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**THE
MISSIONARY
MESSAGE
OF
FIRST
THESSALONIANS**

By

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The categorical message of the Scriptures in their entirety is that God is at work in human history with a mission to heal the nations through his people in the light of the imminent consummation of his kingdom. This is the *missio Dei* ("mission of God"). Wayne Allen claims that the *missio Dei* is the establishment of the kingdom of God by God through his people (Allen 2001, 3). What is the kingdom of God? George-E. Ladd in his work *The Gospel of the kingdom* states that: "the Kingdom of God is first of all the divine redemptive rule manifested in Christ, and it is secondly the realm of [sic] sphere in which the blessings of divine rule may be experienced" (Ladd 1959, 114).

The *missio Dei*-the mission of God to establish his kingdom-is clearly reflected in every book of Scripture.¹ The mission of God is evident in First Thessalonians as well and can be demonstrated through the application of the Kingdom of God (KOG) paradigm developed by Allen.² Many people believe that First and Second Thessalonians are primarily eschatological in nature and not missionary. That is, they deal mainly with issues relating to the end of this Age. However, Morris gives us an idea of the missiological significance of these epistles:

The Epistles to the Thessalonians ... lack the Theological profundity of Romans and the Exciting controversy of Galatians; but nevertheless their place in Scripture is an

¹ It must be noted that God is the hero of the Scriptures and he is a missionary God.

² Allen has built this model on the foundation of the initial work of Arthur Glasser.

important one. No other writing of the great apostle provides a greater insight into his missionary method and message. (Morris 1956, 9)

Hence, this work is designed to extricate and delineate the missionary message of First Thessalonians based on the kingdom of God (KOG) paradigm developed by Allen.

Throughout Christian history, many models have been generated in order to arrange the biblical and natural data that they may make sense. For example, Augustine attempted to arrange the biblical and natural data from the starting point of the city of Rome (Allen 2001, 4). In addition, there have been some contemporary efforts to arrange and make sense of both the biblical and natural data. For instance, the redemption-centred "Model of the Church in Society: A Common view of the Mid-Twentieth Century" was concocted (Allen 2001, 4-5). However, every model has its weaknesses and its strengths and this model is no exception.³

This paper works with the Kingdom of God paradigm. This model also has its strengths and weaknesses. One of its strengths is that it is built on the kingdom of God concept, which is evident throughout Scripture. Yet one of its weaknesses is that certain elements (limbs) of the paradigm may not be evident in every book of the Bible. Hence, one may tend to read these elements into the Scriptural text. By and large, it is a workable model for it presents the King of the kingdom, the people of the kingdom in covenant relationship with the king, the people's covenant obligations, the enemy of the kingdom, and the day of victory.

The writer will proceed by inductively extracting the missionary message of First Thessalonians through the application of Allen's Kingdom of God (KOG) paradigm. Some information on the historical background of 1Thessalonians will first be outlined. Then the kingdom of God model will be applied to the biblical text. The writer will outline the missionary message of 1Thessalonians using the headings -- the king, the people in covenant relationship with the king, the covenant obligations of the people, the enemy exposed, and the day of victory explained. The implications of the missionary message of 1Thessalonians for world evangelization will then be outlined. Subsequently, a conclusion will be delineated. We will be working mainly with the New International Version (NIV) of The Holy Scriptures in this paper.

³ For more information see Allen 2001, Lecture 1, 6.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF I THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica: The City

Thessalonica was a great, strategic seaport city with a natural harbour at the head of the Gulf of Thermaikos in Greece (Ockenga 1962, 13). In Paul's day, it was already a well-established and important city. Cassander, son of Antipater, founded Thessalonica in 315 B. C. He named it after his wife, Thessalonica, who was a daughter of Philip of Macedon and a half-sister of Alexander the Great (Ryrie 1959, 8). It was situated on the Via Egnatia (The great Egnatian Way) that linked Rome with the East (Hiebert 1971, 11; Ockenga 1962, 13; Ryrie 1959, 8; Stott 1991, 17). "It was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the cities along the entire Egnatian Road..." (Ryrie 1959, 8).

Thessalonica was "a natural centre of commerce" (Ockenga 1962, 13) with a population of approximately 200,000. The Romans made it the capital city of the province of Macedonia (Ryrie 1959, 8; Stott 1991, 17). It was the "key to the whole of Macedonia" (Hiebert 1971, 11). Thessalonica's commercial activity made it both an opulent and a free city with tremendous autonomy (Ryrie 1959, 8-9). Today, it exists as Thessaloniki and is one of the largest and most important cities in modern Greece (Hiebert 1971, 13; Stott 1991, 17).

The Church in Thessalonica: Its Genesis

The background of the church in Thessalonica is outlined in Acts 17: 1-10. According to Luke's account, the Thessalonians were evangelized during Paul's second missionary journey. Hiebert notes that it "was but a further carrying out of the commission received by Paul at Troas to work in Macedonia (Ac 16: 8-10)" (Hiebert 1971, 13). After a successful but eventful mission in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), Paul came to the city of Thessalonica accompanied by Silas and Timothy. Paul and missionary friends stayed in the city for approximately three weeks⁴ and preached the gospel in the Jewish synagogue with resounding success. This is reflected in the fact that both Jews and "a large number of God-fearing Greeks," including some "prominent women" were converted (Acts 17:2-4).

Infused with envy regarding Paul's effective ministry, the Jews mobilized some hooligans and incited a riot in the city (Acts 17:5). Not finding Paul at his host Jason's home, they dragged Jason and some of the other believers

⁴ This position has been disputed. See Hiebert 1971, 16-17 and Wiersbe 1979, 12-13.

before the city officials and made a grave accusation against them, which resulted in a city-wide uproar (Acts 17:5d-8). However, the city officials released Jason and his cohorts after making them "post bond" (Acts 17: 9). Ryrie opines that this was probably "a peace bond which included the guarantee that Paul would leave the city immediately and not return" (Ryrie 1959, 11).

During the night, Paul and Silas were smuggled out of the city. They went to Berea for a brief mission. Afterwards, Paul left for Athens where Silas and Timothy rejoined him (Acts 17:9-15). According to Hiebert, "This forced departure... prematurely tore the missionaries from their young converts. It deprived the young converts of the needed personal guidance of the missionaries. It also unleashed the outbreak of persecution against believers, which continued long after the missionaries departed" (Hiebert 1971, 19-20).

Place and Date of Writing

Most, if not all, Bible commentators and scholars agree that Paul wrote this epistle from Corinth during his long stay in the city, at the close of this second missionary journey. At this time, Timothy submitted his report on the young church (1Thess. 3:6-7; Acts 18:1) (see Hiebert 1971, 23-24; Ryrie 1959, 12-13; Stott 1991, 19; Wiersbe 1979, 13).

Unanimity does not exist among Bible commentators and scholars, however, relative to the date of 1Thessalonians. Ryrie believes that it was written "during the winter of A. D. 51-52" (Ryrie 1959, 13). Hiebert believes that the epistle was written "within a short time after his arrival in Corinth... the epistle may be dated in late summer or early fall of either 50 or 51" (Hiebert 1971, 25). Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida (1976, 1) posit that: "It is... fairly certain that 1Thessalonians was written...early in year 51 or late in the previous year". Hence, we can conclude that 1 Thessalonians was written between A. D. 49 and 53. Therefore, 1Thessalonians was one of the earliest written Pauline epistles.

Occasion and Purpose

The immediate occasion for the writing of 1Thessalonians was Timothy's return from Thessalonica with his report on the young church (1Thess. 3:6-8; Acts 18:5). Timothy's report was tremendously favourable for he "brought good news about" the faith and love of the Thessalonians (3:6). Amidst his "distress and persecution," Paul was greatly encouraged by the positive report (3:7). Hence, "In response he sat down and dictated this letter, full of personal affections and thoughtful instructions" (Hiebert 1971, 21).

The epistle itself suggests that Paul wrote for a variety of purposes. First, he wrote the epistle to refute certain false accusations that were being levelled against his missionary friends and himself (2:2-12). Second, he wrote this letter to indicate his stupendous joy upon receiving the "good news" from Timothy concerning the faith, love, hope and steadfastness of the Thessalonian believers (3:6-10). Third, this letter was written to encourage and strengthen the young believers in the face of gentile persecution and trials (2:14-16; 3:2-5; 5:8-11; 16-22). Finally, 1Thessalonians was written in order to instruct the Thessalonian brethren concerning the following: godly living (4:1-8), earning a living (4:1-12), the death of loved ones and its connection to the coming of Christ (4:13-18), and church discipline and order (5:12-22).

THE KING EXHIBITED

God is the indisputable Sovereign. This is the teaching that is found in 1Thessalonians. Paul refers to "his (God's) kingdom and glory" (2:12). This clearly implies that God is the Ultimate King. His kingdom is not derived. It is an integral and inextricable part of his sovereignty over the universe. Hiebert informs us that, "The kingdom of God centers in the person of the King ..." (Hiebert 1971, 106).

In 1Thessalonians the significance and sovereignty of the King is demonstrated in the fact that Paul uses the title "God" (Greek *Theos*) approximately thirty two times (1:2, 4, 8, 9; 2:1a,b, 5, 8,9,10,12,13b,f, 14, 15, 16; 3:2, 9a,b; 4:1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 14, 16; 5:9, 18, 23a,b). The title God in 1Thessalonians corresponds with *Elohim* in the Old Testament. It is used of God in Genesis 1:1 to portray Him in sovereignty and majesty. In addition, the title *God the Father* is used once (1:1) and *God our Father* is used thrice (1; 3 3:11, 13).

Paul lucidly delineates the attributes of God as King in 1Thessalonians. He tells us the God, the King, is characterized by love (1:4), life (1:9), truth (1:9), wrath (2:16), holiness (4:3, 7, implied), peace (5:23) and faithfulness (5:24). Augustus Strong, in his book *Systematic theology*, informs us that truth, love, and holiness constitute God's perfection, which is one of his "absolute" or "immanent" attributes. Faithfulness is a part of his "relative" or "transitive" attributes (Strong 1907, 248).

The personality of God (one of his absolute attributes) is also demonstrated in 1Thessalonians. This is reflected in the fact that he chooses (1:4), calls to his kingdom (2:10), wills (4:3) and appoints (5:9). These attributes of personality are interrelated to the activity of God. God, as King, is active in the sense that he helps (2:2), approves (2:4), tests (2:4), gives (4:8) and

teaches (4:9). The preceding information strongly suggests that God is the ultimate Sovereign of the universe who personally acts to realize his mission (the *missio Dei*).

However, while God the Father is the ultimate Sovereign, "God the Son (Jesus Christ) has been installed as King by the will of the Father" (Allen 2001, 14). God the Son, the king, is called *Jesus* (1:10; 4:14a, c), *Christ* (2; 6; 3; 2; 4:16), *Christ Jesus* (2:14; 5:18), *Lord Jesus Christ* (1:1, 3; 5:9, 23, 28), and *Lord Jesus* (2:15, 19; 3:11, 13; 4: 1, 2). Further, he is called *Lord* thirteen times (1:6; 3:8, 12; 4:6, 15a, b, 16, 17a, b; 5:2, 27).

There is tremendous significance in the title Lord (Gk, *Kurios*). It signifies kingship and sovereignty.⁵ Hiebert notes:

In the Septuagint the name Lord (*kurios*) was the translation of *Jehovah*, the God of Israel. And this divine Lord is none other than the incarnate Jesus ... whom Christians accept and confess as *Christ*, the Anointed One, the promised Messiah, the expected Deliverer awaited by God's people. (Hiebert 1971, 39)

Hence, the Lord is King, as David has outlined in Psalm 2:6-9. Paul indicates that the Lord, the King, during his time on earth, was killed by the Jews (2:15; 4:14), but was raised from the dead (1:10; 4: 14b). This is the King for whom the people of God wait patiently (1:10).

The Lord is the coming King (2:19; 3:13; 4:13-17), who has absolute authority (Gk. *exousia*) (4:2). This authority is derived or delegated power. Jesus himself indicated that he was given all authority in the universe by the Father (Matthew 28:18; John 17:20).

Allen accurately reminds us that,

God, the Son, holds all power and authority of the Father because it was delegated to him by the Father when he was enthroned, installed, as King of Kings on Zion. All the authority of The Word of God applies to Jesus as the Lord ... of the universe. (Allen 2001, 14)

With such delegated power, the King will punish men for their sins when he returns (4:6) and will give salvation (final, consummated) to the people of the kingdom (5:9).

That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the King of the kingdom of God is demonstrated in 1Thessalonians. This may sound paradoxical in the light of the fact that God the Father is the ultimate Sovereign. However, we have also

⁵ *Kurios* could also mean "Sir." However, in the context of 1 Thessalonians it denotes "sovereignty."

noted that He has installed the Son as King of His kingdom. Ladd clearly explains such a seemingly contradictory phenomenon. Says he,

The Kingdom of God is at the same time the Kingdom of Christ (Eph. 5:5); for the Kingdom of God, the redemptive reign of God, is manifested among men through the person of Christ, and it is Christ who must reign until he has put all His enemies under His feet (1Cor. 15:25). (Ladd 1959, 115)

THE PEOPLE EXAMINED

The Thessalonian Believers

In every kingdom, there are citizens. Hence, in the kingdom of God citizens are extant-people who are in a covenant relationship with the King. Who were these people that Paul wrote to in 1Thessalonians? What are they called? First, they are called "the church of the Thessalonians" (1:1). The concept "church" comes from the Greek term *ekklesia*, which means, "called out ones" or "a called out assembly." Paul was not writing to the citizens of Thessalonica in general. Neither was he writing to a church building. The apostle was writing to a called out assembly, a special group of people in the city of Thessalonica, who were identified with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The local church in Thessalonica was a part of the universal Church of Jesus Christ through which the kingdom of God is at work in the world (Ladd 1959, 115). Therefore, the church in Thessalonica was at the same time the bastion or custodian of the Kingdom of God in that region. In addition, Paul calls the Thessalonian Christian "brothers" about nineteen times, indicating their mutual connection to God and Christ. They were a family in Christ.

In addition, Paul referred indirectly to the people of the kingdom of God in Thessalonica as "believers," people of faith. This is reflected in the fact that their faith in God was evident and had become known "everywhere" (1:8). They were also called "you who believe" (2:13). "The present tense marks their believing as an abiding characteristic 'The believers' is a synonym for Christians" (Hiebert 1971, 111). Moreover, the Thessalonian believers were called "sons of light" (5:5), "sons of the day" (5:5) and "those who belong to the day" (5:8). These expressions imply that they "have entered into what Paul elsewhere calls the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (Wanamaker 1990, 182).

We have looked at what the people of the Kingdom of God in Thessalonica are called. We will now turn our attention to the characteristics (nature) of these people as they are outlined in 1Thessalonians. First, Paul notes that the

people of The Kingdom in Thessalonica are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. What does this mean? Morris may be right in stating that the phrase "in God the Father" is peculiar to 1 and 2 Thessalonians. He goes on to note:

The mention of the two persons together is a striking, if incidental, indication of the oneness of the Father and the Son. Being *in* Father and the Son is a way of expressing the closeness of the relationship linking the Thessalonian believers to their God. (Morris 1956, 33)

In addition, Paul tells us that the people of God in Thessalonica are an assembly distinguished by faith, hope, and love. Faith links them with the past. Love connects them to the present and hope points them to the future. Their faith is in God the Father, their hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ and their love is extended toward their brethren. As Stott cogently states,

Every Christian without exception is a believer, a lover and a hoper Faith, hope, and love are ... sure evidences of the new birth by the Holy Spirit The new birth means little or nothing if does not pull us out of our fallen introversion and redirect us toward God, Christ and our fellowmen. (Stott 1991, 30)

Furthermore, the people of God in Thessalonica, who are in a covenant relationship with the King, are a kingdom community that is loved and chosen by God, the King (1:4). Paul outlines his knowledge (Gk. *oida*, "mental perception") of the divine election of the Thessalonian believers based on the King's love. That divine election is based on divine love is an unambiguous teaching of Scripture. In Deuteronomy 7:7-8, for example, Moses reminded the Israelites that,

The LORD did not let his affection on you and chose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you ...

Hence, Stott notes lucidly,

Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 1: 4 Paul unites that love of God and the election of God. That is, he chose us because he loves us ... He does not love us because we are lovable, but only because he is love. And with that mystery we must rest content. (Stott 1991, 31)

Yet many people cannot rest content with the idea of God's election based on his love. Nevertheless, the doctrine of election is an "unsolved mystery" (Hiebert 1971, 52).⁶

In addition, the people of God in Thessalonica were a model community of faith with the responsibility of disseminating the gospel of God (1:7-8). The church in Thessalonica not only imitated Paul and his cohorts (1:6), the Lord (1:6) and the Judean churches (2:14), but they also became the imitated (1:7). Morris informs us that the word "model" (Gk. *tupon*) originally meant "the mark of a stroke or blow, an impression left by a seal or die, an image generally... and so it came to mean a pattern... which is its meaning here" (Morris 1956, 38). Thus, the Thessalonian believers collectively became a model community to Christians in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul calls no other church a model church (Hiebert 1971, 61; Morris 1956, 38).

Moreover, the people of God in Thessalonica were involved in propagating the gospel of the kingdom. For "the Lord's message" was heralded by the Thessalonian Christians throughout Macedonia and Achaia and indeed "everywhere" (1:8). That the word of the Lord spread everywhere in the Roman world from Thessalonica is virtually indisputable since, as we have noted, Thessalonica was situated on the great Egnatian Way, which linked Rome with the East. Morris accurately writes that,

The Word sounded out (*execheo*) is picturesque and might describe the clarion call of a trumpet, or the roll of thunder. It certainly emphasizes the resounding nature of the witness borne by the Thessalonian church. (Morris 1956, 38)

Paul and his missionary cohorts

According to 1Thessalonians, Paul and his missionary cohorts are also the people of God. Paul was a citizen of Tarsus and a persecutor of the church. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, yet he was a very zealous Pharisee (Philippians 3:5). After his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), he became one of the greatest apostles, missionaries, and writers of the Church (Doughlas 1962, 943).

Silas or Silvanus was one of Paul's missionary associates. Silvanus was a Latin term for the Hebrew "Saul." He was a leading member of the Jerusalem church and a co-labourer with Paul on his missionary journeys (Wolf 1970, 8). Timothy, another of Paul's missionary friends, was a young companion of

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this work to delineate the arguments for and against the election of God. Many books have been written on this subject. See Hiebert 1971, 51-52.

Paul from Lystra: Paul was influential in his conversion (1Corinthians 4:17) and he was with Paul during his ministry in Asia Minor and Europe. Timothy was Paul's lifelong companion (Wolf 1970, 8).

They were responsible for the evangelization of Thessalonica. They are identified as apostles of Christ (2:6), men of prayer (1:2, 3), preachers of the gospel of the kingdom (1:5; 2:13; 3:10), exemplary leaders (1:5-6; 2:10-12), and caring shepherds (2:7-8). In addition, these citizens of the kingdom of God were sufferers for Christ (2:12, 15; 3:3-4, 7), men approved by God (2:4), hard workers (2:6-9), and God's fellow-workers (3:3).

Other People of God

Paul mentions other citizens of the kingdom of God. He refers to "all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (1:7). Macedonia and Achaia were "two Roman provinces into which Greece was then divided" (Barker 1985, 1821). Paul also uses the expression "brothers throughout Macedonia" (4:10) to refer to citizens of the kingdom in Macedonia. There were people of the kingdom in Judea as well. For Paul points out that, the Thessalonian believers "became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus" (2:14).

The apostle also identifies other citizens of the kingdom. These are those who are not present among the living. Paul calls them "those who have fallen asleep" in Christ (4:14). To be "asleep" is to be "dead in Christ." This refers to believers who have died in Christ. Hence, these believers are also citizens of the kingdom that God will bring with the King at his coming (4:14).

THE COVENANT OBLIGATIONS EXPLORED

The people of the kingdom, who are in a covenant relationship with the King, are expected to fulfil certain covenant obligations or mandates. These mandates are both cultural and evangelistic (spiritual). In the New Testament, we are told that the new people of God have entered into a new covenant with the King. In this covenant the laws of the King are placed in the hearts of the people, the people belong to the king solely, and they know the king personally (Hebrews 8:8-13; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34). However, the new people of the kingdom are expected to realize certain covenant obligations: the cultural mandate and the evangelistic mandate.

The Cultural Mandate

Philip Steyne, in his book *In Step with the God of the Nations*, notes that, "the cultural mandate speaks of man's responsibility for creation and for his fellowmen" (1992, 28). This cultural mandate is found in 1Thessalonians.

First, it is suggested in the expression “your labour prompted by love” (1:3). Morris posits that,

The word *kopos* (“labor”) denotes laborious toil and directs our minds to unceasing hardship borne for love’s sake [T]hose who yield themselves to God ... are content to give themselves in service to others. Paul thanks God that this is what the Thessalonians have done. (Morris 1956, 34-35)

Furthermore, the Thessalonian believers were asked to love each other “more and more” (4:9, 10). It was their covenant responsibility to demonstrate mutual, egalitarian, and symbiotic brotherly love. Hiebert explains that, “This love is not just a passive disposition of fondness; it manifests itself in overt acts of kindness toward the brethren” (Hiebert 1971, 177). The Thessalonian Christians were to be their brothers' keeper in love.

The cultural mandate of the people of God in Thessalonica is also reflected in Paul’s exhortation that they should work with their own hands so that they may earn the respect of “outsiders” and so that they will become independent (4:11-12). Work is an integral part of the cultural mandate that the people of God are expected to fulfil. Stott tells us that despite the fact that the Greeks loathed manual labour, “Paul the tentmaker reinforced the example of Jesus the carpenter and gave dignity to all honest human labour” (Stott 1991, 90). There is dignity in human labour because it is a part of our cultural mandate.

In addition, the cultural mandate is seen in 1Thessalonians 5:13-15. Here Paul instructs the people of the kingdom in Thessalonica that they should live peacefully with each other (5:13), warn the idle (5:14), assist the weak (5:13) and be patient with, kind and forgiving toward all the members of the faith community and indeed all men.

The Evangelistic Mandate

What is the Evangelistic mandate? Steyne claims that: “The evangelistic mandate speaks of God’s concern for man’s salvation” (Steyne 1992, 28). This mandate is also found in 1Thessalonians. The evangelistic mandate is implied and demonstrated in 1Thessalonians.

The evangelistic mandate is implied in the expression “work of faith” (1:3). Although Paul does not say what he means by this expression, this writer believes that it constitutes the “new Christian lifestyle” (Wanamaker 1990, 75), which necessarily involves the work of evangelism and missions. Thus, Wiersbe is right in noting that, “Their work of faith... expressed itself in their sharing of the Gospel with others” (Wiersbe 1979, 28).

The evangelistic mandate is also demonstrated in 1Thessalonians. The Thessalonian believers, based on their faith, heralded the "Lord's message" in Macedonia, Achaia and throughout the Roman world ("everywhere") (1:8). This was possible because, as we have indicated, Thessalonica was situated in a very strategic location on the Egnatian Way. The Thessalonian Christians both received and transmitted the gospel. "They were trumpeting forth the Good News of Salvation, and their message had a clear and certain sound" (Wiersbe 1979, 29).

Finally, the evangelistic mandate of the Thessalonian church included living a particular lifestyle as a model of the *missio Dei* and of the kingdom of God. Theirs was to be a lifestyle of holiness (4:1-8) and love (4:9-10) in the sight of "the heathen" (4:5) or "the outsiders" (4:13). They were to be characterized by constant joy, peace, and thanksgiving (5:16-18). They were not to extinguish the Spirit's fire or to treat prophecies with disdain. Rather, they were to apply certain tests to every thing including prophecies. In the process, they were to embrace whatever is deemed good and abstain from evil (5:21-22). By living this kind of lifestyle, therefore, the people of the kingdom were living an exemplary life in the sight of the rest of men so that those men would ultimately be saved.

Moreover, Paul and his missionary friends fulfilled the evangelistic mandate in Thessalonica. They carried the gospel to the city not merely with words, but also with power, with the Holy Ghost, and with "deep conviction" (1:4-5).⁷ They modelled the gospel that they preached (1:5), in spite of strong opposition (2:2). They shared the gospel of the King as well as their lives (2:8).

Further, their preaching of the word of God was effective among the Thessalonians and they were constantly involved in "spreading the gospel of Christ" (3:2). Hence, while it is a fact that the missionary mandate is not clearly delineated to the churches, Paul's letters bear "witness [to] his own missionary activity which was an example to them.... The example set by the apostles was significant motivation to maintain the task of world evangelism" (Steyne 1992, 270).

THE ENEMY EXPOSED

A deadly enemy constantly opposes the Kingdom of God. This is taught in the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation (Genesis 3; Isaiah 14: 12-14; Ephesians 6:10-18; Revelation 12ff.). This enemy is a spiritual power who

⁷ cf. Acts 17:1-10.

will do whatever it takes to thwart the will of the King and destroy the Kingdom of God. 1Thessalonians reminds us that this evil foe antagonizes the King and his people incessantly.

What is the identity of this enemy in 1Thessalonians? In this epistle, Paul identifies the enemy, first, as *Satan* (2:18). Who is Satan? What does Satan mean? According to *The New Bible Dictionary*,

Satan is a malignant reality, always hostile to God and to God's people, but he has already been defeated in Christ's life and death and resurrection, and this defeat will become obvious and complete in the end of the age. (Douglas 1962, 1147)

Wanamaker calls him "God's enemy" (Wanamaker 1990, 122). Hogg and Vine tell us more about Satan. They note that,

In the N.T. the word occurs thirty-six times, and always with reference to the sinister and mysterious *enemy* [emphasis added] of Christ and His people" (Hogg and Vine 1914, 82).

Furthermore, the enemy of the kingdom of God is also called "the tempter" (Gk. *ho peirazon*) (3:5). This gives us an idea as to his nature and activity. A tempter tempts. The Greek term for "tempt" here is *peirazo*, which, according to Thayer, means "to try, i.e. ...in a bad sense: to test one maliciously...to try or test one's faith, virtue, character, by enticement to sin, hence...to solicit to *sin*" (Thayer 1901, 498). Consequently, Wanamaker explains that:

The imagery of Satan as the tempter of Christians was derived from Paul's apocalyptic framework in which Satan was viewed as the arch-adversary of God. (Wanamaker 1990, 132)

This enemy is exposed in 1 Thessalonians.

Relative to the activity of Satan, the enemy, in 1Thessalonians he was undoubtedly behind the "severe suffering" of the believers in Thessalonica, when they were initially regenerated (1:6). The enemy was also behind the trials and persecutions that the people of God were facing. In testing them, the tempter was trying to unsettle and destroy their faith in the King (3:3-5). "Whereas Paul thinks it is possible that Satan had applied pressure to his converts he does not think it likely that they would have given way" (Morris 1956, 65).

Moreover, the exhortations in 1Thessalonians 5:21-22 are instructive relative to the hidden work of Satan among the people of God in Thessalonica.

For while the Thessalonian Christians were not to “treat prophecies with contempt” (5:20), they were instructed to test all things and in the process “hold to the good” and avoid all forms of evil. This suggests that the enemy was actively involved in the affairs of the brethren in Thessalonica. For that reason, the believers were to test all things.

Finally, the enemy of God and His people was active in the lives of Paul and his missionary cohorts- Silas and Timothy. As a result of the work of the enemy, they “suffered” and were “insulted” in Philippi (2:2a; cf. Acts 16:16-40). The enemy was also at work when they faced “strong opposition” while preaching the gospel of the kingdom in Thessalonica (2:2b; cf. Acts 17:1-9). It is clear that enemy incited Jews in Thessalonica to try to keep Paul and his associates from “speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved” (2:16; cf. Acts 13:45, 50; 17:5; 20:3).

Paul tells us that when he tried to visit Thessalonica again Satan, the enemy, hindered him (2:18). The enemy always seeks to impede the progress of God’s servants. The enemy was apparently behind the distress and persecution that Paul and his co-workers underwent as they sought to disseminate the gospel of God, the king (3:70). Therefore, Ladd reminds us that,

God’s kingdom is at work in the world and is engaged in a mortal struggle with evil. The Church is the instrument of this struggle. Conflict, therefore, must be ever an essential element of the life of the Church so long as this Age lasts. (Ladd 1959, 121)

The enemy of the King and his people is still at work today.

THE DAY OF VICTORY EXPLAINED

We have seen that God in Christ is the ultimate King of his kingdom. He has entered into a covenant relationship with his people, including those in Thessalonica, who are expected to fulfil certain covenant mandates. However, a recalcitrant enemy, who is determined to facilitate the destruction of the kingdom of God, relentlessly opposes the King and his people. The significant and ultimate consideration in this writer’s mind, nevertheless, is that this enemy has already been defeated and will be defeated on the day of victory-victory for the king and his people. We will examine and explain the expected day of victory as Paul articulates it in 1 Thessalonians.

The day of victory in 1 Thessalonians is termed “the day of the Lord” (5:2). The expression “day of the Lord” is the translation of the Greek expression *hemera kuriou*. There is no definite article before the expression.

Consequently, this writer concurs with Hiebert who believes: "The absence of the definite article lays stress upon the character of the *day*, it is a day belonging to the Lord" (Hiebert 1971, 210).

The idea of the *day of the Lord* is not unfamiliar to the Old Testament. It is a term that is found frequently in the Minor Prophets. According to *The NIV Study Bible*, "The expression goes back to Am 5:18. In the OT it is a time when God will come and intervene with judgement and/or blessing. In the NT the thought of judgment continues (see Ro 2:5; 2Pe 2:9), but it is also the "day of redemption" (Eph 4:30); "the day of God" (2Pe 3:12) or of Christ (1Co 1:8; Php 1:6) and the "last day" (Jn 6:39), the "great Day" (Jude 6) or simply "the day" (2Th 1:10). It is the climax of all things" (Barker 1985, 1824).

Correspondingly, Paul gives us some ideas relative to the character of the day of the Lord. He notes that the day of the Lord "will come like a thief in the night" (5:2). Hogg and Vine illuminate this simile. They note that, "The unexpectedness of the coming of the thief, and the unpreparedness of those to whom he comes are the essential elements in the figure..." (Hogg and Vine 1914, 154).

In addition, Paul develops the notion of *the day of the Lord* in chapter 5:3-9. These verses suggest that Paul is dealing with the tribulation or judgment aspect of the day of the Lord. For there will be "sudden destruction" (5:3). Ryrie accurately states that,

The Day of the Lord is...a time when God deals with the world in judgment for its sin. ... But it is also a time of blessing when the earth shall enjoy the personal reign of Christ during the millennium However, in this passage Paul ... deals only with the judgment aspect of that day. (Ryrie 1959, 68-69)

This great day of victory would be a day of judgment for those who say "peace and safety" (5:2). These people are the people of the enemy, those who belong to the darkness- sons of the night. The day of the Lord will indeed be a day of doom and destruction to those whose lives are characterized by darkness- the darkness of sin and rebellion. These people are appointed to suffer wrath, unlike the people of the Kingdom (5:9). Hence, the day of the Lord is indeed the day of victory for the King and his people. The *missio Dei* will have been completed.

The people of the kingdom are appointed to enjoy the victory of the King. They will be saved from the wrath to come (5:9). This is reflected in the fact that the *Parousia* (the Second Coming of Christ) will precede the day of the Lord. The *Parousia* will include the "rapture" of the people of God (4:13-18). For that reason, the day of the Lord must be distinguished from the *Parousia*.

Hiebert tells us that, "As a prophetic period the day of the Lord is inaugurated with the rapture of the church as described in 4:13-18 ..." (Hiebert 1971, 211).

The *Parousia* will necessarily include the rapture of the church, according to the apostle. Paul introduces this new doctrine, which he claims is based on "the Lord's own words" (4:15), in order to assure the Thessalonian brethren concerning the fate of their loved ones who died. He tells the Thessalonians that the living believers will not precede the dead ones. For both the living and dead believers will be "caught up" (Greek *harpazo*; Latin *rapere*; English *rapture*) in the air to meet the Lord when he himself returns in the *Parousia*. Then we all will be with the Lord forever (4:16-17). Hiebert has cogently noted: "The *we* is comprehensive, covering all believers. Both the living and the dead will share the glorious destiny of being ever ... with the Lord" (Hiebert 1971, 203).

The message of this portion of Scripture, therefore, is that the people of God—both the living and the dead—are destined to win. For the Lord's victory will be our victory. The *Parousia* will indeed inaugurate the day of the Lord—the Day of Victory.

After this protracted prophetic period, which will include the great tribulation, the revelation of Christ, and the millennial reign of Christ (Hiebert 1971, 211), "the end will come, when he (Christ) hands over the kingdom to God the Father..." (1Cor. 15:24). This would happen

after he [Christ] has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until God has put all his enemies under his feet ... When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all" (1Cor. 15:24, 25, 28).

IMPLICATIONS FOR WORLD EVANGELIZATION

The missionary message of 1Thessalonians, which we have delineated in the preceding pages, has tremendous implications for world evangelization. The following are some of the implications. First, the missionary message of 1Thessalonians implies that the *missio Dei* continues in the contemporary world. God's mission was advanced in the time of the Thessalonians and should be advanced today.

Second, the people of God are expected to play a centrifugal role in God's mission, not a centripetal one. They are to disseminate the gospel of God, the good news of the kingdom that had its origin in and with God. Therefore, third, the local church should be perceived as God's missionary people by faith. Hence, missions should no longer be relegated to a select few, like Paul

and his missionary brethren in the first century. It should be the work of the entire people of God wherever they are found in local gatherings.

Fourth, the people of the kingdom must embody or epitomize the gospel that they preach. They are to be a model community in the sight of the watching world. As they imitate the King, the peoples of the world will in turn imitate them. Fifth, the Holy Spirit must be an integral element in the realization of our evangelistic mandate. Without his active involvement, we would not effectively fulfil this mandate.

Sixth, as the instrument of the Kingdom, the propagator of the gospel of the kingdom, the Church of Jesus Christ will be in constant conflict and confrontation with the enemy of the kingdom who seeks to destroy her faith and to obliterate the kingdom of God. Finally, as the people of God seek to evangelize the world, they must be cognizant of the urgency of their task. For the kingdom of God, while it has already been inaugurated, will soon be consummated!

CONCLUSION

The preceding reflections verify the claim made earlier by this writer that the continuation of the *missio Dei* is evident in the book of 1Thessalonians. God was accomplishing his mission to heal the nations in and through Paul, his missionary friends and the church in Thessalonica. We have also outlined the missionary message of First Thessalonians based on the Kingdom of God paradigm.

The missionary message of 1Thessalonians demonstrates the *missio Dei*. For we have noted that the King of the kingdom of God is primarily referred to as the *Lord* of the universe in 1Thessalonians. The people of God, which included the Thessalonian believers, Paul and his missionary cohorts, among others, were loved and chosen by God as a model community of faith to advance the *missio Dei* through the fulfilment of their evangelistic mandate—the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to the nations.

However, we have also noted that, according to 1Thessalonians, the enemy of the kingdom, who is called *Satan* and *the tempter*, seeks to hinder the advance of the mission of God and destroy the faith of God's people. Yet Paul has cogently outlined an imminent and inevitable Day of Victory — the day of the Lord -- in which the Lord would judge his enemies, establish his millennial reign, and then usher in the Age to Come - the Kingdom of God. However, this would be preceded by the *Parousia*, which will include the rapture of the people of the kingdom. Thus, victory for the King and his people is assured. Hence, the *missio Dei* will ultimately be consummated!

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