

THE GOSPEL TO THE NOBLE AND TO THE MORE NOBLE.

– JULY 18. – ACTS 17:1-12. –

"They received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily." – Acts 17:11.

LEAVING Philippi at the request of the magistrates, and for the sake of peace, not insisting upon his rights as a Roman citizen, Paul with Silas and Timothy proceeded westward, leaving Luke with the believers at Philippi for the further establishment of the believers in the truth. Their next stop was at the city of Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. They were seeking cities where there were considerable numbers of Jews, knowing that they would be the best prepared to understand the gospel and to accept it. One of the attractions at Thessalonica was a large synagogue: and it was to the Jews, as usual, that the Apostle first addressed himself.

It is worthy of note that the Apostle's manner was not that of a "ranter," but of a logical and connected reasoner: his proofs were brought from the Old Testament Scriptures; and the correspondence between these testimonies concerning Messiah, given of God through the prophets, with the facts and circumstances of our Lord's ministry and death were logically set forth. And no doubt all his hearers had some knowledge of the matters which had transpired in Jerusalem; for representatives undoubtedly went every year to Jerusalem, to the Passover. The reports which reached them had no doubt all been from the prejudiced Jewish side of the matter, leading them to believe that, while Jesus was a good man who performed many wonderful works, he was nevertheless an impostor, possessed of a devil, a false Messiah, etc. The Apostle's work, then, was largely to correct these misapprehensions, and to show that the very things which they had heard respecting the ignominious death of Jesus were all parts of the divine plan, that fitted perfectly to the previous testimony of the

prophets. He proved to them that Messiah must of necessity have died as the Redeemer, before he could justly dispense divine mercy and forgiveness to any. And then, he showed that all these things had been accurately and properly fulfilled in the experiences of Jesus.

As usual, wherever the true gospel went, the result was *a division*; and the same is true to-day.

So our Lord foretold, saying, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." The sword of the spirit is the Word of God, and it not only separates in congregations, but also in homes – the Ishmael class opposes the Isaac class – the Esau class opposes the Jacob class. Many not appreciating the divine plan are surprised that the truth causes division. Such divisions along right lines are to be expected and esteemed: but the Apostle speaks of another kind of divisions which are disapproved and are to be avoided; namely, divisions on technicalities, methods, forms, genealogies, etc. The Apostle assures us that such divisions are of the adversary. But divisions as between those who accept Christ as their Redeemer and the only hope of salvation, and those who do not so accept him, are most important and to be desired. Upon all other points the Lord's people are to be peace-lovers and "peace makers." "So far as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Waive all unimportant tests and shibboleths, but in no sense or degree either ignore or deny the only basis of Christian fellowship – the "ransom for all."

The believing Jews consorted or associated with the brethren, and quite a good many Greeks, including a number of honorable women, were counted among the believers; and the cause seemed to be gaining a good foothold: but again God permitted a disturbance which brought the truth and its servants more prominently before the attention of the whole people and served to make the cleavage between the believers and **[R2183 : page 204]** the unbelievers the more distinct. Thus not only a trial of faith and of character was brought unto the believers, but a blessing came, also, to those who were faithful; for all who took

a decided stand for the truth were undoubtedly helped and strengthened thereby. The spirit of compromise with error is the most subtle and dangerous spirit encountered by those who are called to forsake all and follow Christ.

The unbelieving Jews were those who were not in proper condition of heart to receive the truth; – of the Ishmael class, they were full of envy and jealousy against the true seed of Abraham – the true heirs of the promise. They did not hesitate to employ hoodlums as their servants in creating an uproar and making a mob-assault upon the house in which they supposed Paul and Silas and Timothy were lodged. Not finding these, they took Jason and others of the new converts before their tribunal, accusing them of consorting with the disturbers of the peace. As usual, sagacity was shown in the nature of the charges; the same charge was brought forward that was brought against our Lord himself, namely, treason to Caesar – teaching of another king. Under autocratic governments, such as that of the Caesars, rulers everywhere were expected to be specially severe against any and every form of treason, and to have ignored such charges would have made them appear to be co-conspirators against Caesar. How shrewdly the adversary makes his attacks!

Since the Lord had been pleased to frustrate the plans of the enemies of the truth for the arrest of his ministers, the latter concluded that it would be the proper thing not to arouse further antagonism, nor to challenge their enemies by bringing charges of riot, etc., but rather peaceably departed for another city. In this they followed the instructions of our Lord, "When they shall persecute you in one city flee unto another." They followed the example of our Lord also, of whom we read that he left Judea and Galilee, for he "could not walk in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him."

The words of the enemies – "These that have turned the world upside-down are come hither also," indicate how wide-spread was the knowledge of the truth at this time, and how zealous the efforts of the

apostles were conceded by their enemies to be. Nor was this turning up-side-down wholly the work of the apostles: rather it was the work of the spirit of the truth, wherever the truth was preached; the apostles were merely zealous in introducing the *truth* which did the work. When they were gone, the true believers, inspired by the same spirit, continued the work of turning matters up-side-down, not only in the synagogue, but also, we may be sure, in their own hearts and in their own lives; turning out the evil and impure, and turning in more and more of the fruits and graces of the spirit of the truth. The reason that so many who receive some knowledge of the truth, know little of the turning up-side-down of the perversities of their old natures is, because they fail to receive the *spirit of the truth*, fail to come into full sympathy of heart with the principles of divine righteousness which inspired the word of truth and formulated the divine plan. Alas! many seem to receive the truth not in the *love of it*; but rather in the love of controversy or in curiosity. To such it will be of no real value. To profit us it must be received as the sword of the spirit to kill the old nature, that the new nature may develop; – it must become "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" to us, that we may by divine grace conquer self and bring every thought into captivity to the will of God.

The next stop was at Berea, sixty miles west of Thessalonica. Of the people of this city wonderful words of commendation are written, "These were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word in all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." This commendation is frequently misunderstood as applicable to the Christians at Berea; but not so, it applies specially to the Jews at that place: they seemed to be just ready for the truth, and yet received it, not in a spirit of credulity, simply because it was told to them, but properly they were ready and of a proper spirit to **[R2184 : page 204]** investigate, and to see whether the things spoken fitted to the prophetic statements respecting Messiah and his work, etc. This is always a mark of true nobility, and such noble persons are worthy of the truth and are enabled to receive it. Nevertheless, we are to remember that readiness to investigate and to

receive the truth are not the only qualities which go to make up a Christian. In one of his parables our Lord illustrates a class which was *ready to receive the Word*, but had no root in themselves, and who consequently, when the sun of persecution arose, withered and drooped and lost their Christian vitality. – Matt. 13:6,20,21.

Apparently, the larger proportion of the Jews at Berea became believers, and the unbelievers were so comparatively few that they did not attempt persecution. But whether it was from lack of persecution, or whether it was that the seed at Berea fell into hearts that had less depth, it is nevertheless a fact that the Church at Thessalonica seems to have flourished far better than the Church established at Berea. This is evidenced by the fact that the Apostle wrote two of his epistles to the Church at Thessalonica, and we have no record of any written to the Church at Berea. We may draw a lesson from this to the effect that it is not always the places in which the truth is most favorably received that it will hold out the longest and bring forth the most fruitage. Persecution and opposition are often agencies of great blessings; – in part perhaps because they draw the line of demarkation sharply between those who are the Lord's and those who are not the Lord's. A certain amount of persecution is very helpful in the establishment of character. Hence the encouragement of the Apostle to "rejoice in tribulation;" and again his declaration, "Tribulation worketh patience." Again the Apostle Peter stated that present afflictions may be considered light, because we recognize that "they work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."
