Thessalonians, Epistles to the

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I. Introduction

A. The city of Thessalonica

The Thessalonica that Paul knew, unlike the ruins of Corinth or Ephesus, lies mainly buried beneath the modern metropolis. The pre-Roman remains include a Serapeum, a temple to the Egyptian Serapis. Other impressive archaeological sites post-date Paul: the Roman forum, an

odeon and an impressive *cryptoporticus* (a covered gallery), which housed a market. The city was a thriving port and was a stop along the Via Egnatia, which ran from Byzantium in the east across Macedonia to a port, whence a traveler could sail across the Adriatic to Italy and then proceed by road to Rome. Its population was Greek mixed with other ethnic groups. From AD 44 onward it served as one of the four district capitals of Macedonia, and as a "free city" enjoyed expanded political rights. Over the last century, inscriptions have borne out the testimony of Acts 17:6, 8, that the city was ruled by politarchs (πολιτάρχαι). This title was specially associated with, but not limited to, the government of Thessalonica. They were probably five politarchs on its council.

Beyond its worship of the Olympian pantheon, Thessalonica was heavily influenced by Roman religion and ostentatiously worshiped the "divine Caesar" (Steimle, 2008). Some have suggested that as early as the 1st century, Thessalonica also played host to the Cabiri cult, with its bloody mysteries and ritual sex. In that case, its presence may have elicited a warning against fornication (πορνεία) in 1Th 4:3-8 (Jewett, 1986, 127-32). Others have urged a more measured reconstruction and dating of the cult, given that there are few solid data, also noting that Paul everywhere condemns illicit sex (Vom Brocke, 2001, 117-21).

Acts 17:1-2 states that, unlike the informal gathering at Philippi (Acts 16:13-16), Thessalonian Jews had a formally-constituted synagogue with a building. Acts 17:4 implies that both Jews and God-fearing Greeks were in attendance. Paul makes no reference to a local synagogue in the Thessalonian epistles, although it would have been exceptional if he had; nor is there archaeological or inscriptional data to support the existence of a contemporary synagogue. The earliest evidence dates from the 4th century AD or later (it is sometimes mistakenly reported to be from the 4th century BC); nevertheless, it is a bilingual Samaritan-Greek inscription, indicating the presence of a congregation of Samaritans. Vom Brocke gives the fullest summary of all relevant data; he concludes that a non-Samaritan Jewish synagogue was established in Thessalonica before the Christian Era (2001, 217-33).

B. Acts and the Thessalonian Epistles

Some question the methodological validity of using Acts as an overarching plot into which the epistles may be placed; others find no intractable problems with correlating the documents where possible. In a comparison of the documents the following data are relevant: First, the books follow different agendas: the author of Acts wishes to demonstrate the continuing spread of the gospel, in fulfillment of the Lord's command (Acts 1:8) and, at the start of the Macedonian campaign, as the result of fresh divine guidance (16:6-10). On the other hand, the epistles are written, not to describe the long-range work of Paul, but to confirm those who have already come to the Christian faith. Second, Acts traces the antagonism of Thessalonian Jews to the gospel (17:5-7; 17:13), and additionally the resistance of some Jewish Christians to admit Gentiles to the church without the requirements of Torah (15:1, 5, 24). Unless "your countrymen" (1Th 2:14) refers to Thessalonian

Jews, an unlikely interpretation, then according to that letter, the Christians were persecuted by local Gentiles. 1Th 2:14-16 contains sharp words against the Jewish leadership in Judea, for their persecution of the church and their opposition to Gentile evangelism (but see doubts about the authenticity of these verses in **2 B Authenticity and literary integrity**). Third, Paul's report of being "badly shamed and insulted" in Philippi (1Th 2:2) is an apt summary of the conclusion of the work in Philippi as detailed in Acts 16:19-40. Fourth, Acts can be read to mean that Paul spent only three or four weeks in the city (Acts 17:2); the epistles cast serious doubt on that time frame, given the high awareness of doctrine in that city when Paul writes 1Th, and the multiple gifts that Philippi sent during his time there (Phil 4:16; Malherbe, 2000, 60-61; Fee, 2009, 6). It is possible that the Acts account reflects the author's habit of telescoping events. Fifth, Acts reports that at its inception the church was composed of some Jews and a greater number of God-fearing Greeks (Acts 17:4), but no Greeks directly from paganism (although the Western text of 17:4 adds "and" [καί] before "Greeks," implying that many converted right out of paganism: "[many?] God-fearers and many Greeks and not a few noble women"). 1Th 1:9 implies that Thessalonica was a Gentile church, and that they had turned from idols to God without spending time in the synagogue. Sixth, Acts makes no reference at all to Pauline epistles.

C. The Pauline mission

What is traditionally labeled the second journey (Acts 15:40-18:22) began in Antioch. Paul and Silas and later Timothy revisited the churches of Galatia, and then moved across the Aegean to Macedonia in response to a night vision (Acts 16:9-10). Acts may imply that its author joined the team at Troas and crossed to Philippi, but did not continue on to Thessalonica (16:10-17 is a so-called "we-section"). They evangelized the smaller city Philippi and were forced to leave after the beating and imprisonment of the two principals at the hands of the city magistrates. They traveled westward along the Via Egnatia to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), and followed the typical Pauline plan of preaching in the synagogue, where there would be an audience of Jews and also God-fearing Gentiles; his converts would provide the basis for a congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians. This time opposition arose from the Jews, who took Jason and other Christians before the city magistrates. Jason was forced to post bond as a guarantee against further disturbance. From there Paul and Silas – but apparently not Timothy – went to Berea (Acts 17:10-12), where the Jews gave them a better reception. Nevertheless, Jews from Thessalonica arrived and stirred up discontent, forcing Paul to sail to Athens (Acts 17:14-15), to which city Silas and Timothy later traveled (so implied in 1Th 2:17-3:2, but not Acts). From there they sent Timothy north to Thessalonica (1Th 3:1-2). Timothy later returned, presumably to Corinth, with the good news that the disciples there had survived and were thriving (3:6) despite the persecution they suffered (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-5; 2 Thess 1:5-7). From the letters, we can reconstruct that he went north again with 1 Thessalonians; upon his return, he was sent on a third trip with 2 Thessalonians. Paul and Silas desperately wished to see the Thessalonians, but Satan "blocked" them (1Th 2:18); Paul does not say in what this impediment consisted.

Paul's next missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:17) was centered in Ephesus, but it also included visits to the existing churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia (Acts 20:1; 2 Cor 7:5) and Achaia. Sometime around 55-56 he must have passed through Thessalonica, and then again on the return cycle from Achaia. Very little else is known about the church from the 1st century AD, although they may be among the Macedonians whom Paul praises for their generosity (2 Co 8:1-5). Acts implies that Aristarchus and Secundus were the trustees whom the church has selected for the Jerusalem offering (Acts 20:4; see also 19:29) and that Aristarchus continued with Paul to Rome (27:2; Col 4:10-11, Philemon 24).

D. Chronology

Date of 1 Thessalonians: Most scholars date 1Th (and 2Th, if genuine) in the early 50s, during the second missionary journey. The Pauline team evangelized Macedonia and Achaia during the reign of Claudius (41-54), in which period the senate appointed Junius Annaeus Gallio as proconsul of Achaia, to govern from Corinth. Fortuitously, external evidence from inscriptions has allowed scholars to determine one of the few dates in Paul's ministry, since Gallio's proconsulship may now be fixed around 51-52. Acts 18:11-12 implies that Paul had been working a year and a half in Corinth before Gallio's arrival, although the text could be interpreted in other ways. A common reconstruction is that the team worked in Macedonia in 49 or 50 and that Paul wrote 1Th in 50-51 (see especially Riesner, 1998, 157-211; also Jewett, 1979, 38-40).

A few scholars date the letters in the third journey: Schmithals (1972, 181-91) because he believes Paul is confronting the Gnostic teaching which supposedly lies behind the other epistles of that period. The principal alternative to the traditional dating is the hypothesis put forward by Knox and developed by Lüdemann, according to which Acts is unreliable when it places the initial work in Galatia before the evangelism of Macedonia and Achaia. Rather, Paul was in Macedonia as early as 39-40, and arrived in Corinth long before Gallio took the proconsulship. Lüdemann dates 1Th around 41 (1984, 238). The view has failed to convince many.

Date of 2 Thessalonians:
If 2Th is genuine. The similarities between the two letters suggest that they were written one after the other, giving a date of 50-51 for both. Timothy might have left Thessalonica for Corinth with a question about the resurrection (a trip of two weeks), returned north with 1Th (another two weeks), spent time there and returned to Corinth with an update and the question about the Day of the Lord. This allows the space of a month or two between the Thessalonians' first question (*what of the Christian dead?*) and their second (*is the Day of the Lord really at hand?*).

If 2Th is pseudonymous. If someone other than Paul wrote the letter then its dating poses a greater challenge. The *terminus ad quem* is some time before Polycarp quoted it in his letter to the Philippians (c. AD 110; see below, **3 B Authenticity and the question of pseudonymity**).

The *terminus a quo* is also problematic, given that the author might be implying that the Jerusalem "sanctuary" (ναός) still exists as he writes (2Th 2:4); or the author could be projecting his teaching back in time to before its destruction in AD 70 (Malherbe, 2000, 372). If the epistle were composed after the death of Paul, but before 70, this leaves a foreshortened window of time to pass off the letter among churches who had known the apostle. Most scholars who reject Pauline authorship date the document in the last two decades of the 1st century, when the church was suffering from heightened persecution.

E. The function of the epistles

The popularity of letter-writing in the 1st century AD was due in large part to the *Pax Romana*, with its Roman roads and sea lanes free of pirates. An individual bearing a letter could travel from Corinth to Thessalonica within two weeks, which for most of human history would constitute impressive speed for a private message.

It is doubtful that 1Th is the oldest Christian epistle (see Acts 15:23-29), nor even the first Pauline letter. Paul had participated in itinerant ministry for perhaps 15 years and may have already used the genre; indeed, if 2Th is genuine, then "every letter of mine" (3:17) may imply the existence of previous epistles which, like the "previous letter" of 1Co 5:9, are now lost.

A method that today seems to have always born the Pauline imprint was to write an epistle. He would place it in the hands of a trusted co-worker; in this case, apparently Timothy. The messenger was not simply obligated to ensure the delivery of the letter, but also to read it, explain it, note the state of the church and gather any response to take back to Paul. The church would have been in the main illiterate, and so letters were not documents to be stored away and taken out for leisurely study. The scroll was to be read aloud as a script with which to recreate the original speech event, giving the gathered church a shared aural experience of Paul's "voice." The apostle dictated his epistles, which lent them a lively style that would remind the church of his presence. He also wrote personal greetings at the end (2Th 3:17). The Thessalonian church was responsible to see that all believers heard the letter (1Th 5:27), which directive may have led to the early and wide distribution of copies.

As scholars are fond of repeating, the Pauline epistles were "occasional letters," that is, responses to the immediate needs of the churches rather than theological treatises. Nevertheless, they are not merely or even principally *ad hoc*. They are the reaffirmation of doctrines that the church already possessed, and Paul's response for some new occasion usually consisted of the application of known truth. The Thessalonian epistles are typical in that regard, and this explains the prevalence of so-called "reminder language," for example 1Th 3:4 – "when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know" (see 1Th 1:5, 2:1, 2:2, 2:5, 2:9, 2:10, 2:11, 3:3, 3:4, 5:1, 5:2; 2Th 2:5, 2:6, 3:7). 1Th is almost

entirely a reaffirmation of what they already knew and practiced; the only material which could be labeled as fresh is the resurrection of the saints in 4:13-17. Likewise, in the case of 2Th, the main doctrinal teaching (2Th 2:1-12) is, at least in the historical situation presumed in the letter, already known (2:5, 6).

An unusual feature in the two Thessalonian epistles is the naming of Silas and Timothy, hence "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians" (1Th 1:1). While they conceivably were co-authors with Paul, the better interpretation is that they stood with him as he composed the letters, in order to amplify their encouragement to believers who knew and loved all three men (Malherbe, 2000, 86-89). This view better explains the alternation from "we" to "I," as in 1Th 2:18 – "For *we* wanted to come to you – certainly *I, Paul*, wanted to again and again – but Satan blocked *our* way."

F. Rhetorical criticism, rhetorical analysis and social models

Over the past three decades, scholars have given serious attention to methodologies which look to rhetorical categories to unlock the text (Aune, 2003, 460-65). In "classic" rhetorical analysis, the epistles are scrutinized with regard to their use of *rhetorical forms* which were contemporary with Paul (Jewett, 1986, 61-87; Wanamaker, 1990, 48-52; Donfried, 2002, 1-79; Witherington, 2006, 16-36). In some cases, the interpretation of the text may be predicated on both the form Paul uses and its function in context: e. g., since Paul's description of his ministry in 1Th 2:1-12 is similar to Dio Chrysostom's presentation of the ideal philosopher, then perhaps Paul is not, after all, defending himself against accusations (Malherbe, 2000, 153-63).

Additionally, some have employed rhetorical analysis to determine the overall *genre* of the letters (Johanson, 1987; Donfried and Beutler, 2000, 19-21; see the overview by Walton, 1995, 233-40), in some cases using the Aristotelian categories of epideictic, deliberative and judicial speeches. Others have criticized the approach, given the difficulty of achieving anything like a consensus in the definition or application of genre categories. In the case of 1Th, e.g., the letter is notoriously difficult to assign to a ready-made genre or even to outline.

Another approach is to use theoretical models taken from the discipline of social science, in an attempt to determine the "social situation" of Paul or one of his churches (Wanamaker, 1990, 53-63; Witherington, 1990, 36-44). Jewett (1986, 135-78) argues for a "millenarian" model of Thessalonica, while others argue that the church was infested by Gnosticism (Schmithals, 1972). As in the case of genre analysis, one methodological danger inherent in "modeling" lies in its vulnerability to circular reasoning.

II. 1 Thessalonians

A. Content

1:1 is a typically Pauline introduction. From 1:2 onward, prayer and thanksgiving dominate 1Th, motivated by the return of Timothy with good news about the church (3:6). 1:2-10 is a report on their prayers and thanksgiving because of their faith, love and endurance (1:3), which are indicators of divine election and God's ongoing work within them (1:4-6). The church is renowned for its conversion from idolatry to the gospel (1:7-10). 2:1-12 is a description of the apostles' ministry among them, emphasizing their sincerity and self-sacrificing love; scholars debate the function of this passage, as shown above **1 F Rhetorical criticism, rhetorical analysis and social models**. 2:13-16 contains a denunciation of the Jewish religious establishment in Judea, which opposes God and tries to forbid the evangelization of Gentiles (see below, **2 B Authenticity and literary integrity** for an interpolation hypothesis). In 2:17-3:13 matters become more perilous, as Satan himself blocks them from returning to Thessalonica, a dilemma that leaves them anxious about how the church was bearing up under persecution. Timothy successfully visited them and brought back good news, which leads to more prayer for the disciples (3:11-13). The exhortation in 4:1-12 concentrates on sexual purity, brotherly love and industriousness. From there Paul moves on in 4:13-18 to the only strictly doctrinal issue, the resurrection of the saints at the Parousia. In addition, according to 5:1-11, the sudden coming of the Day means that Christians should live in the "day" and the "light", that is, holiness and readiness. As in many Greco-Roman letters of moral instruction, Paul gives a staccato list of injunctions in 5:12-22, focusing on the dynamics of congregational life, including directions concerning prayer and prophetic utterances. He closes in 5:23-28 with a benediction and other epistolary conventions, including the charge to have the letter read aloud to all.

B. Authenticity and literary integrity

Almost no-one has doubted that 1Th is Pauline material, but some have doubted its integrity, that is, that the letter was composed as it now stands.

1) Interpolation theories. A few have said that 5:1-11 is an interpolation of non-Pauline material (an idea described by Wanamaker, 1990, 33), but the hypothesis has won little attention. Of greater consequence is the idea that the harsh condemnation of the Jews in 1Th 2:13(14)-16 was not part of the original letter but was inserted later. In no small part this is due to the reader's puzzlement over how Paul's antagonism squares with his statements in Ro 9:1-3, 11:26; in fact, F. C. Baur rejected the authenticity of 1Th because of this single paragraph. The best-developed hypothesis is from B. A. Pearson, who states that an early scribe wrote the lines as he reflected on the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, wishing to rally all Christians, whether Jewish or

Gentile, to oppose the Jewish establishment (Pearson, 1971). There is no manuscript evidence to support the idea, and despite some interest (Schmithals; Richard) it has not been convincing.

2) Theories of compilation. Schmithals, based on his idea that the Thessalonian letters represent Paul's struggle against Gnosticism, claimed that there were originally four letters, which, if properly rearranged, chronicle the evolution of that debate: Epistle A (2Th 1:1-12 + 3:6-16), Epistle B (1Th 1:1-2:12 + 4:2-5:28), Epistle C (2Th 2:13-14 + 2:1-12 + 2:15-3:3), Epistle D (1 Th 2:13-4:1) (Schmithals, 1972, 212-13). Richard, who rejects the Pauline authorship of 2Th, divides 1Th into an "Earlier Missive" (2:13-4:2, excluding the "interpolated" 2:14-16) and a "Later Missive" (1:1-2:12 + 4:3-5:28) (Richard, 1994, 11-19). In general scholars have decided that such hypotheses break the stricture against multiplying assumptions (e. g., where does one original epistle begin and end; why would a later editor rearrange the material, and do it clumsily) and thereby lose credibility.

C. Theology

1Th assumes that its readers already possess a surprisingly nuanced knowledge of Christian teaching, especially christology. This is even more impressive given that Paul and Silas may have spent only a short time there, and that much of the congregation came to Christ directly from paganism without having passed through the synagogue, where Gentiles might have at least gained a basic understanding of monotheism (1:9, 2:4, etc.), an ethic based on the character of the deity (4:3) and the principle that God is not subject to Fate but makes his own decisions (e. g., 1:4, 3:11). Some of the notable points of doctrine are:

1) *Christology*. The Lord Jesus Christ fulfills many roles of the Lord Jehovah from the Hebrew Scriptures (Fee, 2007, 31-83): e. g., Zech 14:5 has "then Jehovah my God will come, and all the holy ones with him"; the verse is transformed in 1Th 3:13 so that it is the Lord *Jesus* who comes with all his holy ones; the "Day of Jehovah" tradition implicitly becomes the day of the Lord Jesus in 5:2. This high christology makes itself felt whenever a Christian prays, not only to the Father but also to Christ (3:11-13).

2) *Salvation*. Christ saves through his death and resurrection (4:14, 5:9-10) and will ultimately deliver his people at his coming (1:10, 5:9). Outside the church, people "sleep" and live in "darkness" and "drunkenness" and will be taken by surprise when Christ comes (5:2-3). The Spirit plays a substantial role (1:5-6, 5:19-20), since it is he who empowers the believer to live in holiness (4:8). Paul implies that the New Covenant is in force (4:9); not even in Qumran, with its high interest in the New Covenant, was it expected that the Spirit would enable Jews and Gentiles to walk in holiness during this age.

3) *Eschatology*. For the Christian, to speak of the end is to speak of the coming of God's Son. This stands contrary to Second Temple Judaism, in which a messianic figure(s) plays a subsidiary role and in some traditions does not appear at all.

Paul may have taught the Thessalonians certain motifs that show up in the synoptic tradition (see Rigaux, 1956, 98-101; Witherington, 1992; *contra* Tuckett, 1990), for example, the coming of

Christ with his angels and the gathering together of the saints. Paul also falls in line with the tradition by expanding on the theme of readiness at the Lord's coming (5:1-11).
There are several explanations for why Paul taught about the Parousia – perhaps the Gnostics taught a merely spiritual resurrection and Paul had to correct it; or some Thessalonians were "enthusiastic," that is, so filled with the Spirit that they felt themselves above ethical norms; or it was the timing of the Lord's return that was already raising questions. None of these may be proven from the text itself. So far as Paul states, it was the resurrection of the saints and nothing else that was in doubt (4:13-17); it is possible that their uncertainty is attributable simply to the rejection of that hope by the surrounding culture. In addition, Paul probably regarded the imperial *Pax et securitas* as the mere illusion of "peace and safety" (5:3; he uses the Greek form of the Roman slogan). Overall, Paul's interest in eschatology is not speculative, but pastoral, in order to give his disciples a set of references for their behavior in this age.

III. 2 Thessalonians

A. Content

2Th begins with a greeting and a thanksgiving which are similar to 1Th (2Th 1:1-4). A major theme of this epistle is the distinction between believers and the wicked. In 1:5-12 Paul recognizes that the believers experience persecution at the hands of those who reject the gospel. When Christ comes he will vindicate the saints and "inflict vengeance" and eternal punishment on the wicked. Yet, this is no reason for the Christians to be self-satisfied – rather, they must seek to live worthy of God's call (1:5, 11-12). The main doctrinal issue has to do with a rumor concerning "the Day of the Lord" (2:2). Some understand the issue to be that the Day of the Lord had already arrived (Jewett, 1986, 100; Fee, 2009, 273), perhaps in a hyper-spiritualized fashion, and the author is counterbalancing their error with traditional futuristic eschatology. Another possibility is that some thought the Day was imminent and were beginning to panic; in that case Paul reminds them that they already still hold to the futuristic hope and are aware that the great apostasy and the man of sin must appear before the Day of the Lord (Bruce, 1982, 166; Green, 2002, 305). Since these signs have not yet taken place, then "the restrainer" is still in place. As in 1Th, Paul is not indulging in apocalyptic speculation; he is interested in affirming the Thessalonian believers, and develops the thought that while the world is deceived by Satan, the saints know God's plan. In 2:13-15 he pushes this bifurcation further, emphasizing their election by God and their need to hold fast to true teaching. The request for prayer in 3:1-5 is unusually detailed; if God alone can call people to belief in the gospel, then the Thessalonians should pray that the gospel has continuing success. The main exhortation, in 3:6-15, has to do with disciples who do not work and, perhaps, are asking the church for aid. Scholars are divided as to their motivation. Paul tells the church not to support such a person and to "have nothing to do with

them" (3:14). The letter closes in 3:16-18 with a conventional conclusion, including Paul's signature.

B. Authenticity and the question of pseudonymity

Polycarp (c. 110 d. C.) quotes 2Th and seems to attribute it to Paul (Pol. *Phil*. 11.3-4); Justin Martyr uses language from 2Th, "man of sin" and "man of apostasy" (*Dial.* 32; 110), but does not mention its source; the Marcionite canon included it. Later in the 2nd century, Irenaeus refers to Paul in "the second to the Thessalonians, speaking of Antichrist," going on to quote 2Th 2:8 (*Adv. Haer*. 3.7.2); around the same time, the Muratorian Canon names two Thessalonian epistles. Thus was 2Th universally accepted as Pauline until doubts were raised in the early 19th century. The view gained greater momentum with the publication of Trilling's *Untersuchungen* (1972), which provides the most cogent argument that 2Th is pseudepigraphical, that is, attributed to Paul but not written or authorized by him. The principal arguments include: 1. Style and Language. It is so close in style to 1Th that it could be viewed as a crude adaptation of the genuine letter. 2. Tone. 1Th is exuberant and warm, whereas 2Th seems more distant and matter of fact. 3. Tradition plays a larger role in 2Th, indicating that it was written decades later than 1Th and depends on earlier instruction rather than the living voice of the apostles (see 2:15; 3:6); on the other hand, in both instances the tradition is said to be "from us", not from earlier authorities. 4. Eschatology. Most importantly, whereas in 1Th the time of the Parousia is unknowable, 2Th 2 provides a (partial) eschatological timeline that expects a final apostasy and the man of lawlessness before Christ's coming. Perhaps this reflected the interests of the church late in the 1st century, along with Matt 24 and the Revelation.

In that case, 2Th might be from an admirer of Paul, an adaptation of his theology to a new situation (Trilling). Alternatively, 2Th could be seen as the work of a usurper (Marxsen, 1982, 30-35), who wishes to supplant the earlier letter (2:2) with his own eschatological program, using the final autograph (3:17) to invalidate the (presumably) unsigned 1Th.

Some who reject Pauline authorship seem to imply that their viewpoint is all but universally accepted; nevertheless, a broad array of authors maintain its authenticity (Bruce; Marshall; Wanamaker; Malherbe; Witherington, 2006; Fee; Green, to name a view). These scholars do not find the objections to Pauline authorship insurmountable, and point to the paucity of pseudonymous letters from that period, which would provide a parallel to a pseudonymous 2Th. Then too, there the difficulties of introducing such an epistle into the church, leading to its nearly-immediate acceptance by Polycarp of Smyrna and (unlike NT epistles such as Hebrews or 2Peter) with no doubts over its authenticity. In that case, the contrasts between the epistles are softened if both are read in the broader context of the Olivet tradition. The epistles have similar styles because they were sent within weeks or months of each other, but reflecting a change in circumstances in the church, which Paul had to address (Marshall, 1983, 40-45).

An older approach has few followers today (although see Malherbe, 2000, 352-53): Paul wrote both letters, but to different groups in Thessalonica, for example, 1Th to the leaders of the church, 2Th to all the members; or the view of von Harnack, that 1Th went to Gentile Christians (1Th 1:9) and 2Th to Jewish.

C. Order of the Letters

The canonical order of 1Th and 2Th has traditionally been assumed to reflect the order of their composition; in addition, Irenaeus and the Muratorian Canon label them "first" and "second" (see above **3 B Authenticity and the question of pseudonymity**). Conversely, some have speculated that multiple epistles to one destination might have been arranged in order of size (so 1-2 Cor; 1-2 Tim), so that 2Th was placed second without historical grounds. Wanamaker (1990, 37-45) has championed this hypothesis, arguing that many issues are clear up if Paul wrote 2Th first, adding that his theory undermines the arguments of those who reject its authenticity. His re-ordering of 1-2Th has persuaded few (see the review by Malherbe, 2000, 361-64).

D. Theology

Whatever one's conclusions about the authenticity of 2Th, its author was clearly aware of 1Th and presumed much of its doctrinal paradigm, in particular the high christology, God's sovereignty over history, his "election" of a people, the deception of humanity outside of Christ, the persecution of God's people in this present age, and the coming of salvation.

1) *Christology*. Christ again assumes the roles of Jehovah, for example in a revised version of the Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24-26), which is now fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ (3:16, 18). Christ, alongside the Father, is the object of prayer (2:16-17). At his coming, Jesus fulfills the role of Jehovah Sabaoth (1:7). Later (1:9) Paul alludes to Isa 2:10, "hide in the dust from the terror of Jehovah, and from the glory of his majesty," applying it to the Lord *Jesus*, "separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." Christ's coming is a divine "epiphany" (ἐπιφανεία, 2:8).

2) *Salvation and damnation*. As in 1Th, the people of God are his called and chosen (2Th 1:11; 2:13-14). Paul speaks of salvation as a future event, when Christ and his people will be "glorified" (2Th 1:10-12; 2:14). The rest, who do not obey the gospel (1:8, 2:11-12) and who might even persecute the saints (1:6), love unrighteousness and will be condemned (2:12). Especially in the end times, Satan will deceive them further (2:9-10) and even God will send them "a powerful delusion" (2:11). More than in other epistles in the Pauline canon, 1:6-9 gives greater detail about the punishment of the wicked at Christ's coming, using such tropes as angels, divine vengeance, fire and eternal destruction.

3) *Eschatology*. As in 1Th, the eschatology of 2Th is christocentric. In 1Th, Paul states that the time of the Day of the Lord is unknown (1Th 5:1-4). 2Th offers no detailed program of end-time events, but it does add that one may know that the Day is *not* at hand, since the final apostasy

and the man of sin have not yet made their appearance (2:1-12). This tradition has echoes in the Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) and in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:15 and Mark 13:14). In the situation presumed by the letter, the Thessalonians know the identity of the "restrainer" (2Th 2:6). One could interpret 2Th 2 as a contradiction or even a rejection of Paul's earlier teaching; or conclude that the teachings of both epistles have their basis in the eschatological traditions of the early church. The Matthean Olivet Discourse, for example, places side-by-side the suddenness of the coming of Son of Man with signs which must occur before the end can come. 4) *The work ethic*. Paul (1Th 1:3, 2:9, 4:11) had already taught the importance of (manual) labor. For those who accept the Pauline authorship of 2Th, the abandonment of gainful employment has gotten worse in the interim. Some had become, literally, "disorderly" (the *ataktos*/ἄτακτος word group); they deserted their gainful work and (perhaps) asked the church for support. There is no consensus as to why people would do so; the options are: 1. They were simply of poor moral character (Trilling; Malherbe). Indeed some mistranslate *ataktos* as "lazy" or "loafing around" (*contra* the major lexical reference works and especially Spicq, 1956, 12; Rigaux, 1956, 104-05). 2. They assumed the Parousia was near (2:1-2) and so they abandoned jobs that now seemed mundane (Marshall). A subset of this viewpoint is that they were "enthusiasts," people so focused on the other world that they neglected their work (Mearns). 3. Since Paul connects his labor specifically with preaching, it is possible that some claimed financial support from the church for their evangelistic labor, 1 Th 1:8 (Jewett). 4. The view that is currently gaining popularity looks to the Greco-Roman institution of patronage: poorer citizens depended on the more powerful of society for protection and basic sustenance, in exchange for loyalty (Green; Witherington, 2006; Wanamaker). None of the four views has direct support from the text, not even **2**, which depends on an argument *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (*since* the letter mentions eschatology and *then* problems with work, *therefore* false eschatology was the cause for neglecting work). All that is certain is that their behavior was contradictory to the apostolic ethic and must not be tolerated. 3:6-15 contains, not a full ethic of work, but a reminder to take action against those who err.

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