

Paul's Second Missionary Journey Continues

Acts 17:1-15

Acts 17:1-5: *"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures, ³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."⁴ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.*

⁵ But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷ Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus."⁸ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. ⁹ So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

¹⁰ Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed."

Background Notes

In Acts 16 the gospel came to Europe as Paul responded to the "Macedonian vision," sailed from Asia across the Aegean Sea, and came to Philippi. God used a number of interesting events - including the conversion of a businesswoman named Lydia, the imprisonment of Paul and Silas, and a unique earthquake - to bring about the formation of the church at Philippi.

In Acts 17 Paul and his missionary team moved on in Macedonia and came to the city of Thessalonica. It appears that Luke stayed on at Philippi to help the church there, because in this section of Acts Luke stopped using the pronouns "we"

or “us,” but changed to “they” or “them.” Luke rejoined the apostle Paul about six or seven years later, near the end of Paul’s third missionary journey. In Acts 20:5 he again picked up the use of the pronouns “we” and “us.” Luke remained with Paul for the rest of the book of Acts.

Possibly Paul bypassed Amphipolis and Apollonia (v1) because there were no synagogues in these towns. But there was a synagogue at Thessalonica, so Paul and his team stopped there because they knew they could get a hearing in the synagogue, and start teaching about Jesus, using the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul spent three Sabbaths reasoning with the Jews from the Scriptures (v2).

Paul may have spent more than three weeks in Thessalonica, because he preached to the pagan Gentiles there as well. From the epistles of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we learn that most of the converts at Thessalonica were not Jews or God-fearing Gentiles, but rather Gentiles whose lifestyle was steeped in idolatry. *“You turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9).* It seems that Paul spent a number of weeks at Thessalonica. What was the content of his message to the Jews in the synagogue there? That brings us to our doctrinal points.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Scriptures predict the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah.

Notice Paul’s approach to the Jews at Thessalonica: *“Explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ” (v3).* Paul showed the Jews that the Old Testament Scriptures predicted the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah. Then he showed them that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these prophecies, and thus He must be the Messiah.

This is a good way to approach Jewish people with the gospel today. Judaism still tends to ignore the “Suffering Messiah” passages in the Old Testament, and emphasizes the “Glory” passages. So when Jewish people are willing to listen, show them that *their Scriptures clearly predict the sufferings and the resurrection of the Messiah.*

What are these Scriptures? Isaiah 53, for sure. Verses 7-8: *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”⁸ He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.”*

Notice how verse 8 differentiates between the *individual* Suffering Servant and the people of the *nation*. I emphasize this point because modern Judaism tries to say that the “Suffering Servant” is the *nation of Israel*, thus avoiding the obvious

implication that this passage refers to the sufferings of Jesus, the Messiah. But no - this cannot be. Verse 8 shows that the Suffering Servant and the nation of Israel are clearly distinguished.

Isaiah 53 also predicts the resurrection of the Messiah. Look at the end of verse 10: *“He shall see His seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.”*

I'm sure that Paul also would have used Psalm 22 in his witness to the Thessalonian Jews. A Messianic psalm, Psalm 22 predicts both the sufferings and resurrection of Christ. Here are a few verses about the Lord's suffering, beginning at verse 14: *“I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me.*

¹⁵ *My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.*

¹⁶ *For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet;*

¹⁷ *I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. ¹⁸ They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.*

The resurrection of Christ is also seen in Psalm 22:22: *I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.* The use of the future tense is certainly an indication of the resurrection of the suffering Messiah. Verse 22 could not be true if the Messiah was not resurrected.

And Psalm 16:10, another Messianic psalm, also predicts Christ's resurrection: *“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*

Clearly the Old Testament Scriptures show and predict the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah. This was the essence of Paul's teaching and preaching at Thessalonica. The Scriptures predict the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah.

2. The Scriptures prove the historicity and accuracy of the gospel.

As a result of Paul's preaching at the synagogue in Thessalonica, a number of Jews and Gentile proselytes believed. But the unbelieving Jews were jealous and formed a mob. When they couldn't find Paul and the others, they dragged Jason (Paul's host) and some other brothers before the city officials, and falsely accused the Christians of trying to undermine Caesar's authority. Jason was forced to post bond for them, with the idea that Paul and his team would leave town. Jason had most likely become a believer through Paul's ministry, and he may be the Jason who is mentioned in Romans 16:21.

Paul and Silas left Thessalonica at night - a wise move! - and went on to Berea. Timothy may have stayed on at Thessalonica, and then joined Paul and Silas a little later at Berea. The Jews at the synagogue in Berea were much more

receptive to the Word than the Jews of Thessalonica. *“They were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with eagerness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”*¹² *Therefore many of the Jews believed, as did a number of Greeks - prominent women as well as men”* (v11-12).

Notice that the people of Berea checked the Scriptures to see if the message Paul was preaching was true. They found that his teachings were rooted in historical fact, and that Jesus was the fulfillment of accurate prophecies. Thus many of them came to faith in Christ.

This is still true today. When people check out the teaching of the Bible and the gospel it presents, they will find that it is not just fables or “wishful thinking.” The message of the Bible and the gospel is based on historical facts, and it is accurate in every detail. If they are open minded, they will be led to faith in Christ.

Many of the Jews at Berea became believers, but the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea and stirred up the crowds there. So the brethren at Berea escorted Paul safely to Athens. Meanwhile, Timothy and Silas stayed on in Berea for a few more days, and then followed Paul to Athens.

The Bereans are a great example for anyone who really wants to know the facts. *Read the Bible!* The Scriptures prove the historicity and accuracy of the gospel.

Practical Application

Let’s turn the world upside down!

Turn the world upside down - not in a *bad* way, but in a good way! As Christians, we are not to be rebels and revolutionaries plotting to overthrow the governments of the world. We are to be preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ that will turn the world upside down - in a good way!

Look what the Thessalonian agitators said about Paul and his team: *“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too”* (v6). Listen - the world has not changed. It is still opposed to the good news of Jesus Christ. The world desperately needs to be turned upside down, as people are converted by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Let’s turn the world upside down!