

Thessalonica Historical Background

Thessalonica in Greek = "victory of falsity"

Original name was Thermai, which means "Hot Springs." Because of its location on the Thermaic Gulf, it had always been a famous harbor. Xerxes the Persian had his naval base there when he invaded Europe.

The city was founded in 315 BC by Cassander a military General for Alexander the Great, who took control of Greece after Alexander's death in 332 BC. Cassander renamed the city Thessalonica, which was the name of his wife, who was a half sister of Alexander the Great.

Thessalonica surrendered to the Romans after the Battle of Pydna and became the capital of the second of four districts in Macedonia (167 BC). Later in 147 BC Macedonia was made into a single province and Thessalonica became the new capital.

It was located along the Via Egnatia, (the Egnatian Way) which was completed in 146 BC (built as a military highway). This made it a very important strategic spot with the port and major highway. This city had about 200,000 people in it. It was taken over by many countries through the centuries including France, Spain and Germany in 2nd WW. Today it is still the largest city on the Macedonian continent with over 400,000 people in it. It is called Thessaloniki or Saloniki.

Its fine harbor facilities served powerful commercial and trading interests. The population included many nationalities and diverse, highly developed religious groups (such as the Jews).

It was a free city which meant it had never suffered the indignity of having Roman troops quartered within it. They had their own ruling authorities called Politarchs. Acts 17:6.

This is important to remember when considering the riots caused by the Jews over Paul's preaching. For while the civic authorities did not take seriously the accusation of treason presented by the Jews (Acts 17:5-9) it was imperative that there be no unnecessary disturbance in the city if it was to retain its free status (remember Judea, many Roman troops quartered there because of constant uprisings by the Jews).

Cults in Thessalonica:

Egyptian cults - Serapis & Isis

Greek gods - Aegean island -

Samothrace - Cabirus cult

worship of Caesar - civic cult

Serapis - Zeus like figure - great popularity as a god of the after life, of fertility and of healing. He was a savior for sea farers, giver of oracles and dreams

<https://sites.google.com/a/indubiblia.org/inductive-bible-study/1-thessalonians-1>

Dionysus - was a god of vegetation finding embodiment as either a bull or a goat. As the god of wine he was thought to communicate his power to his devotees through the intoxicating influence of wine, stimulating them to orgiastic excesses, wild dancing and music, and every form of ecstatic revelry.

Most people of the pagan culture were hostile and angry towards Jews & Christians who converted pagans from the religion of their ancestors.

The Jews were hostile because they didn't want to lose the followers that they had. And they didn't agree with the claims of Jesus being the Messiah so they thought the Christians were leading people astray.