

## ST. PAUL AT THESSALONICA AND BEREIA

– JULY 2. – ACTS 17:1-15. –

METHOD OF INDOCTRINATION IN THE EARLY CHURCH – IMPORTANCE OF UNPREJUDICED STUDY OF THE BIBLE – THE RANSOM THE PIVOTAL POINT OF THE GOSPEL – THE FEW BELIEVED – THE MAJORITY EMBITTERED – THE MISSIONARIES CHARGED WITH TREASON – SLANDER EVER THE WEAPON OF ENVY AND PRIDE – GOD'S SERVANTS PERSECUTED EVER.

**"Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior." – Acts 5:31.**

LEAVING Philippi, St. Paul, Silas and Timothy went about one hundred miles to the southwest and stopped at the city of Thessalonica, the largest commercial city of Macedonia – a city now known as Salonica. En route they passed two cities, where apparently they found no opening for their Message, no hearts prepared. Philippi was one of the few cities where the Gospel made any headway before the city had first come under the influence of Judaism to some extent. Evidently the scattering of the Jews throughout this region had more or less acquainted their neighbors with the true God, the observation of His Laws and respect for His revelations and for the promised Messiah.

At Thessalonica the missionaries found a Jewish synagogue; and in harmony with their usual custom they attended worship there. For three Sabbath days they reasoned with the congregation from the Scriptures. The word rendered reasoned in Verse 2 implies a dialogue or discussion. St. Paul discussed the Bible with the Jews. The propriety of his course is evident. The Jews were familiar with the Messianic prophecies; and although making their home amongst the Gentiles, nevertheless, as the Apostle declares, they were

continually hoping for the fulfilment of the grand promises made to Abraham, confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob – the Oath-bound Covenant. – Acts 26:7; Hebrews 6:13-19.

This form of preaching the Gospel has fallen considerably into disuse amongst Christians. It is an excellent one. We have endeavored to revive it amongst the friends of Present Truth everywhere by especially commending to them the Berean Bible Studies and such discussions of the Word of God with the aid of helps. The effect is excellent. In this way many obtain clearer conceptions of the Truth than they would get from any ordinary discourse. While we commend any kind of Bible study, we especially commend this form which the Lord has blessed above all others for the enlightenment of His people in this end of the Gospel Age. This method is for the advantage of the entire class; for an able leader is not so indispensable as with other methods. One danger with able leaders is that sometimes their ability goes in a wrong direction and misleads the too confiding ones under their care.

For this kind of Bible study both a textbook and a question book are used. The textbooks are the **STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES**. In these volumes the teachings of the Bible have been brought into an assimilable form. Each subject is treated systematically, with references to various parts of the Bible in which these subjects are stated. It does not surprise us, therefore, that those of God's people who have learned the value of this method of Bible study and who follow it have a clearer understanding of the Word than have others.

### **THE ESSENCE OF ST. PAUL'S TEACHING**

After telling us that the Apostle reasoned with the Jews concerning the Gospel Message, our Study explains something of his method; namely, he opened the Scriptures to them, pointing out what they had not previously noted respecting Messiah – the fact that it was necessary for Christ to suffer death and to rise from the dead before He could be the King promised. The Jews knew of the

Scriptures which referred to Messiah's sufferings. But these they ignored, and grasped only those which referred to His Millennial Reign of glory, honor and power.

What they needed was just what the Lord sent them in the Apostle – some one to explain the Scriptures, to answer their questions and to help them to find the answers to their own questions in the Scriptures. St. Paul showed them the connecting links between the two lines of prophecies pertaining to Messiah. He pointed out the fact that through the power of sin inbred, ingrained, death reigned over the human race, and that none could be released from this condition without a Redeemer. Messiah would indeed reign over His Kingdom, the world; but previously a redemption must take place, a lifting of the curse of death. Then he produced the facts of Jesus' death, "the Just for the unjust," and showed that our Lord's resurrection was exactly what had been declared by the Prophets, and was necessary for Him to carry out in due time the foretold blessing of Israel under their New Covenant and the blessing of the world through Israel. – Genesis 2:17; 3:19; 12:3; Ezekiel 18:4,20; Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Then the Apostle showed that first, however, an elect class must be gathered, to be associated with Messiah in His Kingdom; and that these must demonstrate their worthiness by laying down their lives in consecration in His service. The sum of the Apostle's argument was, "This Jesus whom I preach unto you is Messiah."

### **ITS EFFECT UPON THE HEARERS**

Some of the Jews believed the Message and took sides with St. Paul and Silas; but evidently they were only a minority. With them were some devout Greeks and also a number of prominent women. The division time had come. The wheat amongst the Jews in Thessalonica must be separated from the chaff class, as elsewhere. (Matthew 3:11,12.) They were being gathered into the Gospel garner, into the Spirit Dispensation. They were being transferred from Moses

to Christ, from Natural Israel to the new Spiritual Israel, called to be a Royal Priesthood, a peculiar people, for a Divine purpose.

Only a minority of the Jews could receive this Message. The remainder were embittered. Therefore they became jealous of the success achieved by these strangers, who had been in the city but a few weeks, but who nevertheless had already made considerable impression upon Gentiles, whom they had been unable to influence and to convert to Judaism.

Having no truthful argument, no logic wherewith they could overcome the arguments of the missionaries, the unbelieving Jews resorted to Satan's usual tactics of misrepresentation, slander, thus arousing prejudice, hatred, malice, etc. They even incited an uproar in the city – a mob, which made an assault upon the house of Jason, with whom the missionaries were lodging. Not finding the missionaries, the mob, under leadership, took Jason and other believers before the magistrate, saying, "These that have turned the world upside down have come here also." Jason has received them, and is thus a participant in their wrong-doing. They are traitors to this government and the Emperor; they teach that there is another king – Jesus.

This was almost the exact charge brought against our Redeemer when He was brought to Pilate's judgment bar. And there is a measure of truth in it; for the **[R5913 : page 185]** Caesars claimed not only to be civil rulers of the world, but also to be the Pontifex Maximus, or chief religious ruler. While the Kingdom which Jesus and the Apostles preached is a Heavenly one, a spiritual one, nevertheless the Message includes the thought that in due time this Heavenly rule, or authority, would be extended to the affairs of earth, and Messiah's Kingdom would be worldwide – "under the whole heaven." – Daniel 7:27.

We can readily see that such a proclamation might be construed as treasonable from the world's standpoint. But surely the Jews had

no excuse for using their influence along these lines; for they well knew that all the hopes and promises in which their nation rejoiced led up to just such a Kingdom hope. Nevertheless, their pride and hatred blinded them to the injustice of their course when they incited the heathen multitude. It should not surprise us at all if in the near future false Christians – Christians not in the proper attitude of heart to receive the Message of Present Truth – should similarly charge us with treason because we preach "the Kingdom of God's dear Son," about to be established in power and great glory, in the midst of a period of social distress and anarchy. Nor will it surprise us if these false Christians should be the very ones to incite the multitudes and the rulers against us.

### **"TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN"**

The Jews realized that there was a conflict on between Judaism and Christianity; and that wherever the two came into contact there could be naught else than a clash, and one or the other be turned upside down. Similarly, some of those who are at present blinded to Present Truth rail at us in almost the same language. And the truthfulness of the assertions cannot be controverted. The Gospel of Christ created differences in the Jewish system then, as the Gospel Truth is doing now in Christendom. This is what our Lord Jesus foretold when He said, "Think not that I have come to send peace upon the earth. I have come to send a sword. . . . And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." – Matthew 10:34-36.

Our own experiences, like those of the Apostles, corroborate the truth of our Lord's statement. An irrepressible conflict is on. However, had the Jews but properly understood the matter, they need not have given themselves such concern. They might have known that comparatively few would accept the Message of the Gospel; and that the few going out from them would scarcely be missed.

And so it is today. Our dear friends in the various denominations are fearful lest Present Truth capture their people by the wholesale.

But they are mistaken. It will take only the Elect, and leave the remainder. The wheat are comparatively few in proportion to the tares; and only the wheat is being gathered. The tares must be left in the bundles – in sectarian bodies. They must not in any manner get in amongst the wheat ready for the garner. The separation of the wheat from the tares should not, and could not, take place in the past, but must and will take place now, in the Harvest of this Age.

Apparently this attack upon Jason and others was not permitted of the Lord until the work of propagation had been well accomplished, and until those who had an ear to hear had a good opportunity to hear the Message. The rulers of Thessalonica put Jason and the other believers under bonds, to guarantee against a certain forfeit of money or of property that these Christian missionaries should raise no further disturbance. As a result, St. Paul and Silas realized that their work at Thessalonica was at an end; and, that they might not jeopardize the interests of the Cause and of their friends by further public utterances, St. Paul agreed that they should leave the city quietly, secretly.

### **"THE MORE NOBLE BEREANS"**

The next stopping place was Berea; and there, as usual, the missionaries went first to the synagogue. They were agreeably surprised to find the Jews at that place very honest-hearted. We read, "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 these things were so." The Greek word used here for "noble" seems to imply persons of noble birth, a higher and nobler class than those of the more commercial city. Nobility of character is favorable, wherever found and from whatever causes; and true nobility implies reasonableness, as distinguished from prejudice.

The Bereans were reasonable. Professing to believe all that was written in the Law and the Prophets, professing to be looking for the

Messiah, they welcomed the servants of God who sought to draw their attention particularly to the "things written aforetime." With all readiness of mind they began to examine the Scriptures, not merely on the Sabbath, but daily, to see how well the Apostle's arguments were supported by the testimony of the Law and the Prophets. As we should expect, many of so noble a class accepted the Good Tidings. Indeed, the wonder is that any person of noble and reasoning mind, once becoming acquainted with the glorious Message of God's love and mercy through Christ – His Plan for selecting the Church now and of blessing all the families of the earth through that Church by and by – could disbelieve it or could attribute such a Gospel to any human source. Surely its internal evidences are convincing that it is not of man nor by man, but of the Lord!

We read that many of the noble Bereans believed – Jews and Greeks, men and women. Here is a suggestion to us all. We should have a judgment and conviction respecting the Divine Word; but it should not be so unreasonable a one as to hinder us from receiving further knowledge from the same source. We are to "try the spirits," the teachings, the doctrines. This does not signify, however, that we are to be "blown about by every wind of doctrine." We should know in whom we have believed; and having been once convinced, we should not be easily turned aside from a properly grounded faith.

If we are satisfied that we have been building upon the Rock Foundation furnished us in the Divine Revelation, we should expect that any further light coming to us would not be contradictory to what we have found to be Scriptural and harmonious with the Divine character. On the contrary, we should expect that all further light from the Divine Word would be consistent with the foundations of our faith. Anything that would set aside or make valueless the first principles of the doctrines of Christ should be promptly rejected.

## **PERSECUTED IN EVERY CITY**

If the missionaries of the Cross of Christ were vigilant and earnest, so were the servants of error. The Jews of Thessalonica learned that the missionaries were at Berea, and forthwith began to foment strife and to raise a disturbance amongst the people. The missionaries concluded that this was a sign that they should move forward.

Let us be on the alert to watch for the leadings of the Lord's providence; and while not fleeing persecution in the ordinary sense, let us be ready to move when persecution seems inevitable and when apparently it might be considered as an indication from the Lord that He had service for us in some other field of labor. Thus persecuted, St. Paul went to Athens; and later Silas and Timothy followed him thither.

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