

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

A LOOK AT THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 17: 1 - 15

The journey continues.

Having left the believers in Philippi following their release from jail, Paul and Silas travel across northern Greece to Thessalonica and Berea. The narrative is now back in the third person, suggesting that Luke has remained in Philippi, perhaps to lead and strengthen the church there.

It's about 100 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica, and a further 50 to Berea. So it's another good walk for the apostles.

They appear to have had a mixed reaction in these towns. In Thessalonica, we see Paul reasoning from the scriptures – showing how Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, identifying him with the Christ of Scripture.

But the Gospel message always produces a reaction. We see a divided response to Paul's preaching. Some people believe, but Paul and Silas are attacked on two fronts. They are accused of rejecting Judaism and defying Caesar. Some of the Jews who reject this new teaching stir up some non-believing Gentiles. We're told that jealousy is the prime cause of their dissent. They set off a riot, claiming that the missionaries have caused trouble, i.e. treason. It is probable that a legal ban was put on Paul, so that he could never again visit Thessalonica.

Nevertheless, Paul's letters to the Thessalonians suggests that he made some strong converts here, left a committed church behind him, and continued to hold them in great affection. 1 Thessalonians 1 praises them for their faith and commitment. (1 Thess 1:7 'You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.')

The apostles' time in Berea seems to have been profitable. We read that the Bereans had 'more noble character than the Thessalonians', and were more willing to give the apostles a hearing. They received the message, and took the time to study the scriptures to authenticate what he was saying.

Unfortunately, the hostility from Thessalonica followed them, forcing them out of the town, and onwards to Athens.

We must note Paul technique. He used scripture intensively. He always sought to substantiate his arguments. This reminds us of the important distinction between doctrine and indoctrination. Paul wanted his hearers to think, and to be convinced about the truth of his arguments. Nowhere does he call for his followers to accept his arguments without the justification of scripture. He wanted them to examine the faith for themselves and come to a firm belief.

So in these episodes in Thessalonica and Berea, we see a combination of three elements at work in the spread of the gospel: prayer, teaching, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.