

Acts 099
Satan's Hindrances
Acts 17:1-9
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Let us open our Bibles this evening to Acts 17. We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts here on Wednesday evenings. You find, as I have mentioned many times, the outline of the Book of Acts 1:8, where Jesus tells His disciples:

"...and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem [Acts 1-7], and in all Judea and Samaria [Acts 8-12], and even to the remotest part of the earth [Acts 13-28]" (Acts 1:8).

We are looking at that third section. We had the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), and the "what are we going to do with all these saved Gentiles?" section called the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Then Paul launches out on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22).

- V. Thessalonica Ministry (Acts 17:1-9)
 - A. Paul's journey (1)
 - 1. Amphipolis (1a)
 - 2. Apollonia (1b)
 - 3. Thessalonica (1c)
 - B. Paul's preaching (2-3)
 - 1. Custom (2)
 - 2. Content (3)
 - C. Results of Paul's preaching (4)
 - 1. Jews (4a)
 - 2. Greeks (4b)
 - 3. Women (4c)
 - D. Opposition to Paul's preaching (5-9)
 - 1. Mob described (5a)
 - 2. Attack on Jason (5b-6a)
 - 3. Accusations (6b-7)
 - 4. Results of mob action (8)
 - 5. City's decision (9)

Paul has made it out of Philippi, which was studied in the last chapter. He leaves Philippi, and the next place he goes to is Thessalonica. That is in Acts 17:1-9, and Lord willing, we are going to try to cover that section this evening.

the conversion of Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailer and his household. Luke is left behind.

Here Paul, Silas, and Timothy come to Thessalonica, and the first thing it says is that they stop there because there was a synagogue of the Jews. Why does it keep saying that Paul went to the synagogue of the Jews? The answer is in Romans 1:16, a book that Paul, from our chronology, has not even written yet. In it he will lay out his ministry philosophy and he will say this in Romans 1:16:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

His ministry philosophy was to go to the Jews first, to find out where they gathered, find out where they met, which was typically in the synagogue. They are the elect nation of God. He basically is giving them constantly the first bite of the apple, so to speak, the first opportunity to receive the gospel.

Typically what happens is that it does not go well for him. They end up kicking him out of the synagogue and he goes among the Gentiles in the town, where he reaps this great harvest. The Jews get wind of it, and they get jealous of his success amongst the Gentiles. So they drive him out of the city and he goes to his next destination.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum and myself, also following Arnold Fruchtenbaum, are of the persuasion that this mandate to the Jew first and then to the Greek is still binding today. I do not see anywhere in the Book of Acts or in the Bible where God says not do that anymore. I think that that missionary practice is a good one.

He goes to this synagogue and he starts to do his preaching in the synagogue (Acts 17:2-3). This is very common with Paul, and he has a custom (Acts 17:2) and then he has content (Acts 17:3). Notice his custom:

"And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2).

Now a lot of people and commentators, I think, make this mistake. They say that Paul was only in Thessalonica for three weeks because it says he went to the synagogue and reasoned with them for three Sabbaths. That would be basically a three-week period of time. I do not think that is true; I do not think Paul was in Thessalonica for three weeks. I think he was in Thessalonica probably six months to a year. The three weeks is just a period of time that he spent in the synagogue, not the total time he spent in Thessalonica.

Dr. Toussaint, in "The Bible Knowledge Commentary," makes this point:

"The reference to three Sabbaths does not mean the missionary band stayed only three weeks in Thessalonica. Paul carried on the work with a Jewish emphasis for three Sabbaths and then turned to the Gentiles and ministered to them for some weeks after that. This was the situation for three reasons: (1) The Philippian church sent money to Paul at least twice during this visit (Phil. 4:15-16), implying a longer lapse of time than three weeks, (2) In addition, Paul supported himself by manual labor (1 Thes. 2:9; 2 Thes. 3:7-10). This may indicate that considerable time elapsed before the aid from Philippi arrived. (3) Most of the converts at Thessalonica were not from the synagogue but were Gentiles steeped in idolatry (cf. 1 Thes. 1:9)."¹

In this time period, if you got a gift from a church, particularly a brand new church, you know that was a big deal. It is unlikely that he would get two financial gifts in a three-week period of time. He must have been in Thessalonica longer than three weeks.

He was a tentmaker, and anybody that started a business knows that it takes more than three weeks to get a business off the ground. You have to develop clientele and marketing by word of mouth, and people need to trust you. He was one of these types of people that worked with his hands, and then he supported himself through this trade of tentmaking (1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10). From that money that he made through this trade, he was able to sort of finance his ministry stay in Thessalonica.

He is going to write to them a little later and say, "You have turned from idols to serve the living God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). That is a statement that does not apply to Jews, because one thing the Jews were not in the early first century was idolaters. There is something that happened in their history that purged their nation of idolatry: the Babylonian captivity. They were idolatrous, worshiping all kinds of statues and graven images before the Babylonian captivity, which began about 605 BC and probably lasted up to about 536 BC. By the time they came out of the captivity, they were a lot of things, but they were not idolatrous anymore.

Paul obviously left the synagogue and went to the Gentiles, or else it would not say here that they turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). That kind of statement would not make sense for a three-week ministry amongst the Jews. He spent a lot of time amongst the Gentiles outside of those initial three weeks in the synagogue.

When Paul was going to write to the Thessalonians from Corinth, not long after he was kicked out of Thessalonica, maybe six months to a year later, he wrote to them the two letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. He wrote to them in such a way that it seemed like those new believers in Thessalonica already understood a ton of information. It is

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 401.

almost as if, when he wrote the Thessalonian letters, he was reviewing ground he had already covered. He will say things like:

"Do you not remember that while I was with you, I was telling you these things?" (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

A very significant doctrinal foundation had already been laid down by Paul before he wrote a letter to them. The Scofield reference Bible says that they already had an understanding of the Trinity. These are baby Christians, and most seasoned Christians today are never taught these things. They already understood the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; they understood the Second Advent; they understood the Day of the Lord; they understood eschatology, which is the study of the end; they understood the assurance of salvation, the doctrine of conversion, the doctrine of election, and the doctrine of future resurrection. They already understood sanctification, basic Christian behavior.

You cannot develop a knowledge base like this in three weeks in a synagogue with no contact with the Gentiles. He was obviously with them for an extended period of time, teaching these new Christians in Thessalonica, who were going to learn about how they got saved, these basic doctrines.

This was very helpful. I found this in the Scofield Study Bible:

Presumed Knowledge	
Trinity	1:1, 5-6
Holy Spirit	1:5-6; 4:8; 5:19
Second Advent	1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:14-17; 5:23
Day of the Lord	5:1-3
Eschatology	2 Thess 2:5
Assurance	1:5
Conversion	1:9
Election	1:4
Resurrection	4:14-18
Sanctification	4:3; 5:23
Christian behavior	2:12; 4:1

Adapted from Scofield Study Bible, 1640

When I got saved about the age of 16, I very quickly became interested in the End Times. A lot of people around me at the time said that as a new Christian I should not focus on that stuff, that I needed to focus on the big ticket items like the Trinity, the virgin birth, the Holy Spirit, and the Christian life. After that I could graduate into more advanced knowledge.

For a long time, I believed that was true, that you just do not teach new Christians about the End Times until I read the Thessalonian books. Paul obviously taught them about

the End Times as baby Christians, and he taught them advanced subjects like the beast or the Antichrist and the lawless one in the temple.

"Do you not remember that when I was with you, I was telling you these things?" (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

That idea that you hide the ball from people is not a game that we play here at this church. We just teach the Bible. If it happens to deal with an eschatological subject, and if a person is two days old in the Lord, we teach it to them. We teach them the full council of God's Word.

This little chart proves that he could not have been in Thessalonica for only three weeks. He was obviously there for a much longer period of time. I am thinking at least six months to a year.

Keep in mind that the ministry was not his full time job. He was working with his hands in his trade and the ministry he was doing was something he was doing part-time on the side. Yet he laid tremendous teaching down for these people when they were very fresh in the Christian life.

That was Paul's custom. This is how he operated. He goes to the synagogue for three weeks, and he is trying to do something from the Scriptures.

"And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them [the Jews] from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:1).

What Scriptures would those be? It cannot be the New Testament because we do not have a New Testament yet. The only book that Paul himself has written by this time is the Book of Galatians. The Thessalonian books have not been written yet. The two Corinthian books and Romans have not been written yet. The prison letters, of course, would not be written until he made his way to Rome. The pastoral letters would not be written until he got out of Roman imprisonment, and 2 Timothy would not be written till he was thrown back into prison again.

The Gospel of Luke probably does not even exist at this point. Maybe, what we would call, 'gospellettes' were floating around, that Luke would use as sources to compile his material, which he mentions in Luke 1:1-4. Probably the only gospel that could have been written by this time was Matthew's Gospel, which church history believes is the earliest recorded gospel. Maybe the Book of James had been written, although it is hard to be certain.

Other than that, you do not have a New Testament. So the only Bible that he had was what we call Old Testament; the Jews call it Hebrew Bible. Their name for it is Tanakh, TNK. These are three Hebrew words: T stands for Torah, which is the first five books of

the Bible, the books of Moses; N stands for Nevi'im, meaning prophets; and K stands for Ketuvim, the writings.

In a minute I will show you Jesus making references to all three sections. Those are the three major sections of Hebrew Bible. They organized their Bible differently than we as Protestants organize what we call the Old Testament. Their organization was organized according to Tanakh. It is the same material we have, but organized a little bit differently.

Why does Paul use Tanakh when he is in the synagogue? Because the synagogue is comprised of Jewish leaders and Jewish people that accept the authority of Tanakh. When he goes to Athens in this chapter and goes to Mars Hill and speaks in front of Gentiles, he does not use Tanakh. Why would he not use Tanakh with them? Because they are Gentiles and they do not accept the authority of Hebrew Bible. He appeals to the Bible that they did have, which is general revelation—creation.

He uses different evangelistic strategies depending on who he is talking to. In this case, he is in a synagogue, he is with Jewish people. He opens Tanakh, which we call Old Testament and they call Hebrew Bible, and he starts to reason with them.

What is he reasoning with them about? I am glad you asked. That takes us to his content (Acts 17:3). We'll start back in Acts 17:2:

"And according to Paul's custom, he went with them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3).

This is referring to Yeshua, that is Jesus. This is the King that the leadership of the nation of Israel rejected in the Gospels.

He wants to use their Bible to show them that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah. He is trying to get these people saved. The Old Testament makes that claim, as does the New Testament about the Old Testament. It claims that the information contained in Tanakh points to Jesus. In fact, Jesus made an issue of this in John 5 with the religious leaders that he was engaged with.

He says in John 5:39, *"You search the Scriptures."* What Scriptures would those be? The only Scriptures on the record at this point are Old Testament or Tanakh.

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these [Scriptures] that testify about Me" (John 5:39).

"If you believe Moses' first five books of the Bible, you would believe Me because Moses wrote about me." He is making a claim here that His whole life is predicted in the

Old Testament, which makes Jesus very unique. If He is right (and He obviously is), He is the only person that has ever walked the face of the earth whose life was framed as a script hundreds and thousands of years before He was born.

This is what Paul is appealing to in the Jewish mind, to get these people to recognize who Jesus is: "He is your Savior. He is your Messiah. He is your Christ." He is trying to get them to trust in Him so as to be saved.

Jesus also made reference to this in the Emmaus Road walk. If I could be a fly on the wall for one conversation or sermon from the life of Christ, this would be my pick. He is walking with them on the Emmaus Road after His resurrection; He is in His resurrected body. He is using Hebrew Bible to show the disciples that everything that has happened to Him was predicted in the pages of their own Scriptures.

I want to be a fly on the wall because I want to know what Scriptures He is using, because the Emmaus Road walk is not an infinite walk. It is finite. What Scriptures did He use? I am kind of frustrated because Luke does not tell me, so that is why I want to be a fly on the wall to hear this. I guess I will get a chance to ask Jesus Himself when I get to heaven. "What Scriptures did you use on the Emmaus Road walk?"

"Then beginning with Moses [Torah] and with all the prophets [Nevi'im], He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27).

"No he said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses [Torah] and the Prophets [Nevi'im] and the Psalms [Ketuvim] must be fulfilled'" (Luke 24:44).

The Psalms is a synonym for the writing section, because it is the most prominent book in the Ketuvim.

When He says, "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms," He just went through the three major divisions of Hebrew Bible; He went through Tanakh. He says, "The whole thing points to Me and is fulfilled in Me." Luke talks about how, as He was opening the Scriptures to them, their hearts began to burn because the evidence is overwhelming.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, says:

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

He is saying that the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus were predicted in Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) hundreds and thousands of years before Jesus ever showed up. That makes Jesus very different. He is the only person that has ever walked this planet into a script that had already been written.

Josephus makes reference to this as he is describing Christ. Josephus was a first-century historian who wrote a little after the time of Christ.

"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared."²

Even Josephus is making reference to this Hebrew Bible script, the prophets that foretold Jesus.

What scriptures was He referring to? We do not know, but here is my guess: I think He was referring to Isaiah 7:14, written 700 years in advance, which describes His virgin birth. Then He probably referred to Micah 5:2, also written 700 years in advance, which tells exactly where He would be born, the exact city. Next, He probably referred to Numbers 24:17, written 1,400 years in advance, which says He has to be Jewish; He has to be a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Maybe He appealed to Genesis 49:10, written 1,800 years in advance, which tells us what tribe he would come from. Of Israel's twelve tribes, the Messiah is going to come from Judah. He probably made reference to Daniel 9:25-26, written 600 years in advance, which tells the exact time, even the exact day that He would ride into Jerusalem and present His messianic credentials to the nation, and how they would respond to His message, that they would reject Him.

Daniel tells you, 600 years before it happened, how it would happen. That is why on Palm Sunday, He is riding into Jerusalem crying, weeping (Luke 19:41). Why is He crying? Because He knew what would happen. It is part of the script. They would reject Him. He may have referred to Isaiah 53:9, written 700 years in advance, which said He would be crucified between thieves. He may have referred to Isaiah 53:5, written 700 years in advance, which indicates that He would be pierced. He would not be stoned to death. The prophets say he would be pierced.

² Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.3.3.

Maybe He referred to Psalm 22:17, written 1,000 years in advance, telling us that none of His bones will be broken. Maybe He referred to Psalm 22:18, written 1,000 years in advance, indicating that they would gamble for His clothes. Maybe He referred to Isaiah 53:9, written 700 years in advance, indicating that He would be buried in a rich man's tomb.

That is quite a walk. How would you like to walk with Jesus and have this whole explanation? No wonder their hearts were burning within them as He was opening to them the Scriptures.

That is what Paul is trying to do. He is trying to show the Jewish mind, "Do not take my word for it, this whole Jesus thing. It is right there in your own Bible." He does not do that with the Gentiles because they do not accept Hebrew Bible, but he does it around people that accept the authority of Hebrew Bible.

What are the results of this preaching? There were some favorable results amongst the Jews. Not most of them, but some of them believed.

"And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women" (Acts 17:4).

Who are the God-fearing Greeks? God-fearing Greeks are Gentiles that converted to Judaism because they believed in Yahweh and wanted to walk with Yahweh. They are called proselytes. The most famous proselyte in the Bible is Ruth, who was from Moab, which today is modern-day Jordan in the Transjordan. She said to her mother-in-law, Naomi, "Your God will be my God. Your people will be my people" (Ruth 1:16). That is a Gentile converting to Judaism, kind of like what happened to the Ethiopian eunuch when he encountered Philip and wanted to walk with God (Acts 8:26-39).

Paul preached Jesus to those folks who would also be in the synagogue, and he had some success with them. Luke is really good at pointing out the women. It says at the end of Acts 17:4: *"and a number of the leading women."*

If you are looking for a pro-woman book, I would pick Luke and Acts, because women are constantly highlighted in those two books—the prequel and sequel written by the same author. Luke is trying to show the universality of the gospel. The gospel is for everyone, even people who are considered lower on the social ladder in Greco-Roman times, like women.

That is why Jesus in John 4 is ministering to the Samaritan woman. She is the wrong gender; she is the wrong race; she is a Samaritan; and she has the wrong morality, having had five husbands and her current partner was not even married to her. Here was Jesus going out of His way to minister to her and saying things like, "If you drink

from this water, you will thirst again. But if you drink from living water, you will never thirst again" (John 4:13-14). He was referring to the Holy Spirit.

The disciples were saying things in John 4 like, "Why are you talking to her? Why are you wasting your time with her?" In other words, why don't you go talk to someone important? That is because to God, women are important. They are image bearers of God, on equal par with a man.

My wife and I are headed to the exact same heaven. We are joint heirs of salvation. In this life we play different roles, but just because you play a different role does not mean you are not ontologically somehow inferior. The Bible teaches nothing like that.

That is why Luke over and over again keeps talking about the women. Even when they were praying in Jerusalem in Acts 1, he mentions the women. He records Lydia's conversion in Acts 16. This is Paul's first convert in Europe. This is how the gospel took off in Europe. In Macedonia, Lydia, a woman, is his first convert.

I think sometimes in our conservative circles, we are so aggressive about man's role in marriage, woman's role in marriage; or man's role in the church, woman's role in the church. We are so aggressive about it, and rightfully so, because there is a lot of feminism where a woman many times will want to usurp the role of a man as the head of the marriage, or as the head of the church. We fight so aggressively against that that we miscommunicate in the opposite direction that women are somehow inferior. That is not a biblical understanding, and Luke brings out a nice balance.

He actually had some results that were favorable. What happens when you win a battle? The empire strikes back is what happens. Sorry to borrow that from Lucas or whatever that guy's name is that came up with all that cool stuff. You heresy hunters out there, I am not endorsing everything. I am not endorsing Star Wars.

Here it comes, the empire striking back. The mob is described there in Acts 17:5. My point is, whenever you make any kind of progress with God in ministry, expect Satan to hit you. It kind of goes with the territory. If there is a lot of opposition and people getting upset at you, sometimes it tells you that you are over the target; you are doing something right. You do not want to get pushback because you are rude, crude, lewd, and obnoxious, but if you are getting pushback for doing the right thing, that is an indication that you are probably in the right place.

Paul has a little bit of success in the synagogue and he gets push back. There is this mob generated against him. You will see that in Acts 17:5:

"But the Jews becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar" (Acts 17:5).

There were a lot of these unhinged people walking around, and they were easy to work up into a frenzy. That is what these unbelieving Jews did to Paul. They whipped up this mob against him. They stormed the house owned by a guy named Jason (Acts 17:5-6).

"...and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have upset the world have come here also'" (Acts 17:6).

It looks like there are believers now in Thessalonica. This is the beginning of a church.

This crowd gets whipped up into a frenzy by the unbelieving Jews. They go after Jason's house because that is where Paul, Silas, and Timothy were staying. They could not find Paul, Silas, and Timothy in the house when the crowd arrived, so they grabbed Jason out in front of the city authorities. and they started to hurl accusations against Jason. They hurl three accusations. First, they say, "You are causing a disturbance."

The Whole World?
(Revelation 3:10)

- 1) Oikouménē – known world? (Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28)
- 2) Oikouménē – entire world (Luke 4:5; Acts 17:31; Rev. 12:9)
- 3) Context favors the global definition
 - a. Adjective “whole” (*holos*)
 - b. Rev. 6–18

The word 'world' is an interesting one. It is the Greek word 'oikoumene' (οἰκουμένη). Many times it refers to the known world, not all the planet earth, but only the habitable world or the known world. Other times, even in this chapter, 'oikoumene' (οἰκουμένη) can mean the whole human race (Acts 17:31), which we will be getting to down the road. 'Oikoumene' (οἰκουμένη) is one of those terms that is not a technical word. It does not mean the same thing everywhere it is used; you have to define it by its context.

Here it does not refer to the whole world, although it can refer to the whole world elsewhere. Here, it refers to the known world, the habitable world, the Greco-Roman world. So what they say about Jason is that he and his missionary companions have turned the known world upside down with their teaching and with their Christianity.

What a great compliment that is. Wouldn't it be great if the City Council got mad at us at Sugar Land Bible Church and said, "You have turned the whole city upside down with

your doctrine and teaching?" That would be a sign that we are doing something right. However, this is not the norm. The church typically does not turn the world upside down. The church has a tendency to become worldly. The world oftentimes turns the church upside down.

That is what was going on in Laodicea, which literally means 'the people ruling'—'laos' (λαός), people; 'dike' (δίκη), to rule. Jesus would confront them in Revelation 3:15-17.

*""I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked""
(Revelation 3:15-17).*

I do not think it is a loss of salvation there. I just think He is nauseated with the condition of Laodicea.

We want to be a church that turns the world upside down. We do not want to be a group of people where the value system of the world comes into the church and turns the church upside down as was happening in Laodicea.

The first charge against Jason is, "You are causing a disturbance. You have turned the known world upside down, the 'oikoumene' (οἰκουμένη)."

The second charge is, "You are proselytizing" (Acts 17:7). Here is the charge:

""and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar"" (Acts 17:7).

Which decrees of Caesar? Roman law forbade proselytizing Roman citizens. Yet these guys came into town and they evangelized Roman citizens. They broke the law. This is what is being said here against Jason.

The third charge is insurrection, found at the end of Acts 17:7: *""saying that there is another king, Jesus.""* They interpreted king Jesus as a competitor to Caesar, which was obviously a perversion of what they were saying. They made it sound like these guys were insurrectionists. They were against Caesar because they kept talking about another king and another kingdom. These accusations, other than proselytizing and maybe the disturbance, which was not physical but was theological, but some of these charges, like insurrection, were patently false.

That is what Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great" (Matthew 5:11).

Jesus prepped us for this kind of thing, and that is what is going on here in Thessalonica.

What are the results of the mob action? It troubled the multitudes.

"They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things" (Acts 17:9).

The crowd is already agitated, and now they are more agitated. The city officials are troubled because they are saying, "We have to do something about this because there is an actual charge on the table here of insurrection. If we do not do anything about this—like kick these guys out of here, out of Thessalonica—then we are going to be charged with insurrection or accommodating insurrection, allowing insurrection."

This leads to Acts 17:9 where the city council makes a decision. The first thing they did was to take security.

"And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them" (Acts 17:9).

They could not get their hands on Paul, Silas, and Timothy because they did not happen to be in the house by the time the crowd arrived, so they took it all out on Jason. The city council basically said, "We want you to take a pledge that you are going to get out of Dodge. You have to get these guys out of here, out of Thessalonica, permanently." Apparently Jason said, "Okay, we will do that."

This may explain why, when Paul is going to write to the Thessalonians about six months to a year later from Corinth, he says, "I kept wanting to come to you, but Satan stopped us." The church is going to complain against Paul that he left them. "You were our mother; you were our father, spiritually, and you left us. You abandoned us. We are abandoned children." Paul will explain to them that, "No, that is not true." He was actually kicked out of Thessalonica and he wanted to return over and over again, but Satan stopped him.

What did Satan use to stop him? Arguably, this pledge from Jason that these guys were leaving and they were not going to come back. This may explain why Paul says this in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18:

"But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your

face. For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18).

There was something that Satan used to prevent Paul from going back to his babies, the Thessalonian believers. Maybe it was this pledge that Jason took. It is just a theory.

The city took this pledge from Jason, and then they released Jason and others under the guarantee that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were leaving. Acts 17:9 says, *"They released them."*

Then these unbelieving Jews in this mob, after Paul, Silas, and Timothy left, turned on Paul's converts. They turned on the baby Thessalonian Christians, the ones that had turned from idols to serve the living God, this mass of Gentiles that apparently got saved in Thessalonica. Paul is dealing with a bunch of newly saved people. He cannot return the way he wants to in order to minister to them, and they are suffering.

What do you tell a suffering Christian? That is what 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 is about.

"Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this" (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3).

How do you minister to a brand new Christian that is suffering? You give them the doctrine of suffering, that this is part of growth as a Christian. It is so important that we communicate this to new believers. When I got saved at the age of 16, in the spring of 1983, the following year was my junior year in high school, and I have to be honest with you, looking back on it, it was probably the worst year of my life.

My life has been pretty good and if I had some low points, that age, 11th grade, would be a low point for a lot of different reasons. I thought to myself, "What have I done wrong here? I have trusted in Christ and everything seems to be going wrong." Fortunately, I had a relationship with the guy that led me to Christ where he said, "You can call me anytime you want to call me." Sometimes I would call him like in the middle of the night and say to him, "This has happened. That has happened. This has happened, what am I doing wrong?"

Here was his response. He would say this over and over again, and I did not like it when he said it, but in hindsight, I understand what he was getting at. He would say to me,

"I am grinning from ear to ear," after I told him all my problems. He would say, "The reason I am grinning from ear to ear is because you are exactly where you are

supposed to be. What you are experiencing, you are actually destined for. God is using these things to grow you up in Christ."

That is so important to communicate to new Christians because they do not know up from down. They do not have any biblical understanding or doctrinal understanding. They do not understand the doctrine of suffering. They think, "I am a Christian, so everything is supposed to be smooth sailing." That is not the way it works. God immediately allows people to go through trials because He wants to bring them to maturity through trials.

This is what Paul is explaining in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

"For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain" (1 Thessalonians 3:4-5).

"I am really worried that Satan is going to come into your ear and whisper, "You are out of God's will because you are suffering." This is what I thought. I thought I was out of God's will because I was suffering, when I needed to understand that I was in God's will.

The crowd that drove Paul, Silas, and Timothy out, unbelieving Jews who were whipping up this mob into a frenzy, now turned on Paul's converts. As baby Christians, they needed teaching on the doctrine of suffering because they thought that they were outside of God's will. In fact, Satan was exploiting that situation to deceive them into thinking they were outside of God's will. Paul is saying to them, "I am grinning from ear to ear. You are exactly where you are supposed to be. So hang tough, under the resources of God."

"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you" (2 Thessalonians 1:6).

Is your suffering from unbelief at the hands of unbelievers? Do not think that they are getting off the hook just because God is using their persecution against you to bring you to a new level of maturity. The Bible does not say that all things are good. It says that God uses all things together for good (Romans 8:28). Not everything is good.

God says, "Even though I am using this to bring you to maturity, I am keeping a record of all of these people that are abusing you." Believe me, the time in history is going to come where God is going to deal with them in justice, but right now He is allowing it to happen because it is a step in your growth. It is a stage in your growth. Unless you have a good discipler in your ear explaining this stuff to you, Satan will work havoc in your life and try to convince you that you have missed God's will, that Christianity works for

everybody else, but it does not work for you. In reality, you are right where you are supposed to be.

"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire" (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

At the Second Advent, God is going to deal with all of the people that are troublemakers in your life. Right now, He is allowing it as part of your growth. That is how the Thessalonian ministry ends.