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a ***Grace Notes*** course

## **The Acts of the Apostles**

an expositional study  
by Warren Doud

Lesson 307: **Acts 17:1-9**

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ACTS, Lesson 307, Acts 17:1-9

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**Acts 17:1-9****Acts 17:1**

**Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews:**

Thessalonica was about 100 miles from Philippi, a journey of about five days. From Philippi, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke traveled about thirty miles to the town of Amphipolis. They may have stayed the night there, but there is no record of any formal preaching activity. Archaeologists have found no evidence of a synagogue either there or in Apollonia.

The disciples were traveling on the Egnatian Way, a major Roman highway, built much as the other great roads in the Roman Empire, such as the Appian Way in Italy. The Egnatian Way began on the Adriatic coast in north Macedonia; in fact it was considered the extension of the Appian Way, with traffic being ferried across the Adriatic to and from Italy. The road passed through Epirus and Thrace and afterwards continued to Byzantium (later Constantinople).

It was another day's journey (about 27 miles to Apollonia) where they would have stayed the second night. After traveling another day or two they arrived at Thessalonica, 38 miles from Apollonia.

At Thessalonica, the traffic of the sea met the traffic of the land. The city, located on the Gulf of Salonika, is near two rivers (the Vardar and the Vistritza). In ancient times, the people used these rivers to transport the agricultural products they raised in the fertile plains along the river banks. Besides being a commercial center, the city in Paul's day was the capital of Macedonia and served the entire province as an administrative center. In their campaign against Brutus and Cassius, who had assassinated Julius Caesar, the Romans placed a military garrison in Thessalonica. For its support of Mark Antony and Octavian (later known as Augustus), the Romans gave Thessalonica the status of a free

city in 42 B.C.<sup>3</sup> When Paul and his companions stayed there, about two hundred thousand people, among them numerous Jews, lived in Thessalonica. This strategically located city became a base from which the gospel spread throughout Macedonia and Greece (I Thess. 1:8).<sup>1</sup>

TOPIC: THESSALONICA

Paul and the others visited the Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica and waited for the invitation to speak.

**Acts 17:2**

**And Paul, as his manner was, went in to them, and for three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,**

Paul was consistent in that he customarily preached the gospel first of all in synagogues, wherever he found one. As a Jew he would have been welcomed in any synagogue, and as an educated Pharisee and student of Gamaliel he would certainly be invited to speak. Of course, his preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ was met with mixed response, as some Jews, and Gentile proselytes, were very happy to receive the good news of Christ, while others were made very angry by this "heresy".

He reasoned with them out of the Old Testament scriptures for three sabbath days. The disciples were delighted that so many people received the word gladly, but they were not surprised at the vehement and violent reaction of the dissenters.

The sabbath was obviously the great day of preaching, but the disciples must have preached the gospel all over town during the other days of the week. And there is nothing to say how long the disciples stayed in Thessalonica, after speaking in the synagogue on three sabbath days, they probably would have spent the rest of their time with believers.

<sup>1</sup> Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953-2001). *Vol. 17: New Testament commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*.

**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.**

**Opening and alleging**

This construction in Greek is (**dianoigon kai paratithemenos**). The first word, “opening”, is used in the figurative sense of opening the eyes, heart, or mind to help someone understand something. He was explaining something that was concealed or obscure in their thinking, so he opened what was shut to them.

The word “alleging” speaks literally of setting something before someone, such as food; but here, again, figuratively, Paul is setting ideas before people, laying down a proposition, for the purpose of expounding or pointing out truth.

So we have in the NASB, “explaining and giving evidence, and in the NIV, “explaining and proving”

**that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead**

This is Paul’s major argument about the Messiah, that Jesus is the Christ, who through His suffering, death, and resurrection had fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the scriptures. Jesus expressed the same argument after His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27).

The doctrine of the resurrection is a common theme the apostles proclaim wherever they speak (see Acts 2:24,32: 13:30,33,34,37; 17:31). By this doctrine Paul convinces both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

**and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.**

Or, This is the Messiah, namely Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you.”

This is Paul’s method everywhere he preaches to Jews, to offer substantive proof that Jesus is

the Messiah; and he presented the gospel in this way in Damascus, in Antioch of Pisidia, and here in Thessalonica

**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.**

Some of the Jews accepted the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah, and that what Paul and Silas had taught them about Jesus was true. They cordially embraced the missionaries in fellowship, appeared at meetings with them, and privately speaking with them.

The “devout Greeks” were proselytes of the Jewish religion, and a very large number of them became Christians, joined the fellowship of the disciples.

The “chief women” who believed were some of the wives of principal men of the city. These were convinced and converted and professed faith in Christ Jesus.

These new believers, Jews and gentiles, were the core of the new local church in Thessalonica.

In historical records, Silas is said to have been the first bishop of the church in Thessalonica. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century there were martyrs for Christ here. The emperor Antoninus Pius wrote, in behalf of the Christians there, to “give them no disturbance”.<sup>2</sup> There is known that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century there was a church there; Tertullian makes mentions of it. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the emperor Theodosius was baptized at Thessalonica.

TOPIC: PROSELYTES

**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**

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 50.4.c.26

**company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.**

Paul gives a hint of the heated discussion which took place here when he says, in 1 Thess. 2:2 that he preached “in much conflict”. He was trying to convince Jews to think of their scriptures in a new light, and that always causes deep emotion and conflict.

**But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy**

The word “envy” is from the Greek (**zeilos**) which can mean “zeal” or “jealousy”. The success of the disciples’ preaching in Thessalonica was too great to please the rabbis and many of the other Jewish men. Here was Paul, preaching Jesus Christ, and pulling people away from the synagogues toward the Christian fellowship.

Paul and Barnabas ran into the same problem in Antioch of Pisidia.

**Acts 13:45**, But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul argues against some of the slanderous things that were spread against him here. The rabbis said that they were “deceivers, using words of flattery as men-pleasers, after vain-glory, greedy of gain”, etc. (1 Thess. 2:3-10).

**took unto them certain vain fellows of the baser sort and gathered a company**

The **agora** or marketplace was a natural resort of men with nothing to do, like the various places in our cities where the bench-warmers flock. Plato (in *Protagoras*) calls these types (**agoraioi**), and that’s the word Luke uses here to describe idlers or good-for-nothing fellows, bums ready for any job. The Romans called these types *subrostrani*, “hangers around the rostrum”.

In communities where there were lots of slaves, there was a contempt for manual labor, which led to the existence of numerous worthless idlers; and in a seaport especially there would be the usual loafers around the wharves ready to be hired for any work.

The church in Thessalonica had to deal with some of the layabouts even in their own churches.

**2 Thess. 3:10,11**, For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

The Jewish leaders now gather themselves a choice collection of these market-loungers or loafers or wharf rats. They probably found them all in the marketplace, where the rabbis could give them their instructions and pay them off.

**and set all the city in an uproar**

They created a huge tumult and continued the uproar for a long time.

**and assaulted the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the people**

Jason was Paul’s host in Thessalonica. It’s not known for sure who Jason was; the name was used by both Jews (for Joshua or Jesus) and by Gentiles (Jason the Argonaut; Jason the king of Thessaly). He may well be the Jason mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:21, in which case he was a Jew, because Paul calls him his “kinsman”.

The mob stormed into Jason’s house and searched for Paul and the other disciples. It was a lynch mob.

**Acts 17:6**

**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 here also;**

The mob didn’t find Paul and the others in Jason’s house, so they dragged Jason himself,

and some other Christian men, who were probably at Jason's house, to the center of the city where the "rulers of the city" sat, the mob yelling and screaming like the house was on fire.

The apostles, they claimed, had thrown the whole world into disorder, had made commotion and disturbances in other cities, and turned men away from their religions and customs. Now "they have come here" to make similar disturbances and disorders. This is a very exaggerated expression, typical of the language of angry emotions.

#### Acts 17:7

**Whom Jason has received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.**

Now Jason, and the other Christian brethren, themselves are in trouble, in fact under threat of death; they could be condemned as an accessories to treason.

This was the very question that the Pharisees and Herodians tried to catch Jesus on, that He was teaching against the Roman emperor (Mark 12:13-17). The mob is claiming that Paul wants to replace the Roman emperor with another king, Jesus. Paul had certainly preached about a heavenly, spiritual kingdom, with Christ at the head, but the Jews were quick to seize upon this language as being treasonous.

Also, Pontius Pilate was forced to hold on to the Lord when he really wanted to let him go, because Jesus was accused by the Jews of making himself a king in opposition to Caesar.

**John 19:12,** And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend: whosoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.

#### Acts 17:1

**And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.**

The mob continued to agitate the rulers and the people still more; the leaders could not ignore a charge of treason. Also, they had no way to disprove the claim, since Paul and Silas were not present. In a free city like Thessalonica, there was always a dread of doing anything which would give the Romans an excuse to take away the privileges of free citizenship they had been granted.

#### Acts 17:9

**And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the others, they let them go.**

Jason and the other believers were released; the Greek wording indicates that they posted bond. The charge was serious, but the proof was slim, being presented only by an angry mob.

Jason's final release may have been contingent on his being able to persuade the disciples to leave town. At least no one was cast in prison or flogged, and they could go about their business.

#### Proselyte

A proselyte was any non-Jew who lived among the Jews.

The word "proselyte" is from the Greek **proseilutos**, a "stranger" or "foreigner", a person who has come from his own people to live in a new country, with people of another culture.

Among the people who lives among the Jews, all of those who were not descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, were known as "strangers," or "proselytes." The Jews recognizes two types of proselytes, the "proselytes of the gate" and the "proselytes of the covenant."

The "proselytes of the gate" were people who wanted to live among the Jews but who would not submit to circumcision. However, they usually acknowledged Jehovah as the true God, avoided idolatry; but they were not obliged to observe any of the Mosaic institutions. They were not allowed to eat the Passover or partake of any of the sacred festivals.

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The “proselytes of the covenant” adopted the Jewish religion completely, even agreeing to follow the rite of circumcision, observe all the ceremonies of the Law. In fact, they were no different from the Jews in their culture and practice, except that they had once been “heathen,” or gentile. They had the same rights, spiritual and secular, as the Jews themselves.

**“Grecians”**

The word “Greece” is from the Latin *Graeci*, the name given to them by the Romans, who applied to the whole people the name of the first tribe the Romans came across, the *Graioi*, a Boeotian tribe that took part in the colonization of Cyme in Italy.

The various Greek communities referred to themselves by the name Hellenes; they called their country Hellas, and their language the Hellenic language [‘h ‘el l h n i k i g l o s s a]. Even today, the Greeks use these names, and the official name for Greece is “The Hellenic Republic” [HELLINIKI DIMOKRATIA]. A Greek person, then, is a Hellene.

**(NAS: Hellenists)** from Ἕλληνιστοῦ The Revised Version says “Grecian Jews,” because “Grecians,” in English, might be thought to mean Gentile Greeks. In the NAS, “Hellenists” means Jews.

The word **Hellenist** refers to a Jew, not a Greek, who comes from outside Palestine, from such areas of Greek influence like Alexandria or Cyrenia (coast of Libya). The contact of Jews with Greeks first began when Alexander forcibly settled 8,000 Jews in Egypt, in the Nile delta, where they formed a large part of his new city, Alexandria. From Egypt the Jews gradually spread along the whole North African coast. Jews were also removed by Seleucus Nicator, from Babylonia to Antioch and Seleucia, and under various persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes and other Greek rulers, scattered themselves through Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, and the Greek islands of the Aegean.

The majority adopted the Greek language, and many forgot the Aramaic dialect which had been the Jews’ language since their captivity.

**“Hebrews”**

Any man was a **Jew** [i oujdi ao~] who could trace his descent from Jacob. The word “Jew” is a racial identity.

A **Hebrew** was a Jew who spoke Hebrew and retained Hebrew customs, following the ancient religion closely.

The Hebrews whose families had come from Aram were called **Arameans**. This word refers to Aram, or Padan-Aram, the district of Mesopotamia surrounding the city of Haran, and the territory included the city of Damascus. Aram was the 5<sup>th</sup> son of Shem, Noah’s oldest son; Haran was the elder son of Terah and Abraham’s brother; he was the father of Lot. The Jews from these areas spoke Aramaic (Assyrian), as did the Palestinian Jews of the time of Christ. Parts of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, and Jesus spoke Aramaic.

Note: King Ahab fought against Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, whose capital was Damascus.

The distinction between a Hebrew and a Hellenist was a distinction within the Jewish nation, not between the Jews and other nations. Paul calls himself a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” that is, a Hebrew and of Hebrew parents, speaking Hebrew and following Hebrew customs.

In this verse, both Hebrews and Hellenists are Christian believers, but there is still the line of cleavage between the two groups, which had the potential for conflict.

A **Hellenizer** was a Jew who followed Greek philosophy and culture instead of the Jewish religion and practices.

**Thessalonica**

From [Thessalonica](#), an article in Wikipedia.

Thessaloniki (Greek: Θεσσαλονίκη), historically also known as Thessalonica, or Salonika, is the second-largest city in Greece and the capital of the periphery of Central Macedonia as well as

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the de facto administrative capital of the Greek regions of Macedonia and Thrace.

The city was founded around 315 BC by the King Cassander of Macedon, on or near the site of the ancient town of Therma and 26 other local villages. He named it after his wife Thessalonike, a half-sister of Alexander the Great (Thessalo-nikē meaning "Thessalian Victory") (See Battle of Crocus field). Under the kingdom of Macedon the city retained its own autonomy and parliament.

After the fall of the kingdom of Macedon in 168 BC, Thessalonica became a city of the Roman Republic. It grew to be an important trade-hub located on the Via Egnatia, the road connecting Dyrrhachium and Constantinople which facilitated trade between Europe and Asia. The city became the capital of one of the four Roman districts of Macedonia. Later, and because of the city's importance in the Balkan peninsula, it became the capital of all the Greek provinces of the Roman Empire. In 379 when the Roman Prefecture of Illyricum was divided between the East and West Roman Empires, Thessaloniki became the capital of the new Prefecture of Illyricum.

**From an article in the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.**

Thessalonica, the second city in Europe to hear the preaching voice of St. Paul, and probably the first church to receive an epistle from him, is now called Salonika. Situated on the great Northern Military Highway from Italy to the East (known as the Egnatian way), it was a strategic commercial and military center in Paul's day. It is still the main street of the modern city.

Luke tells us, in the original Greek version of Acts 17:6,8, that the magistrates or rulers of the city were called Politarchs. For many years modern critical scholars pointed out that this term or title was not found in all Greek literature, and therefore Luke had made a mistake in using it.

Later, however, the title was found inscribed in various ruins in Thessalonica, the most

prominent of which was on the arch of Vardar Gate, which spanned the Egnatian Way, at the west entrance of the city. The inscription runs, in part, as follows:

In the time of Politarchs, Sosipatros, son of Cleopatra, and Lucius Pontius Secundus Publius Flavius Sabinus, Demetrius, son of Faustus, Demetrius of Nicopolis, Zoilos, son of Parmenio, and Meniscus Gaius Agilleius Poteitus ...

Thus is named the six city officials who were head of the "peoples assembly."

Paul and Luke certainly passed through this gateway and noted the inscription with interest. Thus, Luke wrote quite correctly of the magistrates – calling them by the title which was apparently used only in that section of the country.

The arch was torn down during a riot in 1876, after which the inscription was acquired by the British; and it is now in the British Museum. Once again archaeology verified the correctness of the Scriptural account.

**The following is from "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul," by W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson**

The Apostolic city at which we are now arrived was known in the earliest periods of its history under various names. Under that of Therma it is associated with some interesting recollections. It was the resting place of Xerxes on his march; it is not unmentioned in the Peloponnesian war; and it was a frequent subject of debate in the last independent assemblies of Athens. When the Macedonian power began to overshadow all the countries where Greek was spoken, this city received its new name, and began a new and more distinguished period of its history. A sister of Alexander the Great was called Thessalonica, and her name was given to the city of Therma, when rebuilt and embellished by her husband, Cassander the son of Antipater. This name, under a form slightly modified, has continued to the present day.

The Salneck of the early German poets has become the Salo of the modern Levant. Its

history can be followed as continuously as its name. When Macedonia was partitioned into four provincial divisions by Paulus Amilius, Thessalonica was the capital, of that which lay between the Agius and the Strymon. When the four regions were united into one Roman province, this city was chosen as the metropolis of the whole. Its name appears more than once in the annals of the Civil Wars. It was the scene of the exile of Cicero; and one of the stages of his journey between Rome and his province in the East. Antony and Octavius were here after the battle of Philippi: and coins are still extant which allude to the "freedom" granted by the victorious leaders to the city of the Thermaic gulf. Strabo, in the first century, speaks of Thessalonica as the most populous town in Macedonia. Lucian, in the second century, uses similar language.

Before the founding of Constantinople, it was virtually the capital of Greece and Illyricum, as well as of Macedonia, and shared the trade of the Aegean with Ephesus and Corinth. Even after the Eastern Rome was built and reigned over the Levant, we find both Pagan and Christian writers speaking of Thessalonica as the metropolis of Macedonia and a place of great magnitude. Through the Middle Ages it never ceased to be important: and it is, at the present day, the second city in European Turkey. The reason of this continued preeminence is to be found in its geographical position. Situated on the inner bend of the Thermaic Gulf, half way between the Adriatic and the Hellespont, on the sea margin of a vast plain watered by several rivers, and at the entrance of the pass which commands the approach to the other great Macedonian level, it was evidently destined for a mercantile emporium. Its relation with the inland trade of Macedonia was as close as that of Amphipolis; and its maritime advantages were perhaps even greater.

Thus, while Amphipolis decayed under the Byzantine emperors, Thessalonica, continued to prosper. There probably never was a time, from the day when it first received its name, that this

city has not had the aspect of a busy commercial town. We see at once how appropriate a place it was for one of the starting points of the Gospel in Europe; and we can appreciate the force of the expression used by St. Paul within a few months of his departure from the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:8), when he says, that "from them the Word of the Lord had sounded forth like a trumpet, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place"

No city, which we have yet had occasion to describe, has had so distinguished a Christian history, with the single exception of the Syrian Antioch; and the Christian glory of the Patriarchal city gradually faded before that of the Macedonian metropolis. The heroic age of Thessalonica was the third century. It was the bulwark of Constantinople in the shock of the barbarians; and it held up the torch of the truth to the successive tribes who overspread the country between the Danube and the Aegean, the Goths and the Slavs, the Bulgarians of the Greek Church, and the Wallachians, whose language still seems to connect them with Philippi and the Roman colonies. Thus, in the medieval chronicles, it has deserved the name of "the Orthodox City." The remains of its Hippodrome, which is for ever associated with the history of Theodosius and Ambrose," can yet be traced among the Turkish houses.

Its bishops have sat in great councils.<sup>3</sup> The writings of its great preacher and scholar Eustathius (12<sup>th</sup> Century) are still preserved to us. It is true that the Christianity of Thessalonica, both medieval and modern, has been debased by humiliating superstition. The glory of its patron saint, Demetrius, has eclipsed that of St. Paul, the founder of its Church. But the same Divine Providence, which causes us to be thankful for the past, commands us to be hopeful for the future; and we may look forward to the time when a new harvest of the

<sup>3</sup> We find the bishop of Thessalonica in the Council of Sardis, AD 347; and a decree of the Council relates to the place.

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work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope," shall spring up from the seeds of Divine Truth, which were first sown on the shore of the Thermaic Gulf by the Apostle of the Gentiles.

If Thessalonica can boast of a series of Christian annals, unbroken since the day of St. Paul's arrival, its relations with the Jewish people have continued for a still longer period. In our own day it contains a multitude of Jews commanding an influential position, many of whom are occupied (not very differently from St. Paul himself) in the manufacture of cloth. A considerable number of them are refugees from Spain, and speak the Spanish language. There are materials for tracing similar settlements of the same scattered and persecuted people in this city, at intervals, during the Middle Ages; and even before the destruction of Jerusalem we find them here, numerous and influential, as at Antioch and Iconium. Here, doubtless, was the chief colony of those Jews of Macedonia of whom Philo speaks; for while there was only a Proseucha at Philippi, and while Amphipolis and Apollonia had no Israelite communities to detain the Apostles, "the synagogue" of the neighborhood was at Thessalonica.

The first scene to which we are introduced in this city is entirely Jewish. It is not a small meeting of proselyte women by the river side, but a crowded assembly of true born Jews, intent on their religious worship, among whom Paul and Silas now make their appearance. If the traces of their recent hardships were manifest in their very aspect, and if they related to their Israelitish brethren how they had "suffered before and been cruelly treated at Philippi" (1 Thess. 2:2), their entrance in among them must have created a strong impression of indignation and sympathy, which explains the allusion in St. Paul's Epistle.

He spoke, however, to the Thessalonian Jews with the earnestness of a man who has no time to lose and no thought to waste on his own sufferings. He preached not himself but Christ crucified. The Jewish Scriptures were the ground of his argument. He recurred to the same subject again and again. On three

successive Sabbaths (Acts 17:2) he argued with them; and the whole body of Jews resident in Thessalonica were interested and excited with the new doctrine, and were preparing either to adopt or oppose it.

The three points on which he insisted were these: that He who was foretold in prophecy was to be a suffering Messiah; that after death He was to rise again; and that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah who was to come. Such is the distinct and concise statement in the Acts of the Apostles (17:3): and the same topics of teaching are implied in the first Epistle, where the Thessalonians are appealed to as men who had been taught to "believe that Jesus had really died and risen again" (4:14), and who had turned to serve the true God, "and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus" (1:10).

Of the mode in which these subjects would be presented to his hearers we can form some idea from what was said at Antioch in Pisidia. The very aspect of the worshippers was the same; proselytes were equally attached to the congregations in Pisidia and Macedonia, and the "devout and honorable women" in one city found their parallel in the "chief women" in the other. (cp. Acts 13:50 with 17:4) The impression, too, produced by the address was not very different here from what it had been there. At first it was favorably received (Acts 17:4 compared with 13:42-44), the interest of novelty having more influence than the seriousness of conviction. Even from the first some of the topics must have contained matter for perplexity or caviling. Many would be indisposed to believe the fact of Christ's resurrection: and many more who, in their exile from Jerusalem, were looking intently for the restoration of an earthly kingdom, must have heard incredulously and unwillingly of the humiliation of Messiah.

That St. Paul did speak of Messiah's glorious kingdom, the kingdom foretold in the Prophetic Scriptures themselves, may be gathered by comparing together the Acts and the Epistles to

the Thessalonians. The accusation brought against him (Acts 17:7) was, that he was proclaiming another king, and virtually rebelling against the Emperor. And in strict conformity to this the Thessalonians are reminded of the exhortations and entreaties he gave them, when among them, that they would "walk worthily of the God who had called them to His kingdom and glory" (1. Thess. 2:12) and they are addressed as those who had "suffered affliction for the sake of that kingdom" (2 Thess. 1:5).

Indeed, the royal state of Christ's second advent was one chief topic which was urgently enforced, and deeply impressed, on the minds of the Thessalonian converts. This subject tinges the whole atmosphere through which the aspect of this church is presented to us. It may be said that in each of the primitive churches, which are depicted in the Apostolic Epistles, there is some peculiar feature which gives it an individual character.

In Corinth it is the spirit of party (1 Cor. 1:10), in Galatia the rapid decline into Judaism (Gal. 1:6 ff), in Philippi it is a steady and self denying generosity (Phil. 4:10 16). And if we were asked for the distinguishing characteristic of the first Christians of Thessalonica, we should point to their overwhelming sense of the nearness of the second advent, accompanied with melancholy thoughts concerning those who might die before it, and with gloomy and unpractical views of the shortness of life and the vanity of the world.

Each chapter in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians ends with an allusion to this subject; and it was evidently the topic of frequent conversations when the Apostle was in Macedonia. But St. Paul never spoke or wrote of the future as though the present was to be forgotten. When the Thessalonians were admonished of Christ's advent, he told them also of other coming events, full of practical warning to all ages, though to our eyes still they are shrouded in mystery, of "the falling away," and of "the man of sin." "These awful revelations," he said, "must precede the

revelation of the Son of God. Do you not remember," he adds with emphasis in his letter, "that when I was still with you I often told you this? You know, therefore, the hindrance why he is not revealed, as he will be in his own season."

He told them, in the words of Christ himself, that "the times and the seasons" of the coming revelations were known only to God: and he warned them, as the first disciples had been warned in Judea, that the great day would come suddenly on men unprepared, "as the pangs of travail on her whose time is full," and as a thief in the night; and he showed them, by precept and example, that, though it be true that life is short and the world is vanity, yet God's work must be done diligently and to the last.

The whole demeanor of St. Paul among the Thessalonians may be traced, by means of these Epistles, with singular minuteness. We see there, not only what success he had on his first entrance among them, not only how the Gospel came "with power and with full conviction of its truth," but also "what manner of man he was among them for their sakes." We see him proclaiming the truth with unflinching courage, endeavoring to win no converts by flattering words, but warning his hearers of all the danger of the sins and pollution to which they were tempted; manifestly showing that his work was not intended to gratify any desire of self advancement, but scrupulously maintaining an honorable and unblameable character. We see him rebuking and admonishing his converts with all the faithfulness of a father to his children, and cherishing them with all the affection of a mother for the infant of her bosom. We see in this Apostle at Thessalonica all the devotion of a friend who is ready to devote his life for those whom he loves, "all the watchfulness of the faithful pastor, to whom "each one" of his flock is the separate object of individual care.

And from these Epistles we obtain further some information concerning what may be called the outward incidents of St. Paul's residence in this city. He might when there, consistently with the

Lord's institution and with the practice of the other Apostles," have been" burdensome" to those whom he taught, so as to receive from them the means of his temporal support. But that he might place his disinterestedness above all suspicion, and that he might set an example to those who were too much inclined to live by the labor of others, he declined to avail himself of that which was an undoubted right.

He was enabled to maintain this independent position partly by the liberality of his friends at Philippi, who once and again, on this first visit to Macedonia, sent relief to his necessities (Phil. 4:15,16). And the journeys of those pious men who followed the footsteps of the persecuted Apostles along the Via Egnatia by Amphipolis and Apollonia, bringing the alms which had been collected at Philippi, are among the most touching incidents of the Apostolic history. And not less touching is that description which Paul himself gives us of that other means of support his own labor night and day, that he might not be burdensome to any of them (1 Thess. 2:9).

He did not "rob other churches," that he might do the Thessalonians service, but the trade he had learnt when a boy in Cilicia justified the old Jewish maxim; "he was like a vineyard that is fenced;" and he was able to show an example, not only to the "disorderly busybodies" of Thessalonica (1 Thess. 4:11), but to all, in every age of the Church, who are apt to neglect their proper business (2 Thess. 3:11), and ready to eat other men's bread for nought (2 Thess. 3:8). Late at night, when the sun had long set on the incessant spiritual labors of the day, the Apostle might be seen by lamp light laboring at the rough hair cloth," that he might be chargeable to none." It was an emphatic enforcement of the "commands" which he found it necessary to give when he was among them, that they should "study to be quiet, and to work with their own hands" (1 Thess. 4:11), and the stern principle he laid down, that "if a man will not work, neither should he eat." (2 Thess. 3:10)

In these same Epistles, St. Paul speaks of his work at Thessalonica as having been encompassed with afflictions, and of the Gospel

as having advanced by a painful struggle. What these afflictions and struggles were, we can gather from the slight notices of events which are contained in the Acts. The Apostle's success among the Gentiles roused the enmity of his own countrymen. Even in the synagogue the Proselytes attached themselves to him more readily than the Jews. But he did not merely obtain an influence over the Gentile mind by the indirect means of his disputations on the Sabbath in the synagogue, and through the medium of the Proselytes ; but on the intermediate days he was doubtless in frequent and direct communication with the Heathen. We need not be surprised at the results, even if his stay was limited to the period corresponding to three Sabbaths. No one can say what effects might follow from three weeks of an Apostle's teaching. But we are by no means forced to adopt the supposition that the time was limited to three weeks.

It is highly probable that Paul remained at Thessalonica for a longer period." At other cities, when he was repelled by the Jews, he became the evangelist of the Gentiles, and remained till he was compelled to depart. The Thessalonian Letters throw great light on the rupture which certainly took place with the Jews on this occasion, and which is implied in that one word in the Acts which speaks of their jealousy against the Gentiles.

The whole aspect of the Letters shows that the main body of the Thessalonian Church was not Jewish, but Gentile. The Jews are spoken of as an extraneous body, as the enemies of Christianity and of all men, not as the elements out of which the Church was composed. The ancient Jewish Scriptures are not once quoted in either of these Epistles. The converts are addressed as those who had turned, not from Hebrew fables and traditions, but from the practices of Heathen idolatry. How new and how comforting to them must have been the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead.

What a contrast must this revelation of "life and immortality" have been to the hopeless lamentations of their own pagan funerals, and

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to the dismal teaching which we can still read in the sepulchral inscriptions of Heathen Thessalonica, such as told the bystander that after death there is no revival, after the grave no meeting of those who have loved each other on earth. How ought the truth taught by the Apostle to have comforted the new disciples at the thought of inevitable, though only temporary, separation from their Christian brethren. And yet how difficult was the truth to realize, when they saw those brethren sink into lifeless forms, and after they had committed them to the earth which had received all their heathen ancestors. How eagerly can we imagine them to have read the new assurances of comfort which came in the letter from Corinth, and which told them `not to sorrow like other men who have no hope”

But we are anticipating the events which occurred between the Apostle's departure from Thessalonica and the time when he wrote the letter from Corinth. We must return to the persecution that led him to undertake that journey, which brought him from the capital of Macedonia to that of Achaia.

When the Jews saw Proselytes and Gentiles, and many of the leading women of the city, convinced by St. Paul's teaching, they must have felt that his influence was silently undermining theirs. In proportion to his success in spreading Christianity, their power of spreading Judaism declined. Their sensitiveness would be increased in consequence of the peculiar dislike with which they were viewed at this time by the Roman power. Thus they adopted the tactics which had been used with some success before at Iconium and Lystra (Acts 14), and turned against St. Paul and his companions those weapons which are the readiest instruments of vulgar bigotry.

They excited the mob of Thessalonica, gathering together a multitude of those worthless idlers about the markets and landing places which abound in every such city, and are always ready for any evil work. With this multitude they assaulted the house of Jason (perhaps some Hellenistic Jew, whose name had been molded

into Gentile form, and possibly one of St. Paul's relations, who is mentioned in Romans 16:21), with whom Paul and Silas seem to have been lodging. Their wish was to bring Paul and Silas out to the demos, or assembly of the people. But they were absent from the house; and Jason and some other Christians were dragged before the city magistrates.

The accusation vociferously brought against them was to the following effect:” These Christians, who are setting the whole world in confusion, are come hither at last; and Jason has received them into his house; and they are all acting in the face of the Emperor's decrees, for they assert that there is another king, whom they call Jesus.” We have seen how some of the parts of St. Paul's teaching at Thessalonica may have given occasion to the latter phrase in this indictment; and we obtain a deeper insight into the cause why the whole indictment was brought forward with so much vehemence, and why it was so likely to produce an effect on the magistrates, if we bear in mind the circumstance alluded to in reference to Philippi, that the Jews were under the ban of the Roman authorities about this time, for having raised a tumult in the metropolis, at the instigation (as was alleged) of one Chrestus, or Christus; and that they must have been glad, in the provincial cities, to be able to show their loyalty and gratify their malice, by throwing the odium off themselves upon a sect whose very name might be interpreted to imply a rebellion against the Emperor.

Such were the circumstances under which Jason and his companions were brought before the politarchs. We use the Greek term advisedly; for it illustrates the political constitution of Thessalonica, and its contrast with that of Philippi, which has lately been noticed. Thessalonica was not a colony, like Philippi, Troas, or the Pisidian Antioch, but a free city (*Urbs libera*), like the Syrian Antioch, or like Tarsus and Athens. The privilege of what was technically called” freedom” was given to certain cities of the Empire for good service in the Civil Wars, or as a tribute of respect to the

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old celebrity of the place, or for other reasons of convenient policy. There were few such cities in the western provinces, as there were no municipia in the eastern. The free towns were most numerous in those parts of the Empire where the Greek language had long prevailed ; and we are generally able to trace the reasons why this privilege was bestowed upon them. At Athens it was the fame of its ancient eminence, and the evident policy of paying a compliment to the Greeks. At Thessalonica it was the part which its inhabitants had prudently taken in the great struggle of Augustus and Antony against Brutus and Cassius. When the decisive battle had been fought, Philippi was made a military colony, and Thessalonica became free.

The privilege of such a city consisted in this, that it was entirely self governed in all its internal affairs, within the territory that might be assigned to it. The governor of the province had no right, under ordinary circumstances, to interfere with these affairs. The local magistrates had the power of life and death over the citizens of the place. No stationary garrison of Roman soldiers was quartered within its territory. No insignia of Roman office were displayed in its streets. An instance of the care with which this rule was observed is recorded by Tacitus, who tells us, that Germanicus, whose progress was usually distinguished by the presence of twelve lictors, declined to enter Athens attended with more than one. There is no doubt that the magistracies of such cities would be very careful to show their loyalty to the Emperor on all suitable occasions, and to avoid every disorder which might compromise their valued dignity, and cause it to be withdrawn. And on the other hand, the Roman State did wisely to rely on the Greek love of empty distinction; and it secured its dominion as effectually in the East by means of these privileged towns, as by the stricter political annexation of the municipia in the West.

The form of government in the free cities was very various. In some cases the old magistracies and customs were continued without any

material modification. In others, a senate, or an assembly, was allowed to exist where none had existed before. Here, at Thessalonica, we find an assembly of the people (Acts 17:5) and supreme magistrates, who are called politarchs (Acts 17:8). It becomes an interesting inquiry, whether the existence of this title of the Thessalonian magistracy can be traced in any other source of information. This question is immediately answered in the affirmative, by one of those passages of monumental history which we have made it our business to cite as often as possible in the course of this biography. An inscription which is still legible on an archway in Thessalonica gives this title to the magistrates of the place, informs us of their number, and mentions the very names of some who bore the office not long before the day of St. Paul.

A long street intersects the city from east to west. This is doubtless the very direction which the ancient road took in its course from the Adriatic to the Hellespont ; for though the houses of ancient cities are destroyed and renewed, the lines of the great thoroughfares are usually unchanged. If there were any doubt of the fact at Thessalonica, the question is set at rest by two triumphal arches which still, though disfigured by time and injury, and partly concealed by Turkish houses, span the breadth of this street, and define a space which must have been one of the public parts of the city in the apostolic age. One of these arches is at the western extremity, near the entrance from Rome, and is thought to have been built by the grateful Thessalonians to commemorate the victory of Augustus and Antony.

The other is further to the east, and records the triumph of some later emperor (most probably Constantine) over enemies subdued near the Danube or beyond. The second of these arches, with its sculptured camels, has altogether an Asiatic aspect, and belongs to a period of the Empire much later than that of St. Paul. The first has the representation of consuls with the toga, and corresponds in appearance with that

condition of the arts which marks the passing of the Republic into the Empire.

If erected at that epoch, it was undoubtedly existing when the Apostle was in Macedonia. The inscription in Greek letters, is engraved on this arch of marble," and informs us still of the magistracy which the Romans recognized and allowed to subsist in the "free city" of Thessalonica. We learn from this source that the magistrates of the city were called politarchs, and that they were seven in number; and it is perhaps worth observing (though it is only a curious coincidence) that three of the names are identical with three of St. Paul's friends in this region, Sopater of Berea, Gaius the Macedonian, and Secundus of Thessalonica.

It is at least well worth our while to notice, as a mere matter of Christian evidence, how accurately St. Luke writes concerning the political characteristics of the cities and provinces which he mentions. He takes notice in the most artless and incidental manner, of minute details which a fraudulent composer would judiciously avoid, and which in the mythical result of mere oral tradition would surely be loose and inexact. Cyprus is a proconsular province. Philippi is a "colony." The magistrates of Thessalonica have an unusual title, unmentioned in ancient literature; but it appears. from a monument of a different kind, that the title is perfectly correct. And the whole aspect of what happened at Thessalonica, as compared with the events at Philippi, is in perfect harmony with the ascertained difference in the political condition of the two places.

There is no mention of the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship; but we are presented with the spectacle of a mixed mob of Greeks and Jews, who are anxious to show themselves to be "Caesar's friends. No lictors, with rods and fasces, appear upon the scene; but we hear something distinctly of a demus, or free assembly of the people. Nothing is said of religious ceremonies which the citizens," being Romans," may not lawfully adopt; all the anxiety, both of people and magistrates, is

turned to the one point of showing their loyalty to the Emperor. And those magistrates by whom the question at issue is ultimately decided, are not Roman praetors but Greek politarchs.

It is evident that the magistrates were excited and unsettled as well as the multitude. No doubt they were anxious to stand well with the Roman Government, and not to compromise themselves or the privileges of their city by a wrong decision in this dispute between the Christians and the Jews. The course they adopted was to "take security" from Jason and his companions. By this expression (Acts 17:9) it is most probably meant that a sum of money was deposited with the magistrates, and that the Christian community of the place made themselves responsible that no attempt should be made against the supremacy of Rome, and that peace should be maintained in Thessalonica itself. By these means the disturbance was allayed.

But though the magistrates had secured quiet in the city for the present, the position of Paul and Silas was very precarious. The lower classes were still excited. The Jews were in a state of fanatical displeasure. It is evident that the Apostles could not appear in public as before, without endangering their own safety, and compromising their fellow Christians who were security for their good behavior.

The alternatives before them were, either silence in Thessalonica, or departure to some other place. The first was impossible to those who bore the divine commission to preach the Gospel everywhere. They could not hesitate to adopt the second course; and, under the watchful care of "the brethren," they departed the same evening from Thessalonica, their steps being turned in the direction of those mountains which are the western boundary of Macedonia. We observe that nothing is said of the departure of Timothy.

If he was at Thessalonica at all, he stays there now, as Luke had stayed at Philippi. We can trace in all these arrangements a deliberate

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care and policy for the well being of the new Churches, even in the midst of the sudden movements caused by the outbreak of persecution. It is the same prudent and varied forethought which appears afterwards in the pastoral Epistles, where injunctions are given, according to circumstances, to "abide" while the Apostle goes to some other regions (1 Tim. 1:3) "hoping that he may come shortly" again (1 Tim. 3:14), to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders," (Tit. 1:5) or "to use all diligence" to follow and co operate again in the same work at some new place.

Passing under the Arch of Augustus and out of the Western Gate, the Via Egnatia crosses the plain and ascends the mountains which have just been mentioned, forming a communication over a very rugged country between the Hellespont and the Adriatic.