

Acts 17:1-15: What Leads You, the Circumstances, Satan's Whispers or Jesus' Voice?

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA October 1, 2017

I. Introduction

Do you ever notice the thought process you go through when something or someone upsets you? Something goes wrong, someone does something to you and then you react, usually very badly. Why? Why don't we respond better? Why do we usually end up more upset than when we started? How do we escape this vicious cycle?

II. Acts 17:1-15: Who Dictates Your Next Move, the Circumstances + Satan's Whispers or Jesus?

17:1-9, in the process of spreading the Gospel in Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten, jailed, and tortured. But God used this to save the Philippian jailer and his entire family. When the city officials sent word to release them, Paul refused and revealed that he and Silas were Roman citizens. This terrified the officials since they have beaten and imprisoned two uncondemned Roman citizens! The officials go quickly to release them and beg them to leave their city. Before leaving Paul and Silas encourage the newly planted church in Philippi. They pass through Amphipolis (30 miles southwest of Philippi) and Apollonia (27 miles southwest of Amphipolis) as they make their way to Thessalonica (38 miles west of Apollonia). Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. It had a population of over 200,000 and was a major seaport and commercial center.

Paul was likely in Thessalonica a few months (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10); it had a large enough Jewish population for a synagogue. Following his custom, Paul reached out to the Jews first. He attended the Synagogue for three Sabbaths and made his case from the Jewish Scriptures that the Messiah they've been waiting for had to suffer, die, and rise from the dead. And that this Messiah was none other than Jesus Christ. This was difficult for Jews to accept (even Jesus' disciples, Mark 9:31-32) because they believed that Messiah would defeat all their enemies and rule the world forever, not suffer and die. But some of the Jews were persuaded and a great number of the Gentiles too, including many prominent women, i.e., the Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel alongside them. They all believed in Jesus and joined Paul and Silas.

Those who rejected Jesus and were jealous because Paul had taken away so many Gentiles, including many wealthy women, set the whole city in an uproar. What's astounding is how they did it. They assemble a mob of pagan Gentiles, led by wicked Gentiles whom they hire from the marketplace. How ironic, these devout Jews who think they're doing God's work and consider Gentiles unclean, recruit evil pagan Gentiles to help them fight God's cause! They're so blind they're doing the Devil's bidding. They gather the mob and attack Jason's house, where Paul and Silas were staying. Their plan was to hand them over to this crazed mob. But when they can't find them, they drag Jason and other Christians to the city officials—a church had been established likely at Jason's house (Aristarchus and Secundus were members, Acts 20:4). What do they accuse them of? Disturbing the peace and treason. Who's disturbing the peace here? These were serious charges, especially the one of treason. The Roman world knew of one king, Caesar. Anyone else claiming that title was killed. So to claim that Jesus was king would put your life in danger. All this is enough to agitate the mob and city rulers enough to force Jason and the others, who had nothing to do with these charges, to post bond before letting them go. If there was future trouble with Paul and Silas, Jason and the others would lose their money and be thrown back in jail. This was likely why Paul couldn't return to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18).

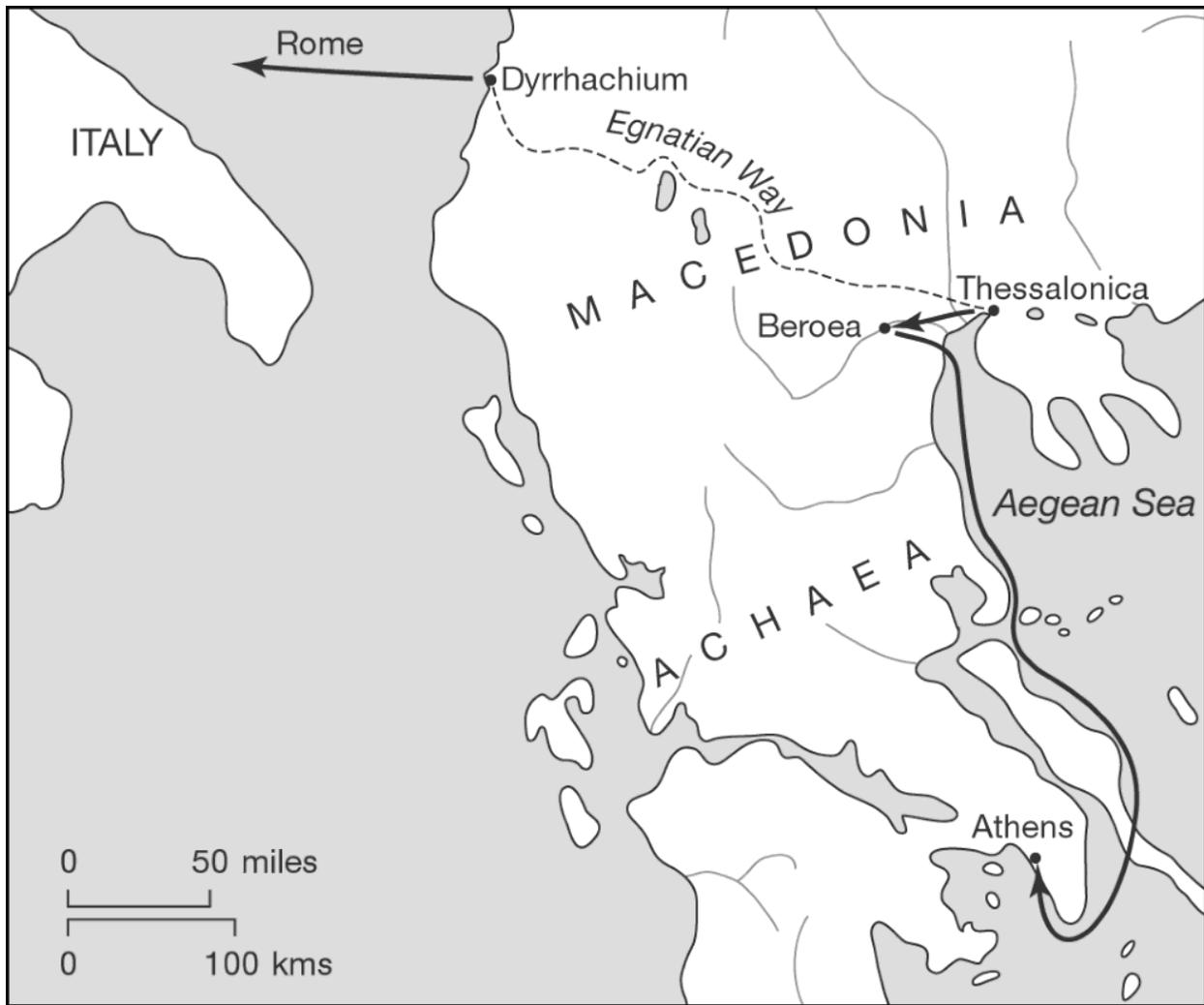
17:10-15, since this was a very dangerous situation for Paul and Silas, the church escorts them in the middle of the night to Berea (48 miles west of Thessalonica). And they do the same thing there that they did in Thessalonica, they preach the Gospel in their synagogue. Would you risk your life again? Who interprets your circumstances, you, the situation, Satan's whispers, or Jesus? The reaction of the Berean Jews was the complete opposite. For the first time Paul runs into a synagogue who doesn't respond with jealousy and hate. Instead, those of Berea eagerly accepted what Paul said. But they didn't accept it without question. In fact, they checked the very Scriptures Paul appealed to in order to verify if what Paul claimed about Jesus was true. They did this day after day, looking to see if in fact Messiah was supposed to suffer, die, come back from the dead and if in fact Jesus was that Messiah. The result: unlike previous synagogues, many of them believe as well as a great many of their Gentiles, including prominent men and women.

As great as this was, it was short-lived. As soon as the Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching the same message in Berea, they traveled 48 miles to Berea and began stirring up the crowds in that city. In response, the brethren quickly remove Paul from the situation and escort him from Berea all the way to Athens (this shows that a church was also established in Berea, Sopater was one of its members, Acts 20:4). Since their focus was Paul, Silas and Timothy stayed behind, which gave them an opportunity to disciple and strengthen the brethren in Berea. When Paul got to Athens, he sent word with the Bereans who escorted him for Silas and Timothy to join him ASAP.

What drives your actions? We have the same exact situation yet two opposite reactions. We have two synagogues both allowed a Pharisee named Paul to speak to their members. After hearing the message, both synagogues lose a great number of their members, including many of their wealthy supporters. One synagogue responds with jealousy and hate, the other with acceptance and open arms. Why?

What did the Jews from Thessalonica believe, how did they see the situation and was Satan helping them interpret it? How did the Jews from Berea see their losing all those members, who's voice were they listening to? Was Satan lurking behind the scenes, guiding, interpreting, urging those who were upset and angry? Yes, Satan was there before, during and after. Notice what happened after Paul and Silas were driven out of Thessalonica, who was present and active? Satan was, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5.

What drives your response? When you're having a difficult time with a friend, your spouse, your kids, your neighbor, how do you react and why? When you're struggling with your health, whether it's your fault or not, how do you respond and why? How do you see the situation and how did you come to that conclusion? Was it your wisdom that led you there or someone else's? Pay attention to the whispers in your head, it's not just you talking to yourself. Satan is constantly giving you feedback about what you need to do.....but so is Jesus, do you hear His voice in the midst of all the chatter?



III. Conclusion

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

¹ Wright, T. (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13-28* (p. 81). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.