



RESOURCE KIT FOR THE STUDY OF SAINT PAUL: SESSION TWO

This 'kit' is provided as a follow-up to the interactive e-conference on Paul sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to mark the close of the Year of Paul on 30 June, 2009. It may be used by individuals or by groups of people who might meet regularly to use it as a basis for communal study, reflection and discussion.

The passages are taken from Paul's **Letters**, along with some extracts from the **Acts of the Apostles** that provide a context for what we read in the Letters. Details from the Letters and the Acts are not always in harmony, since they stem from different times. But together they fill out the picture.

The selection of passages has been made according to major **themes** that feature in the Letters of Paul. While this procedure may give a more rounded presentation of Paul's theology, it has the disadvantage of removing the passages from their immediate contexts in the wider texts. Those who have time and leisure might profit from reading the entire letters from which the selections are taken.

Those who would prefer to study **entire** letters are advised to begin with the shorter ones such as **Philippians**, **1 Thessalonians**, **Philemon**, and **Colossians**.

Though the early themes by way of introduction focus upon Paul's early life and mission, the later ones follow in no particular **order**. Individuals or groups should feel free to pick and choose among the themes as they see fit, rather than being bound to see the whole course through to the end.

The **Questions** posed at the conclusion to each selection are intended to stimulate the reflection and discussion that might promote deeper engagement with the texts. It is in no sense necessary to move through all the questions. Stay with those that you or your group find most interesting. The final questions in each case are more directed to seeking the meaning of the texts for our life in the Church today.

The accompanying **Brief Sketch of Paul's Life and Missionary Career** and the **Glossary of Pauline Terms and Concepts** are provided to help with the interpretation of the texts. If you or your group come across terms or concepts that are difficult or unusual, consult the Glossary.

In some cases the texts are accompanied—before or after— by a **Note** explaining the role of the text in the wider context and providing information essential for understanding.

The **translation** used in the texts is that of the *New Revised Standard Version* (with spelling occasionally modified to conform to Australian usage).

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2. PAUL'S EARLY LIFE ON MISSION (1): THESSALONICA

The Foundation of the Christian community in Thessalonica: Acts 17:1-15

17:1 After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." 4 Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

5 But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. 6 When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, 7 and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus." 8 The people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this, 9 and after they had taken bail from Jason and the others, they let them go.

10 That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas off to **Beroea**; and when they arrived, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so. 12 Many of them therefore believed, including not a few Greek women and men of high standing. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Beroea as well, they came there too, to stir up and incite the crowds.

14 Then the believers immediately sent Paul away to the coast, but Silas and Timothy remained behind. 15 Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as **Athens**; and after receiving instructions to have Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible, they left him.

Questions:

1. What do you learn from the account in Acts about Paul's strategy regarding the preaching of the Gospel when arriving in a new city?
2. What is it about the proclamation of the Gospel that stirs up hostility from some of the Jews (not all, note!)?
3. Why do 'the people and the city officials' feel threatened by what Paul is preaching?

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of how they came to faith: 1 Thessalonians 1:1—2:12

1:1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly

3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.

9 For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

2:1 You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. 3 For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.

5 As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; 6 nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, 7 though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.

8 So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. 9 You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. 11 As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children,

12 urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Questions:

1. What do you think is Paul's aim in recalling to the Thessalonians the circumstances of his original preaching among them?
2. Do you recognise a familiar pattern in v 3?
3. What understanding of the experience of the Holy Spirit emerges from Paul's statements in vv 4-5?
4. In what way have the Thessalonians become 'imitators' of Paul?
5. Why does Paul dwell upon the extent to which the faith of the Thessalonians has become so widely known across other communities of believers?
6. What effect do you think that 'turning' from the worship of idols to the worship of a 'living and true God' would have had upon Paul's Thessalonian converts?
7. How do you understand the statement in v 10 about 'awaiting his Son from heaven? What are we to make of such expectation today? Are we still in some sense 'waiting' people?
8. What do you learn from Paul's descriptions in 2:1-12 of his own conduct as an apostle on mission?
9. What do you learn about the way he sees his on-going relationship with the Thessalonians?