

July 9, 2000 by Steve Brandon



## The Church of the Thessalonians (part 2)

### Acts 17:1b-4; 1 Thessalonians 1 & 2

1. Coming to Thessalonica (verse 1a)
2. Activity in Thessalonica (verses 1b-4)
3. Expulsion from Thessalonica (verses 5-9)

It is that time again this evening that we come the exposition of the scriptures. It is really this portion of our time together that we can most clearly see what God would have us to do here in Rockford. We are going to look again at the "church of the Thessalonians."

As I look deeper and deeper into this book, I am more and more convinced of its profitability for us here in Rockford. If we could experience only in part what Paul and the church there experienced, the church here someday will be a wonderful place to be.

Last week, we began our study by looking at Acts 17, where Paul first came into contact with the Thessalonians themselves. I would invite you to turn there in your Bible, for we are going to begin here tonight. As we look at the first 9 verses in Acts 17, I chose to outline them with three points:

1. Coming to Thessalonica (:1a)
2. Activity in Thessalonica (:1b-4)
3. Expulsion from Thessalonica (:5-9)

If you recall, our first point (and actually the only point we got to last week), took us back to the beginning of Paul's missionary endeavors. We looked at what Paul was seeking to do as he journeyed across Asia minor. Paul's home base, if you recall was the church in Antioch. And it from this church (as recorded in Acts 13) that Paul and Barnabas were commissioned and sent away to the work the Holy Spirit had set apart for them.

We saw how Paul and Barnabas traveled ... From Antioch to the coastal city of Seleucia. From Seleucia, they sailed to Salamis, another coastal city on the island of Cyprus. They traveled through the length of the island until they reached Paphos. From Paphos, they sailed to Perga (in the region of PAMPHYLIA). They headed north until they reached the city of Antioch (which is usually referred to as "Pisidian Antioch," because the city is located in the region of PISIDIA).

Luke records for us many of the great details of Paul's activity in that city. Luke records how Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue and how the Jews wanted them to come back and preach to them the next Sabbath. The next Sabbath came and the Jews rejected the message, so Paul turned to the Gentiles and many believed. The Jews were stirred to jealousy and drove them out of town. As you remember last week, we went through that passage in great detail, because of its similarity with what happened in Thessalonica.

From Pisidian Antioch, Paul went to Iconium and preached in the synagogue. They were driven from Iconium to the town of Lystra, where again Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel. Having been driven out of Lystra, they landed at Derbe, where they "made many disciples" (Acts 14:21).

At this point, they made a U-turn and traveled back to many of the cities they had previously visited. They went back through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. Luke records for us of their activities in Acts 14:22-23, ...

Acts 14:22-23

[They were] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and [saying], "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

From Pisidian Antioch, they came to Perga (in PAMPHYLIA). From Perga went down to Attalia (the coastal city). From Attalia they sailed back home to Antioch (their home church). Once back in Antioch, "they spent a long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:28), and made a brief trip "up to Jerusalem" (Acts 15:2). When back in Antioch, Paul "said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are' (Acts 15:36)." After a disagreement, Paul chose Silas to come with him, and he headed north (Acts 15:40).

Paul traveled through SYRIA and CILICIA, "strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:41). He came to Derbe. From Derbe, he went to Lystra, where he picked up Timothy (Acts 16:3). Silas and Timothy were with Paul when he wrote First and Second Thessalonians). From Lystra, he passed through the PHRYGIAN and GALATIAN regions clear up to the region of MYSIA, until finally, he reached the city of Troas. It was in Troas, where he had the MACEDONIAN vision: a man appeared to him in a vision and said, "Come over to MACEDONIA and help us. They sailed from Troas to Samothrace and landed at Neapolis. From Neapolis, they traveled to Philippi. From Philippi they traveled through

Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica (as Acts 17:1a records for us).

Now, we have not yet mentioned anything about the city itself. It is important to know that the city of Thessalonica was strategically placed to be one of the controlling cities of all of Macedonia. Not only did it have a good natural harbor, the Thermaic Gulf, but it was also placed nicely along the Egnatian way (the road that cuts across Macedonia). For a while, Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. Cicero described it as "laying in the lap" of the Roman Empire. Meletius said, "So long as nature does not change, Thessalonica will remain wealthy and fortunate." Gibbon records that "Before the foundation of Constantinople, Thessalonica is mentioned ... as the intended capital" of the Roman Empire (i.e. the world). The city was founded in 315 B. C. by Cassander, who named it after Thessalonica, his wife. Shortly before Paul came, it was the largest of the Macedonian cities; there are estimates of a population of 200,000 people.

Thessalonica was a strategic city of Macedonia. And it is to this city that we find the apostle Paul arriving. And thus, we came to the close of our 1st point last week:

#### 1. Coming to Thessalonica (:1a)

Now, along the way, we made some critical observations. The primary of which indicates exactly what Paul did in each of the cities that he visited. In general (not in every case, but in general), Paul did three things.

- a. He went to the synagogue.
- b. He turned to the Gentiles, and
- c. He faced persecution.

A second observation we made is that his agenda was to plant churches. That was clearly his objective.

We saw him establish churches in Pisidian Antioch, in Iconium, in Lystra, and (probably) in Derbe. He had just come from Philippi, where the foundation was laid for a new church. We will see Paul travel from Thessalonica to establish a church in Corinth as well.

Thessalonica was no exception. Paul's mission was to establish a church. He had a plan. His plan was to enter the synagogue (if it existed) and preach. After addressing the Jew, he would turn to the Gentile, and hopefully establish a church in that city. And indeed, a church was established. Paul wrote several letters to this church (1 & 2 Thessalonians).

All of this leads us to the second point...

#### 2. Activity in Thessalonica (:1b-4)

Up until this point, we have been quite factual. Up until this point, we really have been through a simple history lesson. However, with this next point, we are going to begin to see a little bit more of what Paul's message was, how Paul's message was received, and what sort of relationship did he have with the Thessalonians. In order to determine what happened in Thessalonica, we are going to look from two perspectives that the Bible gives us: Luke's perspective and Paul's perspective. Luke gives us his perspective in Acts 17, in the text we are currently looking at. Paul gives us his perspective in his letter to the Thessalonians, particularly for the 1st two chapters.

Let's look first at, ...

##### a. Luke's perspective

Acts 17:1

Now when they [i.e. Paul and Silas, note also that Timothy was most certainly with them as well] had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

What is Paul going to do? Go into the synagogue! Remember the pattern: Synagogue, Gentiles, Persecution.

Acts 17:2-3

And according to Paul's custom [and we have seen his custom], he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'

Of course Paul went into the synagogue. As F. F. Bruce once wrote, "This pattern of entering first into the synagogue was a practical expression of the principle laid down by Paul in Rom. 1:16 -- that the gospel should be presented 'to the Jew first.' " [\[1\]](#)

You see this all over the Bible. "To the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 2:9,10). One man said that this was "Primitive Evangelistic Policy." This same policy didn't originate with the apostles. It originated with Jesus, Who told His twelve disciples this same thing (Matt. 10:5,6): "Do not go in [the] way of [the] Gentiles, and do not enter [any] city of the Samaritans; (:6) but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Think about what it was like in Paul's day. When he came into a town, often, the town had never before heard the gospel. The proclamation of Jesus had never been uttered. They did not know the name: "Jesus Christ." There were no churches. There were no Christians. There was nobody who ever heard of the good news before.

The most straightforward strategy in those days would be to find those people who are god-fearers and true believers in God, who had never heard the message of Jesus, the Messiah, yet. These people assembled at the synagogue. And it appears as if Paul often experienced the same success that Peter did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), where he explained from the Scriptures how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, how it was necessary that the Jews didn't recognize their Messiah - that he might be put to death, how it was

necessary for Jesus to rise again from the dead - for the forgiveness of sins.

Then, the Holy Spirit would open their minds and they would see the truth. They would say, "Brethren, what shall we do?" The answer would be, "Repent from your sins and believe in the gospel!" Often times many would respond to his message and follow Paul. We see in Pisidian Antioch that, "many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, ... When the Gentile heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. ... And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region" (Acts 13:43, 48-49). In Iconium, Paul "entered the synagogue of the Jews ... and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of the Jews and of the Greeks" (Acts 14:1). And in Derbe, they "preached the gospel to [Derbe] and ... made many disciples" (Acts 14:21).

Often times, it was easy to establish a Christian Church from those Jewish believers who would leave the synagogue, because many of these believers loved the scriptures and knew them, because there were certainly many godly men in these places, who could serve instantly as elders (like we saw in Acts 14 - appointing elders in every city), and because the people themselves were certainly walking in a manner pleasing to the Lord (as they had been believers for quite some time). I have been asked before, "Well, then, in establishing a church, shouldn't we first go to the synagogues?" My answer is "no."

Think about it. How many of you have ever been to a synagogue? Paul had! How many of you have ever spoken at a synagogue? Paul had! How many of you would fit right in at a synagogue? Paul had! How many of the Jews in the synagogue have never heard of Jesus Christ, and are in need of hearing it from the first time from us? Perhaps a few, but certainly not most! Most Jews today have rejected the clear claims of their Messiah. How many Rabbi's haven't been shown the scriptures which point to Christ? I know that in their preparation, they must go to the scriptures that Christians use to point to Jesus being the Messiah and have learned to explain it away.

The situation is different today. When Paul went to preach, he often went into a place and preached Christ for the first time. "I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was [already] named, ..." (Rom. 15:20). I do not think that there is even one single town in America (with more than a few hundred people) that doesn't have at least one church in it. Even if there isn't a church, I am sure that the name "Jesus Christ" was named. Used in a swear word, if nothing else. Our strategy, by nature, needs to be different.

So, how should it be different? I remember in former days being trained in College Ministry. "How to impact a campus for Jesus Christ." The very first thing we were trained to do was "mobilize" the Christians. That was certainly Paul's purpose. He wanted to "mobilize the Godly." That is what we have been doing for the past several years. We have been mobilizing Christians in Rockford. It then is the core of the church from which you can ably minister to the unconverted.

But in some ways, our strategy needs to be the same as Paul's: find the interested. Notice that Paul was constantly in conversation with those who were interested in his message. You remember in Pisidian Antioch, when the people begged him to come back again the next Sabbath, Paul knew that they were interested, so he came back and preached to them. The reason why Paul was three Sabbaths in the synagogue was that the Jews were interested in his message -- at least for three Sabbaths anyway.

And so today, we need to be about the business in Rockford letting people know about our plans here to establish a church and see exactly who is interested. Take a few brochures home. Think and pray through who you might give them to. See who is interested.

One of the things that I try to do at work is really think through how it is that I can communicate spiritual things to people in such a way as to find out how interested people are. I like to ask people questions that I would like to be asked. "Hey, did you do anything special this weekend?" I listen to them for a few minutes and inevitably, they ask, "And you?" Glad you asked! So I tell them things about the latest church activities.

I like to ask people, "What do you like to do in your spare time?" I listen for a few minutes about their hobbies, and often they say, "And you?" So I tell them about how much of my free time is devoted to Christ and serving His church.

Perhaps we could call these our "And You?" questions. Just even this past week, I had the opportunity to speak with somebody at work. He had inquired about something earlier, so I mentioned something about our church and he expressed some interest. So, I gave him a brochure from Kishwaukee Bible Church and invited him to join us on Sunday morning. We'll see if he is more interested in the future. I'm simply trying to be faithful to open my mouth. If the church of Jesus Christ is to grow, it is through His faithful saints opening their mouths to speak forth what is important to them. Paul sought to make conversation and see who was interested in learning about the Messiah. So should we talk about the gospel and see if others are interested.

Let's look at Paul's message in the synagogue. We will then look at their reception of Paul's message, and their relationship.

The content of Paul's message shouldn't surprise us.

Acts 17:3

Explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

In these verses here, Luke merely gives us a summary of what Paul was saying. All Luke records for us is a summary of what Paul said. This is unlike Acts 13 in Pisidian Antioch, where much of Paul's sermon was recorded. But Luke tells us that Paul was both Explaining and Giving Evidence.

The NAS footnote on these words are excellent. Paul was ...

i. Explaining (i.e. opening)

This word is used to describe the opening of a womb in Luke 2:23. The same word is used by Stephen to picture the opening of the heavens to receive him in Acts 7:56. On the road to Emmaus, the same word is used to describe how Jesus was "explaining" or "opening" the Scriptures (Luke 24:32), which resulted in the "opening" of their minds to understand the scriptures (Luke 24:45).

This is speaking of the process of taking a Bible passage that is confusing or unclear and beginning to tie several things together, so that it is understood. Like what Philip did with the Ethiopian Eunuch. Philip asked, "Do you understand?" The Eunuch replied, "How could I unless someone guides me?" Philip then opened up to him Isaiah, ...

Isaiah 53:7,8  
He was led as a sheep to slaughter;  
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
So He does not open His mouth."  
"In humiliation His judgment was taken away;  
Who shall relate His generation?  
For His life is removed from the earth.

Philip, "Opened his mouth and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35).

This is similar to the process of taking a non-Believer, or a new believer through a text of scripture, which is not easily understood. And having them understand! Like a few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to open up Genesis 3:15 with someone this week, "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." I have had many opportunities over the years to sit down with those who don't understand the scripture and open it to them and show them how things all work together. This process is exhilarating. It is at the heart of the joy of the Christian ministry.

Paul wasn't simply (i) explaining, he was also, ...

ii. Giving evidence (i.e. placing before)

This word is often used to describe the placing of food before others. In Mark 6:41 we read of the feeding of the multitudes. Jesus gave the food to the disciples "to set before" the multitudes. Often it is used to describe the entrusting of a teaching to others: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). At times, it is used to describe teaching, which is placed before people: in Matthew 13:24,31 Jesus "presented" parables to the crowds; that is, he "set them before" the crowds.

Do you get the picture? Paul was in the synagogue with Bible (maybe scroll?) in hand and opening it up and explaining it to them. He was demonstrating with reasoned proofs of how it was necessary for Jesus to suffer and rise again from the dead! He was trying to be as clear as he possibly could. Paul was attempting to address the mind.

Let's look more closely at the content of Paul's message in the synagogue Now, realize that when the scriptures say, "the Christ," to Jewish minds, they would hear, "Messiah!" And so, I read it that way...

Acts 17:3  
Explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.

Luke gives us a summary of Paul's logic. His approach was first to demonstrate from scripture that certain things were true of the Messiah. Things that had to happen in His life. He had to suffer. And He had to raise from the dead.

We could postulate here about which texts Paul would have used. We could postulate that he used Psalm 22, which begins ...

Psalm 22:1, 7-8, 16-18  
My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? ...  
All who see me sneer at me;  
They separate the lip they wag the head, saying,  
Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him;  
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him. ...  
For dogs have surrounded me;  
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;  
they pierced my hands and my feet.  
I can count all my bones.  
They look, they stare at me;  
They divide my garments among them,  
And for my clothing they cast lots.

Perhaps he went to Isaiah 53, ...

Isaiah 53:2-12

For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,  
And like a root out of parched ground;  
He has no [stately] form or majesty  
That we should look upon Him,  
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.  
He was despised and forsaken of men,  
A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;  
And like one from whom men hide their face,  
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,  
And our sorrows He carried;  
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten of God, and afflicted.  
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
The chastening for our well-being [fell] upon Him,  
And by His scourging we are healed.  
All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.  
He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He did not open His mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,  
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
So He did not open His mouth.  
By oppression and judgment He was taken away;  
And as for His generation, who considered  
That He was cut off out of the land of the living,  
For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke [was due?]  
His grave was assigned with wicked men,  
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,  
Because He had done no violence,  
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

But the LORD was pleased  
To crush Him, putting [Him] to grief;  
If He would render Himself [as] a guilt offering,  
He will see [His] offspring,  
He will prolong [His] days,  
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.  
As a result of the anguish of His soul,  
He will see [it] and be satisfied;  
By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many,  
As He will bear their iniquities.  
Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,  
And He will divide the booty with the strong;  
Because He poured out Himself to death,  
And was numbered with the transgressors;  
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,  
And interceded for the transgressors.

Perhaps he went to Psalm 16, ...

Psalm 16:10  
For You will not abandon my should to Sheol;  
Neither will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

So, when Paul had demonstrated that Messiah was to suffer and die and raise from the dead, he sought then to show that Jesus was the one who met these requirements. Jesus was The Messiah in General. And Jesus was The Messiah in Particular.

We have postulated what Paul would have preached. Our best guess of what Paul actually said can be found in Acts 13. Look at how these elements are present in this passage:

God chose our father and made them great. He led them out of Egypt (verse 17). God gave them judges (verse 20). God gave them kings: Saul (verse 21) and David (verse 22). "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus" (verse 23). Paul said, "Those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled [these] by condemning [Him]. And though they found no ground for [putting Him to] death, they

asked Pilate that He be executed. And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead" (verses 27-30). "God has fulfilled this [promise] to our children in that He raised up Jesus. ... He raised Him up from the dead..." (verses 33-34). "... He whom God raised did not undergo decay. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, And through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be free through the Law of Moses" (verses 37-39). And then we see a warning against unbelief in verses 40 and 41.

I would bet that Paul preached and taught a similar message in both places. In fact, I would venture to say that much of Paul's time was spent preaching and teaching the same message. You see, he was "a travelling evangelist." He probably preached the same message again and again. It was his ol', "Jesus is the Messiah" message, which he always preached for his first sermon in the synagogue, where he went to the same passages. I say this, because this was the heart of his evangelistic ministry! He primarily went into synagogues and had to demonstrate to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. And this needed to come from the Scripture.

This is nothing more than Paul proclaiming the mystery of Christ. Remember when Paul spoke in Ephesians 3 about the mystery of Christ, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;" It was as if the proper understanding of the Old Testament was veiled from all who looked at it. It was as if they were looking at Messiah's coming as one event. How could Messiah suffer? How could Messiah reign also?

The solution was that passages talking about Messiah suffering were fulfilled in Jesus on the cross. But the passages talking about Messiah coming in His glory are to be fulfilled when Messiah returns! It made sense for Paul to open up to them scriptures in which they had never before understood correctly, because they looked the scriptures the wrong way. They had the wrong paradigm. They were looking at things the wrong way. And Paul merely opened the scripture and explained these things to them.

As I said before, this wasn't a new message for him. We saw how he preached this message to the Thessalonians in Acts 17. We have just seen how he preached this to those at Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13.

Even just as he was converted, it says that "Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 9:22). When he went into the synagogues and divided the people, there is nothing else that would have divided them like this message! In Iconium (Acts 14) it appears as if the same thing happened!

This was a constant theme. How did they respond? Verse 4 tells us that the response was mixed, ...

Acts 17:4

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

Some believed, some didn't. Paul's experience in Thessalonica is indicative of how evangelism always works: Some believe, some don't.<sup>[2]</sup> When I preached on Acts 17, I made this point also. In recent months, in family worship, we were going through Acts. "Carissa, did the people believe?" The answer is, "Some did and some didn't!"

This, my friends, is evangelism. This, my friends, despite the response, is successful evangelism: when you can open the scriptures and explain to others what they say! And they understand. You leave the results up to God. You preach, not knowing if God will open the mind and the heart! You seek to persuade with the whole of your being. You seek to pray for God to open the heart with the whole of your being.

You see, our job is to throw seed. Matthew 13 speaks of the parable of the sower, who threw his seed. Based upon the type of soil, the seed grew (or not!). Notice more carefully how Luke records the particular response of the Thessalonians, ...

Acts 17:4

some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

Notice that it was *some* of the Jews, but a *great multitude* of the God-fearing Greeks. Some of the Jews. A great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks. This is in contrast to Acts 17:12, where it speaks of how *many* of the Jews in Berea were persuaded at the preaching in the synagogue.

It is interesting to note that when Paul continued on to Berea, he comments that those in Berea "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, [to see] whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). We often hear this verse in reference to the noble-minded Bereans, but what about the ignoble Thessalonians? Get the picture? Paul is opening up the Scripture to the Jews in Thessalonica and they simply dismissed. They didn't want to take in the evidence in the case Paul was presenting. In Berea, we get the idea that a natural consequence of their examining the scripture truthfully was their acceptance of Paul's message. Acts 17:2 says, "Man of them therefore believed." It was like it was inevitable!

They demonstrate their ignoble character when they not only kicked Paul out of Thessalonica, but they also came to Berea and kicked Paul out of Berea!

Acts 17:13-14

But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came

there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds. And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there.

Ray Stedman called these Jews, "the hounds of hell, who panted their way down from Thessalonica". Notice that Luke's perspective is that the Thessalonians were ignoble. However, when we look at what Paul, himself says about the activity that occurred in Thessalonica, you get the sense that the people there were quite noble! They received the word gladly! They were an example to all! Every place heard of how they received the word. Every place heard of their conversions! I think that the proper way to reconcile this difference is by noticing that Luke's perspective is focusing primarily on the Jews! Primarily it was the Jews who were ignoble, ...

Acts 17:13

But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

Luke is relatively silent on the reception of the Gentiles. However, Paul is not silent. Paul is grateful to God for their reception of the message.

Let's turn finally to the perspective that Paul gives us. We have looked at Luke's perspective. Now let's look at Paul's perspective.  
b. Paul's perspective.

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians. I simply want to read to you much of 1 Thessalonians, chapters 1 & 2 and comment on a few verses to describe to you Paul's activity in Thessalonica, concerning which Luke is silent. Let's look first at how Paul describes his preaching:

1 Thessalonians 1:5

for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. For our exhortation does not [come] from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed -- God is witness -- nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing [mother] tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, [how] working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and [so is] God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we [were] exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father [would] his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Now we can look at how Paul describes the reception of the message:

1 Thessalonians 1:2

We give thanks to God always for all of you, ...

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, [that is] Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Many received the gospel! Verse 5 tells us they received the gospel with much conviction. Verse 6 says In much tribulation. And verse 9 says it was a notable reception.

Notice verse 9. The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve a living and true God! The Jews or God-fearers wouldn't turn from idols! It must be that they were Gentiles!

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted [it] not [as] the word of men, but [for] what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured

the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they [did] from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

Last, we will see how Paul describes his relationship to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing [mother] tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, [how] working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and [so is] God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we [were] exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father [would] his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while--in person, not in spirit--were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, more than once--and [yet] Satan thwarted us. For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

And in chapter 3, ...

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also [do] for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

This was a tremendous relationship! Oh, if we could taste of this. There was a fond affection (2:8), They had become very dear to each other (2:8). Paul speaks of the people being his glory and joy (2:20).

I love this about our group up here. You really seem to love each other. This love for the Thessalonians was very great! Paul had to leave town quickly, which caused Paul to send Timothy to see how they were doing (3:6). This letter was a drive-by loving concern of Paul. He was thankful (1:2, 2:13, 3:9) for their walk! I am thankful for your testimony! And like Paul's exhortation in chapter 4, I say to you: we are doing well, but need to excel still more!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 9, 2000 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] NEED REFERENCE

[2] Acts 13:42-45; 14:1,2; 16:15,19; 17:4,5,32,34