoming scenario that would more closely agree with what actually happened to the temple at the hands of the Roman general Titus (so also Rigaux 1956: 145; Witherington 2006: 12–13).

Third, although the practice of writing in another person’s name—pseudepigraphy—was relatively common in the ancient world, it is only rarely if ever found in the genre of letters. As Carson and Moo (2005: 541) note: “Pseudonymous writings were, of course, quite common, especially in the apocalyptic genre of the Jewish world. But the evidence for pseudonymous *epistles* is meager at best” (see also their longer discussion of pseudonymity on 337–44; also Witherington 2006: 11, 13). This is understandable given the ad hoc nature of letters, which typically address specific situations rather than general ones. Furthermore, it is clear that the earliest Christians did not view pseudepigraphy as an acceptable practice and were on their guard to ensure the authenticity of any document claiming apostolic authority (Wilder 2004: 246). These historical observations make it harder to believe that 2 Thessalonians is pseudonymous and, if it were so, was not recognized as a forgery but instead could be cited as Pauline by Polycarp (*Phil.* 11.3–4 cites 2 Thess. 1:4 and 3:15) already in the early part of the second century.

### CONCLUSION

A judicious evaluation of all the various arguments used to establish the non-Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians reveals that they, both individually and also cumulatively, fail to make a convincing case that Paul did not write this letter as the document itself claims (2 Thess. 1:1; 3:17). In fact, our survey has demonstrated how subjective the arguments against Pauline authorship typically are: proponents far too often exaggerate both the similarities and differences between the two letters, as well as frequently distort the more natural meaning of certain key texts so that their theory of pseudonymity gains further support. One cannot escape the conclusion that for too many commentators of 2 Thessalonians, pseudonymity, like beauty, lies largely in the eye of the beholder.