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A People to Be Glad For and a People to Be Sad For 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 Part 2

We are returning to VV. 13-16. Let us begin by reading the passage. **“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. (14) 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, (15) who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, (16) 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.”**

In this passage we see a very vivid contrast. A contrast between the believing church of Thessalonica and the unbelieving Jews who persecuted the church.

As we noted last time the church at Thessalonica believed with very limited opportunity. However the Jews rejected God’s message with unlimited opportunity. For the people in Thessalonica there was but a very brief hearing of the gospel, however, for the Jewish people there had been centuries of exposure to the revelation of the goodness of God. Therefore, in these verses, we have a people to be glad for and a people to be sad for.

In VV. 13,14 Paul spelled out for us reasons why we can be glad for the Thessalonian church.

(1) THEIR RECEPTION OF THE WORD

V. 13 **“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.”** When the Thessalonians listened to Paul and his companions they did not feel that they could take it or leave it, but rather they accepted it as God’s very words to them chose to act accordingly. The message that they received as God’s very word to them transformed their lives. This transformation led to difficulties in their lives. They began to experience an increasing amount of persecution. And yet even though this was true they did not waver.

(2) THEIR PERSEVERANCE IN SUFFERING

V. 14 **“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.”** Why didn’t the Thessalonians waver? Why had they persevered in suffering? They really believed that the message that they had received was God’s very words to them.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

After having shared these two reasons he makes a 180 degree about face and moves in a totally different direction in his thinking. This change of direction appears to be initiated when Paul refers to the “Jews” at the end of **V. 14**.

Was there some event that was presently taking place that involved Jews that might have provoked Paul to turn his attention from the Thessalonians to the Jews in **VV. 15,16**? Certainly it might be possible but certainly a pressing current event was not necessary for Paul to make this statement.

Paul had a running conflict with the Jews. It was endless. It was persistent. Paul was before his conversion a Jewish leader. In fact he was “the great persecutor of the church,” but almost immediately after his conversion “the persecutor” became “the persecuted.” In **Acts 9** which records for us the conversion of Paul we find him at the beginning of the chapter going to Damascus to arrest Christians, and then at the end of the chapter we find him in the synagogues of Damascus seeking to convert the Jews to Christianity. What was the Jewish response to Paul’s new message? In **V. 23,24** it tells us that the Jews plotted to put Paul to death. But the conflict between Paul and his own countrymen did not stop there, it continued on throughout the rest of his life. Repeatedly they sought his life. Repeatedly they sought to destroy him.

It was not as if the gentiles treated Paul better, but there was a great distinction in Paul’s mind between the gentiles and the Jews. The gentiles were not God’s chosen people. But the Jews were. The Jews were a people that had been extended by the Lord almost unlimited spiritual privilege. Paul in **Acts 9:4** wrote concerning the Jews (TURN IN BIBLES) “**Israelites** (The name goes back to Gen. 32:28 where it was given to Jacob after he had wrestled with an angel). It signifies the name of God’s own chosen people.” Then Paul goes to say in **Acts 9** “**Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons**” (this was a national rather than a personal adoption or election). Then it says, “**and the glory**” the shekinah glory which was a visible manifestation of His presence with them. This shekinah glory led them in the wilderness and lived in their tabernacle and temple). Not only this but the passage goes on to say, “**and the covenants**” (God’s special pledges given to them through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David). They were given “**the law**” the Mosaic morality, the source of blessing and prosperity. They were given “**the service**” the detailed instructions on how to approach God. They were given the “**promises**” most likely best expressed in the Messianic hopes. This was all in **V. 4**, but then Paul goes on to **V. 5** “**whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever, Amen.**” The Jews, not the Amorites, the Hittites, Canaanites or Americans, but the Jews alone of all the peoples of the world, God had chosen to work through to accomplish his plan of redemption for this world.

How should we feel about the Jews who though so privileged as a nation has by and large rejected their Messiah as a nation. We should feel great compassion for them. In **Luke 19:41** Jesus looking at the city of Jerusalem wept. It says **And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, (42) saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. (43) for the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, (44) and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”** The Jews have been a truly blessed people and yet as we look at them as a nation we should, like Jesus, feel a heart of compassion for them.

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THEY ARE A PEOPLE TO FEEL SAD FOR.

And yet though all this is true I don't want you to think or be confused.

Though the nation of Israel did in fact reject Israel when he presented Himself to them there was a small group of Jews that did in fact respond to the truth and were in fact given the gift of salvation.

In fact it is important to understand that there has always been within the nation of Israel those certain Jews who personally responded to the light that had been given them. Paul refers to this group as the “**remnant**” in Romans 9:27 and 11:5.

And though there has been a remnant of Godly Jews, because of repeated national rejection of God and his word, the Lord has given the torch of truth to another and that is the church. It is no longer the nation of Israel that is bearing witness to how men might become saved, but rather now it is the church.

You will remember in **Matt. 22** Jesus said. The king prepared a feast for his son and he went to the people who had been pre-invited and said it is time now to come. And they wouldn't come, so he went out into the highways and byways and collected anyone. The basic truth of this parable is that when the Jews as a nation said no to their messiah He turned to the world. It is now those who have responded to Christ, a few Jews but mostly gentiles, who is now telling people how to be saved.

Is that all there is for Israel? The answer is no!! **Romans 11** makes it very clear that someday all Israel will be saved. **VV. 25-27** “**For I do not want you, brethren to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; (26) and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The deliverer will come from Zion, and He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.” (27) And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.**” The Lord is not done with Israel. He has made promises to them as a nation and those promises will be fulfilled. There is a day coming when there will be national repentance. **Zechariah 12:10** speaks about that future day. It says in **Zechariah** “**And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.**” When Zechariah was writing this prophecy it must have been very confusing as to who he was referring to when he spoke about the one whom they have pierced but it certainly is not unclear to us. There is a day coming yet in the future when Israel will once again be at the forefront of God's redemptive plan.

And yet though all this is true in respect to the future. The Jews, at the time of Paul, and even to this day for the most part are a people to be sad for because they had the greatest privilege and they are lost without their messiah, damned to hell.

The Jews started the fires of persecution with the killing of Jesus. Then they continued the fires of persecution wherever Paul went. Rejecting the churches, rejecting Christ, spreading the fact that Christianity was not true.

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Paul sees them in contrast to this church at Thessalonica. In **VV. 13,14** as he looked at the Church of Thessalonica they were a church to be glad for. But now as we look at **VV. 15,16** we see a people to be sad for. **WHAT WERE THE SPECIFIC REASONS TO BE SAD FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE?**

THEIR REJECTION OF THE WORD (V. 15). The Thessalonians received the word, but the Jews rejected the word. Let us read **V. 15** **“Who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out.”**

We, I am sure are continually rejecting the word of someone. It is not unusual to reject a message that you or I might be receiving, and certainly the Jews were by and large rejecting the message that Jesus was the Messiah the Savior of the world. But when have you and I killed the messenger because we have rejected their message? The Jewish nation as a whole rejected the message totally, completely. They could not have rejected the message more forcefully.

But what made this rejection even worse was the fact that it had been a pattern. Paul says that they not only killed the Lord Jesus but also the who? **The prophets.** The actual murder of the prophets is not recorded for us in the O.T. but it is alluded to in both the O.T. and the N.T.

O.T. **1 Kings 19:10** Elijah is speaking and he says , **“I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life to take it away.”**

N.T. **Heb. 11** in referring to the prophets says beginning in **VV. 37** **“They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (38) men of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. (39) And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised.”**

The execution was not an isolated event it was a continuing event in the life of Israel. But this was the capstone of their rebellion. It was because of the rejection of Jesus, their Messiah, that the Lord turned to the world looking for individuals rather than nations to call out to form the church which will now carry the message to the world. But don't think that just because God has temporarily set the nation of Israel aside as the torchbearer of truth that that rejection of the truth became any less fervent.

THEIR HINDRANCE TO THE WORK

(V. 15). The Thessalonians honored the apostles, but the Jews hindered them. Look at **V. 15** again **“Who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, drove us out.”** The verb **“drove us out”** conveys **“hunting something down like an animal”**. They hunt us down with the intention to persecute us and even to execute us.

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This is not to say that they were doing anything different to the apostles than the gentiles but Paul is sharing these actions by the Jews in light of what might have been. It is declaring it because it is such a great tragedy, but this is not all. Not only was Paul sad for the Jews because they had rejected the truth and hindered the word, but he was sad for them because of their impending judgment.

THEIR IMPENDING JUDGMENT (V. 15,16). Let us read **VV. 15,16 “who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, (16) 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.”**

The Jews in driving apostles out of Thessalonica “thought” they were “**pleasing to God**”. But Paul is saying that rather than being pleasing to God they are “**hostile toward all men.**” How were they hostile to all men? Paul explains this in **V. 16.**

“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.” There is only one way to God, and that is through hearing and receiving the gospel of Christ. The Jews were actively seeking to prevent this from taking place. They were in effect seeking to keep people from being saved. Can you imagine a more heinous crime? It is one thing to choose damnation for yourself, but then to act in such a way as to take others with you will not be looked upon favorably at all. And this explains why Paul says what he now says.

“They always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.” This is a frightening text. **“They always fill up the measure of their sins.”** Just as God’s judgment fell on the Amorites when their sin **“had reached its full measure” in Gen. 15:16** so even now the Jews have now done this through their rejection of Christ and their continued hindrance to His work. There is a limit to God’s patience with sin. And when that limit is reached then judgment is inevitable. You wonder why the Jews as a people have suffered so severely so often. It is because they are continually pushing God to the limit that he has set, and once the cup begins to overflow judgment is inevitable.

In **1 Thess. 1:10** God’s wrath is future. But here it appears to be past. This phrase can express an arrival with or without participation in whatever experience lies at the destination. Jesus in **Matt. 12:28** told the Jews that the kingdom of God has come upon you”. This is the same verb in the same tense (EPHTHASEN). The statement affirms its arrival, while leaving open whether people have yet received it or not. Because they have filled up the measure of their sin God’s wrath is even now over their heads though it has not yet engulfed them. Paul is simply indicating that Christ’s prophecies concerning their house being left desolate was about to be fulfilled. And It was. In a few short years the Jewish nation was totally destroyed and it’s people scattered around the world.

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CONCLUSION

PAUL WHEN HE CONSIDERED THE THESSALONIANS KNEW THAT EVEN IN SPITE OF THEIR VERY LIMITED OPPORTUNITY THAT THEY BEEN DELIVERED FROM GOD'S WRATH THEY WERE A PEOPLE TO BE GLAD FOR.

AND YET AS HE CONSIDERED HIS OWN PEOPLE AND THEIR REJECTION OF JESUS IN SPITE OF THEIR UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITY THEY WERE A PEOPLE TO BE SAD FOR.

WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT GROUPS OF PEOPLE. WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE THESSALONIANS AND THE JEWS. BUT WE CAN BRING THIS DOWN TO A PERSONAL LEVEL.

IF WE HAVE RECEIVED THE GOSPEL AND PERSEVERED IN IT WE ARE A PEOPLE TO BE GLAD FOR. BUT IF WE HAVE REJECTED THE GOSPEL, BY OUR LIVES HINDERING THE WORK OF GOD TO BRING OTHERS TO HIMSELF THEN WE ARE A PEOPLE TO BE SAD FOR.

In **John 3:36** it says, **“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him.”**