

## Studies In Thessalonians #2

“Paul, and Silvanus and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace” (1 Thessalonians 1:1).

With these words commenced the important and everlasting value of Paul's Spirit directed words for churches and Christians. With the possible exception of Galatians, 1 Thessalonians is the first of thirteen known letters we have from Paul. However, of these thirteen, ten of them identify Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ. It is only 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon which do not include Paul's identification of himself as an apostle. The phrase “grace and peace” is very similar to other such greetings. Of the thirteen epistles, this greeting is found eleven times. The two exceptions to such a greeting are his letters to Timothy in which he adds the word “mercy” (cp. 1 Tim. 1:2).

To readers of the New Testament, Paul needs little introduction. He is the apostle to the Gentiles, turned from a fierce persecutor and blasphemer to an ardent defender of Jesus and His gospel.

However, Silvanus (although perhaps better known as Silas), though familiar to brethren, does not have as great a distinction as Paul. This brother (whom Paul includes in both his letters to the Thessalonians) first enters biblical history as “chief man among the brethren” (Acts 15:22) whom brethren in Jerusalem chose to accompany and confirm the letter sent from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to brethren in Antioch of Syria which letter freed the Gentiles from the necessity of being circumcised and keeping the law, but bound them to abstain from blood, things strangled, things sacrificed to idols, and fornication (Acts 15:29).

Although Judas called Barsabbas (the second of two men sent to confirm the decree in Jerusalem) returned back to Jerusalem, Silas remained behind in Antioch. When Paul and Barnabas had their disagreement over John Mark and separated, Paul chose Silas to accompany him in his travels, the second so-called “missionary journey” of Paul. It was on this trip (lasting perhaps three years) that churches were established to whom five of Paul's letters would later be written (1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Corinthians, and Philippians). Silas was a worthy companion, his sole one as the journey began, although later would include both Luke and Timothy (Acts 16:1-3; 10). Silas was a co-prisoner with Paul in Philippi and it is implied that he, as did Paul, had Roman citizenship for Luke's history records Paul as saying, “... they have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men that are Romans ...” (Acts 16:37). Timothy remained in Thessalonica when Paul had to flee onward to Berea but Silas accompanied him there (Acts 17:10). But when Paul had to leave Berea for Athens, Silas and Timothy (who had joined them in Berea) remained behind. When Paul wrote the letter to Thessalonica from Corinth, obviously Silas was with him there. At this point in Luke's history, Silas drops from view; he does not appear again in Luke's Acts. Paul does mention Silvanus in his second Corinthian letter (2 Cor. 1:19), a letter written during his third journey but a reference back to the time of the writing of the Thessalonian epistles. In Peter's first letter to the “elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia,

Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1), Peter mentions one Silvanus (our faithful brother as I account him) as the one through whom he had written to them. If the Silvanus mentioned by both Paul and Peter are the same man (which we regard him to be), he would be traveling in much the same area in delivering Peter’s letter as he had traveled with Paul when the two of them left Antioch and went through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:6).

But while Silas is only included in the salutations of two of Paul’s letters, Timothy was included more times than any other companion of Paul — six. Paul includes his name in his letters to Corinth (2 Corinthians), Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1-2 Thessalonica, as well as having had two personal letters from Paul. Paul was high in his praise of Timothy. In his letter to the Philippians he said, “For I have no man like-minded, who will care truly for your state” (Phil. 2:20). Timothy was his “son” and as one follows the steps of this grand apostle he will see that not far behind him was Timothy going from place to place at the behest of Paul to strengthen churches, oppose false teachers, put men in mind of apostolic commands, and ultimately to be Paul’s comforter when he was martyred.

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