

THE REST OF THE STORY

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 17:1-15

Topic

Paul is twice driven out of cities when envious Jews
cause the mob to be stirred-up against him

Title

Mob Stirs

Acts 17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 17:2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Acts 17:3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

Acts 17:4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

Acts 17:5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Acts 17:6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."

Acts 17:7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus."

Acts 17:8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

Acts 17:9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Acts 17:10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

Acts 17:12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

Acts 17:13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.

Acts 17:14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.

Acts 17:15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Introduction

You gotta love the Bereans!

For centuries they have had churches and bookstores and ministries and schools named after them. Pastors and Bible teachers frequently exhort their hearers to be like the Bereans in their approach to the Word of God.

I want to be a Berean; so do you. What is it that set them apart from their Thessalonian counterparts?

There is a subtle but significant clue in the way the two groups are described. Look first at the Thessalonians in verse two. You're told that Paul reasoned with them **for three Sabbaths**. On three - consecutive Saturday's the apostle broke open the Scriptures seeking to show them that the promised and prophesied Messiah had come and was none other than Jesus Christ.

Look next at the Bereans. Paul went in to their synagogue. Immediately following his first visit we're told that they began to **search the Scriptures daily**. They didn't wait until the following Sabbath.

I think Luke was drawing a contrast. The Thessalonians, for the most part, were content to attend synagogue each Saturday and hear the Word taught. The Bereans had a very different approach to the Scriptures. They attended synagogue but were in God's Word daily.

It's not just a matter of daily Bible reading. In Thessalonica they had what I would call a *legal* approach to God's Word. They kept the Sabbath and the other outward forms of the Law of God but had no daily relationship with the Lord through His Word. But in Berea they had a *living* relationship with God's Word – daily spending time in it, searching it, seeking for the Lord Who is revealed in it.

Legal or living – that's the contrast. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Won't Be A Berean With A Legal Approach To God's Word, but #2 You Will Be A Berean In A Living Relationship With God's Word.

#1 You Won't Be A Berean
With A Legal Approach To God's Word
(v1-9)

We've said that Paul's missions strategy was to enter a city and preach in its synagogue(s). Another aspect of his strategy is starting to emerge. He went to the largest city in each area first. He established a church. Then it was the mission of the church in that city to reach out with the Gospel to outlying areas.

God's strategy for reaching the world is flexible. But one thing that never changes is His desire that each local church be a missions-minded church that reaches its own area and beyond.

Acts 17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Getting from Philippi to Thessalonica took a minimum of three days journeying a little more than thirty miles a day. They passed through the smaller towns with their sights set on reaching Thessalonica, a city of about two-hundred thousand.

Acts 17:2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Acts 17:3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."

It's always exciting to demonstrate from God's Word the fulfillment of types and prophecies. Imagine the thrill of seeing the story of Abraham almost sacrificing his son, Isaac, as a type of God the Father sending His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be the final sacrifice for the sins of the world. Or the excitement of showing the true meaning of Psalm twenty-two, quoted by Jesus as He hung on the Cross as proof He was its subject.

The theme Paul emphasized in Thessalonica was the suffering and death of the Messiah followed by His resurrection. God the Holy Spirit knows what people need to hear. We must remain sensitive to His leading to determine our emphasis when presenting Jesus to them.

This Jesus, Paul said. It is our joy to reveal Jesus as He is presented in God's Word. Nothing added; nothing removed. He is the way of salvation for all who will believe. He was and is **Christ** – the promised and prophesied Savior.

Acts 17:4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

It seems most of those converted were Gentiles. When you read Paul's subsequent letters to the church at Thessalonica there is a decidedly Gentile feel. That's to say the opposition about to form was mostly from the nonbelieving Jews.

Acts 17:5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Acts 17:6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

Acts 17:7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus."

Out of envy they stirred-up a mob against the missionaries. Then they blamed the riot on Paul!

The missionaries were lodging at the home of one of those converted, a guy named **Jason**. He and a few other brethren found themselves targets because of simple hospitality!

We over-use an expression today, "Flying under the radar." Try as you might to fly under the devil's radar, sooner or later you're going to be targeted.

Acts 17:7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus."

Acts 17:8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

Roman rulers were charged with keeping the peace. Even though it was the Jews who broke the peace, it was blamed on Paul and his party. The accusers also twisted Paul's teaching about the return of Jesus to set up His kingdom into a potential revolution against Caesar. These were serious charges.

Acts 17:9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Apparently Jason agreed to convince Paul to leave the city. He posted a bond guaranteeing it. We don't know whether Paul was in agreement with it or not but he honored it.

- being changed to bring change -

The mention of the three Sabbaths is taken by some scholars to mean that Paul was only in Thessalonica for about twenty-one days. But other scholars cite evidence he was there longer. I don't think Luke meant the comment to establish how short a time Paul was there but to describe the attitude of the Thessalonian Jews. They heard God's Word taught every Sabbath. They were keeping the outward requirements of the Law of Moses. But they were not searching the Word to know God intimately. When Gentiles started getting saved they weren't interested in the truth, only in preserving their legal way of life.

As Christians saved by grace through faith we've never been under the Law of Moses. Nevertheless it is human nature to want to relate to God in a more 'legal' way. We want rules and regulations; we want to know exactly what we can and cannot do. Either formally or

informally we make lists to guide us. Even if we read the Bible daily we can fall into a legal rut of thinking we have met the minimum requirements.

The church at Ephesus is always a good measure for us. They were doing all the right stuff. But Jesus said they had left their first love for Him.

The Thessalonian Jews are a warning to us to examine the nature of our walk with the Lord. Has it become too legal? If it has, we need to be more Berean!

#2 You Will Be A Berean In A Living Relationship With God's Word (v10-15)

Acts 17:10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Berea was sixty miles away. The journey was made more difficult because it occurred at night when it was inadvisable to travel.

Acts 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

The Bereans **were more fair-minded**. Some of your bible's say they were more **noble**. Scholars struggle to define exactly what Luke meant – some even suggesting that they were of a higher social or intellectual class. I think Luke defined for himself what he meant when he said after the comma **that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**.

You are noble and **fair-minded** if you approach the Word ready to receive new insights about your Lord. You're not just in the Word mechanically, but in it romantically.

There is also a strong exhortation here for us to be discerning of everything we hear taught from God's Word. Take no one at their Word without examining their message using God's Word.

Acts 17:12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

The power to save was not in Paul's argument or oratory. He simply explained the simple meaning of God's Word. The Bible was the power of God unto salvation.

Acts 17:13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.

Acts 17:14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.

Acts 17:15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

How did they hear about what was going on in Berea? Probably a Jew traveling to Thessalonica attended synagogue. But there was something different about him. He was now filled with the joy of the Lord and sharing about Jesus the Christ!

These opposers from Thessalonica came and once again the mob was stirred. It may not be a mob stirred against you. It might be a person, or several people. They might be family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers. It's hurtful but never should it be unexpected.

If you want to be Berean in your approach to God's Word you must see it as **authoritative**. You must believe it to be:

1. Inspired. It means *God-breathed*. God superintended the human authors of Scripture so that using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original manuscripts.
2. You must believe the Bible to be inerrant. "By this word we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth."⁵³
3. You must believe the Bible to be infallible. Until about 1960-65 the word infallible was used in the same way as the word 'inerrant'. In recent years the word infallible has come to be used in the weaker sense of the Bible not leading people astray in areas of faith and practice but allowing for factual errors.

The authority of the Bible – its inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility – are your foundation. They cannot be compromised.

Next to be a Berean you need the understanding that,

Hebrews 4:12 ...the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Here is that verse in the Amplified Bible:

For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.

Other verses that speak of God's Word as alive are Psalm 19:7-9; Psalm 119; Romans 1:6; and First Peter 1:23.

You are to approach the Bible as something that is alive. While you search it, **it is searching you!**

A good Berean operates on both these levels. He or she won't compromise the authority of the Bible. But never forget that you are reading the Word in a living relationship with its Author and Subject.

Never become mechanical. Remain romantic!