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**A0919 – May 10, 2009 – Acts 17:1-9 – The Failure Of Pragmatic
Philosophy**

Alright, let's get back to Acts. I want to thank Mark Beall, Dick Roesch and Brian Williams for teaching in my stead while my family was on vacation. Now we want to regain our bearings in the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit, and hopefully you are reading the Book as we work through, reading and reviewing. I can teach you the Book of Acts but I cannot be your spiritual life. You have to study it personally, daily. Alright, we're in Acts 17 but having been out of it for a couple of weeks so let's review the basic structure of the book. Acts 1:8 is the key that gives us the outline of the book. In Acts 1:8 the gospel goes out in three stages, first it goes to Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria and finally to the remotest parts of the earth. You ought to have that written down somewhere in your Bible, you ought to have it memorized. Three successive stages; stage one, chapters 2-7 the gospel in Jerusalem; stage two, chapters 8-9 the gospel in Judea and Samaria; stage three, chapters 10-28, the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth. We've worked to chapter 17 so we're in stage three, the remotest parts of the earth and in particular the gospel's invasion into Europe.

The significance is always downplayed by the secular humanist which is the reason the West is what it is today. First of all, we have economic reform that gave rise to capitalism. You never had that until you had a developed Protestant theology. And as the protestant base erodes capitalism erodes right along with it. The two go hand in hand and if one goes the other goes and the vacuum will be filled by secular humanism and socialism; those two go hand in hand as well. Secondly, the gospel invasion into Europe provided the basis for the rise of science. There's no basis for a rational investigation of nature apart from a rational God who created nature. Even the enemies of the Christian faith admit this. Loren Eiseley, world renowned historian of evolutionary thought, admits, quote "it is the Christian world which finally gave birth in a clear, articulate fashion to the experimental method of science itself."ⁱ It simply would not have arisen apart from a Christian base.ⁱⁱ The third effect of the gospel invasion into Europe brought the division of powers into government in Europe because they respected the biblical teaching of

man's depravity and the need for checks and balances. Everywhere else, tyranny or anarchy. Fourth, it affected the social structures of the West. First, it effected the first divine institution, responsible labor. Labor was viewed, in a developed Protestant theology, as that which chiefly brings glory to God and a hard day's labor, whether one is a carpenter or a doctor, was honored. In the second divine institution of marriage, women in the west were set free from the oppressions which existed in Greece, Rome and other cultures, all because of the biblical teaching of the male and female becoming "one flesh" and a new family unit. So the gospel had profound implications for the West, whether it be capitalism, division of powers, science, labor, marriage or family. The forms we function in and which bring so much freedom all arose exclusively because of one factor; the invasion of the word of God into the west and for no other reason whatsoever. So you can hardly say that chapters 16-17 are insignificant. This should be in every history book, but it's not of course, it's suppressed by the humanist agenda that is out to destroy the word of God, so you never hear it.

In Acts 16:16-24 we had the economic impact. This economic impact was brought about for several reasons; but largely it was brought about because when people become Christians they no longer value certain products the same way and this causes a shift in demand and that means some people are out of work and have to move into new areas of production. So it can shift the market.

In verses 25-34 we showed another point of impact: the impact on problem solving devices; that there is a pagan way of solving problems and there is a biblical way of solving the same problems. Suicide is a common pagan solution; it's easy for the non-Christian who interprets his situation as total chaos, having no hope apart from the Scriptures to just simply go into a suicidal response, sort of grand tantrum, and take their life, escape the problem, or think he has until he has to stand before God without the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. This was the solution of the Philippian jailer; Paul stepped in and challenged that. Biblical solutions begin by enveloping them with the sovereignty of God, cutting them down to size, realizing things are not out of control, God has it under control and Paul brings that doctrine in to impact the Philippian jailer and his whole household who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verses 35-40 we said the third point of impact involved the law. And here the law was used illegally against the Christians, and Paul says, no, no, I'm not going to let you get by with that. Law was given by God to be executed justly and when it's not Paul would stand up and use Law against those who used it against him. Paul recognized that God gave human government as a problem solving device and if we sit by and let the humanists legislate and

legislate against the Christians and do nothing about it, it's our fault. You cannot sit around and say with genuine Christian piety, "Oh, I just let God take care of that." God's not going to take care of that, God gave you a tool to take care of it, and unless you exercise faith by standing up and using the tool you will be legislated against and controlled and silenced by the humanists who are using the tool to silence you. It's been happening for decades because Christians think it's godly to be doormats. It's not godly at all; it's rebellion against the word of God. Paul never lay down.

Now today, in chapter 17, we continue in the area of Law and the question of to whom does the Christian ultimately owe his loyalty: to Christ or Caesar, to God or man, to the Lord of the universe or the lord of a human empire, a very basic question. When the government says one thing and God says another, which takes priority. And at Thessalonica, we infer the answer by the fact that Paul gets jammed by another believer, another believer who thinks he's doing the right thing. He actually thinks he's helping Paul by submitting to Caesar. All because the believer does not have enough Bible doctrine to know what is right and what is wrong in a case of law. As Solomon said, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is death," and that's the case here. This new believer named Jason follows a pragmatic philosophy of law rather than a biblical philosophy of law and as such all he can see is that if he uses pragmatism he can save his own skin and bones but the consequence is that Paul will have to face a greater problem. And so we learn that you may think you are doing what is right and you may even reach the goal you wanted, but the problem is you surrendered to the opposition because you submitted to their terms of agreement. And therefore you lose. And finally it illustrates you cannot defeat Satan by the use of non-biblical strategies. You can try, but you will not succeed, and often immature believers try to solve problems on a non-biblical base, but in every case, somewhere down the line bigger problems are generated.

In Acts 17, verse 1, let's get re-oriented to the second missionary expedition. **Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.** You remember Paul's intention on this journey was only to return to the Galatian region and check on the churches they had planted there, but in time they were lead by the Holy Spirit to Europe. And they landed in Europe in what is called Macedonia and went up to the colony of Philippi, today he continues westward along the Via Egnatia, and all these towns are bunched together: **Amphipolis, Apollonia and Thessalonica.** It is **Thessalonica** where he stops in the first 9 verses of Acts 17, and the rest of v 1 tells us why: **there was a synagogue of the Jews**, but apparently there was no synagogue in **Amphipolis and Apollonia.** Paul went to the Jew first and if there were no Jews he pressed on. He was not authorized to go to the Gentile

first, he was authorized to go to the Jew first, a principle we see over and over in the Book of Acts. And finally when they come to **Thessalonica** they find a **synagogue of the Jews**. Thessalonica was the major city of Macedonia. It's still there today but it's called Salonika. The town goes back many, many centuries before Paul as it was originally known as Therma because it sat on the Thermaic Gulf and later re-named Thessalonica after the wife of Cassander, Alexander the Great's step-sister. So Paul is following his customary method of "to the Jew first." And **Thessalonica** is where the Jews had gathered to form their ghetto. And we gather they had at least ten Jewish men because they have a **synagogue**. And so Paul stops. As verse 2 says, **according to his custom**. Why does Paul go to the Jew first when he was personally commissioned to go to the uncircumcised, the Gentiles and Peter to the circumcised, the Jews? Because doctrinal principles override God's personal call on your life. Doctrine is never superseded by something God wants you to do. What God wants you to do must fit within the prior doctrinal framework. And Paul obviously perceives that 'to the Jew first' is a doctrinal principle and not just his personal taste for evangelism. So the first reason is doctrine, the doctrine stated in Rom 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." The gospel is to the Jew first in the 1st century as well as the 21st century. But you still may ask why? Why has God authorized a 'to the Jew first' methodology for the missionary? Well, there are a number of reasons we've mentioned. For one it was given to the Jewish people to be a light to the Gentiles. What nation on earth was given the privilege of the first missionary endeavor? It was the Jewish nation. God revealed Himself to the Jewish people and gave them the Scriptures so they might be a light to the Gentiles. Acts 13:47, built right out of Isa 49:6. Two, they already know the local language and culture of their community. They are built into that community and already have contacts which make them excellent witnesses. Three, they share the same categories of the OT that Paul shared, so they have a link with Paul in terms of their conceptual framework and therefore, a good place to start. And there are other reasons.

And so, v 2, having arrived in Thessalonica, Paul goes to the Jew first, and **he went to them [Jews], and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures**. Alright two things we observe about Paul's method. First, the source of Paul's knowledge. Paul's epistemology was a Bible first epistemology. He reasoned from the Scriptures, he did not reason to the Scriptures. Those are two diametrically opposed systems of epistemology. If you reason to the Scriptures then you start with human reason as ultimate and use it to arrive at the Scriptures truthfulness or falsity, the human mind is ultimate. Paul never used that approach because Paul knew the mind was depraved along with the rest of man. Man is comprehensively fallen and that includes the mind and therefore the human mind is not a valid starting point.

And therefore Paul reasoned not *to* the Scriptures but **from the Scriptures**. So the Scriptures, divine revelation, are the starting point for knowledge. But what Scriptures is Paul reasoning from? Well, a) he's reasoning in the synagogue, so obviously he's using the OT and b) he only has two NT books available anyway. What are they? James, written about AD44 and Galatians, written about AD49. The year here is 50-51 and the next epistles to be written will be to the Thessalonians, so 1 and 2 Thessalonians quickly follow Paul's visit here and we'll see why he was limited to writing letters to them later. Something happens which forces Paul to the pen. And so he took the **OT Scriptures** and **reasoned** from them. Scripture was the basis of Paul's epistemology. Second observation, he **reasoned from them**, *dialegomai* which has two meanings. It can be a formal address or it can be give and take, more of a discussion. The standard operating procedure in the first century synagogue is they followed a liturgical calendar and each Sabbath, every synagogue would read from the same passage of the Torah and a corresponding passage from the Prophets or Writings. Every synagogue was on the same calendar and so every synagogue was reading the same portion of Torah and the same portion of the Prophets or Writings. Every year they would read through the entire Torah, every three years they would read through *most* but *not all* of the Prophets or Writings. *Most*, but *not all*, that's important for verse 3 because you can see that Paul has to really emphasize two truths, the death and resurrection of the Messiah, those truths happened to fall in portions that were not read in the synagogue, so Paul is having to read those portions and explain them. So this was the procedure: Sabbath would come and people would attend synagogue, if they didn't have an itinerant Bible teacher then a man from your congregation would read the scheduled passage from Torah and the Prophets or Writings. And by the way, the man chosen could be any male age 13 or above who had been bar Mitzvah'd. Even a 13 year old could be called to read and to prepare a brief sermon, and then he would have to answer questions from the men. The Jews knew of no such thing called adolescence where you sow your wild oats. When you were 13 you were a man in the sense that you were expected to act like a man, be prepared for rational discussion as a man, be prepared with Bible lessons as a man. And you wonder why we have so many problems in our society. Today we're lucky if a boy becomes a man by age 30. Many of them are still children at age 60. Never grew up, never had expectations placed on them by their parents. Not the Jews. When you're 13 you're a man and you better act like a man and that means writing Bible lessons for synagogue and presenting them, and answering questions. Why do you think Luke includes the story in his gospel of Jesus up in the Temple of Jerusalem at age 12? Jesus hadn't been bar Mitzvah'd yet, that's why? And yet Jesus at 12 was leagues ahead of his peer group in Bible doctrine. What's Luke saying by putting that one boyhood story in there? That the primary focus of Jesus Christ was Bible doctrine. Jesus was leagues ahead of the experts of His day

at age 12, the guys who not only memorized the Torah but the entire OT. The standard we have set for our young men is so low comparably we've produced a whole generation of effeminate rock star sports fanatics who can't even read the Bible. It's a farce. Think of that fathers when you think of your boys and what you require of them. Normal synagogue practice followed this rotation of men who would give the sermon and answer questions. That's what's involved when it says Paul reasoned with them. And Paul, who was an itinerant evangelist, was doing this for **three Sabbaths**. He would reason with them from the OT Scriptures which means he would give a sermon and then he would entertain questions, Q & A, give and take.

V 3 explains the reasoning process, two participles explain the two things Paul did, **explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."** **explaining**, that participle means "to open up," He's opening up the Scriptures by explaining what they mean and secondly, he's **giving evidence**, another participle, this one, *paratithemi*, (*para* means "alongside" and *tithemi* "to lay or put down,") means "to lay two things alongside one another." What things was Paul laying side by side? Well, on one side Paul had the OT Scriptures and on the other Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures. So on one side the Scriptures and on the other side the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Now here his audience is Jewish so he does things in a Jewish way using the historical framework methodology. What that does is that gives it context. Over and over you see the great saints of Scripture use this approach, which is heavy on history. Why? Because history gives you a framework for interpreting everything else. If you start over here with a false history, say the history of evolution (which is on the scale of billions of years), and evolutionary history says this is how life appeared on earth and this is the path of development, that's man's best guess as to how history should be arranged when you start with human reason. Then you read the Bible and you find a totally different history of how life appeared. Not only is the scale different, (six thousand years versus 15 billion) but the sequence the organisms appear is radically different. Now how can you talk about any subject without one of these two views of history infecting every word and every thought? Your view of history is the background against which all your statements get meaning. And so we can both talk about birds but if we have a different concept of the origin of birds we're not talking about the same thing. Context determines the meaning and origins is *the* ultimate context. So Paul's going to give them a context for everything he says. And when Paul is speaking to Jews he starts with the Gen 12, the Call of Abraham. He doesn't start with Gen 1-11, Creation, Fall, Flood, Noahic Contract. They all agree with those basic categories, these are orthodox Jewish people. They have no problem with the Creator-creature distinction, no problem with the monogenetic origin of mankind, no problem

with the origin of evil and suffering, no problem with God's role as judge and savior, no problem with the stability of the universe being governed by the word of God, no problems whatsoever. They all share those basic categories of thought. That's important because later in Acts 17 Paul's going to face a Gentile audience in Athens, the philosophical intellectuals of his day and they have a pagan background not a biblical background. So he's going to go to them and if you drop down to v 24 what's he going to go into? "The God who made the world and all things in it." That's Creation. Why does he go into Creation? Because pagans always bury the truths of origins, they get it all messed up and so Paul has to deal with that. That's where you learn who God is, who man is and what nature is. If you don't share those basic categories of thought then the cross makes no sense. Drop down to verse 26, "And He made from one man every nation of mankind," the origin of nations. There he's talking about Noah and out of Noah came three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and they went out to form 70 nations and so forth. In other words there's a common root of humanity. If we had all the genealogical data it would go back to Noah, we're all from him. And if we're all from him then we're all in the same predicament. He was a sinner, the Fall, and these are the four big events Paul would use to work with Gentiles, they're absolutely essential. This is where you should start with pagan Gentiles in America, you should never bypass Gen 1-11 because if you do you'll never get to the Jesus of the NT. You may get to Jesus, but it'll be the wrong Jesus, but here he's at the synagogue, he's dealing with orthodox Jews so he starts with the Gen 12, the Call of Abraham.

Now, how do I know he starts with the Call of Abraham? It doesn't say anything about the Call of Abraham. I know that from Acts 13, Paul's address at Pisidian Antioch, that was the standard address Paul gave Jews. So the first thing he goes into is the Call of Abraham. He might ask, now was Abram a Jew or a Gentile when God called him? Well, he lived over in Ur of Mesopotamia and that's where God called him out. He was a Gentile man. Alright, well, is the truth just for the Jewish people? Well no, I guess it could be for Gentiles too. Well what did God promise Abram? That he would be given a land, a seed and a worldwide blessing. Did you ever think of that third part - worldwide blessing? Does that include Jews only or Jews and Gentiles? Hmm, well, I never thought of it that way before Paul. Well, think of it that way now. What else did God promise Abraham? The seed, the blessing has to come through the seed, where else is the world going to get it? Well, the seed has come, the seed is Jesus, go check it out, we have all the genealogy right down at the Temple. You can check it out for yourself, he's the son of David, and he's of Judahite heritage. Jesus fits the profile. See the OT is setting a profile of the Messiah. And what Paul is doing is saying that over here I have the Messiah's profile and over here I have Jesus' profile. Now compare and you get a match. Paul was doing the same thing that is

done in the modern forensic laboratory when they search for a murderer. They get the fingerprints from the weapon, they do a search at the CIA database, they get 98% identity, they find some hair and do a check on the DNA with that individual, that moves things up to 99.7%, and they say, John Doe fits the profile. That's what Paul's doing, he gives more and more data and he says Jesus fits the profile.

And so he might ask them, alright guys, when was our father Abraham justified? Was it before or after circumcision? Oh, before. Was father Abraham justified before the Mosaic Law existed? Yeah, yeah, yeah he was. Well then it's by faith alone isn't it? It can't be by the Law or else Abraham's wasn't justified? You know, I guess you're right Paul.

Now what is Paul doing while he's doing all of this? He's getting rid of objections so that when he gets down to the person of Christ he's cleared a path so they can completely concentrate on the person and work of Christ and not get bogged down in all this other stuff. So he meets all the objections first, he deals with them, then he can talk about Jesus without people thinking of Jesus as some kind of freak that came out of Palestine in the 1st century. He resolves the objections first to prepare the way.

Another thing he would bring up would be the Exodus; he would say when did our people become a nation? Oh, at the Exodus. Okay, good, now how did they get freedom from Egypt? By putting blood on the door. Blood on the door? What did the blood on the door do? Well, it stopped God's judgment; the death angel saw it and passed over. So we had a substitutionary blood sacrifice there didn't we? So now what's he done? He's set them up because later on he's going to talk about Jesus' work on the cross and now they're going to understand Jesus' work on the cross because he's got a parallel, he's got a reference, it doesn't come completely of the clear blue that Messiah got executed on their behalf. We now can explain Jesus' execution.

And then he would go on to the event of Mt Sinai and the giving of the Law. Now, we have the Law, the Law is righteous and good, but have you broken the Law? Have you broken one of the Ten Commandments? You all know deep down in the heart you broke the Law. And if you broke one Law then what does the holiness of God do? It says "judge," so you stand condemned by the Law, right? Yes, we know that. Alright, then you can't be saved by the Law can you? The Law condemns. Right Paul. Well, then the righteousness has to come from the outside, and that's what God was up to with the person and work of Jesus on the cross, that's where salvation comes from and then they could understand. The Scriptures were opened so they saw the importance of the Christ.

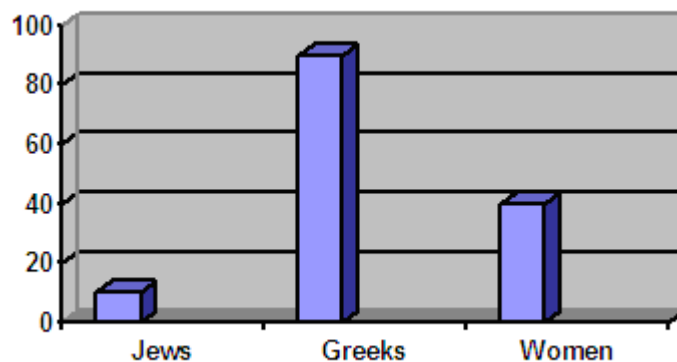
So again he's getting rid of objection after objection after objection so when he gets down to Jesus these objections have been dispensed with; all the theological problems have been met; all the objections have been met. And then he could just march through the OT like this, from event to event. That basically was his approach and in so doing if someone attacks him - Paul, you're introducing something new, I don't buy this substitutionary blood atonement. You don't? What do you do about the Exodus? Well, I have to buy that don't I, I'm a Jew. Right? Well, then if you can buy it at the Exodus why can't you buy it at the cross? Well, I don't know Paul. It does seem reasonable; they fit.

That's what Paul is doing in verses 2-3, then he would come along, and you can see how this would take three weeks to get it all out on the table and that's okay. Paul wasn't in a race to get to Jesus; Paul was on a mission to help people understand the Scriptures, and that takes time. So don't race to the gospel, take your time, work with people. Now, in that context, in the greater story of history that God is sovereignly working out, we can talk about the individual verses. We interpret in context. And it says here Paul was intensely interested in presenting verses that relate to **the Messiah having to suffer and rise from the dead**. Two truths related to the cross, that's the gospel, 1 Cor 15. So he's set the context, now he hits the verses. And we can tell from Acts what verses. If you want an exercise to do I encourage you to go back through the speeches in the Book of Acts and start pulling out all the OT quotes. Start in Acts 2, Peter's sermon, then Peter again in Acts 3, Stephen in Acts 7, Philip in Acts 8, Paul in Acts 13, Acts 14; just go through all the speeches. I dare you to do it. Watch what verses they quote from the OT, make a list of the quotes. Go through all the Book of Acts doing this and I guarantee you you'll come up with three or four verses that are quoted over and over and over again. Then come back and say, what truths are these verses emphasizing? I think you'll find something interesting; the death and resurrection of the Messiah. Those are the two OT truths about the Messiah that weren't read much in synagogue. The one they did read is Deut 21:22-23 which said if a person was hung on a tree they were a criminal. How did the 1st century Jew interpret Jesus? As a criminal. Why? Because of intense exposure to Deut 21. But what about Ps 16? What about Isa 53? Isa 53, I know for a fact was not a part of the liturgical reading. Isa 53 wasn't read? No, so people weren't familiar with the greatest passage on the Messiah's suffering in the whole OT? No. Paul brought it to light.

Verse 4, **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.** Now notice the verb **persuaded**, it means they were convinced, what does that mean for you when you evangelize people? That you do what Paul did. You don't just say, Jesus died and rose again, now

will you believe in Him? And when they say, well, no, I've got a problem here and I've got a problem there. Should you say, now don't worry about that stuff, we'll get to that later, for now just believe in Jesus? Paul never did that. Paul removed the objections, Paul defended the Christian faith, Paul **persuaded** men, and he started with Scripture and had a reasonable discussion. Paul never expected anyone to just believe. He expected men to think, that's what the word persuaded implies. Now think guys, you believe Abraham was justified by faith, you believe he was justified before the Law of Moses, you believe in the substitutionary blood atonement, and all these OT verses point to the Messiah as the atonement. Now, Jesus fits the profile, will you believe? And **some of them were persuaded**, which means they believed in the Lord Jesus who died a substitutionary death and rose again.

Continuing verse 4, notice the proportional response to the gospel. Luke is precise and he's telling us something, that something has shifted here. **Some Jews, a large number of God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.** Three groups. If we were to put this on a bar chart, in column one you have the Jews, **some Jews**, its low,



then in column two you have the **God-fearing Greeks**, they were monotheists, they attended synagogue and studied Torah, of them Luke says **a large number**, so high response. Then **the leading women**, that means the women who were higher up in the community, of them **a number**, literally, "not a few," so they're somewhere in the middle. Notice the proportions. This is the first signal of this kind we get in the Book of Acts. What's the significance? The significance is that this is telling us what the nature of the Church is going to be for the next 2000 years, that we're getting a shift and the Jewish percent is decreasing; the Gentile percent is increasing and finally the women.

Why does Luke single out the women? Christianity did something tremendous for women. The constant barrage of propaganda in our day, "Oh, the Bible teaches submission, women are inferior. Why, if we were all to follow that we'd devolve into cavemen." It's quite the reverse. People who

think that are quite ignorant of history. Before Christianity women were considered little more than cattle. In fact, today Semitic cultures, particularly Islam, could care less about the women. In Islamic culture when a man refers to his wife he's referring to his slave and when he has children and you ask him how many children he has he'll say I have five sons, the girls frankly aren't worth mentioning. Women are absolutely inferior. And what you're getting here, passage after passage in Acts is a notice that women are coming into the Church in droves. Women too are being persuaded. It's a tremendous discovery. Wow, you know, women have brains. They see the freedom they can have in Jesus Christ, they realize they are fully functioning human beings and not second class. And Luke, as a doctor standing by, sees this and he's just amazed. Every time he gives an analysis of the gospel reception he's got some crack about the women. Who was the first woman in Europe to accept Christ? Lydia, an upper class business women. Who are these women? Upper class women. So there's this constant theme Luke hits, watch what Christianity did for women. And get some facts before you start spreading false propaganda.

Verse 5, **But the Jews**, and uh, oh, here it comes, here comes the collision, someone would dare put Christ up against Caesar, someone would actually bring absolutes into the situation. Just three weeks and we're talking a city of 70-100,000 people and Paul's been there three weeks and a mob is going to form, the whole city of 100,000 people are going to start frothing at the mouth over Paul. Now just imagine someone waltzing into a town of 100,000 people and in three weeks he's got the whole place upset? That's power, that's influence and it wasn't because of Paul's great oratorical abilities. He didn't come with the smooth rhetoric of the sophists of his day. It was pure content, it was the content that got them upset, and someone's challenging Rome - quite an accomplishment in just three weeks. So let's read the collision, **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; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶When 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; ⁷and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." ⁸They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. ⁹And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.**

Now, what we have here is a new believer, Jason, totally spoils things, and this is a lesson to learn. Paul has made waves. Paul, in fact, liked making waves, he was a wave maker, he had no problem going into a place and getting things stirred up, and he saw that as a sign he was actually getting

through. What Paul detested was getting people all confused. We already saw that at Lystra. It was just a mess. Everyone was coming out to worship him and Barnabas, but when he actually communicated the gospel, people began to line up on one side or the other side, and that made Paul happy. Why did that make Paul happy, to see people all upset? Because he knew the gospel was making inroads, he knew they heard the issues and they understood the issues and it got under their skin because on one side you have God the Holy Spirit convicting men of sin and on the other side you have Satan causing men to go into a frenzy mob mentality. Just the situation you want in an evangelistic encounter, positive or negative, but not confusion.

So Paul has been clear with the gospel and the two sides line up and notice where it all begins in v 5. **the Jews became jealous.** It doesn't start with any kind of good motive; it starts with a sin problem of jealousy. It's always like this, let the voices of Christians be heard and acted on in Washington and the humanists will always react. Why? Plain and simple jealousy, they want to have the influence, they want to have the power so they incite a big plot to expose influential evangelicals, they attack our public monuments, they attack the Pledge of Allegiance, anything that remotely sounds Christian, and they try to tear it down. So what do they do here, they go down to the **market place and** pick out a few of the **wicked men.** Plato tells us these were the riff-raff of society, always hanging around like bums, guys who would take any job. So the Jews ally with the bums and what does verse v 5 say? They **formed a mob and set the city in an uproar;** did Paul set the city in an uproar? No, Paul didn't, the mob did, the media did, they're the ones that irritated everyone. All Paul was doing was suggesting that Jesus might be the Christ.

And they **attacked the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.** Notice they **attacked the house of Jason,** but you notice someone's missing in these verses, the prize player—Paul. Why is Paul missing? Why has Jason suddenly come into the scene? We don't know why but it's going to lead up to a very interesting application at the last verse of this passage. Jason happens to be the owner of the property where these Christians were meeting; he owned the house. And so the city goes to the property owner, and they start arresting the property owner, and then they make a charge in verse 6, **These men who have upset the world** - that means the social order, they've disturbed the social order, they've turned it "upside down," how did they turn it upside down? Because of their claims of Christ, that Christ was King, He was over all, and His words are the authoritative words. This is one of those little backward compliments paid to Christianity. They mean it in a bad sense but if you think of it, that's quite a compliment being paid to these Christians that in three weeks they could upset the social order with the preaching of the gospel.

And now Acts 17:7, they go on to distort history by saying **they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus**. So they've set Jesus against Caesar. Now if you're a student of the NT and you've studied a bit, I'm sure when you read that it reminds you of an argument you heard once before, something about Jesus being a King, something about Him being in competition with Caesar. And yes, you did hear it before; you heard it at the trial of Christ. You heard it at the trial before Pontius Pilate, it was exactly the charge that was leveled against Jesus, now leveled against His followers, and will be always leveled against His followers. And this is a charge that they are introducing a Jewish King in competition with a Roman King. Now this introduces us to an interesting bit about the times of the Gentiles vs. the times of the Jews. The times of the Jews is the Millennial Kingdom. But to get to the Millennial Kingdom the times of the Gentiles must come to a close and that means all Gentile Caesars must be disposed of. Now, Satan knows that, he knows the plan of God, so far as it is revealed in Scripture. So this is a conflict between God and Satan represented by Christ and Caesar.

And in v 9 the deal is made, something happens here that has serious repercussions, **And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them**. To see what this is turn to 1 Thessalonians 2:18; Paul sees far more sinister things in this deal that was worked out between the court and Jason than just a bail agreement.

In 1 Thess 2:18 Paul notices there's another problem entirely, Paul says: "For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once," that means over and over he wanted to come back to Thessalonica, but I couldn't because "Satan hindered us." Satan hindered us? How did Satan hinder you? What did he do, did he throw up a road block so Paul couldn't get through? What did Satan do? Was it Paul's fear of physical persecution that kept him from going back? No, Paul didn't fear getting beat up, he's been beat up, he'll be beat up again. He's not afraid of that. Well then, what's the matter with Paul here, why does he say Satan hindered him? Because of the **pledge** agreement, a deal was worked out and the deal went like this. Jason, you own that property down on 4th St, right? Right! Christians meet there, right? Right! Paul came in there, he used your property to proclaim this challenge to Caesar, did he not Jason? Yes! Then let me tell you something, Jason, we'll let you off from jail for \$5,000, but Jason, if your friend Paul shows up again you go to jail. There's the agreement; how clever of Satan. Satan fed this immature believer a line, a pragmatic line. You can get off Scott-Free Jason if you pay this money. And Jason bought it, hook, line and sinker. Paul didn't instruct Jason to do this. Paul was willing to face the music and everywhere he goes he does face the music. But what this does is lock Paul out of

Thessalonica, he can't go back now, he's jammed. So, this is what happens when you follow pragmatic law rather than biblical law, you get a Satanic hindrance. What you should do as a Christian is use the law to your advantage. , Jason had done nothing wrong, Paul had done nothing wrong. If there were consequences to face they should have faced them. Eventually Paul would have done exactly what he did at Philippi; he would have turned the tables on the city rulers and put them on the ropes. But now he's got this satanic hindrance to put up with. Paul's blocked and he can't go back and instruct these new believers and he's not going to force his way back in and cause problems for Jason, so he's forced to write letters, and thus the Thessalonian epistles.

Now when you see something like that happen in your life, that is a satanic hindrance, and that's how you spot a satanic hindrance. It's not some obvious thing, the work of Satan is more subtle than that, he doesn't walk around in a red suit and horns and say, "Do you want to sin." When Satan operates there's a degree of intelligence to his operation and Jason didn't catch it. Jason got aced so now Paul has to say, "we wanted to come back, yet Satan hindered us." And that's by application how you can spot the work of Satan. It will always involve a very clever block in your life, not just an ordinary block, a clever one.

ⁱ Pearcey, N., & Thaxton, C. B. (1994). *The soul of science : Christian faith and natural philosophy*. Turning point Christian worldview series (18). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

ⁱⁱ Pearcey, N., & Thaxton, C. B. (1994). *The soul of science : Christian faith and natural philosophy*. Turning point Christian worldview series (17). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

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