

Acts Series

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Good news @ Midweek

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Paul's Second Missionary Journey Part III
Taking the Gospel to Thessalonica & Berea
(Acts 17:1-15)

Introduction:

1. Here are some pictures of ancient Thessalonica:



"Very little has been uncovered at ancient Thessalonica because Thessaloniki sits atop the remains. The areas pictured to the left was formerly a bus station; when it was moved in 1962, this 1st or 2nd century A.D. forum was revealed. Excavators found a bathhouse and mint dating to the 1st century A.D. below pavement surrounding an odeum. An inscription (30 B.C. to 143 A.D.) from the Vardar gate bears the word *politarches*, the word Luke used in reference to the officials of the city before whom Jason was brought by the mob (Acts 17:6). The word does not appear in any other Greek literature but does match the archaeology of the site."

Pictures and information taken from www.bibleplaces.com

2. Here are some modern pictures of Thessaloniki



Eastern seafront



Parts of Central and Eastern Thessaloniki looking out from the ancient Byzantine walls



Map of Modern Day Greece

Thessaloniki (Salonica) is the capital of the Macedonia Region

3. Background on the city of Thessalonica:

- It was located approximately 100 miles west of Philippi and was the next major population center along the Egnatian Way. (See page 256)
- It is situated on the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea (The Thermaic Gulf), and during Paul's day it was the chief seaport of the Roman province of Macedonia. During that time; it along with the ports located at Corinth and Ephesus served as the main shipping centers that serviced Achaia (Greece) and Asia.
- In addition to its connection to the shipping traffic it also served as a major military post for the Roman Empire and a city of commerce for land travel.
- Being a major city in Paul's day; the estimated population was 200,000 and there were varying ethnic groups:
 - 1) Primarily _____
 - 2) Probably a fair amount of _____ settlers
 - 3) A probable contingency of those from the _____
 - 4) There were _____ living there as well due to the reference to the presence of a Synagogue.
- There is some disputes as to who was responsible for putting Thessalonica on the map (some attribute it to Phillip of Macedon, others to Cassander who was one of Alexander the Great's generals), but whatever the case, one key thing to note is the strong pagan influence of the region and their need to hear the Gospel.
- Paul will spend at least 3 weeks in Thessalonica and many commentators and scholars conclude his stay may have been as long as 2-3 months. (Phil. 4:15-16, I Thess. 2:9, II Thess. 3:7-10)

Turning the World Upside Down For Christ (Acts 17:1-9)

"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" Acts 17:6b

1. On the way from Philippi to Thessalonica; the missionary team (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) passed through two cities (Amphipolis & Apollonia) and covered approximately 100 miles. We are not told why they didn't stop and preach in those towns but the conclusion is there was not a synagogue there or perhaps there wasn't a means of a platform for Paul to preach the Gospel.
2. When they reached Thessalonica they found a synagogue and as was the custom, they preached the Gospel to them.
 - Let's take note of a few things:
 - 1) We are told that they _____ with them.
(I Peter 3:15)
 - 2) There must have been some interest in what Paul declared for they were invited back for a total of _____ weeks.
 - 3) What did Paul use as a tool to compel or persuade them to embrace Christ as the Messiah?
 - What were the positive results of Paul's preaching? (Acts 17:4-5)
 - 1) Some of the _____ were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas.
 - 2) There was also a large contingent of God-fearing _____ who believed what Paul declared.
 - 3) Also, a number of the leading _____ were also persuaded to follow Christ.

- What were the negative results of Paul's preaching? (Acts 17:5)
3. Take note of the accusations of this Jewish mob; *"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" Acts 17:6b*
- In what ways did the mob declare that they (Paul, Silas, Timothy, Jason and others) were being subversive?
 - Is there any significance to the claim; *"and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus"*?
 - Although the charges (as the mob portrayed them) were over exaggerated in that Paul was not promoting an overthrow of the Roman government (see Romans 13:1-3), the fact remained that a kingdom was coming that would one day be ruled by Christ.
 - 1) It would be this very teaching by Paul of a "messianic kingdom" and, some later confusion caused by false teachers, which will prompt Paul to write his first letter to the Thessalonians during his first stay in Corinth (approx A.D. 52). We know this from reading I Thessalonians 3:13, and I Thessalonians 5:1-11)
 - 2) There was a need to further clarify the coming kingdom, and Paul will pen a second letter to the Thessalonians not long after he wrote his first letter. (See II Thessalonians 1:5-10, 2:14)

4. A few other observations and points of significance:
- Jason (who provided lodging to Paul and his companions) is possibly a relative of Paul. (Romans 16:21)
 - The development of opposition to the message of Gospel (of which Paul was committed to preach) was becoming obvious, and its primary Opposers were the Jews, who continued to reject the fact that Jesus is the Messiah!
 - For whatever reason the authorities could not find Paul and Silas and some sort of promise or pledge (perhaps a monetary bond) was made by Jason and others, that ensured Paul and Silas would leave the city and not return.
 - Paul actually does not return to Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 2:18) but this does not stop the Gospel from spreading there. (I Thessalonians 1:7-10)
 - What is it about the Gospel that causes people to strongly reject it?

Triumph Weighed Against Travail (Acts 17:10-15)

"Therefore many of them believed...but when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the Word of God was preached by Paul at Berea they came there also and stirred up the crowds." Acts 17:12-13

1. We are told by Luke that **Paul** and **Silas** slip away "by night" (due to the opposition from the Jews in Thessalonica) so as to be undetected and head to the town of **Berea**. (Acts 17:10)

- A little information on Berea:

- 1) It is located about 46 miles southwest of Thessalonica and the Roman philosopher Cicero described it as; "being off the beaten path". It was a much less important city in the Roman Empire.
- 2) It was Paul's plan to go to Achaia (southern Greece) and Berea was on the way.
- 3) When Paul arrives in Berea he finds some very serious "religious people" who Luke describes as; "more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica".
- 4) Just a side note; on Paul's third missionary journey he will be accompanied by a fellow believer named Sopater who is from the town of Berea. (Acts 20:4)
- 5) Here is a modern day picture of Berea (Beroea) which is now called Veria:



- It is possible that Timothy initially stayed behind in Thessalonica and then joined them in Berea later. (Acts 17:14)

2. Take note of the contrast that Luke uses; “Now these (the Berean Jews) were more **noble-minded** than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily** to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11)
- The word **noble** means to have _____
 - Instead of rejecting the message of the Gospel as **some** of the Jews in Thessalonica did; they willingly examined the Scriptures with passion (great eagerness) to determine for themselves whether Paul was speaking truth to them.
 - Although the results were similar (“many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men”), those in Berea (*who apparently did not believe*) did not react in such a harsh and negative way as the Thessalonian Jews.
3. It was G. Campbell Morgan who wrote; “The measure of our triumph in work for God is always the measure of our travail. No propagative work is done save at cost; and every genuine triumph of the Cross brings after it the travail of some new affliction, and some new sorrow. So we share the travail that makes the Kingdom come.” (*The Acts of the Apostles* [New York: Revell, 1924], 405-406)
4. The triumph that the missionary team had in Berea was met by opposition (not from those in Berea) from the Thessalonian Jews who heard that Paul was preaching the Gospel there. (Acts 17:13)
- What was it that made these unbelieving Jews so upset? (John 3:19)

- Once again, Paul is forced to leave (Acts 17:14)
 - 1) He will travel to Athens probably by boat, although some conclude he went by land. There is no clear indication as to how he traveled to Athens – but that is his destination none the less.
 - 2) It appears that Timothy and Silas will remain in Berea for a time (probably to teach sound doctrine and help to establish leaders).
 - 3) Paul will pass on word to Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens as soon as possible. We know that this actually happened by reading I Thess. 3:1-2, 6, Acts 18:1-5)

Closing Remarks:

1. Was the ministry in Thessalonica and Berea a success?
2. Why is there such opposition to the preaching of the Gospel even today?
3. Is declaring the Gospel worth giving our lives for?
4. What sort of risks do you take in telling others about Jesus Christ?