

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

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### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts***

(SB\_Acts 17A\_Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey - Continued)

#### **Introduction**

In our previous two studies, we have observed Luke's account of the beginning of Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey – a journey that so far has taken Paul and his party through portions of Asia Minor where he had traveled on his first journey. After being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to travel northward to Bithynia and southwesterly to Asia, Paul is led by a vision to cross over the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. The first city that Paul and Silas evangelize is Philippi where Lydia from Asia is converted (16:1-15). A demon possessed slave-girl from whom Paul commands the demon to leave becomes the basis for Paul and Silas' imprisonment when her masters are no longer able to profit from her soothsaying (16:16-24). The opposition in that city eventually have Paul and Silas imprisoned and beaten and held overnight where the jailer is converted after witnessing the events surrounding an earthquake (16:25-40). The Philippian jailer is baptized and Paul and Silas eventually leave Philippi and make their way to Thessalonica.

#### **Paul in Thessalonica (17:1-15)**

*Arrival in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4)*

After leaving Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy (and perhaps others) travel south on the Egnatian Road. Evidently, Luke may have stayed in Philippi since his narrative shifts back to the third person again. Luke doesn't use the first person in his narrative again until 20:5 – during Paul's third missionary journey. Amphipolis was about 33 miles from Philippi and most commentators assume that Paul and Silas reached Amphipolis in a day and lodged there overnight. We don't know where they lodged in Amphipolis. The next day they traveled to Apollonia which was another 27 miles from Amphipolis. Finally, they traveled a third day to Thessalonica – the chief city and capital of Macedonia. This made it a center for the evangelization of the Balkan peninsula (cf. 1 Thess 1:7-8).

And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess 1:6-10)

Observation: While we can't be certain, it is assumed from the narrative that Paul and Silas made this journey to Thessalonica in three days.

Observation: Luke doesn't tell us where the party stayed each night.

Observation: Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled in excess of 60 miles in three days.

Observation: We can probably assume that some if not all of this travel was by foot and the rest by horse.

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Observation: We are not told how Paul funded the journey.

Observation: We are not told why they did not stay in Amphipolis or Apollonia nor how they were led to stay in Thessalonica.

Interpretation: The execution of the Lord's purpose for Paul's life was not a path of ease and full of certainty.

Interpretation: Confirmation that Paul was on God's course for his life and within God's will for his life came subsequent to the rough journey.

Application: When we yield to the Lord's will for our lives, we should not expect a life of ease and certainty.

Application: When we yield to the Lord's will for our lives, we should not expect immediate gratification or confirmation.

Paul evidently spoke in the synagogue only three Sabbath days (cf. 13:5, 14; 14:1), but he may have stayed longer in Thessalonica (cf. 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:5). He supported himself there by making tents (Acts 18:1-4; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10), and in an amazing display of their gratitude and appreciation of Paul, the Philippian believers (probably including Lydia) sent two monetary gifts to him (Phil. 4:15-16).

So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them [Aquila and Priscilla of Corinth] and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:3-4)

For you remember brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. (1 Thess 2:9)

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. (2 Thess 3:7-10)

Nevertheless, you have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica, you sent aid once and again for my necessities. (Phil 4:15-16)

It is possible that he ministered primarily to Jews the first three weeks and then turned to the Gentiles similar to what we saw in Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Journey while at Antioch of Pisidia – "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

While Paul spoke in the synagogue those three Sabbaths, he reasoned with them from existing Scripture – the Hebrew "Old Testament." (Note Luke's emphasis upon Paul's diligence and patience – he "reasoned" with them and he was "explaining" and "demonstrating" to them). His reasoning would have supported the fact that the Messiah of prophecy had to suffer and then rise from the dead – a fact that was accomplished in Jesus, thus proving that He was the

Messiah. He did not begin by preaching Jesus to the Jews; rather, he had to persuade them that their Messiah would have to suffer and then rise from the dead, thus destroying a prevalent paradigm that any true Messiah who came on the scene during that day and age would have exalted Himself and Israel above the Roman occupiers first. Once the false paradigm had been altered, then he could establish the connection to Jesus.

We have examined many of the Old Testament Scriptures ourselves that Paul would have used in his attempts to persuade his listeners. There are a large number of passages; however, the classic passages are Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12.

I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a parched, and my tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look at Me and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. (Psa 22:14-18)

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed. (Isa 53:4-5)

And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me Whom they pierced. (Zech 12:10)

Paul's reasoning persuaded some in the synagogue services (cf. 26:28; 28:23). His converts seem to have been mainly Gentiles (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9) many of whom were God-fearers (cf. 10:4; 13:43; 16:14), but some of them were Jews. Jason (v. 5), Aristarchus (Col. 4:10), and Secundus (20:4) were probably included among these new believers. The group of converts also included "not a few of the leading women." This group of women could have belonged to the upper classes or they may have been the wives of leading men of the city. Regardless, it is very interesting that Paul's message resonated and had impact at the leadership level within the city of Thessalonica.

#### *Opposition from the Religious Element (17:5-9)*

Once again, as in Galatia (13:45, 50; 14:2, 19), the religious community stands in opposition to the Truth and resorts to extreme measures to oppose those who proclaim the Truth. In the eyes of the world, it seems to run counter to reason that "religion," which supposedly is the vehicle through which people seek the Truth, would actually oppose the Truth. But, that it will do and it will do so with a vengeance motivated by the sincerest of belief that God is behind their efforts – no matter how violent the means. Religion is almost always the source of greatest opposition to true Christianity because religion provides the adherent with a false sense of self-righteousness. It is amazing how Satan (i.e. the Satanic cosmos) blinds those who once reject the Truth and exchange it in their souls for the lie (Eph 4:17-19 cf. Rom 1:21).

The religious element veiled their opposition to the Truth by using half-truths. For instance, Paul and Silas did teach that Jesus was the Messiah/King of Israel; however, they were not teaching of advocating the overthrow of Roman authority. The religious element took this half-truth and accused Paul and Silas of revolutionary teaching, namely that another King Jesus would rule areas controlled by Rome (1 Thess 3:13; 5:1-11; 2 Thess 1:5-10; 2:14). The religious Jews who opposed Jesus' ministry used the same accusations against Him (Lu 23:2; Jn 18:33-37). Then they accused Jason of harboring a fugitive.

In their self-righteousness, they rationalized and justified their actions until they were able to pay good money to men who would sell out to the highest bidder regardless of how sinister the task. These people were easy to be found in the agora or forum of Graeco-Roman cities. They would gather around the rostrum where a speaker was speaking and they would heckle or applaud depending upon who paid them the most.<sup>1</sup>

Observation: The “religious” Jews who opposed Paul and the Truth he presented aligned with “evil men from the marketplace” to carry out their persecution.

Interpretation: Any opposition to Truth and/or freedom (that is consistent with establishment principles) is evil.

Interpretation: The “religious” Jews of Paul’s day were “respectably evil” and through their rationalization and self-justification had no problem aligning with those who were “not respectably evil” to carry out their persecution of those who were only “perceived to be evil.”

Interpretation: When a person is exposed to the Truth, rejects the Truth and then proceeds to oppose the Truth, then that person is simply manifesting the void of the soul that has created a vacuum.

Interpretation: A vacuum in one’s soul will be filled with the lie of Satan if not the Truth of God’s Word.

Interpretation: The lie of Satan (“religion,” “worldliness,” etc.) is attracted like a magnet to rationalization and self-justification.

Interpretation: The emotion of the soul responds to the content of the soul and exacerbates erroneous thought and motivates one to action – in this case wrong and evil actions consistent with the false norms and standards that have now been adopted in one’s conscience.

Interpretation: When this occurs, the conscience has been seared and emotional scar tissue builds that hardens the “heart” (the soul) to any sensitivity to the Truth that may have existed.

Interpretation: The “religious” Jews of Paul’s day were instruments that Satan used in his two-pronged strategy in this appeal phase of his trial known as human history: 1) neutralization and 2) elimination of the evidence.

Application: Is there any area of your life where you are practicing rationalization and self-justification to deal with testing and struggles? If so, you may be hindering God from filling your soul with all that it takes to become like Christ. If so, you may also have made your soul at least partially open to accepting some of the cosmic lie in whatever area that is at issue, e.g. a sin pattern (mental, verbal or overt) that is being rationalized and justified, an addiction, a non-Biblical or contra-Biblical philosophy of history, a non-Biblical view of the institution of marriage, an improper definition of the “family,” a definition of “success” in life, etc.

In verse 6, Luke uses the Greek word  $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$  (translated as “ruler” in the NKJV). This term was not recognized elsewhere and at one point in time, more liberal

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill F. Unger, "Historical Research and the Church at Thessalonica," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:473 (January-March 1962):41.

scholars dismissed it as a sign of ignorance on Luke's part.<sup>2</sup> Today, the British museum in London houses one of sixteen examples of inscriptions found in modern Slonica (ancient Thessalonica) as a testament to the fact that Luke was only employing a common term used in the more educated circles – in this case a courtesy title given to the magistrates of a Roman colony.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the opposition of Satan (through those blinded by the lie) to the spread of the Truth, the believers would carry on in this city (1 Thess 2:18 cf. 1 Thess 1:7-10; 2:14-16). As they did, their lives and the perseverance in the face of opposition stand as a testimony through the centuries to us today.

#### *The Ministry in Berea (17:10-15)*

For the second time in his ministry, Paul departed from a city by night due to the opposition he faced there (cf. 9:25; Matt 10:23). Paul's ultimate destination was Athens, but he came to a city named Berea (modern Verria) that was located about 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica. Once again, Paul continues the practice of going to the Jewish synagogue first. However, this group of Jews was different. They carefully evaluated what Paul said and went back to the Scripture to examine and compare his teaching with what they accepted as Truth. They were critical thinkers and evaluators, not emotion driven, but emotion responding types.

The result as noted by Luke was that "many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks [Gentiles], prominent women as well as men." Some of those who believed included a man by the name of Sopater who later would accompany Paul on at least a portion of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4).

*An important question* – Was Paul teaching "mystery" doctrine to these Jews when entered the synagogue in each city that he visited?

*Explanation & Answer* – The only Scripture possessed by these Jews by which they could test Paul's teaching was the Hebrew Scripture that we call the Old Testament. The "mystery" doctrines of this new dispensation were not contained in the Old Testament. At least initially and especially in regard to the Jews, Paul probably focused upon building from the foundation of the Old Testament by explaining and attempting to convince the Jews that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah Who fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. So, at least initially, Paul did not focus upon the mystery doctrines, but left that topic for future teaching once conversion had occurred.

The "religious Jews" of Thessalonica who opposed Paul immediately traveled to Berea to try to run Paul out of the region. In that day, it would take a lot to motivate people to travel 50 miles away – especially a non-business venture such as this. It was probably a two day journey. So, these "religious Jews" were very convinced of the "righteousness" of their cause, otherwise, they would not have went to so much trouble. Religious opposition is the worst type of opposition a person can face. In order to prevent a riot, the "brethren" (probably those who accompanied Paul and some of the Bereans) conducted Paul to the sea and on to Athens while Timothy and Silas remained in Berea. They would return with the message from Paul (a "command") to join him in Athens with all haste.

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<sup>2</sup> E. M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series, London: Tyndale Press, 1959; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 129 quoted in Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts" at [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

