

Amphipolis and Apollonia :: Amphipolis was located 33 miles from Philippi and Apollonia 27 miles farther down the same Roman Road (the Via Egnata). From the latter to Thessalonica would have been 3 days travel. The probably spent the night in an inn and then continued traveling on towards Thessalonica. Why not stop there? Those town surely had Gentiles who hadn't heard the gospel news. The text leads us to suspect that they push on to a town that has a synagogue, a community that has already heard the word of God: "a field ripe for harvest" (with a spiritual formation or foundation).

T.h.e.s.s.a.l.o.n.i.c.a :: an important city. The capital of the Roman province of Macedonia (what we now call Turkey). It became a free city in 42 BCE (because it supported Octavian (Augustus Caesar) in the civil war, and so was never conquered as a colony for its faithfulness to the victorious emperor. It minted its own coins and had its own form of government. It was thus well trusted by Rome as attested to in this autonomy. Of course this meant a system of patronage. Their autonomy depending upon them paying homage and loyalty to the power of Rome. They did have the imperial cult, the growing imperial theology that the emperor was the universal savior whose benefactions and aid should be proclaimed as good news throughout the region.

As was his custom, :: throughout Act we see that Paul consistently goes first to the local synagogue to preach about Jesus, then moves outward if rejected.

on three Sabbath :: they are there for at least 3 weeks.

THE SCRIPTURES :: it's all too easy for us to forget that this phrase means the First Testament: the Hebrew Scriptures: the Law and Prophets. The only one that they had. His preaching was a form of rhetoric based upon persuasion and dialogue in view of conversion. The invitation would be to turn from worship of idols and false gods (presumably including statues of emperors past and present) to the one true God. This politically charged language and challenge to the "peace and security" supposedly brought by the emperor is present in the epistle of 1 Thessalonians.

GOD-FEARING GREEKS and QUITE A FEW PROMINENT WOMEN. :: there were "devout" Greeks/Gentiles who believed in the Hebrew God, obeying the Torah law, yet not being circumcised. These women were not just married to prominent men. They themselves were prominent in the life of this regional capital city.

CAESAR'S DECREES :: scholars suggest that this is a ban of certain predictions, not sanctioned by the emperor, such as the coming of a new king/Lord to make all things new.

These men who have caused trouble all over the world :: Some translations present this charge against them as "those who have turned the world upside down..."

King :: the missionaries are threatening the stability of the empire, and the safety of the town, by proposing that Caesar is not king, but only Jesus is. This is a theological as well as a political situation. It's treason to propose another king, a crime worthy of invasion destruction by the Roman legions.

Textual Analysis for 4.17.2016

Acts 17:1-9

¹When Paul and his companions had passed through **Amphipolis and Apollonia**, they came to **T.h.e.s.s.a.l.o.n.i.c.a**, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² **As was his custom**, Paul went into the synagogue, and *on three Sabbath* days he reasoned with them from **THE SCRIPTURES**, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of **GOD-FEARING GREEKS** and **QUITE A FEW PROMINENT WOMEN**.

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,

⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying **CAESAR'S DECREES**, saying that there is another **king**, one called Jesus."

⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

To the church of :: Paul begins his letters with this introduction. We think automatically of a building or an established religious community. Our word “church” comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* (like ecclesiastic). The first part “ek-” is a prefix meaning “out from and to” indicating movement. The root word “klesia” comes from the word “kaleo” meaning “to call”. The word church thus means a community of people who are called out from the world/place in which they are; or a community of people called to a particular common task or way of being.

Grace and peace to you :: Paul begins his letter with this established epistolary (or letter-writing) formula from the Roman times. The greeting in Grace was an established way of writing in Greek. The Hebrews would greet each other with peace – or Shalom. In his greeting we thus see the multicultural nature and identity of the church.

brothers and sisters :: the Greek text reads “brothers” which means both a plural group of men, and a plural group composed of men and women. This translation (NRSV) asserts that the church community was one inclusive of men and women in equality.

Turned :: *stréphō* – properly, to turn (transition); (figuratively) to convert by changing (switching) direction, i.e. go the other way (an “about-face”); taking an opposite or divergent course. (*stréphō*) usually has a straightforward meaning (“turn”), graphically illustrating dynamic change (transitioning). See Mt 18:3 and Jn 12:40.

i.d.o.l.s :: this could include idols of other/false gods, as well as presumably statues of current and former Roman emperors which would be venerated in the imperial religious cult.

QUESTIONS FOR PONDERING:

1. What is the life that the Thessalonians are invited to turn from and the life they are invited to turn towards?
2. How is that a similar invitational call of faith for us today?

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

¹Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

² We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, *brothers and sisters* loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you **turned** to God from **i.d.o.l.s** to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.