

Some thoughts on 1 Thess 2:14-16:

I recently re-read this passage and it almost literally jumped out at me that:

- 1) no way did the Apostle Paul write this, and
- 2) it was written after 70 CE (- the original letter was written circa 51 CE).

Why is this important and what does this mean?

Firstly the passage in question (many include v 13 as well):

13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

*14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did **from the Jews,***

15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind

16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last!

How wrong ('the Jews' did not kill Jesus, and the latest evidence indicates that synagogue 'expulsions' ('drove us out') did not occur until well after 70 CE), how exaggerated and anti-Semitic. Also the writer appears to glorify in a nations(?) suffering (the Fall of Jerusalem)!

No wonder I know plenty of committed God-fearers; as well as Torah observant Jews; and even followers of Yeshua, who reject the Apostle Paul as a fraud and a traitor to the faith of Israel, the proto-Judaism of his time!

So let's look a little more deeply at this passage.

After much scholarly research and debate, especially 'form-critical' work 1 Thess 1:10 has been generally accepted as the end of the 'thanksgiving' section and 1 Thess 2:17 as the beginning of the 'apostolic parousia'. Also then, 1 Thess 2:1-12 has emerged as the initial section of the 'body' of this letter, leading quite naturally to 2:17 and leaving 1 Thess 2:13-16 as an intrusion, that is, as not 'fitting in'; as not an original portion of the letter.

Scholars have argued that this is a more plausible explanation than seeing 1 Thess 2:13 as the beginning of a second letter that has been joined to the first letter by a later editor. Some scholars (Pearson for example – see Birger Pearson: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation HTR 64 -1971) have shown that the content of 1 Thess 2:15-16 appears contemporary with the perspective of several post-70 CE Matthean passages. That is, Pearson has given a good argument that this added portion was written some 20 years (post 70 AD) after the original epistle (circa 51 AD).

It has been mainly through modern linguistic techniques that scholars have been able to more conclusively show that 1 Thess 2:13-16 was not part of the original letter and was added by a different author. As I am no linguist, I will not attempt to even explain how this is done. For those who wish to follow-up on this though, I recommend '1 Thess 2:13-16: Linguistic Evidence for an Interpolation' by Daryl Schmidt, Journal of Biblical Literature (June 1 1983).

A dissenting view argues that, given that there are no ancient manuscripts which exclude these verses; that they can be seen in some ways to fit logically and stylistically into the epistle's context; and that the strong language here is consistent with other statements by Paul against his opponents, the Pauline authorship of this text should be presumed. It is also possible that 'the Jews' being referred to here was not the whole nation of Israel, but just the Judeans. These possibilities, even if correct, would in no way change the historical impact of these anti-Semitic words.

In summary then, some consensus has been established that the content of 2:13-16 does not fit well into 1 Thessalonians, nor into Pauline thought in general, and that formally this section intrudes into the overall structure of the whole letter.

Also, that the linguistic evidence suggests that it did not come from the same author as the rest of the letter, but is rather built around an amalgamation of Pauline expressions.

Scholars therefore politely call it an interpolation (added text into a passage).

I think it would be fairer and probably more accurate to call it a corruption; a sinister, evil, inexcusable perversion.

Why?

Because it is passages like this in the NT that have directly led to false understandings and interpretations of scripture; which in turn have been used to justify a great many pogroms and evil perpetuated against the Jewish people over the last 1900 years.

It is because of corruptions of the NT like 1 Thess 2:14-16 that minimally result in 'Replacement Theology' and anti-Semitic attitudes and behaviour.

Believing that the vitriolic and virulent words here are Scripture and hence reflect the mind of God leads some otherwise decent and well-meaning Christians to take a stance that is very un-godly and unhelpful to say the least.

I see Christian scholars, even scholars of considerable standing, who believe that they are not anti-Semitic and don't subscribe to Replacement Theology (for example, that the 'Israel of God' is the church) and yet appear to read this text without flinching!

It is way past the hour! It is time that Christians recognized that many of their doctrines are not only wrong but lead to great evil because they have been developed through a Hellenistic mindset. It is time for Christians to reject Hellenistic Christianity and begin to learn to view the Bible with Hebraic eyes and as a result to more accurately and honestly see the One True God and His eternal purposes and plans.

How can this be accomplished?

Here are just a few ideas:

- Seek out Jewish theologians who have studied the NT such as Prof Amy-Jill Levine and Prof Mark Nanos;
- Enrol in courses with organisations like The Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding & Cooperation (www.cjcuc.com);
- Join local organizations which pray for Israel and are similar to The Olive Tree Connection (for those who live in Brisbane, Australia - www.theolivetreeconnection.com);
- Seek out teaching on the Hebraic mindset;
- And try to befriend any Jewish neighbours or acquaintances you may have and try to humbly learn from them.

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