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THE MOB IN THESSALONICA AND THE GREAT REVIVAL
IN BEREA

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 70
ACTS 17:4-15

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ACTS 17:4-15 "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. 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. 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. 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. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 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. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. 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. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed."

In our last study we left Paul and Silas in Thessalonica. Paul's custom was to go to the Jews first. You remember Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, but also to the Greek". "To the Jew first" does not mean that Christ died first for the Jew and then for the Gentile, but it simply means that the plan began with the Jews. Salvation is equally for Jews and Gentiles. Therefore in Thessalonica for three sabbaths, Paul reasoned with the Jews out of the Old Testament scriptures.

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." These Jews were religious, and they went on negative signals and they would not believe. As a result they had self-induced misery, which produced envy and jealousy and legalism. "But the Jews which believed not" is in the perfect tense and means they took a permanent stand against the gospel. They were controlled by envy and this produced jealousy and prejudice. Now envy and jealousy are just the worst mental attitude sins one can have. This phrase "Took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort" should read "Took unto them certain evil men from the market place". Now in the market place there were always those idle thugs who wouldn't work, just sitting around and waiting for trouble. These good-for-nothing kind of people can be found in most every big city today, people who will not work and want someone else to feed them. These were the people in Thessalonica who incited the mob. "Gathering a company" means to gather a rabble, or a mob. "Set the city on an uproar" is from one Greek word "Thorubeo" and means to incite a riot. They assaulted the house of Jason for they knew this was where Paul stayed. So a mob is always contrary to everything God and righteousness stand for and is an enemy of all of the four divine institutions. No matter how noble the cause, a mob and a riot is never right--never! A mob always leads to disaster. Religion always advocates this kind of method. Fortunately, they were not able to find Paul and Silas in the house of Jason. By that time, they were gone.

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 hither also;" They dragged Jason and other leaders to the rulers of the city. The word for "rulers of the city" comes from a Greek word "Polatarxes". This is one verse the liberals have really used to try to show the Bible is a book filled with errors. They say that it had been 500 years since the Romans had used "Polatarxes" in their city governments. How do we answer this apparent contradiction in scripture? In this way. Remember that Thessalonica was made a "Free City" by the Roman government. This was the highest status given to any city in the Roman Empire. Tarsus and Athens were free cities also. The city officials of Thessalonica decided to go back to an ancient form of city government that had been quite popular several hundreds of years before, and they used "Polatarxes" in their free city. About twenty-five years ago the archeologists were digging around in Thessalonica and they uncovered a great arch and on it were the names of three "Polatarxes" that are mentioned by Paul; Sopater, mentioned in Acts 20:4, and in the same verse also Gaius and Secundus. All these names are on the marble arch recently uncovered in that city. The principle I am trying to establish is this--The Bible is never wrong, and again and again the spade of the archeologist has substantiated the Bible. Please notice the result of the work of Paul and Silas. It says, "These men that have turned the world upside down". This is one of the best descriptions ever given to the effect of the gospel.

ACTS 17:7 "Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus." The words "do contrary" comes from "prasso" and means to practice. They are accusing Paul and Silas of having a practice that is contrary to Roman law. "Another" king means a king of a different kind. So these men are distorting what Paul had said. Paul never violated Roman law and all he did and said was in support of good government.

ACTS 17:8 "And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things." Any rulers who allow mob leaders to upset them are not fit to be rulers of a city. These "Polatarxes" are being influenced by the mob, and they show that they are not giving the city of Thessalonica stable leadership.

ACTS 17:9 "And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go." So they placed Jason and others under bond and let them go. These rulers realized that having a free city was the greatest thing that had ever happened to them and they are going to try to handle this delicate situation so not to reflect on their city.

The Mechanics Used In Opposing The Gospel In Thessalonica

1. Negative volition at the point of gospel hearing produces a vacuum into which is sucked mental attitude sins such as envy and jealousy. These mental attitude sins are the worst sins of all.
2. Mental attitude sins not only produce self induced misery but they lead to acts of retaliation.
3. In this instance jealousy and envy produced a mob and the mob was used to attack Paul and Silas.
4. The criterion for a mob is emotion. A mob never bases its action on thought, but always on emotion and prejudice. A classical illustration of this was the French Revolution. Remember, a mob will destroy a government if the government does not destroy the mob. In the final analysis rioting and mob violence can only be stopped by shooting those who insist on breaking the law. Another classical illustration was the National Guard at Kent State University. Some were shot, but the violence stopped.

5. Religion uses riots to disrupt good government and tries in this method to bully them into a course of action that is wrong and dishonest. Therefore, religion in our passage here, used mob action to get rid of the missionaries and the preaching of the gospel. Nothing can ever be achieved by violence. Anything that is achieved by violence will be destroyed by violence. There is no stability in a national entity that is built on violence.
6. The emotional and rioting mob acts upon the government until the government is reduced to the same emotional level.
7. Behind the scene religion hides its hypocritical face while manipulating the mob. Therefore, religion disrupts government. It is never the position of Christianity to disrupt good local government. The objective of Bible doctrine is to strengthen, improve, and by peaceful means, encourage local government. Good civil government makes it possible for evangelism and missionary activity to be carried out.

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." Here Paul and Silas left the main highway. Luke had been left in Philippi to encourage the church and Timothy had been left behind in Thessalonica, as described in 1 Timothy 3:5-6. So Paul's companions were dropped off one by one to stay and stabilize the new churches, while Paul and Silas moved on for new conquests. They moved on to Berea, which was 50 miles to the Southwest. Cicero once commented on Berea and called it an out-of-the-way place. When they arrived in Berea, they went to the Jewish Synagogue and began to explain the scripture.

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 verse has been used by so many and in so many ways, but it is a bit mistranslated. Instead of saying, "They were more noble than those in Thessalonica" the Greek says, "They were more open-minded". In other words, this language means that these Jews in Berea were more receptive to the gospel. It means that they had had positive volition when they heard the gospel. These people in Berea received the gospel with "All eagerness of mind". It means they would focus their minds on the gospel and retain what they heard. The Greek word for received is "Dechomai" and it means to receive and retain. When people go on positive signals and have positive volition then the gospel can enter their minds and really do amazing things in the lives of people. And this is exactly what happened in Berea. These people examined the Old Testament scriptures daily. They searched the scriptures, not to try to prove that Paul was wrong, but to try to realize that Paul was right. This reveals to us the wholesome attitude of these people in Berea. "Whether these things were so" should be translated, "If the scripture had it thus". The "if" is a fourth class condition and means to say, "Paul, we hope you are right and when we read the scripture, we find that you are right". So this is a far better attitude than those who have a smattering knowledge of scripture and have read a book or two and search the scripture to try to prove that you are wrong. I run into that quite often. But here in verse 11 we have met open-minded people of Berea who were searching the scripture hoping to prove that Paul was right. Of course, they were not disappointed. They would read Genesis 3:15 and say, "There it is" and they would read Isaiah 53 and they would read Psalm 22 and they would say, "There it is". So these Berean people searched the scripture diligently. They were open-minded and received and retained the scripture.

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

ere was a tremendous turning to the Lord in Berea. Naturally you would expect this after reading verse 11. The word "honourable women" actually means "women of nobility". It means women who had royal blood in them. So the moment they believed, they were saved and they had a genuine revival in Berea.

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." The religious Jews followed Paul wherever he went and they bugged him. They just couldn't let things alone but were constantly stirring up trouble. They came to Berea and began to tell these new converts in Berea things that were just opposite to the teachings of Paul. They told them they had to become Jews to be saved, that they had to keep the law to be saved, and all such things as that. These legalistic Jews were great in stirring up people.

ACTS 17:14 "And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still." These Christians who wanted to protect Paul made it appear that he left the country, but he actually moved south and headed for Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea to organize and stabilize the church.

ACT 17:15 "And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed." So Paul is alone facing the great city of Athens and in our next study we will see him alone in the greatest city of the ancient world.