

2020-2021 Bible Study

#14

1/5/21

Review of our last class

- At our last meeting we discussed (beginning in Acts 16) where Paul traveled through the four churches of *Galatia*
- From there, Paul traveled to *Philippi* in *Macedonia* where he met with a group of Jews celebrating the Sabbath outside the city near the river
- Later, Paul got into trouble with the authorities for healing a slave girl whose demonic powers allowed her to see the future
- The authorities threw Paul and Silas into prison where an angel removed their chains
- The jailer started to commit suicide believing the prisoners had fled until Paul reassured him (leading to conversion of the jailer and his family)

Review of our last class (Cont)

- The next day, the authorities decided to release them, but Paul demanded an apology as he was a Roman citizen
- He and Silas moved on to *Thessalonica* where again they were expelled from the synagogue when Paul told them that Jesus (the Messiah) had died, but then rose from the dead
- After going to the market place (where they met with success), they were reported to the Roman authorities for turning the world against Caesar
- To avoid more trouble, they fled to *Beroea* where they continued to be challenged, so Paul fled to Athens
- Unfortunately, the Greeks of *Athens* rejected his message concerning Christ being raised from the dead

Review of our last class (Cont)

- Paul then moved on to *Corinth* (where Silas and Timothy joined him), and he stayed for 18 months establishing a significant church
- Once he was rejected by the Synagogue, he once again began preaching to the Gentiles
- A Jew living next door to the synagogue was baptized with his household
- During this period, Paul responded to the problems from Thessalonica, which were brought to his attention by Timothy and Silas
- It was from Corinth that Paul sent his letters to the *Thessalonians*
- Let us begin with an **overview of Paul's Epistles**

Pauline Epistles

- The 13 Pauline Epistles are found in the New Testament in two groups each listed from the longest to the shortest as read in the liturgy by the early church:
 - His 9 Community letters
 - Romans to 2nd Thessalonians
 - His 4 Personal letters
 - 1st Timothy to Philemon
 - The letter to the **Hebrews** was originally thought to have been written by Paul, but later scholarship attributed it to be the work of another early Jewish Christian

Pauline Epistles (Cont)

- His letter to the **Romans** was the longest and most complex epistle, and it contains much of Paul's theology
- Father pointed out that if you only read through 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, you are not going to understand much of his theology
- None of the Epistles (except for Romans) were written, for the most part, to tell us everything about what Paul teaching
- On the other hand, Romans was written to a congregation that had never met Paul, and therefore, one he did not catechize in person

Pauline Epistles (Cont)

- Father suggested that Romans is the most valuable of his epistles since it was written to an audience he was attempting to impress by his teaching
- Therefore, he explained every little minute detail of his ideas to them
- On the other hand, in his letters to the ***Thessalonians*** and ***Galatians***, Paul assumed that the congregations knew at least most of what he had taught them in person
- This is why reading *Galatians* (or any of his letters) outside it's context is so dangerous

Pauline Epistles (Cont)

- Father said that if we do not know Paul, his theology, the circumcision party, and the context of the **Book of Acts**, one can become confused when reading his letters
- This, Father said, led in part to the Protestant Reformation
- It would appear that Luther became confused in his reading of the **Book of Romans**
- When one reads the **Book of Galatians**, you would think that Paul was a very angry guy
- But, Father said, he was not angry

Pauline Epistles (Cont)

- The two epistles in which Paul is very stern, upset, and perhaps angry are **Galatians** and **2nd Corinthians**
- But, if we understand why and when he wrote those two letters, we will understand why he used that tone
- These were two Christian churches, founded by Paul, in which he delivered the decision of the council to make sure they did not circumcise their children or keep the Kosher laws
- Upon his return to the region, (on his third journey) he found them all under the influence and direction of the circumcision party, causing him to be very unhappy

Pauline Epistles (Cont)

- As mentioned, since **1st and 2nd Thessalonians** are the shortest of his community letters, they will be listed last even though they were the first ones to be written
- As we said, this often confuses many people reading through the Bible without an understanding of the historical context
- Let us now turn to **1st and 2nd Thessalonians**

1st Thessalonians

1st Thessalonians

- **1st Thessalonians 1:1-10** *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. To the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace...who delivered us from the wrath to come*
 - Father pointed out that Silas and Silvanus are the same guy
 - Also, this greeting is how Paul always began his letters
 - “Paul and (whoever was with him), to the church of (fill in the blank), God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace”
 - Then, came his thanksgiving section
 - I give thanks to God always for you I have heard great things, I really love you, I pray for you all the time, and then he gets into what he wants to talk about
 - If we read this section carefully, we will often find what the rest of the letter will be about
 - Here, he usually hinted about what he planned to discuss
 - Father pointed out that this was similar to how we introduce correspondence (letters or emails) we prepare for others today

1st Thessalonians (Cont)

- Usually, we do not jump right into the heart of the message but start with some sort of thanksgiving or other fluffy stuff
- Then, you get to the heart of the matter
- Thus, Paul, in this first chapter, talks about how he gives thanks to God for his followers in Thessalonica(who had rejected idolatry and were worshipping the true God as Christians)
- He told them how wonderful that was as well as how they were being persecuted requiring them to remain faithful, and await the second coming of the Lord
- This is a hint of where he was going in this letter as it became the main theme of this letter

1st Thessalonians (Cont)

- **1st Thessalonians 3:1-7** *“Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you, that no one be moved by these afflictions... about you through your faith*
 - Paul said that he sent Timothy to them to find out what they were doing and now Timothy has come and told him that they were doing well which made him very happy
 - At this point, Paul is about to get to the heart of the matter

1st Thessalonians (Cont)

- **1st Thessalonians 4:13-15** *“But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope...shall not precede those who have fallen asleep”*
 - Once again, Father pointed out that this the whole point and heart of the letter was that those who were still alive had no advantage over those who had fallen asleep (died)
 - If we read this section carefully, we will see that the Christians of Thessalonica were confused about what was going to happen when Jesus returned (the Second Coming)
 - Paul tried to explain to them that the Christians who died before the return of Jesus were not at any disadvantage
 - This was the question they had been asking Timothy about
 - They were concerned that perhaps their friends and family members who died before Jesus’ return would miss His second coming

1st Thessalonians (Cont)

- Paul is attempting to explain to them that their ancestors will also be raised from the dead upon His return
- He said that all souls who have died before His second coming He will bring with Him when He returns
- He will raise their mortal bodies from the dead, return to them their souls, and then bring them to their final judgment

1st Thessalonians (Cont)

- **1st Thessalonians 4:16-18** *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpets of God... Therefore comfort one another with these words”*
 - Father said that the point Paul was making to the Thessalonians was that:
 - Everyone will wake up and no one will miss His second coming
 - Those who have already died will be raised first
 - Then those who were still alive will be caught up together with the dead into the clouds to meet the Lord and remain always with Him
 - They were not to worry as there was no disadvantage to anyone here
 - Father said that he needed to clarify this text due to the misunderstanding of it due to an eschatological interpretation of it by Darby of the modern Congregationalist movement who preached:
 - About his concept of the “rapture”
 - This term comes from the Latin text meaning to be “caught up”
 - He proposed that at the end of time, Jesus will come in the clouds and take the people on earth who were born-again Christians to a special place in heaven

1st Thessalonians (Cont)

- Then, Jesus and the anti-Christ will have a battle leading to a 1000 year reign of Jesus in which the devil will cause all sorts of trouble (then there will be a resurrection of the dead and a final judgement)
- Father pointed out that there is a major problem with this concept
 - First, it is a brand new way of thinking about the end of the world
 - Second, it says that the resurrection will occur before the “rapture,” which would mean there are two resurrections
 - Father said this was nonsense
 - The church has always held that at the end of time, Jesus will return to the earth to judge the heavens and the earth (the living and the dead)
 - To judge the dead, He will have to raise them first while those Christians who would be alive at that time will arise and meet Jesus in the clouds
 - Nowhere in the story does it say that Jesus will take the living away and hide them in some special place in heaven
 - The image Paul is discussing is that of a king who had gone away returning to his city

1st Thessalonians (Cont)

- In antiquity, when a king returned to his city after having been gone for a while, his supporters blew trumpets and called out, “here comes the King”
- The people could hear when he was still miles away of his coming in order to get everything in the city ready for his return
- Upon his arrival, he would deal with his friends and then his enemies
- Father said that this was similar to what often happens in a family when the children are anxiously awaiting for the arrival of their grandparents for a visit
- This is what was being anticipated here when Jesus would return at His second coming when He will Judge the living and the dead