

Focus on the Bible

First and Second Thessalonians

Triumphs and Trials of a Consecrated Church

Verse by verse he expounds the epistles
with impeccable precision....'

William D. Barrick

Richard Mayhue

After meticulously defining the background for the Thessalonian epistles, Richard Mayhue unfolds Paul's pastoral concerns and theological instruction. Verse by verse he expounds the epistles with impeccable precision. Matters of church government, spiritual gifts, family relationships, church ordinances and future events are examined through the Thessalonian lens. Having been thus immersed in these epistles, the reader will be challenged to live out their teachings. That is the ultimate compliment that can be paid to any sermon or commentary.

Dr. William D. Barrick
Professor of Old Testament
The Master's Seminary
Sun Valley, California

Richard L. Mayhue's lucid exposition of the Thessalonian epistles is merely the tip of a very deep iceberg of information. The author transports us to the past (how these epistles fit within the first century world), propels us into the future (how the panorama of biblical prophecy unfolds), and challenges us for the present (how these epistles equip today's reader). In addition, Mayhue's ability to blend grand biblical themes yields thirty-three Overviews, which should place this work on the desk of any student of Scripture.

Dr. W. Gary Phillips
Professor of Bible
Bryan College,
Dayton,
Tennessee

Richard Mayhue, Th.D. is Senior Vice President and Dean of The Master's Seminary in Sun Valley, CA where he also lectures in Theology and Pastoral Ministry. For most of his 25 years of ministry, he has engaged in both pastoring and training pastors. Dr. Mayhue has written, edited, or contributed to over fifteen books including *The Healing Promise* (Mentor), *How to Interpret the Bible* (CFP), *What Would Jesus Say About Your Church?* (CFP), and *Fight the Good Fight* (CFP). He ministers as an elder at Grace Community Church and serves on the boards of Slavic Gospel Association (ministering in the lands of Russia) and Capitol Ministries (ministering in American state capitols).

Dedication

To my sister Linda Benjamin, her husband Jerry, and their daughter Katie who faithfully travel across America and Canada in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry, not unlike that of the Apostle Paul.

To Dr. Homer A. Kent who gave me a love for the Greek New Testament and modeled the precision with which God's Word is to be handled (2 Tim 2:15).

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Richard Mayhue

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Preface

My great love for the Thessalonian Epistles reaches back over twenty years of: (1) writing my doctoral dissertation on the 'Day of the Lord'; (2) teaching these letters in seminary Greek exegesis courses; (3) teaching Bible Institute (English Bible) courses; and (4) preaching through them expositively verse by verse. They overflow with doctrinal, pastoral, and personal riches.

The biblical text has been interpreted with the consistent use of grammatical-historical principles of hermeneutics (see my *How to Interpret the Bible* in this commentary series). The doubts and spurious theories of Higher Criticism have not been considered for inclusion in this work. A high priority has been devoted to the original Greek text (UBS⁴), history, geography, and culture where appropriate. Special attention has been paid to context, i.e. the immediate text, the Pauline epistles, the New Testament, and ultimately the entire Bible. I have endeavored to provide a balanced treatment by first viewing the individual pieces textually/exegetically and then as they relate to the entire Bible theologically. The ultimate end of this volume is to produce a doctrinal (what to believe) and ethical (how to behave) exposition of 1 and 2 Thessalonians which will appear in the 'Focus on the Bible' commentary series.

The English Bible text employed (unless otherwise noted) is the *New King James Version*. Footnotes have been used sparingly, except where they will lead the reader to resources which effectively expand a discussion. Of special note are the thirty-three *Overviews* designed to provide exegetical, thematic, or theological summaries, which supply necessary background for understanding how a part in the Thessalonian Epistles fits into the whole of Scripture.

Deep appreciation is extended to Malcolm Maclean, who championed this opportunity for me to publish the fruit from several decades of study and teaching; to The Master's College and Seminary board of directors who granted me a sabbatical leave for

writing; to my colleagues at The Master's Seminary who picked up the slack in my absence, especially Dr. Irv Busenitz and Bob White, who also checked all of the Scripture references; to my daughter Lee Carson who faithfully served as the project computer manager; to my son-in-law Mike Carson who did the original artwork on the map of Paul's Second Missionary Journey; and to my dear wife "B" who did whatever was necessary to bring this writing project to a God-honouring conclusion.

May the Lord be pleased to use this commentary in special ways that will be for the spiritual good of His beloved saints and for His great glory.

Richard Mayhue
The Master's Seminary
Sun Valley, CA

rmayhue@mastersem.edu

Helpful Commentaries

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Introduction

The saga of Paul's Thessalonian experience and the continuing spread of the gospel from Asia to Europe begins in Acts 17, after Paul has traveled from Philippi on his second missionary journey. Resulting from his several month stay in Thessalonica, Paul formed a lifetime relationship with the church as her first pastor. He left the priceless legacy of his two correspondences for churches through the ages to study as a superlative example of evangelism and church planting, biblical shepherding, and doctrinal commitment. These so-called 'eschatological epistles' (because of their prophetic content) are equally rich with intimate insights into the proper relationship between a godly pastor and his committed flock.

Historical Background

The initial reference point for dating Paul's second missionary journey (about AD 49-52) is the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-29) which occurred in early to mid-AD 49. Afterwards, Paul returned to Antioch for a time (Acts 15:30-35) and then decided to revisit the sites of his first journey (Acts 15:36). When Paul and Barnabas could not agree on whether to take John Mark or not (Acts 15:37-38), Barnabas sailed with John Mark for Cyprus (Acts 15:39). Paul afterward selected Silas, who had come from Jerusalem (Acts 15:27, 32, 34), and they set out for Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:40-41).

When in Derbe, they invited Timothy to join them on their trip (Acts 16:1-3). They returned to the locations of Paul's previous ministry and strengthened the new believers (Acts 16:4-5). At this point, the Lord issued His famous Macedonia call to Paul and redirected the spread of the gospel west to Europe (Acts 16:6-10).

The party set out for Macedonia where they first ministered in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15; 1 Thess 2:2). After encountering severe spiritual opposition (Acts 16:16-18) plus illegal persecution and

imprisonment (Acts 16:19-34), this small band of courageous ambassadors for Christ departed (Acts 16:35-40). During the several months' ministry in Philippi, a small assembly of believers had been established which numbered Lydia and her household, the Philippian jailer and his family, plus others who must have believed.

At Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

Paul and his companions set out in late fall AD 49 from Philippi for Thessalonica, which was an attractive commercial center in the midst of a politically unique city with a significant Jewish population. They traveled west on the Egnatian Way which extended from Dyrrachium to the west on the Adriatic (modern day Albania) to Byzantium and the Hellespont (Dardanelles Strait) in the east (modern day Turkey). This stone highway was an extension of the Appian Way in Italy and linked Rome with the east, passing through both Thessalonica and Philippi.

They travelled southwest from Philippi to Amphipolis, about a 30-mile journey to this city which was located three miles from the sea. From there, the journey continued southwest for approximately another 30-35 miles to Apollonia and then west another 30-35 miles to Thessalonica. Overall, the journey was about 100 miles in length and took the better part of a week, if they walked. Some have suggested that they might have used horses; it is unknown whether they stayed in each location longer than just overnight.

They arrived in the seaport of Thessalonica (modern day Salonika) on the Thermaic Gulf (modern day Gulf of Salonica) at the northern tip of the Aegean Sea. Thessalonica had been originally founded by Cassander (one of Alexander's four generals, cf. the four horns of Dan 8:22) c. 315 BC on or near the ancient site of Therma and was populated by people from the nearby villages. He named it after his wife who was Alexander's step-sister.

In 168 BC, Thessalonica became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. In 42 BC, it was accorded the status of a 'free city' because of loyalty to the Emperor. Thus, no Roman

soldiers were stationed here and the city had self-government (Acts 17:5-6). Because of its important location, the Roman proconsul resided here.

In Paul's day, the population would have approached 200,000. It ranked with Corinth in Achaia and Ephesus in Asia as a major shipping port. Thessalonica was known to the ancient world as 'the mother of Macedonia' and was said to be 'in the lap of the Roman Empire'.

Paul quickly sought out the Jewish synagogue as was his custom (cf. Damascus, Acts 9:20; Salamis, Acts 13:5; Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13:14; Iconium, Acts 14:1; Berea, Acts 17:10; Athens, Acts 17:17; Corinth, Acts 18:4; Ephesus, Acts 19:8) to declare that Jesus of Nazareth was the Old Testament Messiah (cf. Acts 9:20-22). Over a fifteen day span which included three Sabbaths, Paul preached Christ from the Old Testament to show that the Messiah had to suffer and then be resurrected. He did not merely declare the facts, but persuaded some by his reasoning, explanations, and demonstrations from Scripture. Undoubtedly, Paul recounted his personal encounter with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9).

It could well be that Paul's message here was similar to the message he preached at Pisidian Antioch on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:16-41). There he referred directly to Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33), Isaiah 55:3 (Acts 13:34), and Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:35). He might also have quoted from Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, or used Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34-35) as did Peter at Pentecost. The fruit of this two week ministry (Acts 17:4) came from among the ethnic Jews, the Greeks who embraced Judaism, and as usual a number of women (cf. Acts 16:13-15; 17:12, 34).

There seems certainly to have been an unmentioned, but significant, period of ministry to the Gentiles in Thessalonica between verses four and five of Acts 17. Apparently, after three Sabbaths, Paul turned to the Gentiles just as he had done at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:46; cf. Acts 9:15; 18:6; 22:21; 26:17; Gal 1:16; 2:7-8). This accounts for Paul's elaboration on his ministry in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10, especially his comment about their turning to God from idols (1:9).

The Thessalonian epistles give us relevant glimpses of the church's earliest times. When looking at the early church many contemporary questions arise such as -

- **How serious was Jesus about the Great Commission?**
- **What is the TRUE Gospel?**
- **How do you plant a church?**
- **Which doctrines should you teach to new believers?**
- **What is the pastor's role amongst his flock?**
- **What methods should pastors use to deal with doctrinal error?**
- **What is prophetic teaching and how important is it?**
- **How does a believer live righteously against Satanic assault?**

These are questions that exercise our modern church just as much as the historic Thessalonian one. These timeless letters provide up-to-date answers from a consecrated church, shepherded by godly men devoted to God and to his word. Isn't that what we want too?

'After meticulously defining the background for the Thessalonian epistles, Richard Mayhue unfolds Paul's pastoral concerns and theological instruction. Verse by verse he expounds the epistles with impeccable precision. Matters of church government, spiritual gifts, family relationships, church ordinances and future events are examined through the Thessalonian lens. Having been thus immersed in these epistles, the reader will be challenged to live out their teachings. That is the ultimate compliment that can be paid to any sermon or commentary.'

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