

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

What am I to do with what is communicated in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16? Does Paul really say that the Jewish people are responsible for the Messiah's death?

This entry has been reproduced and adapted from the commentary *1&2 Thessalonians for the Practical Messianic*

“For you, brethren, became imitators of the [assemblies] of God in Messiah Yeshua that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Yeshua and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost” (NASU).

2:14 V. 14, when read alone and by itself in English Bibles (issues for vs. 14-16 discussed further), indicates that the difficulties and sufferings, that the Thessalonians had to experience on behalf of Yeshua, are of the same sort that the Jewish Believers in Judea had to experience: “For you, brethren, became imitators of the [assemblies] of God in Messiah Yeshua that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews” (NASU). The claim that the Thessalonian Believers were “imitators” (Grk. sing. *mimētēs*, μιμητής) of the Judean Believers would be true in that they all followed the same manner of faith practice in Yeshua—but here the remark is mainly concerned with how the Thessalonian Believers followed a similar pattern in being persecuted for their faith in Israel’s Messiah.

F.F. Bruce is probably right to acknowledge how “this was not a deliberate imitation—they knew of the Judean churches mostly by hearsay—rather the experience of the Judean churches was reproduced in the Thessalonian church.”¹ This would be a *passive* imitation, as persecution for one’s faith is not something that Believers typically go out and look for; rejection, being threatened by non-Believers, and suffering some sort of distress for one’s faith is a **common experience** to Messiah followers, wherever and whoever they are. Why the Judean assemblies are specifically in view in v. 14, is suggested by Gene L. Green to be because they “were recognized to be the ‘first fruits’ of God’s work in establishing the new covenant (Rom. 15.26-27; Gal. 1.17-24; 2.1-10) and enjoyed a certain status among the rest of the Christian churches throughout the empire (cf. the Jerusalem council in Acts 15). They now become the paradigm for other congregations, even in this matter of sufferings.”²

What persecution of the Jewish Believers in Judea is in view in v. 14? Acts 12:1-2 informs us how “Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the [assembly] in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword,” which occurred between 41-42 C.E. Added to this can be the later increase of Zealot activity in Judea in 48 C.E. (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.105-136), as the administration of Cumanus, in the estimation of Ben Witherington III, “involved one upheaval after another. Thousands of Jewish pilgrims were slaughtered by this butcher during the Passover festival in A.D. 49 or 50 (Josephus, *War* 2.224-27; *Ant.* 20.105-12)...Cumanus committed a variety of other atrocities.”³ Given some of the turmoil in the province of Judea, it is not surprising to think that the assemblies of Jewish Believers would get caught up in it, and be persecuted in varying degrees if they did not stand up against Roman aggression along with many other of their fellow Jews.

¹ F.F. *Word Biblical Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians*, Vol 45 (Waco TX: Word Books, 1982), 45; cf. Charles A. Wanamaker, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 112; Gene L. Green, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 141.

² Green, pp 141-142.

³ Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp 86-87.

Such a persecution of Jewish Believers in Judea notably did take place at the hands of various other fellow Jews. Paul has said that the Thessalonians themselves had suffered persecution from “people of your own country” (HCSB) or “your own compatriots” (NRSV), with *sumphuletēs* (συμφυλέτης), “**one who is a member of the same tribe or people group, compatriot**” (BDAG),⁴ likely taking on geographical overtones. Because of the reference to the persecution of *tōn ekklesiōn tou Theou tōn ousōn en tē Ioudaia* (τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ), “the assemblies of God that are in Judea” (YLT), with *Ioudaios* (Ἰουδαίος) obviously having a geographic reference—it is thought by some that *hupo tōn Ioudaiōn* (ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων) is better rendered with “the Judeans/Judeans” (CJB/The Messianic Writings/Kingdom New Testament),⁵ than just the more standard “from the Jews.” The rendering of “Judeans” for *Ioudaiōn* is thought to significantly deflate possible anti-Semitism that can present itself in view of the statements of v. 15 which follows.

In v. 14, we see that the Thessalonian Believers have endured a level of suffering and persecution, largely from the local pagans, because they had accepted the good news of Yeshua. Initially, the charges brought against the Messiah followers came from the local Jewish leaders (Acts 17:6-7), but by this point had to mainly have involved the Thessalonians who rejected Israel’s God, and the thought that the message of the Lord Yeshua was subversive and dangerous to the benefactions of Caesar. Charles A. Wanamaker concludes,

“The willingness of the Thessalonians to convert to [Messianic faith] and to remain...in the face of strong coercion from their society indicates an acute sense of dissatisfaction with that society and their position in it. Undoubtedly they found in Paul’s apocalyptic worldview an alternative symbolic world that made greater sense of their lives than the symbolic world that they implicitly rejected in withdrawing from Roman civil religion and rejecting Roman social and political hegemony.”⁶

2:14-16 When encountering 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, there should be no question that the Thessalonians’, suffering for their Messiah faith, is not only compared to the suffering experienced by the Jewish Believers in Judea—but that the Jews who were responsible for such suffering and for seeing Paul removed from the city, is highlighted, and they are condemned for it. Some readings of vs. 14-16, either by laypeople looking at a statement or two, or by those not critically engaging with the text enough, have concluded that the remarks made are significantly anti-Semitic. And, there is no doubting the fact that in past history, the assertion about “...the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets...” (RSV), has been used to support either anti-Semitic theologies or violent acts of anti-Semitism.

Looking at a scope of viewpoints surrounding 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, there are those who have tried to argue that vs. 14-16 are a later interpolation, making them inauthentic to Paul’s letter,⁷ but they lack textual evidence. Alternatively, one may say that Paul had a high moment of frustration, in expressing some extremely negative thoughts about some of his fellow Jews—which he made sure never to repeat again in any of his other letters. In past examination, there has been some rather poor,⁸ or at least less-than-sensitive handling of these verses.⁹ Yet, in more recent examination, moderation for the statements which appear in vs. 14-16, as well as a wider reading for Pauline and other New Testament materials, has been stressed.¹⁰ Elsewhere in the Pauline letters, it is not a group of Jewish people which is labeled as responsible for the Messiah’s death, but instead “the rulers of this age” (1 Corinthians 2:8), obviously referring more to all of fallen humanity. Undeniably, the best approach when reading vs. 14-16 requires us to make some closer observations about what is being asserted.

A standard way of looking at 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 is noted by the *NIV Study Bible*, in that “Although Paul had great love and deep concern for the salvation of those of his own race (see Ro 9:1-3; 10:1), he did not fail to rebuke harshly Jews who persecuted the church.”¹¹ Another view, expressed by Raymond F. Collins in the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, is how “Paul’s words fall within the range of self-criticism of his own people, as is found in

⁴ BDAG, 960.

⁵ The TLV has the interpretive “the Judean leaders.”

⁶ Wanamaker, 114.

⁷ Leander E. Keck, “The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians,” in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 868.

⁸ Leon Morris, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp 90-92.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, pp 77-80; Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, pp 46-47; Wanamaker, pp 114-116, 118.

¹⁰ Abraham Smith, “The First Letter to the Thessalonians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11:703-704; Green, pp 143-146; Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, pp 84-87.

¹¹ Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1862.

the writings of contemporary Jewish authors such as Philo and Josephus.”¹² And, John F. Walvoord, looking for a somewhat applicational view of v. 16, takes it in the direction of, “One of the hardest experiences in life when you stand for Christ is to have your own loved ones oppose you,”¹³ not even dealing with the issue of potential anti-Semitism in vs. 14-16.

The Apostle Paul issuing a sharp criticism against his own Jewish people—whether it be remarks that are largely directed to the Jewish people corporately or a specific group of Jewish people/religious leaders—is something that does bear some precedents elsewhere in the Bible. In the confession of Nehemiah 9:26, recalling the history of Ancient Israel, we encounter, “they became disobedient and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets who had admonished them so that they might return to You, and they committed great blasphemies” (NASU). In his defense before the Sanhedrin, the martyr Stephen said, “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become” (Acts 7:52, NASU). And, most important to keep in mind would be some of the words of Yeshua the Messiah Himself to some of the religious leaders:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall *the guilt of* all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:29-36, NASU).

“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and *it was* your fathers *who* killed them. So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build *their tombs*. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house *of God*; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation” (Luke 11:47-51, NASU).

If any reader wishes to accuse the Apostle Paul of anti-Semitism in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, then additional voices chastising either Ancient Israel or sectors of the First Century Jewish community have to be considered as well. (This is especially true if the term γενεά, *genea* is rendered as “race” in Matthew 23:36 and Luke 11:51). It cannot go unnoticed that given the fact that 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 attributes the death of Yeshua and the prophets to a group of Jews, how some have proposed that early Messianic figures like Stephen or James are actually in view,¹⁴ not the Prophets of the Tanach, since the ancestors’ of those in view were responsible for their death in the preceding centuries.

It is difficult to get around the fact that at least some group of First Century Jews is being criticized in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. Unfortunately for many Christian readers over the centuries, who have perhaps read these verses haphazardly, they have fallen into some of the negative stereotypes of the Jewish people present in the First Century period. In Josephus’ work *Against Apion*, we encounter, “Apion also tells a false story, when he mentions an oath of ours, as if we ‘swore by God, the Maker of the heaven, and earth, and sea, to bear no good will to any foreigner, and particularly to none of the Greeks” (2.121).¹⁵ One of the worst views was summarized by the Roman historian Tacitus, who said “The...practices of the Jews are sinister and revolting, and have entrenched

¹² Raymond F. Collins, “The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2118.

¹³ John F. Walvoord, *Bible Study Commentary: The Thessalonian Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Lamplighter Books, 1958), 26.

¹⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 98.

¹⁵ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, pp 800-801.

themselves by their very wickedness...[T]he rest of the world they confront with the hatred reserved for enemies” (*The Histories* 5.5).¹⁶

Representing more of the older interpretation—that Paul is castigating the Jewish people corporately here—Wanamaker further concludes, “The passage also calls into question the legitimacy of the traditional claim of the Jewish people to be the people of God.”¹⁷ Even though he favors a high level of animosity being issued against the Jewish people in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, Wanamaker at least has enough respect to say that the statements in vs. 14-16 “have been used for justifying everything from the pogroms against Jews in the Middle Ages and the inquisitions of the early modern period to the Holocaust itself...That many Christians persisted in anti-Judaism on theological grounds and still persist today **can only be a cause for shame and repentance on the part of contemporary Christians**”¹⁸ (emphasis mine). This would at least be a slight indicator that an interpreter such as himself would favor more of a First Century timeframe for vs. 14-16 being in view.

How has our Messianic faith community approached 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16? Properly interpreting these verses, giving due justice to the text and its original circumstances, has not been something that has been that easy for some people. While sorting through different Christian perspectives, some more current than others, can be challenging, as things have become a little more complicated with the 2011 release of the extremely liberal *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (which is a non-Messianic resource). In its notes on these verses, David Fox Sandmel concludes, “If Paul wrote these words, then he is inextricably associated with the promulgation of anti-Judaism, regardless of his intentions.”¹⁹ Suffice it to say, such a suggestion—that the Apostle Paul is responsible for promoting anti-Semitism, regardless of if he originally intended it or not—is something that can influence a wide number of people within the Messianic movement.

Among Messianic Jews, David H. Stern is entirely justified to protest some of the more paraphrased renderings of vs. 14-16,²⁰ which go beyond the Greek source text and repeat the terminology “the Jews” multiple times:

“You have fared like the congregations in Judaea, God’s people in Christ Jesus. You have been treated by your countrymen as they are treated by **the Jews**, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out, **the Jews** who are heedless of God’s will and enemies of their fellow-men” (NEB).

“For you, my brothers, followed the example of the churches of God which have come into being through Christ Jesus in Judaea. For when you suffered at the hands of your fellow countrymen you were sharing the experience of the Judaeans Christian churches, who suffered persecution by **the Jews**. It was **the Jews** who killed their own prophets, **the Jews** who killed the Lord Jesus, and **the Jews** who drove us out” (vs. 14-15a, Phillips New Testament).

We can add to this the less-than-faithful rendering present in *WBC*, which has, “the Jews—the very people who had killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets.”²¹ No one can blame any of today’s Messianic Jews—those who have professed that Yeshua is the Messiah—for taking extreme offense at some paraphrased, or even some exaggerated renderings, of v. 14.

Given a past history of Christian anti-Semitism, with parts of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 quoted as theological justification—one can surely understand the trend present to render v. 14 with “Judeans.” This is something followed, interestingly enough, by the NKJV: “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans.” The rendering of “Judeans” for *Ioudaiōn* (Ἰουδαίων) is intended to draw the attention to the geographic nature of who is being referred to. While this is not something illegitimate, as it could be used to emphasize the point that there were residents in Judea other than Jewish people, who were responsible for Yeshua’s death—is this the real intention of Paul’s statement in v. 14? N.T. Wright, who favors the rendering “Judaeans” in his *Kingdom New Testament*, and who recognizes that “the Jews” in general are not at all being referred to, still has to

¹⁶ Tacitus, *The Histories*, 273; cf. Green, 145 for a list of additional, negative anti-Semitic perspectives.

¹⁷ Wanamaker, 118.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁹ David Fox Sandmel, “1 Thessalonians,” in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 374.

²⁰ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 617.

²¹ Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, 42.

point out the uncomfortable truth, “within Judaea many Jews had been bitterly opposed not only to Jesus, resulting in their authorities handing him over to the Romans for crucifixion, but also to the groups that sprang up after his **resurrection**, hailing him as Messiah and Lord.”²² It cannot be overlooked that it is not only a group of *loudaiōn* who are said to have killed Yeshua, v. 15 also says *kai hēmas ekdiōxantōn* (καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐκδιώξαντων), “and drove us out,” speaking of Paul’s expulsion from Thessalonica. This can hardly be speaking of just those people in Judea.

In view of the debacle that had transpired in Thessalonica with the Jewish religious leaders in the synagogue (Acts 17:1-9), a challenge is presented to those who think that *loudaiōn* is solely a geographic description. Gordon D. Fee observes, “scholarly integrity demands that one come to terms with the passage as having been written by one for whom its immediate content has touched a raw nerve regarding his own treatment by fellow, but non-believing, members of the Jewish community.”²³ That there were Jews who were one of the main parties involved in the execution of the Messiah, and who opposed the early Messianic movement, cannot be denied from any honest reading of the Gospels and Acts. That this **was not** the whole of the Jewish community, and largely limited to people in positions of religious authority and who were threatened by the good news, is something that has not been emphasized enough. It was genuinely a sector of Jewish leaders in Judea who wanted Yeshua tried and executed; there were scores of Jews in Judea, and most especially in the Diaspora, who had never even heard of Yeshua of Nazareth at the time of His trial and sentencing.

Abraham Smith’s view is, “1 Thess 2:14-16 is not directed toward all Jews—just some. Obviously, Paul does not include himself in the lot...Paul is not talking about *all* the Jews, just *some* Jews—those who opposed Jesus and his movement.”²⁴ In his comments, Witherington is also specific in saying, “‘The Jews’ can mean nothing other than the particular Jews who did the persecuting. It cannot mean all Jews since all Jews were not persecuting Christians in Judea and some Jews were those being persecuted. Of course, when this verse was stripped of its original historical context and sense, and especially in view of its polemical tone, it lent itself to a tragic anti-Semitic use.”²⁵ Green’s observations are also to the point:

“The accusations we encounter in these verses should be read in light of the larger context of Paul’s teaching...We should also remember that Paul was unsparing in his critique of the Gentile populace as well, for they had given themselves over to idolatry and all manner of debauchery that resulted from their rejection of God’s revelation (Rom. 1:18ff).”²⁶

As Messianics evaluate the right way to approach what is communicated in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, **we must oppose any anti-Semitic conclusions drawn by others**. Generally speaking, all of humanity, Jewish *or* otherwise, is responsible for the death of the Messiah—but the specific blame rests with those religious and political leaders whose interests were threatened by the Messiah’s prophetic message of repentance. We cannot act as though there were no Jewish people involved in seeing Yeshua put to death, or that there were no Jewish people who opposed the spread of the gospel message, as that would be dishonest. We have to do our best, as difficult as it may be with external opposition and internal emotions, to facilitate an historically conscious reading of these verses. The specific sectors of the ancient Jewish community’s leadership which were responsible for Yeshua’s death need to be brought to the attention of others, while the ancient Jewish community in general does not receive any unnecessary chastisement.

2:15 The statement made about *loudaiōn*, continuing from v. 14, is “who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone” (NRSV). In many modern English versions, there is a comma that is placed between vs. 14-15, which means that together they would read with, “the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets” (NASU). This can definitely be read from the perspective that it is the Jewish people corporate who are responsible for the death of Yeshua and the Prophets (whether the ancient Prophets in the Tanach or prophetic figures in the First Century *ekklēsia*). Working from the 2005 TNIV²⁷ in his *NICNT* volume, Fee indicates that “The TNIV, along with most English translations, put a nonrestrictive comma here. But there are good reasons to pause on this matter.”²⁸ Technically from the Greek source text, there was no

²² N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 102.

²³ Fee, 91.

²⁴ Smith, in *NIB*, 11:703.

²⁵ Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 85.

²⁶ Green, 144.

²⁷ “the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets” (vs. 14-15, TNIV).

²⁸ Fee, 90 fn#16; cf. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 618.

original punctuation provided for the Thessalonian readers of Paul's letter, between vs. 14-15. The comma provided, in critical editions of the Greek New Testament, is only for the benefit of modern readers:

ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, 15 τῶν καὶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτείναντων Ἰησοῦν καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας

*hupo tōn Ioudaiōn, tōn kai ton Kurion apokteinantōn Iēsoun kai tous prophētas*²⁹

Whether one includes a comma or not between vs. 14-15 does not concern historically and textually conscious readers, as much as it concerns layreaders, whose Scripture examination can often be limited to personal reflection—meaning that less attention than the minimum necessary is given to particulars. Fee addresses this, stating, “The problem for the English reader, it should be noted, is that there is *no relative pronoun* in the Greek text; rather, what follows ‘the Jews’ is a participial construction, where the definite article preceding the participle (lit.=*the* also killing Jesus ones’) functions like a relative pronoun in English.”³⁰ The insertion of a comma, for your average Bible reader, can change the relationship of how one views *tōn Ioudaiōn*, “the Jews/Judeans,” connected to *tōn kai ton Kurion apokteinantōn Iēsoun*, “who also killed the Lord Yeshua.” The main rendering that is encountered in most Bible versions is with a nonrestrictive comma, which many have taken as “the Jews” applying to all Jews. When the comma is removed, a restrictive reading of vs. 14-15 should follow, where “the Jews” only concerns those specific Jews who were responsible for the execution of Yeshua:

a non-restrictive reading: “the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets” (NASU)

a restrictive reading: “the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets” (HCSB)³¹

One will actually encounter some diversity of renderings among Messianic Bible versions, with how to transition between vs. 14-15. The Complete Jewish Bible has “the Judeans who both killed the Lord Yeshua and the prophets,” which emphasizes both the geographic specificity of *tōn Ioudaiōn* and has removed the non-restrictive comma. The Tree of Life—New Covenant has “the Judean leaders, who killed both the Lord Yeshua and the prophets,” which has gone further than geography and interpreted *tōn Ioudaiōn* to be religious and political leaders, although it includes a non-restrictive comma. And, The Messianic Writings by Daniel Gruber has, “the Judeans, those who killed both the Lord Yeshua and the prophets,” opting for *tōn Ioudaiōn* being geographical, but including a non-restrictive comma.

There is definitely an advantage with the reading provided by the HCSB: “**the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets.**” This is a restrictive reading, which attributes the act of murder to only specific Jews who were responsible for the death of Yeshua. So, if one reads vs. 14-15 *intelligibly*, one can see that no anti-Semitism is intended, although chastisement of some specific sector of the First Century Jewish community is intended. This same sector, attributed with Yeshua’s death, is the same which Paul says “drove us out.” While it is admirable that some have favored the geographic rendering “Judeans” for *Ioudaiōn*, this can be used to downplay the ancient opposition that was present to the First Century Messianic movement from various sectors of the Jewish community.

Of course, any reading or rendering of vs. 14-15 presents its challenges, *and anti-Semitism must surely be opposed*, but historical honesty is also required. The Jewish Believers in Judea suffered persecutions from “the Jews who killed both the Lord Yeshua and the prophets” (author’s rendering), which was limited to a specific sector of the First Century Jewish community. This was the same group of people, who were largely leaders, who were responsible for charging Paul before the city leaders of Thessalonica, and seeing him ejected from the city.

While he does not engage with the punctuation issue between vs. 14-15, Green is right to conclude that “Paul does not join in the general and broad-ranging denunciation of the Jews, but limits the critique to Jewish opposition to God’s mission.”³² Paul did not fall into the category of various Greeks and Romans who criticized the Jewish people corporate, and who labeled them as enemies or malcontents to all humanity. Yet for his ministry

²⁹ Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 533; Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 700.

³⁰ Fee, 95.

³¹ “the Judeans who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets” (Kingdom New Testament).

³² Green, 146.

service in the First Century, there was a group of Jewish opponents who were no different than those specific Jews, who were responsible for—along with those specific Romans—Yeshua being put to death. These same sorts of Jews, who were responsible for Yeshua’s death, are those who Paul says “drove us out” of Thessalonica, limiting their ministry outreach.

2:16 The Jewish religious leaders of Thessalonica are said by Paul, to have been those who were “hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved” (a). This would have been the obvious result of Paul and his associates being ejected from the city, as they would no longer be able to proclaim the good news of Israel’s Messiah to the pagans who needed deliverance. And, it should also be observed that such difficulty continued when the Thessalonican Jewish leaders made their way to Berea, and Paul was forced to go on to Athens (Acts 17:10-15).

The consequences of being among those who deliberately impair the spread of the gospel is most severe, whether one be a group of First Century Jewish religious leaders in the Mediterranean, or third world dictators and warlords in the Twentieth Century—and even atheists in the Twenty-First Century who do not want to be “offended.” For the circumstances the Thessalonican Believers are being informed about, Paul attests that the Jewish leaders, who oppose the spread of the gospel among the nations, will do so “with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost” (b). Such wrath or *orgē* (ὀργή) is obviously speaking of eschatological judgment. The language, of filling up the measure of one’s sins, is something rooted within the language of the Tanach, i.e., “for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16), but is something more directly seen in a statement like that of 2 Maccabees 6:14: “For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins.” Yeshua Himself criticized the Pharisaical leaders in Matthew 23:13, “Fill up, then, the measure *of the guilt of your fathers*” (NASU).

The general point taken from v. 16 is that those, who purposefully make it their duty to hinder the plan of God, will have His wrath poured out upon them. Paul does not take aim at a group of people with whom he has some minor theological disagreement or an issue that can be worked out over time; he goes after those who prohibit him declaring the message of Israel’s Messiah and His eternal salvation among the nations. Such people, he says, are steadily filling up God’s wrath against them.

While v. 16 has been taken as some kind of permanent chastisement or rejection of the Jewish people by God, from readers over the centuries, the specific identity of those who persecuted the Jewish Believers in Judea has to be accounted for. Other readers have taken the piling up of God’s wrath to be something that manifested at the fall of the Temple in 70 C.E., and have used it as a support for replacement theology.³³ But, those Jews who are being targeted as enemies of God’s will are not the Jewish people corporately here, but are specifically those leaders who were responsible for Yeshua’s death and for seeing Paul removed from Thessalonica (v. 15). The issue in v. 16 is how, in Green’s words, “Paul and his companions are not fomenting anti-Semitism with the strong rhetoric of this passage. They stand in the prophetic tradition, and that of Jesus, by announcing judgment on those who stood firmly opposed to the new thing God was doing.”³⁴ There is absolutely no way, at such an early stage in the spread of the good news throughout the Mediterranean, that the chastisement issued in vs. 14-16 could be on the Jewish people corporately. When the Jewish people corporately, and the salvation-historical redemption of all Israel, are discussed later in Romans chs. 9-11, there is a significant amount of remorse issued by Paul on behalf of his fellow Jews—and significant instruction issued for care to be taken by those of the nations who have received Israel’s Messiah.

How do Messianics approach 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 in the future? All of us, be we leaders and teachers within the congregation, or Bible readers, need to be about encouraging a careful, textually and historically conscious reading of these verses. It was obviously not all of the Jews or pagans in Thessalonica who opposed the work of the gospel, and so it was obviously not all of the Jews in Judea who saw to Yeshua’s unjustified arrest and execution. Romans were specifically involved in the Messiah’s death every bit as much as Jews were. And, during Paul’s missionary endeavors, the Roman authorities had more to lose from the proclamation of the gospel than did the Jewish religious leaders. The Lord Yeshua, after all, was returning to overthrow the Lord Caesar.

³³ Cf. Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, 49; Wright, 103.

³⁴ Green, 149.

Historical Christianity has been marked with anti-Semitic flare-ups over the centuries, and inappropriate readings of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 have been allowed to prevail in too much of the institutional Church and its people. Not enough Christians have been tempered by Yeshua's own words, as He was dying on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Sinful humankind in general is responsible for Yeshua's death, just as Paul himself says in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that "the rulers of this age...crucified the Lord of glory."

Today's Messianic movement, in rightly opposing anti-Semitic interpretations of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, need not be caught trying to act as though no First Century Jewish person had anything to do with the death of Yeshua. It cannot be avoided that although corporately, the First Century Jewish community cannot be blamed for Yeshua's execution, that ever since the exile of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms—Israel corporate may be considered to be in a condition of national punishment, needing to be decisively resolved. Such a chastisement will only end at the Second Coming of the Messiah, and the complete restoration of the Kingdom. Yet, such a corporate and national chastisement—with much work still to be accomplished as God's prophetic plan takes shape—does not at all prohibit individual people from being redeemed from their sins by Israel's Messiah and reconciled to God. Many of us do share a firm conviction, after all, that the emergence of today's Messianic movement—including the salvation of many Jewish people and evangelical Christians embracing their Hebraic Roots—is one of the final stages of the restoration of all Israel (cf. Romans 11:26ff).