

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 17:7-15 | Session 44 | Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

Paul and Silas have encountered trouble on their second grace missionary journey. After being beaten and subsequently released from prison in Philippi, Paul and Silas (and company) make their way to Thessalonica where they go to the Jewish synagogue first to *reason with them out of the scriptures*. We learned last time that this *reasoning from the (Old Testament) scriptures* was not the grace gospel, since it was not revealed in the Old Testament scriptures; Paul said that *mystery* “in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed...” What is the mystery that was revealed to Paul? “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” This joining together of Jew and Gentle into one body is now made possible *by grace through faith and not of works* (Ephesians 2:8,9). Now, all “by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:39). So, Paul is teaching a transition gospel, first to the Jew in order to persuade them to believe that Jesus Christ, whom they crucified, is the Messiah. Once they believe that by *repentance, and baptism* they would be ripe for the telling of the grace gospel. Again, throughout the book of Acts there is a transition from the dispensation of law, to the dispensation of grace.

Verse 7,8—

In Thessalonica, **Jason hath received** Paul and Silas and the others in his home. As the mob descends on Jason’s home to root out these men *that have turned the world upside down* (vs. 6), they do not find Paul and the others but accuse them all of doing **contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus**. A couple of things to consider: First, Paul and his company must have been well known and word had spread since they are accused of turning the world upside down. Second, since they are accused of saying Jesus is another king, they must have been teaching the physical kingdom (not a spiritual kingdom that is *in your heart*) and the fact that Jesus would return as king of kings and lord of lords. Today, many people teach the kingdom of God is in our hearts. This simply is not a biblical teaching. The kingdom of God is always *future, physical, and fraternal* (i.e., promised to the Jewish nation). Saying that there was another king besides Caesar would have been considered treasonous. The word **decrees** is the Greek word *dogma*; we get our word dogmatic, doctrine, ordinance, etc. Nevertheless, the people were **troubled** or agitated by the false accusations—evidently, they believed the lie.

Verse 9—

When they had taken security. Here is the first hint of persecution among the believers in Thessalonica. The government takes away their money, thus limiting their livelihood. This persecution could have included deaths, since Paul writes about those who *have fallen asleep* (died), in 1 Thessalonians 4:16ff. We have to read into that statement, but it is certainly possible that it included martyrdom of some of the believers there, although we certainly don’t sense the physical persecution from Luke’s description in this verse. In fact, the punishment may seem rather light in the face of treason. I think Luke’s emphasis is on Paul and Silas, et al, and not necessarily on the state of the believers in Thessalonica. Having not found Paul and after receiving money from Jason and perhaps a pledge to stop preaching the treasonous message, they allow Jason and the others to go, but a plan was made to get Paul and Silas out of town under the cover of darkness.

Verse 10—

Luke only mentions **Paul and Silas**, but there may have been others with them (including Timotheus, see verse 14). Remembering, and perhaps still suffering, from the beatings they took in Philippi, the men know all too well they need to get out of town before the mob stones them or beats them again. The gospel could not spread if they were dead. This fleeing at night was not done out of cowardice or fear. Paul mentions over and over again that he is not afraid of dying or ashamed of the gospel (Acts 20:24; 21:13). Likewise, Paul knew he would suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 9:16; Philippians 1:20-23). They didn’t leave Thessalonica without a plan; they were **sent away...unto Berea**. And, as usual, the first place they went to was the **synagogue of the Jews**.

Verse 11—

It is interesting how neighboring cities can be so different. In Berea, the members of this synagogue were **more noble than those in Thessalonica**. **The searched the scriptures**. Just how they did this we don’t know, but we might assume they had a Torah scroll in their synagogue. In Thessalonica, Paul *reasoned out of the scriptures*, so it is unknown if either synagogue had complete Torah scrolls. Or, did Berea have a complete scroll and that is the reason they were more noble? Either way, these people were interested in learning the scriptures with **readiness of mind...whether those things were so** would indicate they question the assumptions.

Verse 12—

The result of diligent and honest searching of the scriptures was **many of them believed**. We stop learning and continue to be stuck in our, perhaps faulty, assumptions when we refuse to listen to an opposing view. Most of us have developed a bias, not from our own study, but from what we have heard over and over from someone else. We should be as the Bereans. Paul is now speaking to both Jew and Greek. In this transition period, he will be preaching the kingdom message to the Jews in order for the nation of Israel to believe, but he will also be preaching the gospel of justification by belief alone. We should keep this in mind as we read Paul’s letters. Sometimes he is speaking to the Jews (and becomes *as a Jew, 1st Cor. 9:20*). Other times he is speaking to the Greeks/Gentiles, or *to them without the law* (and becomes as one without the law, 1st Cor. 9:21). Why does he become *all things to all men?* “That I might by all means save some” (1st Cor. 9:22). There are two gospels to two groups (circumcised and uncircumcised, Gal. 2:7) during the transition period. When things are going well, Satan attacks.

Verse 13—

Many are believing, things are looking up for Paul and the rest, **But...** trouble is close behind. In this case there were many with PDS (Paul derangement syndrome), and even though he had left Thessalonica there were some Jews (Judeans) who just couldn’t let it go, and they traveled to Berea and **stirred up the people**. Paul’s message was offensive to them.

Verse 14,15—

The solution? To keep the gospel spreading, it was better for Paul to leave Macedonia (he was the one the Judeans were apparently after) where the Judean influence seemed to be great. Paul leaves alone **by sea, but Silas and Timotheus abode there still**. Although some from Berea **conducted Paul and brought him to Athens**. (To be continued) ...