

Bible Study # 4

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Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- 49/50 Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:4-29)
 - Peter again presented his conversion of Cornelius to the council
 - Barnabas and Paul explained their conversions of the Gentiles
 - James presented a compromise from the Holiness Code (Lv 17-27) in which the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised or live Kosher, but had to abstain from:
 - Sacrificed to idols (Lv 17:1-9)
 - Blood (Lv 17:10-16)
 - What is strangled (Lv 19:26)
 - *Pornea* (unchastity) (Lv 18:1-18)
 - This was agreed to by the council and expressed in a letter to the churches which was carried back to **Antioch** by Barnabas, and Paul (Acts 15:30-35)

Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- **49-52 Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)**
 - Paul left **Antioch** and moved through the Churches of **Galatia** **leaving a copy of the letter from the Council** (Acts 15:36)
 - Paul was told by the Holy Spirit not to travel to the Roman province of Asia
 - He responded to a dream in which a man invited him to come to **Macedonia** (Acts 16:9-10)
 - He traveled to **Philippi**, the largest city in **Macedonia**, where he:
 - **Converted a slave girl with the gift of divination angering her owners**
 - **Was arrested, thrown into prison, released by an earthquake**
 - **Converted the jailer and his family**
 - **Demanded an apology from the city council before leaving** (Acts 16:11-40)

Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- Paul then traveled to ***Thessalonica*** where he set up a church (Acts 17:1-9)
- He was run out of ***Thessalonica*** after a period of between **3 and 6 months** but before he completed his catechesis (Acts 17:10)
- He arrived in ***Beroea*** where he was again forced to flee by sea leaving Silas and Timothy
- Paul arrived in ***Athens*** where:
 - He sent for Timothy and Silas
 - His message was mocked and rejected by the Athenians primarily because he proclaimed that **Jesus was raised from the dead** (Acts 17:16)

Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- Paul moved on to the ***Corinth*** where :(Acts 18:1-11)
 - He met Aquila and Priscilla who had arrived from Rome
 - Silas and Timothy arrived from *Macedonia* but were sent back to *Thessalonica* by Paul to check on the Church
 - Upon their return to ***Corinth***, Silas and Timothy told Paul that the ***Thessalonians*** had some questions concerning **death and the second coming of Christ** (more details in 1st Thess 4:13)

Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- Paul continued to preach in ***Corinth*** for a period of **18 months**
 - First he was expelled from the synagogue
 - Then he converted the ruler of the synagogue and his family
- Paul wrote the two **Letters to the Thessalonians** (51 A.D.)

An Overview of Paul's Epistles

- Paul's Epistles are listed in the Bible beginning with the longest and ending with the shortest because that is the way they were used in the lectionary of the early church
 - *This lectionary was divided into the Gospel Book and the Epistle Book*
- His **14 Epistles** are divided into two groups:
 - 9 Community Epistles
 - 5 Personal Epistles (including Hebrews)

14 Letters of St Paul

- Community Epistles (9):
 - 1st Thessalonians
 - 2nd Thessalonians
 - Galatians
 - 1st Corinthians
 - 2nd Corinthians
 - Romans
 - Ephesians (captivity)
 - Philippians (captivity)
 - Colossians (captivity)

14 Letters of St Paul (Cont)

- Pastoral Epistles (5)
 - Philemon (captivity)
 - 1 Timothy
 - 2 Timothy
 - Titus
- Hebrews

An Overview of Paul's Epistles (Cont)

- Typically, Paul's letters:
 - Began with his name
 - Included who was traveling with him
 - Identified the Church to whom the letter was written
 - Contained the phrase "In God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"
 - Included the statement containing the words "by grace" and "peace"
 - Often contained a "blessing" followed by a "thanksgiving section"
 - Finally, included a theological section as the heart of the letter

Thessalonica

- Was an European metropolis with semicircular terraces from the shoreline, broken by cross streets and ornamented with the green of gardens and the darker green of Cyprus trees
- Contained: hot springs, theater, arena, shipping accommodations, which lured merchants, travelers, officials and legionaries
- Enabled ships to dock from all parts of the world bringing all sorts of ideas and news

Thessalonica (Cont)

Was a free city under home rule and bore the mark of the pleasure-loving Greeks

- Like all Greek cities, it had distinctly democratic ideas
- Every year a council of six “*politarchs*” was elected
- The Roman governor and his lictors resided here
- The population did not have the best moral reputation as they were overreaching in business and always quick to seize an unfair advantage
- They were often lazy and over-curious, and preferred to buy support of others rather than by their own effort

Thessalonica (Cont)

- In **marriage** they were often **unfaithful** and given to sensual pleasures
- The houses of joy had a fair clientele

It was also a quiet city of workmen who participated in the carpet and tent-weaving industries

The population was a cosmopolitan mixture of: Macedonians, Greeks, Syrians, Egyptians, Jews, Roman officials, and legionaries

Once the gospel was established here it quickly spread all over the Mediterranean territory

Transition to Thessalonians

- Why did the *Thessalonians* have questions about the **death and Second Coming of Christ?**
- Why does it look like Paul was consumed with “**eschatology**” (**the study of end things**), whether the end of an individual life, the end of the age, or the end of the world and the nature of the Kingdom of God?
 - Remember that Paul was chased out of *Thessalonica*
 - When attempting to teach new followers about Christianity and the faith at whatever level, **the last thing one would talk about is the “Second Coming of Christ”**

Transition to Thessalonians (Cont)

- One would not go into a market place and walk up to a pagan and say that Jesus was about to “come back from the dead” because they would have no idea what you were talking about
- The idea of a “Second Coming” would be totally irrelevant until **a person knew about His first coming** and everything that had gone on before
- To do this you would go back to the **Old Testament** and start with the book of Genesis then work your way through all of Salvation History

Transition to Thessalonians (Cont)

- When we look at the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* the **last thing discussed** is the idea of Jesus coming back (the 2nd coming)
 - Paul had to deal with eschatology in these letters **because** he was chased out of town and never had the opportunity to finish teaching and explaining this part of the message
 - Most likely it was one of the last things he had begun to talk about before he was chased out of the city
 - The people who heard this message were probably fascinated but Paul did not have time to fill in all the details concerning how it was going to work within their lives

Review of 1st Thessalonians 1

- We believe that Paul wrote his 1st letter to the Thessalonians between 50 -51 A.D.
- As discussed the need for the letter arose because Paul was forced to leave *Thessalonica* after preaching for between **3 to 6 months** and before he completed his catechesis on the Second Coming
- Even though the Church in *Thessalonica* was coping with their persecutions and still thriving, the people were concerned about what would happen to those friends and family members who died before Christ came at His Second Coming

Review of 1st Thessalonians 1 (Cont)

- Paul told them not to worry that Jesus would “raise from the dead” those who were already dead before he selected the living would accompany Jesus to heaven
- He described Christ’s second coming like the *Parousia* of a king with trumpet blasts and much preparation for his arrival, and it would happen after many signs
- This passage has led to the misinterpretation by Protestant theologians about the “Rapture” as discussed in the *Left Behind Series* of books

Review of 2nd Thessalonians

- A few months later Paul had to respond to a second problem that arose after the members of the Church in *Thessalonica* had received his first letter
- This time the confusion was over **when Christ would come again**
- Some believed that His coming was imminent so they stopped working and lived like parasites off the labors of the rest of the Church community

Review of 2nd Thessalonians (Cont)

- In this letter Paul reminded them that the Second Coming was not imminent and that there would be many signs before it happened
 - Although the exact time was not known as it would come like “a thief in the night”
 - He counseled them not to support those who would not work
- **Now we will return to the time line in Acts 18**

Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- The Jews in **Corinth** appealed to the Roman proconsul *Gallio* to persecute Paul but he rejected their request and ignored the beating of *Sosthenes*, the ruler of the synagogue in his presence (Acts 18:12-17)
- *Priscilla* and *Aquila* traveled with Paul from **Corinth** to **Ephesus** where he stayed only for a few days (Acts 18:18)
- Paul took the vow of the **Nazirite** and traveled through **Caesarea** to **Jerusalem** (perhaps to complete his vow) and then to **Antioch** where he ended his **Second Missionary Journey** (Acts 18:18-22)

Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- 53-58 Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23 – 21:16)
 - Paul again began this journey with a visit of encouragement to the Churches of **Galatia** (Acts 18:23)
 - Meanwhile, Apollos of Alexandria arrived in **Ephesus** and began preaching the Baptism of John (baptism of repentance)
 - Priscilla and Aquila corrected his error, and baptized him with the Holy Spirit, and sent him to **Corinth** where he strengthened the Church there with his great rhetoric (Acts 19:1-20)
 - Paul waited until he arrived at **Ephesus** to write the Letter to the Galatians in response to the issues that arose during his journey through **Galatia**

The Galatian Churches - Antioch of Pisidia

- Located at the foot of the majestic Sultan Dagh mountain range on the western edge of the Anatolian Plateau whose highest elevation was 6500 feet
- The Roman province of *Pisidia* was located in the southernmost part of the old kingdom of the Galatian King *Amyntas* which at that time was part of the Roman province of *Galatia*
- It contained a great Roman aqueduct
- Originally the city was a colony of Roman veterans from the Celtic legion that Caesar had raised in Gaul
- They enjoyed certain rights and privileges
- The city contained many tanneries

The Galatian Churches - Antioch of Pisidia (Cont)

- The Jews of the city had many privileges that had been granted by their friend Julius Caesar
- It was a holy city dedicated to the worship of the moon god (called *Men* or *Lunus* by the Romans)
 - *Men* was from the ancient Persian god *Mithras of the Mazda* religion who was worshipped in Babylon and was seen as a world religion which the fickle Galatians had brought with them from the banks of the Rhine
 - They also accepted the Phrygian cult of the goddess mother Cybele

The Galatian Churches - Antioch of Pisidia (Cont)

- Unfortunately, Paul and his companions knew none of this religious information
- The Jews had a synagogue on the shore of the *Anthios* river so that water would be easily available for purifications

The Galatian Churches - Iconium

- It was located on a high mountain plateau surrounded by snow-capped volcanoes in the mountain country of *Pamphylia* beyond the salt steppe and an almost impassable swamp
- This was a desolate region, like the steppes and deserts of central Asia
 - In the summer the plateau was a terrifying desert from which clouds of dust rose in the stinging heat
 - In winter it was covered for months with deep snow
 - In spring after the winter rains the region was an un-drained swamp into which a rider's horse often sunk to its withers

The Galatian Churches - Iconium (Cont)

- The Iconians were proud of their history

The Emperor Claudius had settled the area as a colony for Roman veterans

Roman officials ruled the city and *Poppaes*, Nero's wife, was represented on their coins as a goddess

The population consisted of Hellenistic Galatians, Roman officials and veterans, and Jews

The city was known for its weaving of wool, making it easy for Paul to find employment

The Galatian Churches - Lystra

- The land leading to Lystra looked like the forbidden steppes with a few pastures for sheep, goats, and donkeys
- The region had a reputation for lawlessness with robbers living in mountain dens for decades
- The people were good-natured, superstitious, and ignorant
- They spoke an Anatolian dialect and only a few spoke or understood Greek
- The Greeks who had settled there had brought their *Phrygian* legends about *Zeus* and *Hermes* which they tied to the local *Lycaonian* saga often

The Galatian Churches - Lystra

(Cont)

- The gate of an Oriental city was the public meeting place for markets, judicial trials and casual social gathering
- The people had dedicated their city to *Zeus* and had built a small sanctuary at the city gate served by a pagan priest
- On certain feast days of *Zeus* the city was filled with farmers for the vicinity as well as a number of beggars
- Paul's ignorance of local custom and a legend of *Zeus* almost cost him his life

The Galatian Churches - Derbe

- Was a small mountain village on the boundary line of Galatia
- It was a robber's den until Claudius had again settled it as a colony of Roman veterans

Transition to Galatians

- This was Paul's **third letter** and it was written while he was in *Ephesus* during his **Third Missionary Journey**
 - The letter was addressed to the **four churches of Galatia** which Paul had established on his **First Missionary Journey**
 - He visited each church on his **Second Missionary Journey** to strengthen the disciples and provide them with the decision of the **Council of Jerusalem** concerning circumcision and Kosher laws
 - At this point most of the believers had come from the Gentiles

Transition to Galatians (Cont)

- Unfortunately, the churches in *Galatia* were infested with the ***Judaizers*** who we met at ***Antioch*** before the Council
- After they had been rejected from ***Antioch*** and later ***Jerusalem***, they moved north into ***Galatia*** where they challenged the authority of Paul and taught that a convert to Christianity had to be circumcised and practice the Kosher laws of Moses
- For one reason or another, after hearing about this problem, Paul decided to wait until he arrived at ***Ephesus*** to deal with it via his **Letter to the Galatians** written between 54 - 57 A.D.

Review of Galatians (Cont)

- Paul undercut the Judaizers argument by stating that he received his apostleship directly from Jesus Christ, who told him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles
- At this point Paul filled in many of the details of his conversion (not presented in Acts,) including his 3 years of meditation in the desert, his return to *Damascus*, his trip to *Jerusalem* followed by his travel to *Tarsus*
- Paul also presented the incident with Peter at *Antioch* where he challenged Peter for his action of removing himself from eating with the Gentile Christians when some Jewish Christians arrived from *Jerusalem*

Review of Galatians (Cont)

- Paul began, using much of his Baptismal theology, to explain his teaching on “justification through faith” in Christ vs in “the works of the Law”
- He warned the *Galatians* of the dangers of “playing with Judaism” while asking why they had rejected their initial conversion to the Christian life in the “works of the Spirit in Jesus Christ”

Review of Galatians (Cont)

- Paul offers the faith of Abraham which he exhibited before his circumcision as a way for them to understand his calling them to their justification by faith in Jesus
- Paul reminded them of the curses of the law that were taken on by Jesus in order to relieve them of its obligations
- Paul also discusses Jesus as the fulfilment of many of the Old Testament (Christocentric) teachings to include the fulfillment of Abraham's third promise for the "blessing of all nations"
- Paul reminded the *Galatians* that those who were baptized into Christ had, in fact, "put on Christ"

Review of Galatians (Cont)

- It would appear that Paul feared that his work among the Galatians may have utterly failed
- He is suffering because he saw that he had to re-confirm their faith even though he cannot go to them in person
- Thus he was speaking to them from the heart as a parent

Early Christian Time Line (Cont)

- Paul also wrote his **1st Letter to the *Corinthians*** from ***Ephesus*** around 57 A.D. followed by his **2nd Letter to the *Corinthians*** possibly from ***Philippi*** around 57-58 A.D.

End of review of 2014-15 presentations

- Next we will look at Paul two letters to the ***Corinthians***