

Acts Chapter 17

Acts 17:1 "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:"

Amphipolis and Apollonia ... Thessalonica": Southwest from Philippi along the Egnatian Way. "Amphipolis" was about 30 miles from Philippi, and "Apollonia" another 30 miles beyond.

The narrative indicates that the travelers stopped only for the night in those cities. Forty miles beyond "Apollonia" was "Thessalonica," the capital city of Macedonia with a population of 200,000. It was a major port city and an important commercial center.

"Thessalonica" was founded after Macedonia became a world power (316 B.C.), and became the principal city of Macedonia. It is situated on the northern tip of the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean Sea and lies at the junction of two main land routes: the renowned Via Egnatia between east and west, and the main route from the Aegean area to the Danube.

"Synagogue" (see note on 13:5). Luke refers to a synagogue only in Thessalonica, which may explain why Paul and his companions did not stay in the other two cities.

Paul, during his second missionary journey, established the Thessalonian church and shortly thereafter wrote to them two of his earliest epistles. He returned at the end of his third trip (20:1), and probably several times later (Phil. 1:25-26; 1 Tim. 1:3). The present city is called Thessaloniki (or Salonika) and has a population of nearly half a million.

This Thessalonica was part of Macedonia. The "they" above, for sure, means Paul and Silas. We could only speculate to whom else is with them. This is not a completely pagan area, because there is a synagogue (place of worship).

Acts 17:2 "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,"

"Paul, as his manner was": Paul began his ministry in each town with the Jews (see note on 13:5).

"Three Sabbath days": The length of his initial public ministry. The actual amount of time spent in Thessalonica would have been longer, extending perhaps to 4-6 months.

Paul preached three different Sabbaths (Saturdays), here. Paul, being a Pharisee, would have access to the synagogue.

Acts 17:3 "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

Christ and Messiah are the same. The Jews had been looking for generations for Messiah. Paul is not accusing them, but explaining to them, of Jesus' death and entombment. He explains that Jesus had to die, so that He could be resurrected. It was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus.

Acts 17:4 "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few."

These Greeks had been attending the synagogue. They were interested in the one true God. Thessalonica was a city actually of many synagogues. At various times, up to 36 of them were in the city. Luke, in his writings, gives credit to the women receiving Christ as Savior.

Acts 17:5 "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people."

“The house of Jason”: The mob assumed Paul, Silas, and Timothy were staying there. Nothing is known of Jason except that he was probably Jewish, since Jason was a name adopted by many of the dispersed Jews.

Jason, some believe was a relative of Paul. The name Jason is a Romanized form of the name Jesus or Joshua. These lewd fellows of the baser sort would be called thugs in our society. Notice, why these Jews came against them, it was envy or jealousy. These Jews had gathered a mob to get rid of Paul and Silas.

Acts 17:6-7 "And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;" "Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, [one] Jesus."

“Contrary to the decrees of Caesar”: One of the most serious crimes in the Roman Empire was to acknowledge allegiance to any king but Caesar (John 19:15).

They do not really have any grievance against Paul and Silas, and surely not this Jason that would stand up before the court, so he tries to say they are trying to take Caesar's throne.

Acts 17:8-9 "And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things." "And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go."

“Taken security of Jason”: A bond, which would be forfeited by Jason should Paul and his companions cause more trouble. As a result, they had no choice but to leave Thessalonica.

Jason had to put up bond for himself and the others so the authorities would let them go.

Acts 17:10 "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming [thither] went into the synagogue of the Jews."

“Berea” was a small city in southern Macedonia. It was an important town that was not on a main route. It lay about 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica and was situated on the eastern slope of the Olympian range. It is now of no historical, political or even commercial importance, but it was prosperous during New Testament times (see note on 13:5).

It contained a colony of Jews with Whom Paul commenced his work at Berea during the second missionary journey. The present city is named Verroia (population 26,000).

Berea is still a city of Macedonia near Mount Bermices. We will see that this group of Jews is well read in the Scriptures. Paul and Silas left in cover of darkness to keep them from imprisoning them. The word has not travelled to Berea yet, so they can find safe haven here.

Acts 17:11 "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

This is exactly what I believe. If a person truly studies the Scriptures with an open mind and heart to receive the Truth, God will reveal that Truth to you. The Old Testament Scriptures point to Jesus. If these people truly understood the Old Testament, they would readily accept Jesus as their Messiah.

Acts 17:12 "Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

Their attitude was better (they were not envious), just eager to know the Truth. Jesus is the Truth. These Greek women were attending the synagogue. They were all worshippers of God the Father already. Now they receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, their Messiah.

Acts 17:13 "But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people."

These Jews from Thessalonica aren't satisfied to run them out of their town; they cause trouble here in Berea, as well. I do not understand how they could stir up those who believed.

I believe it must have been those who rejected Paul's message. The beginning of the Christian movement and the founding of their Churches were under much opposition. Even today, starting a new work is very difficult to do.

Acts 17:14 "And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timothy abode there still."

We see here, that Paul was rushed out of town by night to keep him from being jailed. Why Silas and Timothy stayed behind is not given. Perhaps, they were not at the house when Paul was carried away. The authorities were really after Paul who was the main preacher. The others would have not been in as much danger.

Acts 17:15 "And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timothy for to come to him with all speed, they departed."

“Athens”: The cultural center of Greece. At its zenith, Athens was home to the most renowned philosophers in history, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who was arguably the most influential philosopher of all. Two other significant philosophers taught there: Epicurus, founder of Epicureanism, and Zeno, founder of Stoicism, two of the dominant philosophies in that day (see note on verse 18).

It really appears that Paul was whisked away so quickly, that he did not have time to wait for Timothy and Silas. Paul sends word to Timothy and Silas to come immediately and join him. He perhaps feared for their lives if they stayed there in Berea. Those who brought Paul safely to Athens were to take instructions back to Timothy and Silas.

Acts 17:16 “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”

“City wholly given to idolatry”: Athens was also the religious center of Greece, virtually every deity known to man could be worshiped there. Paul viewed Athens as a city of lost humanity, all doomed to a Christless eternity because of rampant pagan idolatry.

“Athens was the chief city of the ancient city-state of Attica. After the Roman conquests, it was given the status of a free city and exemption from paying taxes to Rome. Though it lay within the province of Achaia, it was free from the rule of the proconsul (governor), at Corinth. Athens is located 50 miles east of Corinth and five miles from the Aegean Sea on a narrow plain surrounded by mountains.

During the New Testament era, Athens was no longer as politically and economically influential as had once been the case, but it remained a major intellectual center of the Roman Empire. Paul ministered there during the second missionary journey but had few converts and may never have returned.

Athens continued to decline though the centuries and in the early 1800s had only five thousand residents. Today it is the capital of Greece and has a population exceeding 600,000 with nearly two million in the metropolitan area.

Paul, later sends Timothy back to Thessalonica and Silas to Berea, because he cannot go back there himself. We will get into a great deal of that when we get into Thessalonians. Athens truly was a city of idols. This was not a godly city by any stretch of the imagination.

Acts Chapter 17 Questions

1. What two towns did they go through on the way to Thessalonica?
2. How many Sabbaths did Paul preach there?

3. What did he use to reason with them?
4. What country was Thessalonica part of?
5. What day is Sabbath?
6. "Opening and alleging..." what, was what Paul preached?
7. What is another name for Christ?
8. Why did Jesus have to die?
9. Who were the two with Paul?
10. What is a synagogue?
11. Who were two specific groups mentioned who believed?
12. Was this the only synagogue? Explain.
13. The Jews that didn't believe were moved with what?
14. Who did they take to attack Paul and the others?
15. At whose home was Paul staying?
16. What other name is the same as Jason in Roman?
17. Who was this Jason?
18. What ridiculous accusation did they make of Paul?
19. The rulers required Jason to do what before he released them?
20. What did the brethren immediately do for Paul and Silas?
21. Where did they go?
22. What mount is this city near?
23. How were the Jews here compared to those in Thessalonica?
24. Why were they convinced of Jesus more readily?
25. How can anyone really learn the Truth?

26. What nationality were the women believers?
27. Who came and stirred up the Jews in Berea?
28. Where did the brethren take Paul for safety?
29. Who remained in Berea?
30. What message did Paul send them?
31. While Paul waited for them, what did he observe about the people of Athens?