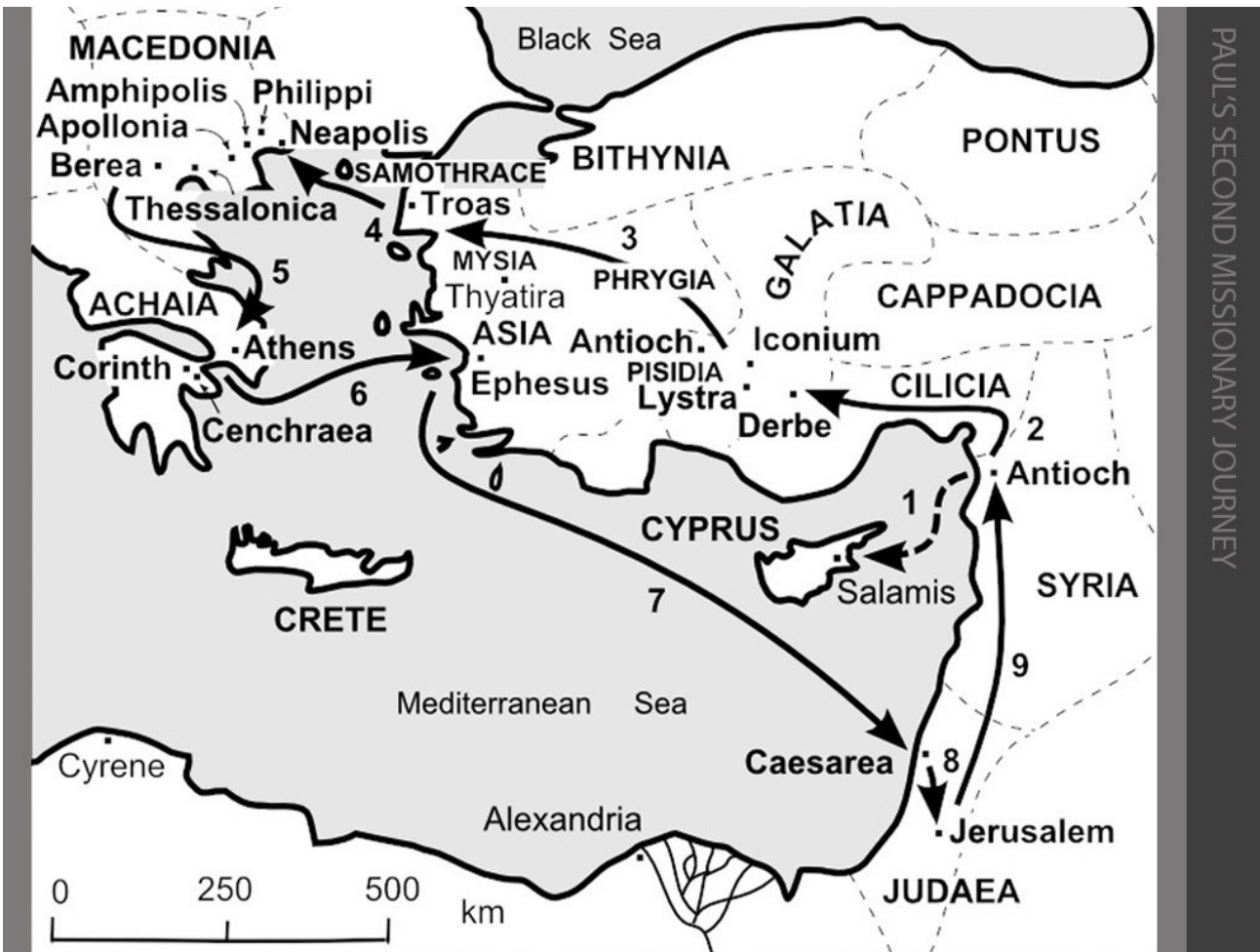


**BEING INTENTIONAL!**  
**ACTS CH17:1-9**

**INTRODUCTION**

How many people approximately live in the UK? Close to 67 - 68 million? Hypothetically, if 5% of that population are truly “born again Christians”, that would mean there around 3.4 million “born again Christians” living in the UK. It would be a number slightly bigger than the population of Wales! If there are around 16,000 people living in Morryston and 5% of that number are truly “born again Christians”, how many people would that be? 800! Or, if there are around 6000 people living on our patch, split roughly in half between Parcgwernfadog and Cwmrhydyceirw, how many are likely to be “born again Christians”? 300! What do we make of that? Potentially 5700 people made in the image of God going to a periless eternity!



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**THE BIGGER PICTURE IN THE CHURCH IN THESSALONICA !**

Thessalonica is in Northern Eastern Greece and was apparently at the time of Paul's second missionary journey, the biggest city after Athens with around 100, 000 people living there, it was named after “Alexander The Great's” half sister. Paul probably visited Thessalonica around AD50 after his stay in Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts Ch15-16 see the map below). Silas was his chief missionary partner (Acts Ch15:40), with Timothy joining in Lystra (Acts Ch16:1-2), followed by Luke in Troas (Acts Ch16:11). When the journey to Thessalonica is made, only Paul, Silas and Timothy go (Acts Ch17:1), it would appear that Dr Luke stayed in Philippi, rejoining the team in Acts Ch20:5-6.

Thessalonica had a Jewish population big enough to have a synagogue and Paul preached there on three Sabbath days (Acts Ch17:2), but probably stayed longer (1<sup>st</sup> Thess Ch2:9 + Philipians Ch4:15), before having to leave the city under the cover of darkness (Acts Ch17:10) because of persecution (Acts Ch17:5-9).

### **WHY DID PAUL AND HIS TEAM GO TO THESSALONICA?**

Acts Ch17:2-3	-	To show them who Christ was from the Scriptures!
1Thessalonians Ch1:5	-	To share the Gospel!
“ Ch2:2	-	“ “ “ “
“ Ch2:8	-	“ “ “ “ and to share their lives!
“ Ch4:1-2	-	To model and teach a life pleasing to God!

### **WHO WAS IN THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA?**

Acts Ch17:1-4	-	Jews and Greeks
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The three men then separated (Acts Ch17:14) going in different directions before reuniting in Corinth (Acts Ch18:5, 2 Cor Ch1:19). It was here that Timothy reported on a number of developments in Thessalonica, having seen their faith, love, loyalty, and steadfastness under persecution (1 Thess Ch3:6-8). Timothy reported that Paul was being criticized for his insincerity (1 Thess Ch2:2-6), for not returning (1 Thess Ch2:17-3:5), in addition to the above, the Church in Thessalonica needed correcting and instruction in areas of:

- sexual morality
- about earning their own living
- preparing for the second coming of JESUS
- and tensions in the fellowship.

*It was in response to the report from Timothy, that Paul probably wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians around AD51-53 whilst in Corinth.* It seems certain that Paul, Silas and Timothy were still in Corinth when the Thessalonians' response to Paul's first letter arrived (Acts Ch18:11 + 18) for he stayed in the City about two years. The news that they received was mixed, as is clear from Paul's second letter, which it prompted. On the one hand, he and his co-workers were deeply thankful to learn of the Thessalonians' growing faith and love and of their perseverance under persecution (2 Thess Ch1:3-4). On the other hand, there was cause for anxiety because the Church was being disturbed in three particular ways.

**First**, the persecution was so severe that Paul felt the need to explain why God allows His people to suffer for the Kingdom and how He will put wrongs, right when JESUS comes (2 Thess Ch1:5-10).

**Secondly**, the Thessalonians were in danger of being deceived by false teaching, which had reached them through a communication which purported to come from Paul but was a forgery (2 Thess Ch2:1-3). In particular they were being told that the day of the Lord had already come. So Paul needed to remind them of God's eschatological calendar, and especially that the revelation of Christ would be preceded by the rebellion of the Antichrist (2 Thess Ch2:3-12).

**Thirdly**, the group of “idlers”, who for whatever reason had given up work, had not followed Paul's instruction to return to work! So he had some stern words in his second letter to and about this disobedient minority (2 Thess Ch3:4-12). Paul also entreated the Thessalonians in this as in all matters to be loyal to his teaching (2 Thess Ch2:13-15) and he took the opportunity to express both his continuing prayers for them (2 Thess Ch1:11-12, Ch2:16-17, + Ch3:16-18) and his need for their prayers (2 Thess Ch3:1-3).

All three chapters of the second letter allude to the Parousia (Jesus' second coming)! 2 Thessalonians, like all of Paul's letters, is a response called forth by special, local circumstances, that need responding to! Paul draws attention to three different people groups who were disturbing the peace of the Thessalonian Church!

Paul's concern for the Church in Thessalonica did not finish with his first letter, his ministry is to continue to disciple those he had won for Christ, those who are his joy, his crown (1 Thess Ch2:19)! So he writes a second letter to tackle the areas that are disrupting and destroying the peace of the Church! In Chapter 1 Paul tackles the persecutors (v4), Chapter 2 the false teachers (v2) and in Chapter 3 the people who are idle (v11).

The background to 2 Thessalonians is therefore the same as 1 Thessalonians with only slight additions. While he was still in Corinth, Paul received word about the Church's condition. Through what channel the report came is not known, but it's content was sufficiently important to prompt him to write 2 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians was apparently prompted by three main developments:

- Persecution of Christians had grown worse and was leaving victims at the point of despair
- Counterfeit letters and other false representations were on the point of convincing believers that the end time was already present because of their increased suffering
- The nearness of Christ's return had been misused as a basis for shirking vocational responsibilities even more than at the time of 1 Thessalonians. The problem had become quite severe.

To meet the above needs, the apostle Paul pursued three broad purposes:

- He provided an incentive for the Thessalonians to persevere a little longer by describing the reward and retribution issuing from the future judgement of God (Ch1:3-10)
- He clarified prominent events belonging to the day of the Lord to prove the falsity of claims that the day had already arrived (Ch2:1-12).
- He used detailed instructions covering disciplinary steps the Church was to take in correcting those who refused to work (Ch3:6-15).

#### **PAUL'S PREACHING IS INTENTIONAL! V1-4**

**V1+2** - Paul had a strategy of preaching in the Jewish Synagogues first (where there were ones) before preaching to the Gentiles and we see this clearly in the following places – Ch13:5; Ch13:14; Ch14:1; Ch17:1; Ch17:10; Ch17:17; Ch18:4; Ch18:19; + Ch19:8 (9 times). He knew that the Synagogues would have both Jews and those gentiles who were either interested in Judaism or had converted to Judaism and he also knew that each Sabbath as was their custom the “Scriptures” (for us the Old Testament) would be opened up and read and explained!

**V3+4** - *Paul's first recorded sermon by Luke back in Ch13:16-41 (There are 9 speeches in Acts by Paul, 5 in sermons Ch13:16-41; 14; 17; 20 + 28, then 4 in defence speeches Ch22:1-21; 23:1-8; 24:10-21; 26:2-27) takes place in the Synagogue in Pisidia Antioch, when we see a clear summary of the History of Israel, of God's providence and Sovereignty over that nation. Paul then details what Jesus went through, how He was treated and why He came. Lastly we see the consequence of Him coming and also the consequence of the Jews response to that coming.*

**To further his points, Paul, in his first recorded Sermon, skilfully uses the very Scriptures that the Jews should be familiar with! From those readings he proves who Jesus is, Scriptures like Psalm 2:7 in Ch13:33, Isaiah Ch55:3 in Ch13:34 and in Ch13:35, Psalm 16:10. These verses come together to show that Jesus is the Son of God, He is from the line of David and God the Father, in raising Him from death, He did not see corruption. Paul uses another quote from the Old Testament this time from Habakkuk Ch1:5. Paul uses it to show the Jews that the way some people will respond has already been foretold, Ch13:41, “a work that you will not believe even if one tells it to you.”**

**We call this a “PESHER.” An Old Testament prophecy, which can be fulfilled by God stepping in on any given day in history and a set day in the future! When they crucified**

## ***Jesus, this was that “set day” in the future – V3 IS A PESHER!***

John Stott states “There can be little doubt that in the Thessalonian synagogue the Scriptures to which Paul turned were those already quoted in the apostles earlier sermons .....” (John Stott, Commentary on Acts, PG 271). Paul understands the culture so well within the Jewish Synagogue, that he uses the Scriptures to:

1. v3 to explain and prove that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer!
2. v3 to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ!
3. v4 to use the Scriptures, through reasoning, explaining and proclaiming, for effective evangelism!

*In 2010 the Evangelical Alliance, together with Christian Research, took a snapshot of the beliefs and practices of evangelical Christians in the UK. Over 17,000 people completed questionnaires, making it the most extensive piece of research of its kind. Here are just some of the questions:*

1. *Approximately how often do you talk about your faith with someone who wouldn't call themselves a Christian?*
2. *Is it a Christian's duty to be actively engaged in evangelism?*
3. *Would you describe the church you attend as engaged with the local community?*

Just like the apostle Paul, who understood his culture, knew the Scriptures and put his full trust in the power of God through proclaiming God's Word, we too, need to be intentional in growing to learn and understand our culture, growing in knowing the Scriptures, growing in trusting in God's Word for transformation and growing in competence in taking people through the Scriptures to reveal Christ! Why? Because it can lead to effective evangelism!

## **THE JEWS JEALOUSY IS INTENTIONAL! V5-8**

V5 – How would you describe jealousy? According to the “New Bible Dictionary” Jealousy – aroused by someone else's quality. The principle OT term “jealousy” in the English Bible is *qin'a* from the verb *qana*, root meaning “**become dark red**” (Number Ch5:14, Proverbs Ch6:34 and Ez Ch16:42. Both the Hebrew and the Greek refer to an “exclusive single-mindedness of emotion which may be morally blameworthy or praiseworthy depending on whether the object of the jealousy is the self or some cause beyond the self.”

V5-8 - Envy – a grudgingly regard for the advantages seen to be enjoyed by others. Jealous over the success of Paul's evangelism, the fact that Jews, a great many devout Greeks and women of high standing, were now turning to Christ, sent the other remaining Jews of the Synagogue into a state of exclusive single-mindedness jealousy, bright red, and with a plan! So the Jews from the Synagogue round up “some wicked men of the rabble”, form a mob and start a riot in the city! Why? They are off to the house where Paul, Silas and Timothy are staying, to do what? To bring them out to the crowd! This isn't to continue the debate on Christianity! Absolutely not! We all know what tends to usually happen through “mob rule”, thank goodness the missionaries are not there! So, Jason (Jason - Romans Ch16:21?) the owner of the house and now a believer and the one providing hospitality for the lads, is dragged outside with some other Christian brothers and taken to the authorities, accused of:

1. Harboring the men who have turned the world upside down!
2. All acting against the Emperor, because these guys, Paul, Silas and Timothy are accused in essence of High Treason, by proclaiming Jesus as King!

So, who are the **real** trouble makers? The Jews from the Synagogue, along with the wicked rabble or the Christians? Who?

V8 - It leaves the inhabitants of the City, disturbed! (Think Proverbs Ch18:17).

So what is going happen?

### **THE BROTHERS BAIL IS INTENTIONAL! V9**

Persecution continues for those following Christ, in this context through Jewish jealousy and the mob mentality, enforced by secular authorities.

Some kind of bail and restrictions are set in place and a monetary transaction is made, between the authorities and the Christians. Bail in this case, as in many cases, is a **temporary release of a person who is a suspect in an investigation into a crime**. Bail can sometimes be granted on condition that a sum of money is presented to guarantee the person coming to court at a future date too.

But there must have been some kind of restrictions set in place, as Paul sets out in 1<sup>st</sup> Thess Ch2:18 – Satan hindered me (contrast with Ch16:6-7)! We know that Paul was prevented from returning and that is why he sent Timothy (1 Thess Ch3:2) back to Thessalonica. The bail conditions in some way, must have influenced the missionaries departure and the decision later on about whom should return.

We will see from next week that despite the missionaries having to move on because of the persecution that the wonderful work of reaching the lost continues. But for now, with it being just *11 weeks and 1 day or 78 days to Christmas, think about our "intentionality" with our culture, our Gospel and our faith and **MINCE PIES! YES 6 MINCE PIES!*** Pray about being intentional with our time, treasure and talents and using them to intentionally offer to spend time with perhaps 2 mature Christians, 2 young Christians, 2 non-Christians, with a cuppa and some mince pies. *Mary had one at Tony + Kim's this week, delicious! You may already be doing this in some form.*

### **APPLICATION**

*Here are just some more questions from the research conducted by the Evangelical Alliance:*

- 1. In a typical week how long do you spend reading the Bible?*
- 2. How often do you read (or listen to) the Bible on your own?*
- 3. How often do you read (or listen to) the Bible with others?*
- 4. Typically, how many hours a week do you volunteer in activities that serve/benefit the local community, and not just your church members?*
- 5. Approximately how often do you talk about your faith with someone who wouldn't call themselves a Christian?*
- 6. How often do you work as a volunteer for your church in an activity that serves the local community?*
- 7. Would you describe the church you attend as working together with other churches in your area?*

*Let's tackle some of these in our weekly connections as we gather together!*