

Acts 17
Verses 1-15

1 Leaving Luke behind, Paul's group took the Egnatian Way, a road that went west from Byzantium to the Adriatic Sea. They went through two large cities without spending time there. Amphipolis sat on a hill with the river Strymon on three sides. Paul went straight for the strategic center of the province, Thessalonica, a journey of 100 miles. Perhaps he did not stop at the other cities because there was no synagogue. God used Thessalonica to spread the Gospel throughout the region. (1Thessalonians 1:8) It was named after Alexander the Great's half sister and was the capital of Macedonia. Recently discovered inscriptions confirm that there were synagogues there. The estimated population at the time was 200,000.

2-3 For three Sabbaths, Paul was given the opportunity to speak to the congregation. We can't tell how long that he was there. It was long enough to receive support from Philippi and to plant a church that helped him in Thessalonica. Notice that he reasoned with them. The word "reasoned" is the source of our word "dialogue". It was not just a sermon but a discussion. (1Peter 3:15) By pointing to Old Testament texts about the Messiah, especially in regards to suffering and resurrection, he showed how Jesus had fulfilled them. This was the chief witnessing method to the Jewish people. We need to be able to do the same. Can you show someone from the Old Testament that Jesus has to be the Messiah?

4 Both Jews and Gentiles who believed in JHWH were persuaded. Paul's reasoning convinced them. Prominent women were probably business women or women whose husbands were influential. Women had a major role in Greek society though not to quite the same degree as men.

5 Whenever you are successful in ministry, persecution can't be far behind. Jealousy is often the root of the animosity. This persecution was nasty, prompting others to do their dirty work for them. (John 3:19) Paul, Silas, and Timothy weren't there so the crowd grabbed his host and others in the house. Jason was a common Jewish name among the Diaspora Jews. It's the Greek equivalent of Joshua. (Acts 13:45)

6 Luke uses the exact term for officials that this particular city used. Inscriptions verify that they were called *politarchai*. It was once argued that Luke had made a mistake by using that term as it was thought to not be used until the 2nd century and so he was therefore an unreliable historian or the 2nd century. Then archeology proved Luke spot on. The term has been found on inscriptions as early as the 3rd century BC in Thessalonica.

KJV uses the term “turned the world upside down”. Actually, from God’s perspective, they were turning the world right side up. Sin has turned the world upside down from God’s original intent, but the world sees us as the subversives.

7 Caesar decreed that no one could predict the death of a ruler or the overthrowing of a Caesar. It was punishable by death to do so. Individuals took oaths to protect Caesar and his family with their lives and the lives of their children. That helps us understand how people may have misinterpreted or intentionally misconstrued Paul’s teaching of Christ as Lord of a kingdom that would one day come and cover the earth. Just the mention of a judgment day violated the edicts (dogma) of Rome. To say Jesus is King of kings was against the Laws of Rome.

The people also feared that if a movement like that grew, the reaction from Rome could cost all the citizens of Thessalonica a great deal. They could be attacked, lose their citizenship, be taxed more heavily, or any number of other dire consequences. You can see how they could easily be persuaded to turn against Paul and the Gospel.

8 –9 We don’t know the extent of the persecution, but 1Thessalonians 4:13 seems to indicate that some lost their lives. Paul’s presence in the city could cost others a great deal. Apparently Jason and company remained under investigation and there was some kind of a trial pending. Meanwhile Paul moved on to Berea.

10-11 Paul, Silas, and Timothy snuck away at night and went to Berea. The Berean synagogue was nobler (eugenos) in that they wanted to search the Scriptures and find out if what Paul was sharing was true. This should be our response to any new teaching that comes our way. They were eager to know if the Messiah had come, excited to find out if their sins had been atoned for by the death of Jesus. Proverbs 9:9

- Compare the Thessalonians and Berean response.

12 Fruit came from among the Jews because of their open and eager attitude to see what the Scriptures truly taught.

13-15 The jealous troublemakers from Thessalonica came down and successfully caused enough trouble to force Paul to leave. Silas and Timothy stayed behind to help establish the church. We won’t hear anymore about Berea except for one new convert that helped Paul later in his ministry, Sopater. (Acts 20:4)

Consider the price Paul paid to plant these churches.

What drove him?

Why did the Jews of Thessalonica have such hatred for Paul and the gospel?