

# *Resurrection Life of Jesus Church*

## **BACK TO THE BOOK OF ACTS (BBA)**

RLJ-1147

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### **PART 36: THE GOSPEL ARRIVES IN ATHENS**

It is obvious that Luke did not record all events that took place during Paul's journeys but picked out certain events that the Holy Spirit showed him were important.

The Roman government had built a major road in Greece called "The Egnatian Way." Paul, Silas and Timotheus took this road when they left Philippi and traveled to the next town, Amphipolis, which was 33 miles away. Only ruins are now left of this city. Luke doesn't tell us of any activity in this city and they continued to Apollonia on the same road 38 miles further. There was again no activity recorded in this city. **Acts 17:1**

## **THESSALONICA**

"Thessalonica formerly Salonika, historically Thessalonica city, capital and residence of the minister for northern Greece and administrative centre of the nomós (department) of Thessaloníki, on the west side of the Chalcidice (Khalkidhikí) peninsula at the head of a bay on the Thermaikós Kólpos (Gulf of Thérmai). An important industrial and commercial centre, second to Athens in population and to Piraeus as a port, it is built on the foothills and slopes of Mt. Khortiátis (Kissós; 3,940 ft [1,201 m]), overlooking the delta plains of the Gallikós and Vardar rivers.

Founded in 316 BC and named for a sister of Alexander the Great, Thessaloníki after 146 was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. As a military and commercial station on the Via Egnatia, which ran from the Adriatic Sea east to Byzantium (i.e., Constantinople), it grew to great importance in the Roman Empire. Two letters written by the Apostle Paul were addressed to its inhabitants (Thessalonians), and its first bishop, Gaius, was one of Paul's companions. The city prospered in the Byzantine Empire despite repeated attacks by Avars and Slavs in the 6th and 7th centuries. In 732, two years after he prohibited icons, the Byzantine emperor Leo III (reigned 717–741) detached the city from papal jurisdiction and made it dependent on the patriarch of Constantinople. During the iconoclastic regimes of Leo and his successors, the city defended the use of icons in worship and acted to save some of these art treasures.

In the following centuries the city was attacked by Arabs, Bulgarians, Normans, and others, and many barbarities were committed on its people. Its allegiance was forced under one or another ruler until after 1246, when it passed into the revived Byzantine Empire. Harassed constantly by the Ottoman Turks, the desperate city ceded itself to Venice in 1423, but the Ottoman sultan Murad II took it with a terrible massacre in 1430. At the end of that century the severely reduced population was augmented by an influx of 20,000 Jews driven from Spain. Thessaloníki became a part of the Ottoman Empire and remained so for almost the next five centuries.



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Thessaloníki was the birthplace of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), and it became the headquarters for the Ottoman Liberty Society, a faction of the Young Turk movement that initiated the Turkish revolution of 1908. The city was captured by the Greek army in 1912 during the First Balkan War and was ceded to the Greek kingdom by the Treaty of Bucharest (1913). The Greek king George I was assassinated there on a visit on March 18, 1913. From 1915 to 1918 Thessaloníki served as the base for Allied operations in the Turkish straits. In 1916 the Greek premier Eleuthérios Venizélos formed a provisional government in Thessaloníki that declared war on Bulgaria and Germany. In 1941 the city was captured by Germans, during whose occupation most of the city's approximately 60,000 Jews were deported and exterminated.

The Via Egnatia traverses the city from east to west, between the Vardar Gate and the Kalamaria Gate, respectively. A 4th-century brick and marble arch built by the emperor Galerius spans the road on the east. The upper citadel walls (built during the reign of Theodosius I, 379–395) survive with restorations. Once the second city of the Byzantine Empire after Constantinople, Thessaloníki is remarkable for its many fine Byzantine churches. The domed basilica of Ayía Sofía (early 8th century) was converted into a mosque in 1585–89. Its nave, forming a Greek cross, is surmounted by a hemispherical dome covered with a rich mosaic dating from the 9th to the 10th century. The Church of Áyios Dimítrios, the city's patron saint, is early 5th century; it was entirely reconstructed in 1926–48. The Panaghia Chalkeon (1028 or 1042) is another excellent example of the Greek-cross design that inspired many later Byzantine churches. Dating from the 5th century, the little Church of Osios David is especially noted for its early mosaics.

Modern Thessaloníki is the terminus of rail lines to other areas of Greece and the Balkans. The harbour was opened to navigation in 1901. The city exports chrome, manganese, and numerous raw and processed agricultural products. Thessaloníki in the 1960s became a major industrial centre with the construction of a large complex including oil refineries, petrochemical plants, and steel works. The city's other industries produce liquors, hides, textiles, carpets, bricks, tiles, soap, and flour. The city is the seat of a metropolitan bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church. It has a university (founded 1925) and an American college, a German school, and a French lycée. The city was damaged by fire in 1890, 1898, 1910, and especially in 1917 and was extensively damaged by an earthquake in 1978. Pop. (1991 prelim.) 377,951.” (Encyclopedia Britannica)

Thessalonica was a major city from which the Roman occupation government ruled the entire region of Macedonia and it is clear that God wanted to establish a strong church in this city. Luke details what took place in this city. **Acts 17:2-4**

We are going to see again the power of Jewish people in the Roman Empire. The Jews in this city were major players in politics and in commerce. They were well organized, had money to hire demonstrators and had the leadership to rule and guide the mob to do what they wanted. Just like they do today, they used the poor, uneducated and criminals to do their dirty work. **Acts 17:5-9**

In reading the text, we can see that Paul, Silas and Timotheus had some time to plant the Gospel but Luke does not say for how long. It could have been one

week but was most likely longer since the foundation of the church was laid before Paul and his helpers left town.

Women played a vital role in this city, and Luke records that many became Christians in addition to the Greek and Jewish men. It must have been the success of people being converted to Christ which upset the ungodly Jewish leadership.

All the Jews at this time believed and were waiting for the Messiah, which in Greek is called "Christ." Thus, Paul began with the Messiah concept and then preached that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah.

## **BEREA**

Berea was a smaller city located at the foot of Mount Bermius and housed a large Jewish population. The Jews in this city were more open to the Gospel, and again we see the same trend, influential women together with Greek and Jewish men were converted to believe that Jesus is the Christ. **Acts 17:10-12**

Likewise, we can again see the power of the Jews at that time. When the Jewish leadership in Thessalonica found out that the Gospel was being preached in Berea and that many had become Christians, they used their political power to force Paul out of the city. But for some reason they were not able to force out Silas and Timotheus, who stayed behind and strengthened the church. **verses 13-14**

It is interesting that Paul was not alone in running away but had some kind of helpers who made sure that he arrived safely in Athens. **verse 15**

## **ATHENS**

"The capture of Athens by the Roman General Sulla in 86 BC was accompanied by great slaughter and much destruction of private houses, but the only public building to be destroyed was the Odeum of Pericles, burned by the defenders lest its timbers be used by the enemy. The odeum was rebuilt a few years later, through the generosity of King Ariobarzanes of Cappadocia.

Under the Roman Empire, Athens enjoyed imperial favour. A spacious market for the sale of oil and other commodities was laid out east of the old Agora with funds originally provided by Julius Caesar and supplemented by the emperor Augustus. In the old Agora itself, a new odeum, or concert hall, was built in the middle of the square by Marcus Agrippa, the emperor's son-in-law and one of his chief lieutenants. A large building, perhaps a lawcourt, was also erected at the northeast corner. At the southeast corner of the Agora, a handsome library was erected about AD 100, the gift of one T. Flavius Pantainus and his family. It was decorated with a group of marble sculpture representing Homer flanked by the Iliad and the Odyssey. On the Acropolis a small round temple was erected to the goddess Roma and the emperor Augustus." (From Encyclopedia Britannica)

Athens had been around for more than a thousand years and was a major city in the Greek Empire. When Rome crushed the Greeks and reduced them to a "tax

paying region” of the Roman Empire, the people in Athens turned their desires to worshipping idols, eating, drinking and living an immoral life. This was the environment that Paul found as he entered the city. The New Testament does not refer to a great Christian church in Athens nor do we find any of the apostles writing a letter to the church in Athens. **Acts 17:16-21**

Paul declared the Gospel to the Jews first and then the Gentiles and Luke records that a few people believed and were saved. Let us now look upon Paul’s sermon in Athens. **Acts 17:22-34**

### **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS CHAPTER?**

1. Wherever you are in the world, there will be Jewish people fighting the message of Jesus with all their might. **Matthew 23:13-15, 29-35**
2. Jewish apostasy is not going to disappear; on the contrary, it is going to grow in power and influence until the culmination of the Antichrist. Christians have to learn to live with it like Paul did. **2 Corinthians 11:24-30**
3. We are not fighting against flesh and blood, behind the ungodly Jews stands the Devil and his hordes of demons. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**
4. We can be strong through Christ and have the victory under all circumstances! **Ephesians 6:10-18**

**DO YOU HAVE AN EAR TO HEAR WITH?**