

## Persuasion and Persecution at Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-9

Sunday, May 8, 2011.

### I. Leaving Philippi.

- A. Honoring the request of the civil rulers of Philippi the apostles leave that city, but they do not do so until they have had an opportunity to meet once more with the newly formed church at the home of Lydia for the purpose of exhorting and encouraging them, and to commend them to the grace of God.
- B. Leaving Philippi they travel South-West toward Thessalonica; a distance about equal to that between New York City and Philadelphia. It would have been a three day journey on foot along a well traveled Roman highway, the Via Egnatia.
- C. Along the way they would pass the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia where they no doubt spent the night but otherwise would not linger there. Thessalonica had a sizable Jewish population and a synagogue, perhaps implying that Amphipolis and Apollonia did not. Thessalonica also was the regional capital city.
- D. The church that would be founded in Thessalonica was particularly dear to the Apostle Paul, as is evident from his two letters to this congregation.
  1. The gospel came among the Thessalonians, not only in word, but with power; with the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance in the hearts of the believers. 1 Thess. 1:5.
  2. They received the word of the Lord in the context of much affliction. 1:6.
  3. They became examples to all other churches around. 1:7
  4. From them the word of the Lord sounded forth throughout the entire surrounding region. 1:8.
  5. The apostles cherished them as a mother cherishes her nursing children. 2:7.
  6. The apostles imparted to them not only the gospel, but also their own lives. 2:8.
  7. The apostles speak of them as their hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. 2:19.
  8. They sent Timothy back to them to check up on them because of the intense longing they had for them. 3:1,2,5.
  9. They were a great source of comfort to the apostles. 3:7.
  10. The apostles longed intensely to see them again. 3:6,10,11.
  11. The Thessalonians excelled in love toward one another and had no need to be taught regarding this. 4:9,10.
  12. By the time the apostle writes 2 Thess. he is able to speak of the exceeding growth in the faith and love of the Thessalonian church, and how they had become a source of boasting for the apostles because of their patience and faith in the midst of much persecution and tribulation. 2 Thess.1:3,4.

### II. Persuasion at Thessalonica.

- A. Persuasion that the Christ had to suffer.
  1. Persuasion was necessary in this area, for the Jews were not expecting the Messiah, when He came, to come as a suffering servant. They were looking for political deliverance.
  2. When the risen Christ joined Himself to two of His disciples as they walked on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, these disciples confide in Him how

they had hoped that it would have been Jesus who would have redeemed Israel from its enemies. Luke 24:21.

3. The Lord opened the Scriptures to them, and their understanding, so they might see how the Christ had to suffer, and so enter into His glory.
4. The Apostle Paul, and the Lord Himself might have done so from passages like Psalm 16 and Isaiah 53, and from the entire OT sacrificial system as the book of Hebrews labors to do, and from the lives of men like Joseph and Moses as Stephen does before his stoning.
5. Not only the Scriptures necessitated the sufferings of the Christ; they were necessary to purchase our redemption out of the slave market of sin. They were necessary to reconcile us to God. They were necessary to meet the righteous demands of God's holy law.

Application:

We may not stand in need of persuasion of the necessity of Christ's sufferings because of a faulty Messianic expectation, but we do need to be persuaded of this because of the sinfulness of our own hearts. There is no other remedy for our hearts; no other freedom from guilt, other than the sufferings Christ endured in our behalf. Have you come to this persuasion and made it the sure ground of your assurance?

B. Persuasion that the Christ had to rise again from the dead.

1. If the Christ had to suffer to purchase redemption for His people, then He had to rise again to apply that redemption to their hearts, and to draw them to Himself.
2. A dead Savior can save no one; by His resurrection Christ became our living Prophet, Priest, and King, and the Great Shepherd of His sheep.
3. "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by His life?" Romans 5:10.

Application:

Is your faith in, and are you looking to, do you have dealings with Christ as the living risen Lord in terms of your salvation, and your walk with Him?

### III. Persecution at Thessalonica.

- A. Once again the Jews become envious of Paul and company for attracting many of the God-fearing gentiles to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. They instigate an uproar once again; charging that the apostles teach about another king – Jesus. True as this is, yet King Jesus would teach us to obey and respect our earthly rulers as much as possible.
- C. The civil rulers of Thessalonica are much more cautious than those in Philippi (Had they heard from them?) They ask Jason and the Christian brothers to post a bond to guarantee civil order, and they release them. Yet any further public ministry on the part of the apostles becomes impossible and they move on.

Application:

Why be angry with God, or with His servants, for giving to others what you don't want? Sometimes we encounter this anger as a reaction to the teaching on election, but it is certainly not absent in other areas of life as the Jews demonstrate here.