

## Thessalonica, In Paul's Day and Today

Thessalonica was founded by King Cassander of Macedon in 315 B.C.—one of the 4 generals who split Alexander the Great's kingdom at his death.

It was a key commercial, military, and political city then, as it has been throughout its history to today. In Paul's day, it had about 200,000 inhabitants, with a large enough Jewish population to warrant a synagogue. It was the capital of the Macedonian Province. Today Thessaloniki (also known by its anglicized name, Salonica) is Greece's second largest city.

Thessalonica is located along the Egnatian Way, a Roman road going from Albania to Constantinople. This road was 19 feet wide and paved with stone slabs or packed sand. Paul and his companions travelled along this road from Neapolis to Thessalonica. Thessalonica is about 100 miles from Philippi and 500 miles from Athens.

Thessalonica was under Roman rule from 186 B.C. to 379 A.D. It was declared a "free city," allowing it to be governed by the Greek system of politarchs and an assembly (*demos*—"crowd" in the NIV). Fear of losing this status may have helped fuel the mob against Paul. The term "politarchs" was only found in the Bible up until somewhat recent times when archaeological discoveries have verified that Luke used the correct term of the day.

The reigning Caesar in Paul's day was Claudius I. He reigned from 41 - 54 A.D. and was succeeded by Nero. He was physically disabled by mentally astute. Possibly emotionally unstable. He ruled competently, expanded infrastructure, and expanded the empire. He affirmed the rights of Jews throughout the empire. However, he instituted numerous religious reforms reviving old festivals and forms of worship to eliminate foreign influences over the Roman religious system. Acts refers to his expelling Jews from Rome, possibly due to the unrest the arrival of Christianity was causing in the Jewish community. He was opposed to proselytising by any religion.

The book of 1 Thessalonians, written around 50-52 A.D., was either Paul's first or second epistle (Galatians may have been the first). It was written before Mark, the earliest gospel. It was written about 20 years after Christ's resurrection.

Just to give you a perspective of what 20 years ago feels like, here are a few of the major news stories from 1988. While on one hand, these seem like a long time ago, they are within our living memory and we can testify that they did take place:

Reagan was president. Calgary Winter Olympics. Iran-Contra affair. Soviets begin withdrawing from Afghanistan. Seoul Summer Olympics. Hurricane Gilbert. Bush/Quayle vs. Dukakis/Benson.

Here are a few quotations from or about Thessalonica:

Cicero: "Thessalonica is in the bosom of the empire"

Inscription in Thess: "After death no reviving, after the grave no meeting again."

### Sources

wikipedia.org: *Thessalonica, History of Thessalonica, Claudius.*

*Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary.*

McGee, J. Vernon. *I & II Thessalonians.*