

## I. Introduction

Good morning! Today I want to encourage all of us to become Bible Detectives. Have you ever read Sherlock Holmes? Do you like Conan the Detective? Do you stay up late reading Agatha Christie novels and cheering for Miss Jane Marple? Many people are fascinated by detective stories. But sometimes we need to do more than enjoy detective stories; sometimes we need to investigate the facts for ourselves. We will come back to this in a few minutes.



Today we are in Acts 17. Paul is in the middle of his second missionary journey. At the end of Acts 16, Paul and Silas left Philippi where they had a difficult, but very successful ministry. You may remember that they were put in jail, but the Lord freed them with an earthquake, and then the jailer and his family came to faith and were baptized. Now they are travelling onward through northern Greece and they will pass through a couple of small cities before arriving at the major city of Thessalonica and ministering there. After Thessalonica, they will go on to Berea as well.



Let's read Acts 17:1-9 and see what happened in Thessalonica.

## II. Scripture Reading (Acts 17:1-9, NIV)

1 When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. 5 But the 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 brothers 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.

## III. Teaching

Most of the old Roman city of Thessalonica lies underneath the modern city, so only a few areas have been excavated. This photo shows an area that used to be underneath a bus station. The bus station was moved in 1962 and since then archeologists have identified a Roman bathhouse, a mint, and other buildings that date back close to the time of Paul's visit.



It was probably about a three day walk from Philippi to Thessalonica. On the way, Paul and Silas may have stayed overnight in Amphipolis and Apollonia, but it seems that they did not stay and preach in those towns, but instead pressed on to Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue. Paul taught there for three Sabbaths and won a large number of followers to Jesus. Then trouble came.

**Acts 17:5a, "But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city."** Some Jews and a large number of Greeks had come to faith and had joined Paul and Silas in trusting in Jesus. Unfortunately, Paul's success in preaching

made the other Jews jealous. So they seem to have devised a strategy for getting rid of Paul. They gathered some bad characters, started a riot, and then afterward blamed the trouble on the Christians.

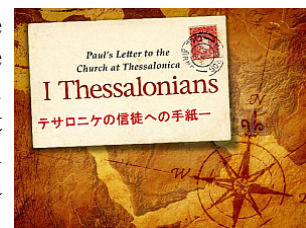
**Acts 17:5b, “They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.”** Paul and Silas were not there at this time, but they must have been staying with Jason since this is where the Jews expected to find them. According to church tradition, this Jason was one of the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus in Luke 10 and is also the same Jason that is mentioned in Romans 16:21 as being a relative of Paul. Jason is originally from Paul’s home city of Tarsus and later on he returned to Tarsus and was appointed by Paul to be the Bishop of Tarsus. Jason died a martyr for his faith and in the Catholic and Orthodox churches is known as Saint Jason of Tarsus.



Led by the jealous Jews from the synagogue, the crowd had come looking for Paul and Silas. **Acts 17:6, “But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,”** Paul and Silas had done nothing but share the love of Jesus and preach the Good News of salvation. But to those who reject Jesus, Christians are troublemakers because the gospel challenges people to repent of their sins.

The accusers said, **“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.”** From this accusation, it is clear that the Good News of Jesus was already having a powerful impact across the Roman Empire. I like the way the New King James Version translates it even better, **(Acts 17:6b) “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.”** They were accused of turning the world upside down. But in reality, the world had been upside down for a long time. Now, by the power of God and His love and grace, the followers of Jesus were trying to turn the world right-side up.

By the way, many Bible scholars believe that Paul’s first letter to the church at Thessalonica was the very earliest of the New Testament writings to be finished. Paul probably wrote 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians while he was in Corinth in AD 51. It is likely that Paul wanted to write quickly and encourage the new believers that he had to leave behind after only a short time of teaching them. In this letter, Paul covered a number of subjects, but we can say that the letter emphasized living a holy life and being ready for Jesus to return any day.



Let’s continue onward and read Acts 17:10-15.

#### IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 17:10-15, NIV)

10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. 13 When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. 14 The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15 The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

#### V. Teaching

Berea means, “place of many waters,” and I think Berea must have been a beautiful and peaceful place. The modern city of Veroia, Greece is located on top of ancient Berea and has a population of about 66,000. There are many churches in Veroia and the Christian population traces its beginning back to Paul and Silas’s visit. This outdoor mural which shows Paul teaching the Bereans is an example of artwork in the city that commemorates Paul’s missionary work.



At the beginning of the message today, I said that I want to encourage you all to become Bible Detectives. More specifically, I want to encourage all of us to imitate the example of the Bereans. Consider how they acted in **Acts 17:11**, “**Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**” The Jews and Gentiles at the synagogue in Berea were of a different and much better character than the people in Thessalonica. In Berea, the people received Paul’s message eagerly. There is no hint of cynicism or division among the people. But at the same time, the Bereans were careful. After Paul spoke, they examined the Scriptures carefully in order to make sure of the things that Paul said.

They, “**examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**” This is a good example for us. We should not be skeptical or cynical when we hear a sermon or a Bible teaching. But we should not be passive either. We should actively listen and then diligently study to make sure of the things we are learning. When we search the Scriptures on our own we reinforce the things we are hearing in church and we verify the reliability of the message. No pastor or preacher is perfect; sometimes there are mistakes. I also make mistakes. It is always good to check and make sure of things. If you develop a healthy habit of studying the Bible on your own, you will grow in spiritual maturity and wisdom much faster than if you just listen passively to the Sunday sermon.



Paul preached and the Bereans checked the Scriptures daily to make sure of the things Paul said. We are not told the exact contents of Paul’s messages in Berea, but they were probably similar to his messages in Thessalonica. In **Acts 17:2b-3**, we read that, “**he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’**” The New Testament had not yet been written, so Paul was using the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ that the prophets had spoken of since the beginning.

Paul’s message to the people of Berea was Good News and I am sure that it brought great joy to the Jews and Gentiles both. But they knew that the claim that Jesus is the Messiah had to be examined carefully. We also have to be careful when a travelling evangelist or preacher comes to town. We want to eagerly receive the message, but we also know that we have to watch out for false teachers and prophets.

The Bereans eagerly received Paul’s message about Jesus, but they also checked the Scriptures. We should strive to follow their example by being good Bible Detectives, searching the Scriptures for the truth. To help us get started, in the bulletin there is a list of a few of the prophetic verses that Paul might have shared with the Bereans in order to explain and prove that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. I have also included the New Testament references that record the fulfillment of these prophecies as well. Look these up and read them carefully and you will be on your way to becoming a better Bible Detective. These are just a few of many prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. The fulfillment of these prophecies is one of the strong proofs that Jesus is Christ Messiah.

The Bereans heard the gospel with joy, but it was not long before the enemies of Christ appeared again. **Acts 17:13**, “**When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.**” This led to Paul leaving for Athens, but Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea and continued teaching the believers.

Later, in his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote to them and encouraged them saying in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-21**: “**Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.**” Paul did not mention Berea by name, but I have the impression that Paul might have been thinking of the good attitude of the believers in Berea when he wrote these words.

“**Test everything. Hold on to the good.**” It is important for us to test everything by carefully comparing it with the Word of God. We should test not only the things we hear in church, but also the customs and world view assumptions of our cultures. It is common for people to assume that the beliefs and customs of their home culture should be accepted without question. But all



things should be tested carefully. What is bad should be rejected. What is good should be held on to like pure gold.

If you received a gold ring that was passed down in your family from a hundred years ago, you would value it as a family heirloom. But unless you test it, you cannot be sure if it is really pure gold. In the case of a ring, it may not matter very much, unless of course you try to sell it. But when it comes to matters of life and death – especially teachings about salvation and eternal life, then it is very important that we examine and test everything carefully. When we die, God will test us to see if we have the pure gold of truth or the false gold of mere human wisdom or the lies of the devil in our heart. Therefore, we should prepare by doing our best to make sure we have the truth.

Even in the church, we need to be careful. Some churches have fallen into the trap that Paul warned against in **2 Timothy 4:3**, **“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”** We need to be good Bible Detectives to check everything carefully and hold onto what is good.

VI. Conclusion

In closing, let’s read just a couple verses of the Old Testament prophecies that speak clearly about Jesus’ death and resurrection. Psalm 22 is a detailed prophecy about the crucifixion. It is written from the viewpoint of Jesus looking down from the cross. Just for a sample, I’ll share **Psalm 22:16-18**. **“Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”**

One of the prophecies that speaks about the resurrection of Jesus is found in **Psalm 16:9-10**, **“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”** Jesus died and He was buried. But He was not abandoned to the grave and His body did not decay, because on the third day He rose from the dead.

Finally, one of the greatest prophetic passages of all is Isaiah 53. Here is a short sample. **Isaiah 53:5-6**, **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

All of these prophecies were given and recorded hundreds of years before Jesus was born. But Jesus fulfilled them all in His life, death and resurrection. Jesus is the true Savior, the Messiah, the Christ. I am confident that if you become a Bible Detective and carefully examine the evidence, you also will see that Jesus is Lord and God. We are all human. We fall short of God’s standards in what we say and do. Like lost sheep, we cannot find our way home. But Jesus is also the Great Shepherd. And when we call out to Him, He comes and gathers us into His strong arms.



Let’s pray.

VII. Prayer

Prophecies about Jesus’ death and resurrection	Old Testament Prophecies (given hundreds of years before Jesus was born)	New Testament Fulfillment
1. Despised and Rejected	Isaiah 53:3, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”	Matthew 27:30-31, “They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”

2. Betrayed by a Friend	Psalm 41:9, "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."	Mark 14:10, "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them."
3. Sold for 30 Pieces of Silver	Zech. 11:12, "I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.	Matthew 26:15, "and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.
4. The Silver was used to Buy a Potter's Field	Zech. 11:13, "And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"--the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter."	Matthew 27:6-7, "The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners."
5. Silent when Accused	Isaiah 53:7 "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."	Matthew 26:62-63a "Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent."
6. Struck and Spit on	Isaiah 50:6 "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."	Mark 14:65, "Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him."
7. Crucified with Sinners	Isaiah 53:12 "Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."	Matthew 27:37-38 "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left."
8. Hands and Feet Pierced	Psalm 22:16 "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet."	John 20:25 "So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."
9. Mocked and Insulted	Psalm 22:7-8 "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'"	Matthew 27:42-43 "'He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"
10. They Cast Lots for His Clothes	Psalm 22:18 "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."	Mark 15:24 "And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get."
11. Buried with the Rich.	Isaiah 53:9 "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.	Matthew 27:57-60b "As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock."
12. Rose from the Dead	Psalm 16:9-10 "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."	Matthew 28:5-6 "The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."