“Since We Believe That Jesus Died and Rose Again”:
The Gospel Paul Preached in Thessalonica as Evidenced by 1 Thessalonians

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In 1 Thessalonians, seemingly Paul’s earliest, extant letter, the missioners’ ēisodoς and the Lord’s παρουσία feature.¹ If Paul is at pains in chs. 1–3 to impress upon the fledgling fellowship in Thessalonica the sincerity and constancy of their apostles’ care whether physically present or absent, in chs. 4–5 he sets forth various exhortations and offers hopeful consolation in light of Christ’s imminent coming.² To be sure, the missioners’ visits and the Lord’s visitation are prevailing epistolary themes in 1 Thessalonians. That being said there is a frequently undetected thread that ties these topics, if not the entire letter, together.³ This leitmotif, in Pauline parlance εὐαγγέλιον, λόγος, or παράκλησις, is the subject of this study.⁴ Integral to Paul’s gospel and at issue in this session is Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection.⁵

This paper begins by identifying passages in the letter where Paul speaks of the gospel that he proclaimed and the Thessalonians’ embraced. The contents of and response to the missioners’ message will then be examined. Lastly, this essay explores the putative origin of the gospel that Paul and his coworkers heralded in Thessalonica in the middle of the first century AD. The scope of this study is necessarily broader than the title. As the sub-title suggests, this piece will consider the κηρύγμα that Paul and his companions preached to the Thessalonians as evidenced by 1 Thessalonians.⁶ Such an approach will enable a fuller understanding of the place of Jesus’ death and resurrection in Paul’s proclamation at that time.
I. “Our Gospel Came to You”

Near the outset of 1 Thessalonians, Paul informs the assembly that their apostles offer perpetual, prayerful thanks to God for them (1:2). Such thanksgiving, Paul indicates, is predicated upon their remembering and knowing. They remember their converts’ faith, love, and hope (1:3; cf. 5:8); they “know” (εἰδότες) of the Thessalonians’ election (τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, 1:4; cf. 2:12; 4:7; 5:9, 24). One may be forgiven for wondering how it was they knew that God had chosen and called these former “idolaters” “into his own kingdom and glory” (note esp. 1:9; 2:12; 4:5). They know, Paul insists, because the gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) the apostles declared to them came not only in word (όμως ἐν λόγῳ μόνῳ) but also “in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ, 1:5).7

To support further his claim that they were loved and chosen by God through the gospel Paul recalls how the assembly “received the word in much affliction” (δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ) with a Spirit-inspired joy. In so doing, 1:6 states, they became imitators (μιμηταὶ) of their missioners and of the Lord (cf. 2:2, 15; 3:7; 4:14; 5:10). Later in the letter in a passage of debated authenticity, Paul maintains the Thessalonian congregation became imitators (μιμηταί) of the “churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea” by virtue of their having suffered the same things at the hands of their own compatriots (συμφιλεταί) that these Judean assemblies did from the Ἰουδαίοι (2:14).8 More than mere mimics, however, Paul reports that the church became an example (τύπος) for other Grecian believers (1:7).9

Additionally, Paul indicates in 1:8 that “the word of the Lord” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου) which had come to them was now sounding forth (ἐξῆχεω) from them “in Macedonia and Achaia.” Yet, Greece was not the only place where “the word of the Lord” was “ringing out” from them.10 Rather, “in every place,” 1 Thess 1:8b maintains, the Thessalonians’ “faith in God
had gone forth.” Hyperbole notwithstanding, Paul continues in 1:9a to link the subsequent dissemination of the gospel through the Thessalonians to the missioners initial ministry (ἐισόδος) in their midst.11

Passing over 1:9b-10 for the time being (see further below), we may note that 2:1-2 depicts the apostles’ founding visit (ἐισόδος) in terms of their effectual, courageous proclamation of the “gospel of God in the face of great opposition” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πολλῷ ἁγίῳ).12 Paul then proceeds in 2:3-12 to rehearse the ministers’ witness and work among the Thessalonians. Whether Paul’s purpose in penning this passage was primarily apologetic or parenetic need not detain us here.13 Instead, it is important for our present purposes to note that the gospel features in Paul’s rehearsal of the apostles’ εἰσόδος. In 2:3 Paul propounds that in contradistinction to philosophic hucksters their παρακλησί to the Thessalonians was not motivated by “deceit,” “uncleanness,” or “guile.” Rather, 2:4 insists that they spoke the gospel—for which they had been approved and with which they had been entrusted by God—not to please people but God, the tester of hearts.

As Paul continues to recall the missioners’ words and ways among the Thessalonians for the encouragement and edification of the congregation (cf. 5:11), the gospel remains central. While with them, Paul maintains, the apostles shared “the gospel of God” as well as themselves (2:8). To support this assertion, he reminds the assembly that they worked night and day so that they might not be a fiscal burden to them as they preached to them “the gospel of God” (2:9). In reflecting upon the ministers’ upright behavior among the believers, Paul likens their role to that of a father with his children (2:10-11; cf. 2:7). This, in turn, prompts him to thank God yet again for the Thessalonians’ reception of the “word of God” as the “word of God” and not as mere mortal musings (2:13; cf. 1:2-5; 4:8).
At 2:17 Paul shifts his focus from the apostles’ past presence to his present absence. He reports that despite repeated attempts to return to Thessalonica he was unable to do so due to Satan’s machinations (2:18). Having been blocked by Satan, Paul decided to send Timothy in his stead so that he might know how they were faring in their newfound faith (3:1-2). Indeed, he was fearful that the tempter might utilize their ongoing afflictions to undermine their fledgling faith and in so doing render vain the labor of the missioners (3:3, 5). For this investigation, it is worth noting how Paul describes Timothy in 3:2. On the one hand, he refers to him as “our brother,” that is, a “fellow believer” and perhaps as a “fellow minister” as well. On the other hand, he depicts him as “God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 3:9). The gospel is foundational for the formation and continuation of the church and is part and parcel of Timothy’s identity. But what are the contents of this gospel to which Paul repeatedly refers in the first three chs. of the letter? It is to this question that we now turn.

II. The Proclamation of the Gospel of God

Although it is not possible to reconstruct fully the gospel that Paul and his associates preached in Thessalonica, the re-collective nature of 1 Thessalonians allows belated readers to know a fair amount about the message they proclaimed. Let us consider the gospel the apostles declared to the Thessalonians under three headings—God, Christ, and until Christ comes.

God

Whether or not the missioners commenced their proclamation of the gospel to Gentiles (note 2:16; cf. 1:9; 4:5) by appealing to a “living and true God” (θεὸς ζωοντι καὶ αληθινός) sooner than later they would have had to address the nature and character of the divine. In the letter
before us Paul juxtaposes τὸν θεόν to τῶν εἰδώλων (1:9). Although Mount Olympus, home to the Greek gods, lay roughly fifty miles south of the city and the Cabirus and imperial cults were gaining considerable spiritual traction in first-century Thessalonica, the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles maintained, “[T]here is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6). It is this God, he insisted, that loves, elects, and calls “into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 1:4; 2:12). It is this God who serves as judge and jury as both adjudicator and avenger (4:6). It is this God who “has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:9). It is this God whose Son is the Lord Jesus Christ (1:10).

The Lord Jesus Christ

Whatever the starting point of the apostles’ preaching “the Lord Jesus Christ” was their focal point (1:1, 3; 5:9, 24). From all indications, the Lord’s parousia featured in the missioners’ proclamation. Paul not only takes up this topic in 4:13–5:11, wherein he both presupposes and expands upon previous instruction (note esp. 4:13-14; 5:1-2), but he also weaves the matter throughout the entire letter. In 1:9-10 he indicates that the Thessalonians’ turning to God entailed their waiting “for his Son from heaven,” namely, “Jesus who delivers us [i.e., believers] from the wrath to come.” Furthermore, Paul concludes chs. 2, 3, and 5 respectively with reference to the Lord’s coming (see 2:19; 3:13; 5:23). It appears that the apostles declared to the Thessalonians that Jesus would soon come “like a thief in the night” (5:2), bringing salvation to believers (1:10; 5:8-9) and sudden, inescapable destruction to outsiders (5:3; cf. 1:10; 5:9). Whereas the “day of the Lord” would catch unbelievers espousing “peace and security” off-guard, those of the light would not be surprised by that day (5:4-5).
An emphasis upon the *parousia*, then, is evident in 1 Thessalonians and was presumably no less prevalent in the gospel that the apostles proclaimed during their sojourn in Thessalonica.\(^{23}\) Does this suggest, in turn, that the missioners neglected to give adequate attention to Jesus’ death and resurrection as they promulgated their message? Put otherwise, did their focus upon Christ’s coming at the end of time cause them to give shorter shrift to the Son’s advent in the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4)? Perhaps, and the Thessalonians’ enthusiastic reception of Paul’s apocalyptic gospel might have tipped the balance all the more.\(^{24}\) Nonetheless, there are epistolary indications that Jesus’ death and resurrection were part and parcel of the apostles’ original proclamation and subsequent instruction.\(^{25}\)

Regarding the Lord’s death, we might begin by observing that in 5:10 Paul states the Lord Jesus Christ “died for us” (τοῦ ᾧ ποθανόντος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν).\(^{26}\) Additionally, in a text of disputed authenticity, it is stated that certain Ἰουδαίοι “killed the Lord Jesus” (τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινόντων Ἰησοῦν, 2:15).\(^{27}\) Furthermore, it is probable, though not provable, that the Thessalonians would have connected the Lord’s affliction, to which Paul refers in 1:6, with his death or perhaps the complex of events leading up to and culminating in his crucifixion. Finally, and most clearly, we discover in 4:14 that Jesus’ death was foundational to the gospel that the apostles proclaimed and the Thessalonians embraced. There, Paul bases his instruction regarding the resurrection of the Christian dead on their shared belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection.\(^{28}\)

Indeed, the hope and consolation that Paul extends to the congregation regarding those who are sleeping—that is who are dead—is predicated upon Christ’s resurrection from the dead (see 4:13-18; cf. 1:10).\(^{29}\) Paul insists that the Thessalonian believers need “not grieve as others do who have no hope” because of their conviction that even as God raised Christ from the dead, God will also raise the dead in Christ (4:13-14).\(^{30}\) As it happens, Paul instructs that “the dead in
Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord” (4:16b-17). Given that God has raised his Son from the dead and that his Son will soon return from heaven to raise the Christian dead, transport the Christian living, and deliver believers from the coming wrath, how ought “the church of the Thessalonians” live in the time between times?

“Until He Comes”

Although Paul and his associates were unable to cross every theological “t” and to dot every ethical “i” during their troubled and truncated sojourn in Thessalonica (note 2:2, 17; 4:13), he and his coworkers were able to offer the congregation at least some instruction for negotiating the nettle between the “now” and the “not yet” (so 4:1-2, 9, 12) For example, it appears that the apostles taught the assembly that they were a part of an extended family loved by God who ought to love one another and to act lovingly and nobly toward outsiders as they work, worship, witness, and wait (see esp. 1:7-10; 4:9-12; 5:12-21; cf. 3:12). Additionally, the missioners, like mothers and fathers, grew to love their children and instructed them to live lives marked by moral purity, embracing holiness and honor and eschewing porneia and epithymia (2:7-12; 4:3-8; cf. 3:13).

Conjoining ethics and eschatology, the founders warned the believers that they would be accountable to the very God who called them to holiness and gave his Holy Spirit to them (4:6-8). Furthermore, in an effort to demarcate and differentiate their converts from “the Gentiles who do not know God” (τὰ ἑθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τῶν θεόν, 4:5), Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy encouraged their “brothers and sisters” to see themselves as children of day and light and to be “clothed and in their right mind” among those who dwell in darkness and night as they await the
Day of days (5:1-8). In the midst of their anticipation, however, they should expect affliction, for this is the Christian lot, as the Thessalonians came to know all too well (3:3-4; cf. 1:6; 2:14).

III. The Reception of the Gospel in Thessalonica

Based upon our reconstruction from the hints given in 1 Thessalonians, the gospel that Paul and his coworkers declared in Thessalonica was decidedly christological and eschatological with a strong admixture of moral and ecclesial instruction “thrown in for good measure.” To review, the apostles’ preachment centered around the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living and true God, who was soon to come from heaven to earth to offer salvation to believers and to mete out judgment to outsiders. Meanwhile, the fellowship of the faithful was to live in such a way so as to please God (4:1). This would entail, among other things, a commitment to sexual sanctification, congregational life, and love for all people. In addition, forgoing retaliation, they were to seek to do good for all (5:15). Furthermore, when in the throes of affliction, they were not to be shaken but were to be mindful that suffering is the Christian lot (3:3).

First Thessalonians indicates and Acts corroborates (cf. 17:5-10a) that there was a mixed response to the gospel the missioners brought to Thessalonica. While some people welcomed the words of the apostles as the word of God (2:13), others—a sizeable majority we imagine—rejected the message and the messengers alike. In addition, some non-Christian Thessalonians opposed their newly converted compatriots in various and sundry ways and for any number of reasons (see esp. 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4). Time and space constraints preclude an exploration of the conflict the Thessalonian believers experienced with outsiders in conjunction
with their conversion. Besides, along with others, I have treated this matter in some degree of detail elsewhere. I would like for us to consider briefly, however, some of the potential convictional obstacles the apostles would have had to combat and overcome in order to convince their “pagan” audience in Thessalonica to embrace the gospel they proclaimed.

In a learned article published in *New Testament Studies* in 2005 entitled “Pagan Philosophers and 1 Thessalonians,” John Granger Cook surveys the antagonistic responses of a number of ancient philosophers (e.g., Celsus, Porphyry, Heirocles, Julian, and Macarius Magnes’s critic) to various aspects of the gospel Paul and his coworkers declared to the Thessalonians. While recognizing that the missioners’ original audience would not have been comprised of intellectuals *per se*, Granger is able to offer a plausible range of “pagan” reaction to the gospel the apostles heralded and in so doing to “show how difficult it was to persuade some individuals to give up paganism.”

Given Paul’s christological monotheism, the Thessalonians would have “had to give up their ancient traditions of polytheism and the accompanying image worship (1:9).” Additionally, as Granger notes, “The philosophers were appalled by belief in a crucified man.” “Surely,” he posits, “Paul [would have] had to persuade his audience in Thessalonica that such a belief made sense.” Furthermore, Granger contends, “The critics found the resurrection impossible to believe. The former pagans in Thessalonica originally had no hope in personal resurrection (4:13), and Paul would have had to help them accept this belief not present in their culture.”

Granger also maintains that the Thessalonians would have learned the following from Paul, as such concepts were absent from or despised by their pagan culture: the meaning of the word “Christ”; the value and necessity of faith in God through Christ; the existence of Satan; the
wrath of God; and the importance of Christian prophecy as opposed to ancient oracles. Finally, while “educated pagans” would resonate with certain aspects of Paul’s ethical instruction, they would excoriate his declaration that believers were to meet Christ in the clouds. Granger thereby concludes, “Christian apocalyptic hope was something Paul had to teach his [sic] pagans as it was a novum for Hellenistic culture.” Similarly, Wayne A. Meeks remarks, “It is remarkable that the former pagans who formed the Christian congregation in the Macedonian city [of Thessalonica] should have been persuaded that such apocalyptic images were an apt picture of their world and lives.” “Yet,” Meeks continues, “language of this sort is so frequent in Paul’s letters [not least 1 Thessalonians, I might add] that we must suppose that it was intelligible and important to his followers.”

IV. The Origin of Paul’s Gospel

As we draw this paper to a conclusion, let us consider one other question: Where did Paul receive the gospel he proclaimed to the Thessalonians and of which he speaks, and to some extent explicates, in 1 Thessalonians? Since 1 Thessalonians does not offer an answer to our query, we are forced to go further into the Pauline field. When we do, Galatians 1 and 1 Corinthians 15 come into clear view. In the former passage, Paul insists that in the first instance he received “the gospel of Christ” that he preached to the Galatians δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Gal 1:12; cf. 1:16, 18). In the latter chapter, the focus of our second paper this afternoon, Paul seeks to remind the Corinthians of the gospel that he preached and they received (15:1). In doing so he declares, “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to
Cephas, then to the twelve” (15:3-5). But Christ appeared not only to Cephas and the twelve, he also appeared, Paul reports, to five hundred other brothers and sisters, to James, and to all of the apostles (15:6-7). Then, “last of all” he appeared to Paul, the ἐκτρωμα among the apostles (15:8).

In Paul’s perception, then, the gospel he received and proclaimed was a confluence of divine revelation and human instruction or church tradition. By the time Paul came to proclaim the gospel in Thessalonica and/or to write to the Thessalonians, his education and experiences in Tarsus, Jerusalem, Damascus, Arabia, Syrian Antioch, Cyprus, Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth and places in between and beyond would have shaped his instruction and incarnation of the gospel. I do not doubt that Paul put his distinct interpretive and pastoral stamp on the gospel he declared in Thessalonica. This certainly appears to have been the case with his emphasis upon Christ’s parousia and its relative proximity. That being said, when Paul appeals in 1 Thessalonians to Jesus’ death and resurrection as the grounds for eschatological hope while simultaneously conjoining eschatological beliefs with ethical behavior, one recognizes that the apostle is standing in a stream that did not begin with him. And lo these many years later, we can see that this stream did not end with him either.

V. Concluding Comments

Acts 17:1-10a offers a truncated and stylized account of Paul’s initial visit to Thessalonica. Therein, it is said that upon arrival in the city Paul went in to the synagogue per his custom to argue with the Thessalonian Jews from the Scriptures and to explain and prove to them “that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead” (17:2-3). While Lukan concerns and vocabulary mark in this passage, it is seems doubtful that Paul would quibble too much with
this summation of his proclamation. For, as we have seen, “‘Christ crucified and raised’ was at the heart of the gospel transmitted to Paul by his predecessors”⁵² and was part and parcel of the evangel the apostle declared in Thessalonica and elsewhere.⁵³

Notes

¹ Margaret M. Mitchell, “1 and 2 Thessalonians,” in The Cambridge Companion to St Paul (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51-63 (on 53), remarks, “While likely not the first letter Paul ever wrote to a church, 1 Thessalonians is probably the earliest letter that was preserved and later published (in which case, it is the oldest writing in the New Testament).” “As such,” Mitchell maintains, “it is an enormously important document: the first early Christian letter, the inaugural text of a tradition of Christian epistolary literature that extends to the present day.” Cf. Raymond F. Collins, The Birth of the New Testament: The Origin and Development of the First Christian Generation (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

² So similarly, Victor Paul Furnish, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 23.

³ Seyoon Kim, “Paul’s Entry (εἰσόδος) and the Thessalonians’ Faith (1 Thessalonians 1–3),” NTS 51 (2005): 519-42, argues that Paul’s proclamation and the Thessalonians’ reception of the gospel “clearly runs through the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians like a read thread” (523). Albeit less prominent, the gospel the apostles proclaimed and the Thessalonians received is by no means absent in chs. 4–5 of the letter. See, e.g., 4:1-2, 7, 9, 11, 14; 5:1-2, 9-10.
Cf. Collins, *Birth*, 37-71. ἐὐαγγέλιον appears in 1:5; 2:2, 4, 8, 9; 3:2 (cf. 2 Thess 1:8; 2:14). λόγος, referring to gospel proclamation, occurs in 1:5, 6, 8; 2:5, 13 (3x) (cf. 2 Thess 2:2, 15; 3:1). παράκλησις is found only in 2:3.

Graham N. Stanton, “Paul’s Gospel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, 173-84 (177), maintains that Jesus’ death and resurrection “was at the heart of the gospel” transmitted to and communicated by Paul.


Gordon D. Fee (*The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 31) states, “[F]or Paul ‘election’ is always a referent to believers, and thus reflects a reality after the fact, not before; and as here [i.e., 1:4-5] it is always seen as an action of God’s love, and thus it becomes a dynamic force in the life of the believing community.” See further, Calvin J. Roetzel, “The Grammar of Election in Four of Paul’s Letters,” in *Pauline
For a thorough treatment of and an up-to-date bibliography on the scholarly debate regarding the (in)authenticity of 1 Thess 2:13-16 (or portions thereof), see now David Luckensmeyer, *The Eschatology of First Thessalonians* (NTOA/SNTSU 71; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 115-72.


James Ware (“The Thessalonians as a Missionary Congregation: 1 Thessalonians 1,5-8,” *ZNW* 83 [1992]: 126-31) contends that the Thessalonian assembly was engaged in active evangelization. So also, Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 117. Cf. otherwise, e.g., Fee, *Thessalonians*, 43.

See further, John Gillman, “Paul’s Ἐἰσοδος: The Proclaimed and the Proclaimer (1 Thess 2,8),” in *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (BETL 87; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 62-70.
12 On the missioners’ declaration in the throes of opposition, see Todd D. Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and its Neighbors* (JSNTSup 183; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 126-30.

13 On the function of 1 Thess 2:1-12, see, among others, Still, *Conflict*, 137-48, who concludes, in contradistinction to Abraham J. Malherbe (“‘Gentle as a Nurse’: The Cynic Background to 1 Thessalonians 2,” *NovT* 12 [1970]: 203-17), that the passage is primarily apologetic. So, too e.g., Kim, “Paul’s Entry.”

14 James E. Frame (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912], 14, 17, 140) depicts 2:1-16 as an *apologia pro vita sua et labore suo* and 2:17–3:10 as an *apologia pro absentia sua*.

15 I think it unlikely that Paul has in view in 2:18 the action taken by the politarchs against Jason and certain other Thessalonian believers reported in Acts 17:9. Instead, “it seems more likely that (an)other now unknown factor(s) kept Paul from returning to the Thessalonian church” (so Still, *Conflict*, 79-80).


John M. G. Barclay (‘Conflict in Thessalonica,” CBQ 55 [1993]: 512-30 [on 516]) contends, “In 1 Thessalonians Paul refers so many times to the terms of his preaching that we can reconstruct its content with some confidence.”

That being said, Furnish (Thessalonians, 48) correctly notes that “the Thessalonians’ service…of ‘a living and true God’ was inseparable from their accepting the good news that God’s Son, Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead, would return to rescues them from ‘the wrath that is coming.’” Furthermore, Malherbe (Thessalonians, 132) rightly recognizes that one should not assume that the missioners sought to convert Gentiles to monotheism in the first instance and to Christ in the second. Rather, “From the start, the presentation of God is Christian, culminating in the saving work of Christ.”


Although no small number of commentators has posited that 1:9b-10 is a “formulaic summary of (Hellenistic) Jewish-Christian missionary preaching” (so Furnish, Thessalonians, 48; see, e.g., Ernest Best, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians [BNTC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1972], 85-87), this view is commanding less and less support among scholars. In addition to Malherbe, Thessalonians, 131-33, Furnish, Thessalonians, 48-49, and Fee,


24 Note Still, Conflict, 234-35.

25 Mitchell (“1 and 2 Thessalonians,” 52) maintains, “The basic plot [of the gospel Paul preached in Thessalonica], encapsulated in 4:14 and 1:10, is quite simple: Jesus died, God raised him from
the dead, and at some future time Jesus will rescue those who believe in him from ‘the coming wrath’ at his ‘parousia’ or advent (2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:9, 23)…."

26 According to James D. G. Dunn (The Theology of Paul the Apostle [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 174-77), one can detect five kerygmatic/confessional pre-Pauline formulae in Paul’s Letters: “(1) Resurrection formulae—‘God raised him from the dead.’ (2) ‘Died for’ formulae—‘Christ died for us.’ (3) ‘Handed over (paradidômi)’ formulae—‘he was handed (or handed himself) over (for our sins).’ (4) Combined formulae—‘Christ died and was raised.’ (5) Confessional formulae—‘Jesus is Lord.’” In 1 Thessalonians, one finds a “resurrection formula” (1:10), a “died for formula” (5:10), and a “combined formula” (4:14). Dunn maintains that the expectation of such formulae, the repetition of such formulae, and the economic explication of central gospel tenets in the midst of complex passages (e.g., Rom 3:21-26) “weigh in favour of recognizing such snatches as indeed formulae which Paul instinctively echoes” (175).

27 For bibliography regarding the (in)authenticity of 1 Thess 2:13-16, in addition to n. 8 above, see also Still, Conflict, 24-45.

28 Michael W. Pahl (Discerning the Word of the Lord: The ‘Word of the Lord’ in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 [LNTS 389; London/New York: T & T Clark, 2009], 169) posits that the long-debated phrase ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου in 1 Thess 4:15 “refers to the proclaimed gospel message about Jesus centred on his death and resurrection which forms the theological foundation of Paul’s response (cf. 4:14)."
N. T. Wright (The Resurrection of the Son of God [Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 215) offers the following commentary on the meaning of resurrection and salvation in 1 Thess 4:13–5:11: “The words Paul uses, the nature of his argument, and the underlying story-line, all make it crystal clear that he belongs, at this point, right in the middle of second-Temple Jewish beliefs about resurrection. Take Jesus out of the picture, and what is being asserted...is familiar from our study of Judaism: it is the position of the Pharisees.”

Hooker (“1 Thessalonians 1.9-10,” 438) observes that “confidence for the future is based on God’s action in the past; it is Jesus, who has been raised from the dead, who is now awaited from heaven, and who will save us from wrath.”

On the familial language in 1 Thessalonians, see esp. Trevor J. Burke, Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians (JSNTSup 247; London/New York: T & T Clark).


Wright (*Resurrection*, 216) maintains that 5:4-8 “offers an *inaugurated eschatology* in which Paul draws on the (Genesis-based) imagery of night and day to say that Christians are *already*, as it were, ‘resurrection people’. Their bodies still need to be transformed, but in terms of the resurrection-related imagery of sleeping and waking they are already ‘awake’, and must stay that way” (emphasis original).

Wayne A. Meeks (“The Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language in Pauline Christianity,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* [ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1983], 687-705 [on 692]) notes, “The expectation of suffering was part of the catechism, so to speak, of the churches in the Pauline mission areas.”

In addition to my *Conflict*, see Craig Stephen de Vos, *Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities* (SBLDS 168; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), and Mikael Tellbe, *Paul between Synagogue and State: Christians, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians* (ConBNT 34; Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 2001).


Cook, “Pagan Philosophers and 1 Thessalonians,” 514.

Cook, “Pagan Philosophers and 1 Thessalonians,” 523.

See Cook, “Pagan Philosophers and 1 Thessalonians,” passim.

Cook, “Pagan Philosophers and 1 Thessalonians,” 529.


Wright (Resurrection, 218) remarks, “[First Thessalonians] 4.14 is, in fact, a succinct summary of virtually the whole of 1 Corinthians 15.”

First Corinthians 15:8 is a notoriously difficult verse. See, among others, Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 732-34.

Dunn (Theology of Paul, 177) resolves the tension between Galatians 1 and 1 Cor 15:1-7 in the following fashion: “What Paul received and preached, and echoed in his letters, was indeed the common Christian conviction that ‘Christ died (for us) and was raised (from the dead).’ That remained the shared confession and bond which held together the first Christian churches, despite all of their diversity, in one gospel. What Paul was convinced of on the Damascus road,
however, was not simply this central confessional claim but also that this Jesus was now to be preached to the Gentiles.”


49 See, too, Dunn, Theology of Paul, 176-77.

50 For a work that seeks “to explore in their infinite depth the images of redemption presented in 1 Thessalonians, most especially the apostolic witness [in 4:14],” see Angus Paddison, Theological Hermeneutics and 1 Thessalonians (SNTSMS 133; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). The quotation (emphasis original) appears on p. 14 of the volume.


Dunn (*Theology of Paul*, 165) remarks, “More than any other of Paul’s key themes, [a] concern for the gospel remains constant throughout Paul’s written ministry—as prominent in what was probably his first letter (1 Thessalonians) as in what may well have been his final imprisonment (Philippians).”