

WHY BEREAN?

The Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that Paul's missionary journeys were often full of hazard and danger. In the second journey he and Silas were smuggled out of Thessalonica, after the trouble recorded in chapter sixteen. They withdrew to Berea, some 50 miles to the south-west. This was a city of Southern Macedonia, situated at the foot of Mount Bernius, which was once large and populous. It was founded probably in the fifth century B.C. and in New Testament times contained a Jewish colony. As Paul travelled from place to place he consistently put the chosen people of Israel first, just as the Lord had done in His earthly ministry (Matt. 15:24), as had also the twelve apostles according to His commandment (Matt. 10:5,6).

In view of God's plan that the knowledge of Himself and the fulfilment of His Kingdom should be world-wide and not restricted to any one nation (Isa. 11:9), this is difficult to understand, till we realize that redeemed Israel was chosen as the Divine channel to bring this about (Gen. 12:3; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 13:47), and so must have God's preparation and the gospel first (Acts 3:25,26; 13:46).

It was in this respect that Israel failed so terribly. After God's education of this people for centuries, they deliberately rejected and crucified their Saviour and King when He came to them in the flesh. A further opportunity was granted them during the Acts of the Apostles, God's longsuffering and grace waiting for their response, but wherever Paul went the Jew opposed and blasphemed (Acts 13:45; 18:6).

But those at Berea were a startling exception :

‘And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so’ (Acts 17:10,11).

How refreshing this must have been to Paul and his friend to find a Jewish community who were willing to listen and test his message fairly by the Old Testament Scriptures! For it was these Scriptures that formed the foundation of what Paul had to teach them (Acts 18:28; 28:23).

The Jews of Berea were ‘more noble’ than those at Thessalonica as is evidenced by their ‘readiness of mind’ to weigh over scripturally what they heard from the apostle. The word thus translated means ‘eagerness’, literally ‘a rushing forward’, and this gives us the *first* necessary mental attitude if we are ever to learn God's Truth. We must show practically that *we are keen to get to know it*. God has nothing for indifferent or half-hearted people.

Secondly we note that these Berean Jews tested all they heard by the one Divine standard - the Word of God. They ‘examined’ or ‘searched’ what God had written through the instrumentality of men. This word means ‘to sift up and down’, ‘to make a careful and exact research’. Here was no hasty flicking over a few leaves of the

manuscript, but rather time and care expended in comparing Scripture with Scripture. The next hindrance then to our acquiring Divine knowledge is laziness, or being so cumbered about with lesser things that we have no time to check with the Word of God all that we hear and read. As one person once said to the writer, 'why should I search the Bible? We pay our minister to do that!'

Thirdly, at Berea, there was no spasmodic searching of the Old Testament. They did it *daily*. It was a continual and daily habit which showed in practice how spiritually keen and hungry they were for Truth. Spasmodic Bible Study accomplishes little or nothing! Furthermore, this Berean attitude gives the death-blow to anything approaching priestcraft or the domination of men, however clever or gifted they may be. Every believer is entitled to search the Scriptures and with the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit, can discover what God wants to teach him. This does not mean there is no place for leaders and teachers. God raises these up and they should be respected as such, but not regarded as infallible. They will in all cases be *men of the Word*, and base all their teaching on the Word of God and not on their personal opinions or the opinions of others.

Let us be sure of one thing. *The Word of God is the very foundation of Christianity*. It is the text book of the Christian profession. Every profession has its necessary text books. Imagine anyone attempting to be proficient in any profession and ignoring its text books! Yet this is precisely what so many Christians do. What a different picture we should see today in Christendom and the world around us, if in every church the Word of God was honoured as such and given its rightful place, and those in the pew were like the Bereans of old, daily reading, searching it and making wonderful spiritual discoveries!

What is there as a substitute for God's Word? Nothing except the confusion of human opinion! Why is it that today we see the terrible drift from truth and upright standards? Why do so many deceptive cults flourish? Largely because God's book of truth is unknown, or is rejected and set at naught. The Lord Jesus said '*Thy Word is truth*' (John 17:17) and to His opposers He said '*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures ...*' (Matt. 22:29) and if He was present today, He would have to say this many times, even to professing Christians.

In order to appreciate afresh how fundamental the Bible is to Christianity let us consider that it is the basis of :

(1) **Salvation and spiritual life :**

'The Word of God is living and powerful (literally)' (Heb. 4:12).

'Being born again ... by the Word of God which *liveth* and *abideth for ever*' (1 Pet. 1:23).

(2) **Assurance :**

'These things *have I written* unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that *ye may know* that ye have eternal life ... ' (1 John 5:13).

(3) **Faith :**

‘So then *faith* cometh by hearing, and hearing *by the Word of God*' (Rom. 10:17).

(4) **Spiritual growth :**

‘As newborn babes, desire the sincere *milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby*' (1 Pet. 2:2).

(5) **The accomplishment of God's purposes :**

‘So shall *My Word* be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void but *it shall accomplish that which I please ...* ' (Isa. 55:11).

(6) **The final judgment of men :**

‘He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him; the *word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*' (John 12:48).

(7) **The one offensive weapon that is given to the believer :**

‘The *Sword* of the Spirit, which is the *Word of God*' (Eph. 6:17).

and note the Lord using this all-conquering weapon in His temptation in the wilderness and thus overcoming Satan with His three-fold ‘*It is written*’ (Matt. 4:1-11).

In view of all the foregoing, no wonder almost the last injunction that the apostle Paul gave was ‘Preach the Word’ (2 Tim. 4:2) for this is the only means through which we may come to a personal knowledge of the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom to know is life eternal.

Now perhaps we can see how wise the Jews at Berea were in placing their faith in the holy Scriptures and making them their basis, and checking everything by them, even Paul's ministry. This too is the reason why *The Berean Forward Movement* and *The Berean Publishing Trust* have used the title ‘Berean’, for the one aim of these two Trusts is to make known the written Word of God and the Living Word Who is the centre of it all. We have no opinions to offer or any gimmicks, but we seek to expound and make known the Word of God, which is ever living and powerful and completely relevant to every situation ancient and modern. We invite our hearers and readers to test honestly and fairly all our witness by what God has said in His eternal Word. The ultimate responsibility then is theirs. As we seek to ‘proclaim the Word’ without addition or subtraction, we do so and say with the prophets of old ‘Thus saith the Lord’, without apology and with absolute certainty for the Scriptures are God's and not ours. Here we have something changeless and eternally secure, a sure foundation for our faith ‘the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture’ as Gladstone once described it.

Like the apostle Paul of old, we endeavour to declare ‘*all* the counsel of God’ (Acts 20:26,27), and this means we not only preach the gospel of God's grace, making known a Saviour Who can ‘save to the uttermost’ (Heb. 7:25), but also the deep things of the Word, the exceeding riches that God wishes to make known to His redeemed people (Col. 1:25-27).

Will you become a true Berean, and in doing this get to know these 'exceeding riches' God is waiting to impart to you?

'The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces'.

'Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them'.

'The unfolding of Thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple' (Psa. 119:72,129,130 R.S.V.).

The Lord Jesus Christ said :

'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away' (Matt. 24:35).

We hope you will test the Scripture references supporting the foregoing article.

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