

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 19B_Third Missionary Journey_Ephesus_Cont'd)

Paul at Ephesus (19:8-41)

In our previous study of this chapter, we were caused to pause and consider the purpose of the sign gifts and miracles during the 1st Century A.D. due to the conversion of the twelve disciples of John the Baptist and their tongues experience at the time of their conversion and baptism. We resume our study of Paul's activities in Ephesus on his third missionary journey with verse 8.

Paul speaks to Jews in the synagogue – As was his custom, Paul went first to the Jews in the synagogue. Here in Ephesus, he spoke boldly and tried to convince them of the fact that Jesus was the Messiah Who would one day return to establish His Kingdom on earth (cf. 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Paul ministered for three months (19:8) in the synagogue without a riot – probably a record for Paul. Some “were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people” (19:9).

Observation: Note how this occurred. Over the three month period some increasingly became hardened in their spiritual hearts.

Observation: As they became spiritually hardened, they became “disobedient.”

Observation: They spoke “evil” of the Way. They equated the Truth that Paul proclaimed with “evil.”

Interpretation: This verse is a classic illustration of negative volition toward the Truth and the progressive stages of reversionism in the life of a religious unbeliever.¹

Interpretation: The rejection was not instantaneous, but gradual. *First*, they began to gradually realize that their self-interest (their privileged position as Jews in the Roman Empire, a protected religion) was at risk through this new doctrine. *Second*, they rationalized their rejection of Paul's message with logic similar to the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jerusalem who rejected Jesus' claims, e.g. “If Jesus was the Messiah, why did He suffer such an ignoble death?” or “Where is this conquering ruler?” or “Surely God is not working and sanctioning the actions of such a small band of nobodies!” *Finally*, they entered into self-justification. They justified their actions against Paul and his followers and in their self-righteousness, they tried to cloak their sinful behavior to be justified in view of this new heretical teaching. The result was a further hardening of the heart toward spiritual Truth and a further alienation from God. They were living in a state of deception and spiritual blindness. In their distorted logic, they called the Truth, evil and they called evil, the truth.

¹ The term “reversionism” is not a Biblical term, but it is a term used to describe a Biblical concept. I will define and develop the concept of reversionism in a separate session; however, the term describes the spiritual progression (or declension) associated with negative volition toward the Truth in the life of a believer or an unbeliever. My understanding and future teaching on the subject will build upon a foundation provided by R.B. Thieme in *Reversionism* (Houston, Texas: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1978).

Application: Is there any area of your life where you have rejected the surgical power of the Truth of God's Word (Heb 4:12)? Have you rationalized your thoughts, actions and behavior to the point of self-justification? Have you even opposed those who are attempting to advance spiritually and lead others in "the Way?"

Paul demonstrates tenacity in spite of adversity & turns to the Gentiles – In the face of spiritual opposition, Paul relocated to a neutral site, the school of Tyrannus who made his facilities available to Paul during the afternoons. One of the ancient manuscripts of the book of Acts indicated that this was a period of time from 11 am to 4 pm which would have corresponded to the hottest part of the day when people rested. We don't know anything about the school of Tyrannus and whether Paul rented the building or whether Tyrannus had become a believer and opened his building for Paul's use. We do know that Paul turned from the Jews to the Gentiles and that this ministry at the Tyrannus school continued for two years. That two year ministry by Paul to the Gentiles bore incredible fruit in the years to follow.

The importance of the church at Ephesus – The Gentile believers from Ephesus established churches all over the province of Asia including the churches of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis in the Lycus Valley (Col 4:13). It is possible, and even likely, that the other churches mentioned in Revelation 2 & 3 (i.e. Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia) got their start at this time based upon the evangelistic outreach of the Gentile believers from Ephesus. Thus, as many as eight, and possibly more, churches were started by this group of Gentile believers in Ephesus.

God had opened a wide door of opportunity for Paul, but there were many adversaries ("But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" – 1 Cor 16:8-9). Timothy and later the Apostle John followed Paul in ministry there. The church at Ephesus became the recipient of at least three New Testament epistles (Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy) and possibly as many as seven (1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation).

While Paul was in Ephesus, he had considerable contact with the church in Corinth which had been established on his previous missionary journey. He wrote that church a letter that he called his former letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9. Then sometime later he wrote 1 Corinthians, probably near the spring of A.D. 56. Timothy traveled from Corinth to Ephesus, then evidently went back to Corinth, and returned later to Ephesus (Acts. 18:5; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11; Acts 19:22). Following Timothy's visit to Corinth Paul evidently made a so-called "painful visit" to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2) and returned to Ephesus. Then he wrote another "severe letter" to Corinth from Ephesus (2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18). We obtain these facts from Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians, the first of which he wrote during the years he used Ephesus as his base of operations. He undoubtedly had other contacts with many other churches about which we know nothing. Luke's purpose was not to give us a complete record of Paul's ministry or the church's growth as a whole. Rather, Luke's purpose was to provide a historical narrative of events surrounding the Transition of God's dispensational administrative arrangement from a Jewish-centric to a Gentile-centric basis as the Body of Christ was formed.

Observation: Paul did not stop ministering when his own people (the Jews) rejected his gospel once again after he had so patiently dealt with them for such a long period of time. (Paul later indicated that he labored in Ephesus for a period of three years compared to the two years mentioned here. Thus, Paul could have ministered even longer than the three months in the synagogue mentioned here).

Observation: Paul was not deterred by negative volition in what was then the "traditional" and accepted setting and worship model, i.e. the synagogue.

Observation: When the “traditional” and socially acceptable worship model of the day housed negative volition, Paul moved to a new model that was not as socially acceptable (i.e. a house and Gentiles), yet filled with positive volition.

Interpretation: Paul was flexible because he was spiritual, not religious.

Principle: Spiritual believers are flexible in regards to non-essentials such as venues while remaining inflexible in their commitment to promoting the Truth in love.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked and thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the Truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

Principle: Spiritual believers possess a servant attitude and approach to ministry. They do not demand their own way and are not offended to the point of quitting when the negative volition of others is manifest toward their ministry.

Principle: Spiritual believers roll with the punches of negative volition. They expect negative volition, but press on with their God-given ministry and goal in life. (Phil 3:12-16)

Observation: Note Luke’s continued emphasis upon Paul’s patient dealing with the Jews, followed by negative volition and response from the Jews followed by a turning to the Gentiles on the part of Paul.

Interpretation: Luke’s historical narrative provides the oft-missed backdrop for the correct interpretation of Romans 9-11.

The old sequence of events unfolded, monotonously true to form. It was not lack of sad experience which led Paul in chapters ix—xi of the Epistle to the Romans to speak of the national rejection of Christ by the people privileged first to hear of Him. It was an essential part of Luke's theme to underline that fact. Hence the careful record of Paul's method, his scrupulous regard for the synagogue, his program of patient teaching and persuasion, the crystallizing of opposition, and the altogether justifiable 'turning to the Gentiles'.²

One of the interesting things to note is how Luke records the similarity of the miracles performed by Peter and Paul. As a matter of fact, almost all of these miracles were demonstrated by Jesus during His public ministry.

Miracle	Peter	Paul
Healing of a Lame Man	3:2	14:8
Healing through the touch of a garment	5:15	19:12
Cast out a demon	5:16	16:8
Dealt with sorcerers	8:18	13:6
Raised the dead	9:36	20:9
Escaped from prison	12:7	16:25

As we’ve noted, the economy of Ephesus was vitally connected to the religious idolatry associated with the temple Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Roman) which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The black, porous, meteorite that fell to the earth was crafted into a

² E.M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series* (London: Tyndale Press, 1959; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 156, quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Acts,” www.soniclight.com.

many-breasted figure that became the object of worship and the hub around which Satan was able to create deception through demonic activity and supernatural phenomenon. Most likely, it was because of the multitudes of magicians and religious charlatans that were present in Ephesus that God demonstrated His power in the supernatural ways that He did. The people needed to have evidence of the power to which Paul testified in order to counter the demonic power that they had seen demonstrated through sorcerers and the like.

The Seven Sons of Sceva – Sceva was evidently the most prominent Jewish priest in Ephesus since he is called the “chief priest.” He was not a Jewish high priest who had held office in Jerusalem since they are all known. Apparently, two or more or perhaps all seven (the Greek word *auton* can be translated “all” or “both”) of Sceva’s sons participated in an attempt at exorcism that backfired.

As in Peter’s case with the sorcerer Simon in Samaria (Acts 8:18-19), some of Paul’s observers tried to duplicate his miracles. In the ancient world, the use of magical names in their incantations was a common practice that was believed to invoke the power of spiritual forces. Some people feared the Jews in the ancient world because they thought the name of God, which the Jews refused to utter, was the key to their powers, including their success in business. Therefore, when they observed Paul exercising supernatural (i.e. “magic”) power in the name of Jesus, they thought they would try it too.

They wrongly concluded that the simple vocalization of Jesus’ name carried magical power. They also had come to view dabbling in the occult as a business and saw tremendous revenue potential in using the name of Jesus to exercise power of these forces over darkness. The use of Jesus’ name by these men who had made a practice of invoking demonic powers for their personal financial gain was extremely insulting to Satan and his demons. The demon (“evil spirit”) responded to the name and power of Jesus which was being invoked by these unbelievers with a physical reaction designed to quell any future attempts on their part to use Jesus’ name and power. The sons of Sceva received a serious beating.

Point of Note – We do not know whether there was a plan of salvation for the fallen angels in eternity past; however, we do know that Jesus’ sacrificial and substitutionary death on the Cross was for humans and human history. If Jesus had died for Satan and for demons (fallen angels), they would all be saved since they believe. But He did not die for these spirit beings. This is just one of the errors of the false theology known as Universal reconciliationism.

This was Paul’s third contact with demonic powers that Luke recorded (cf. 13:6-12; 16:16-18). Demons are very real and it is important to note the significant presence of demons in the 1st Century A.D. during Jesus’ public ministry and during the ministries of such prominent apostles as Peter and Paul. This much demonic activity to have been concentrated in this area of the world at this point in history should cause us to stand up and take notice. Satan knew that this was a critical period and ordered his demonic forces into a heightened state of activity.

An important distinction between Paul’s experience and some of Jesus’ statements – During Jesus’ public ministry, Jesus’ disciple John had asked Jesus to rebuke someone who was casting out demons in His name, and Jesus refused to do so. He replied, “Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:49-50; cf. Mark 9:38-40). In this incident, we see the Twelve demonstrating a bit of self-righteousness. Those who were casting out demons in Jesus’ name were disciples of Jesus and probably believers – though not of the Twelve. Jesus essentially replied to the Twelve that they should regard those who do not oppose them as associates rather than enemies. However, in Paul’s case, the exorcists were unbelievers, not believers as in the case of Jesus’ disciples.

True repentance is manifested in and around Ephesus (v. 17-20) – Many who believed openly named their involvement in evil practices for the sake of financial gain. Those who had been practicing sorcery brought their books (scrolls) containing “magic” formulas, incantations,

spells, astrological forecasts and made a great bonfire. When they calculated the value of the books it amounted to fifty-thousand drachmas or pieces of silver (v. 19). A drachma was about a day's wage and would have taken ten laborers about twenty years to earn.³

Observation: In the case of these Ephesian Jew and Gentile new believers, their "repentance" (i.e. a change of thinking about the Truth of God's Word as it applies to one's life) was accompanied by an outward manifestation that they rejected their former practices as well.

Interpretation: Anytime there is true "repentance" (i.e. a change of thinking about the Truth of God's message), it should be accompanied by a change in behavior. (This statement is not the same as what is frequently referred to as "back loading the Gospel" whereby attempts are made to determine whether someone is really saved based upon their behavior). In the case of these Ephesian Jews and Gentiles, we see behavior that definitely signifies true repentance and an acceptance of Paul's gospel that Jesus is the Messiah/Redeemer of Jew and Gentile. However, we must be careful that we do not establish a rule or requirement based upon how one group of people responded to the Gospel and impose that requirement upon others who come to faith in Jesus. There is nothing required to be saved but faith (i.e. trust) in the all-sufficient work of Christ – period. Twenty years after a person expresses faith in the all-sufficient work of Christ, they may slip into a sin pattern of behavior that is dishonoring to their status as a child of God and a Christian, but that does not negate their salvation. Otherwise, many of the Corinthian believers would have to be classified as unbelievers.

Application: Repentance (i.e. a change of thinking) is something that should occur in believer's lives as they are exposed to the Truth of God's Word. It should result in behavior that increasingly reflects the character of Christ in their lives. Are you constantly examining your thought patterns, attitudes, and behavior in view of God's Word in order to identify areas of your thinking where you should repent?

The reason many Christians never attain victory over sin in their lives is that they fail to do what these Ephesians did: they hang on to the old habits and friends and reading materials, which makes it very easy for them to slip back into their old ways.⁴

The Riot At Ephesus (19:21-41)

Progress Report by Luke ((19:21-22) – Luke provides his readers with another progress report to mark the end of another section of his book. The section just completed (16:6-19:20) records the church's extension in the provinces around the Aegean Sea. Earlier in this session, we noted how significant of a base of operations that Ephesus had become. We'll deal in greater depth in the next lesson with Paul's stated objective of going to Rome and the apologetic emphasis of Luke's narrative throughout the remainder of the book.

The Riot (19:23-41) – As a result of Paul's efforts, Christianity (i.e. "the Way" – 19:9 cf. 9:2; 16:17; 18:25-26; 22:4; 24:14, 22) was spreading throughout both sides of the Aegean Sea region. Pagan worship and all of its related infrastructure was being adversely affected by the conversion of so many to Christianity. Curiosity seekers who had been drawn to Ephesus would purchase souvenirs to take back to their homes with them. These souvenirs were miniature silver images of the goddess Artemis and the leader of the local guild that made these images was named Demetrius. Demetrius used local patriotism as a guise for hiding his real objection to

³ Earl D. Radmacher, general editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1857. See also *Charles F. Baker*, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1981), 121.

⁴ Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts*, 122.

Christianity – it threatened his financial livelihood and future. The fact that some of his hearers actually worshipped this idol and Christianity revealed the true nature of the false god was secondary to people like Demetrius. Nevertheless, religious zeal added fuel to the fire. The only other protest by Gentiles against the gospel that Luke records in Acts also resulted from financial loss (i.e. when Paul and Silas commanded that the demon depart from the slave girl in Philippi – cf. 16:16-24). The profit motive still opposes the spread of the gospel.

There were two goddesses named Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Latin) that Gentiles worshipped in the Roman Empire at this time. One was the goddess of the hunt, usually pictured as a young lady carrying a hunting bow. The other was a fertility goddess portrayed as a woman with many breasts. The latter was the one especially venerated in Ephesus.⁵

Observation: Demetrius led those who opposed the spread of the Gospel.

Interpretation: The insecurity of one who doesn't trust in Christ and His ability to provide is illustrated by Demetrius and those who listened to him. The profit motive and desire for financial security still opposes the spread of the gospel in many different ways.

Application: Can you think of any way in which you've observed the spread of Truth opposed by those whose financial condition would be impacted? Have you been financially affected by a decision to promote the spread of the Gospel and Truth? Are you now opposing the spread of the Truth in any way due to financial reasons?

The opposition to Paul and the Gospel was intense even though the Gospel spread and there were converts all over the region. Paul had plenty of reason to become discouraged, but he also had plenty of reason to be encouraged by the response to the Truth that he witnessed. There is much that Luke does not tell us in his narrative. Paul mentions several events that leave us to guess as to their exact timing and even location in some cases.

One further point should be made, and that is that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while he was at Ephesus, as noted earlier. In that letter Paul speaks of standing in jeopardy every hour, and of dying daily, and then he states: "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (15:32). Then, when we read 2 Corinthians, which was written shortly afterwards, perhaps while Paul was in Philippi, [and] we hear him say: "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust he will yet deliver us" (1:8-10). Evidently a great deal happened to Paul during his stay in Ephesus that Luke did not record. The same thing is true of Paul's experiences elsewhere. In 2 Cor. 11:22-33 Paul tells us he received thirty-nine stripes from the Jews on five occasions, that he was beaten with rods by the Romans three times, that he suffered shipwreck three times, and that he spent a night and a day adrift in the sea, but Luke is completely silent on all of these events, with the exception of a Roman beating at Philippi. Likewise he speaks of being in jail more often than the other apostles, but Luke mentions only the imprisonment at Philippi. The imprisonment at Caesarea and the shipwreck on the way to Rome happened after he had written 2 Corinthians.⁶

⁵ Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts," www.soniclight.com

⁶ Baker, *Understanding Acts*, 124-125.

As a final note regarding this section of Luke's narrative, it is important to note that Paul had made friends with some of the "officials of Asia" (v. 31). Paul had obviously not kept a low profile and at least in part, this may have been due to the fact that he held Roman citizenship in common with these men. He gained their trust by demonstrating that he was not a threat to the Roman Empire and government in spite of his message that Jesus was the Messiah. The message to the crowd (probably about 25,000 people based upon the seating capacity of the amphitheater) that was delivered by the city clerk was probably influenced by Paul's friends in local government.

Observation: Paul made friends with those in positions of power who could have opposed him.

Interpretation: Paul did not compromise his message, yet he was wise enough to know that he should go the extra mile to insure that the local authorities knew that his message was not insurrectionist in nature.

Application: We should be wise and aware of the impact that our message and lives will have upon others who have the power to oppose the Truth due to misinformation. We can act on this knowledge without compromising the Truth and be prepared that there will sometimes be opposition even though we have done all we know to do. The real question is – are we doing anything to advance the Truth?