

**Moving westward to Thessalonica and Berea, then south to Athens** The Second Mission Trip. Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke.

Paul and his companions departed from **Philippi** after visiting with their now beloved hosts one more time. They left with the dignity and respect accorded Roman citizens in good standing. **Thessalonica** was about 80 miles westward on the Roman road along the Mediterranean coast of Macedonia. There was a Jewish synagogue there and Paul, as the Jew he was, availed himself of its hospitality to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to them. The Jews there were Hellenists, people of Jewish descent who had long since resided in Gentile countries, but strenuously maintained their Jewish religious roots. Paul, being a native of Tarsus had been a Hellenist also, so had a welcome there at first. But introducing the name of Jesus as Christ (Messiah) soon divided them. Now they became believers and unbelievers. And not just a few believers but a “great multitude.” The Jews weren’t content to let so massive a division among them go unchallenged. Numbers meant prestige and power to them. The Spirit says they were moved by envy. (Too often envy can divide us believers too, as history shows.) These Jews were certainly accustomed to the many sects among them but holding that THIS JESUS was CHRIST, was to them blasphemy. They reacted with a plot worthy of their fellow Jews in Jerusalem. Recruiting some worthless men hanging around the marketplace they soon had a mob. The cry of the Jews “we have no king but Caesar” echoed again in that remote Gentile city of Macedonia. It had been Gentiles agitating in Philippi but in Thessalonica it was Jews, as had been common in the provinces of Asia Minor. Satan is not without willing dupes to take up his work opposing his arch enemy, Jesus Christ. They arise among many peoples and walks of life but the refusal of Jesus as King is universal.

Jason, one of the converts, had received the missionaries into his home and was personally assaulted when the mob did not find them there. Hospitality to evangelists was the universal sign of the genuine reception of their message. The Lord said that when He first sent out His disciples, Matthew 10. At the end of the Tribulation, hospitality to refugee preachers will be the basis of Gentiles’ entering the Lord’s earthly Kingdom when He comes, Matthew 25. So Jason, with some of the other new converts, was arrested. These authorities acted more properly than those in Philippi taking bail money and releasing them. But the brethren judged the safety of their benefactors more important than losing the funds they had put up for bail. That very night they sent Paul and Silas on to the nearby town of **Berea**.

Not deterred by the rough reception in Thessalonica, Paul went immediately to the synagogue there and preached Christ. Their audience is said to be more noble than those in Thessalonica because they bothered to check what Paul was preaching against the scriptures (Old Testament) they

had in hand. They are hailed as an example to all today. Check against scripture everything you hear preached or taught, including what you read. Many come in the name of Christ that are not His. Or if they are His they still may come with some teachings that are not scriptural and therefore misrepresent the Lord Jesus Christ in some way. God graciously has provided gifted teachers of the word over the years and still does. But prayerfully test them, each of them, against the scriptures.

But be careful to use a reliable **translation** such as the “King James Version or Darby translation and not merely a **paraphrase** such as the “Living Bible.” A paraphrase contains the authors’ “take” on what the scripture is saying, which can be greatly influenced by their own personal knowledge and beliefs. A paraphrase is necessarily limited by the compilers own comprehension of the scriptures and of God and His ways. Some of the more easy to read Bibles versions such as the “NIV” are not literal word by word translations. They are actually thought by thought “translations” where the translators carefully determine the meaning of the original Greek text and create a paraphrase of the thought conveyed by each phrase or sentence. While this can be helpful toward understanding the scriptures it is necessarily limited by the translators’ own knowledge and comprehension. It is better thought of as a commentary. A true translation will seek to faithfully bring the word by word Greek or Hebrew text to us in English (or other language) whether the translators think they fully understand it or not. Clearly the Spirit can speak most directly to the reader through a word by word translation. Note even word by word versions such as the KJV and the NKJV have been influenced by prejudices of the translators (for instance the use of the term “church” for the Greek word “assembly.”)

True to form, the Jews in Thessalonica pursued the missionaries to Berea and soon disrupted the assembly being established there. The brethren sent Paul away toward the sea to safety. He seemed to have become a lightning rod for Satan’s opposition. He left Silas and Timothy to minister to the newborn believers. He had had an incredibly short time with them and he wrote a letter (1Thessalonians) encouraging them soon after he left. The brethren took Paul all the way to Athens, then returned with a charge from Paul to come to him there.

While Athens is revered today as the seat and source of knowledge and wisdom of the “western world,” it was wholly given to idolatry and sin. This fact rather discredits this claim to wisdom. What Paul saw while in Athens soon confirmed what he already had heard but he could not let them go into everlasting torment without warning. He went first to the synagogue of the Jews and disputed there, then daily with devout people (presumably of Jewish persuasion) in the marketplace. Then some Geek philosophers ran across him and he took them on. Some, though intellectually skilled in reasoning and abstract thought, couldn’t seem to take in

what he was proclaiming. While some didn’t “get it” at all, others perceived he was bringing a strange new religion with strange gods. This tickled their intellectual curiosity and they invited him deeper into their established schools of reasoning.

**21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)**

This sounds like a modern University, doesn’t it. The right to “academic freedom” to pursue knowledge without interference from government (except for freely flowing funding) is a basic tenet of such institutions. While a believer can attend and acquire knowledge and skills necessary pursue a professional career one must always be on their guard against the insidious, infectious philosophies of the world infesting such places.

Even Paul’s extraordinary lecture didn’t stir them. But

God that made the world and all things therein, Genesis. 1,  
He is Lord of heaven and earth,  
He dwells not in temples made with hands;  
He is not worshiped with objects of men’s hands,  
He has no need of animals or men’s wealth offered to Him.  
He is the only source of all life. It has its breath from Him.

He made all men, Genesis 1.

All mankind is of one ancestor, of one blood, Gen. 9-11.  
Early families grew and became nations under His watchful eye, Genesis 10:5.

The history of Man emerged under God’s oversight and control, Daniel 4:17.

God had set the boundaries of the various nations before they were even established, Deuteronomy 32:8.

He has intervened in history intending that people would seek Him out. Examples:

The Flood, Genesis 6-9; The Tower of Babel and scattering of the nations, Genesis 10,11; The call of Abram, Genesis 12, Acts 7; The subsequent Exodus of Israel from captivity in Egypt to inhabit the land of Canaan after exterminating its unredeemably wicked inhabitants, Genesis 15, Joshua 6:17.

God’s interventions were intended to draw men to seek Him and follow Him, Psalm 50 :15.

He is not far from any man anywhere, James 4:8.

In Him we all live and move and have our being, our very existence, Eccl. 12:7, Job 12:10.

Paul quoted their own Greek poets: who said “we are also His offspring.” He reasoned then, if mankind are God’s offspring, God is not like anything in creation that men value such as gold and silver. Much less is He a graven image fashioned by skillful men.

**All this Paul characterized as times of ignorance.** This must have been a shocking statement to the Greeks who held wisdom in such high esteem. Ignorant? Ignorant

how it should stir us! He started with an altar that had been standing in their midst for centuries inscribed “*To the Unknown God.*” It was a relic planted in Greek civilization as a reminder of the God above all idols and legends. In “Eternity in Their Hearts” Don Richardson sites this altar as an example of God inserting a lasting reminder to local cultures of His existence and their responsibility to seek Him.

Some have criticized Paul’s use of logic to seek the hearts of these people. If anyone was up to this task it was Paul who was highly educated himself. Yet as he very pointedly states in his letter to the Corinthians (another Greek stronghold of man’s wisdom) God is not intellectually perceived or understood. Yet Paul reveals much in his brief message that is deeply satisfying to those having faith in Christ—all of it found in the scriptures already. Search them out.

indeed! How preposterous! How true! Even today!  
Yet their city had an altar to the unknown God.

Paul faithfully and urgently tells them, “God has spoken now and COMMANDS\* men everywhere to repent for He has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness. How essential for parents to teach their young children to obey them so they will be ready to obey God’s command to repent.

Not only will God judge the world, He has given authority to judge to one certain Man.

That Man’s name is known and HE was already alive, having risen from the dead.

The assurance of this coming judgement rests in the fact God has raised Jesus from the dead.

The apostle to the Gentiles was granted a golden opportunity in Athens to bring Christ right to hearts of the wisest of the world. He came away with two named converts and only a few others. The rest either mocked when they hear him speak of resurrection or put him off for another hearing. Satan had these souls so firmly in his clutches even Paul’s gospel could not rouse them from their intellectual complacency. They wouldn’t even mount an old fashioned riot as had arisen in Philippi and Thessalonica. Deadly apathy reigned supreme. And it is infecting the United States and other western nations of the territory once ruled by Rome, looked upon once as “Christian nations.” What are they today? What are we? Cling to Christ in the midst of moral and religious degeneracy surrounding us.

So Paul moved on, southward in the Grecian peninsula to a city famous for its indulgence and corruption, Corinth.

By Ronald Canner, November 11, 2009