

Lesson 7 - 9 September 2012

The Third Missionary Journey Begins

Lesson Scope: [Acts 18:23-19:41](#)

Lesson Focus

Paul's third missionary journey began at Antioch (Acts 18:22, 23). From there he traveled to Asia Minor, "strengthening all the disciples." This lesson focuses on Paul's stay of more than two years at Ephesus.

Ephesus was the capital of the province of Asia. It was well positioned for commerce, having a seaport and a number of main roads leading to it. Also, the temple of Diana was in it. This magnificent temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and seems to have contributed much to the wealth and character of the city. Through commerce and worship there was much traffic through this city, providing abundant opportunity for the spread of the Gospel.

The works of darkness were also rampant in the city. Idol worship involves much debauchery. The city was also steeped in the practice of magic. This provided a fertile seedbed both for the Gospel message and for stiff opposition.

Satan seeks to keep men under his sway by blinding them to the truth. But the Gospel challenges every false religion and offers to fallen man the only way of salvation.

We cannot avoid opposition when we experience the work of the Gospel and share its message with others. The Gospel does have the answer for all men, but all men will not receive it.

This lesson provides opportunity to again strengthen ourselves against the varied pressures of our time. While we do not face a pronounced conflict with false religions today, we very definitely face a host of pietistic influences that can be just as much of a threat, especially to our children. We must continue to teach that there will always be a line of tension between the true child of God and those satisfied with less than full Gospel obedience.

Lesson Aim: To present principles related to the conflict between the Gospel and false religions.

Theme Verses: 2 [Corinthians 4:3, 4](#). But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Lesson Text:

The Gospel versus Jewish Unbelief

[Acts 19:1](#) ¹ And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

[Acts 19:8-12](#) ⁸ And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. ¹⁰ And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. ¹¹ And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: ¹² So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

The Gospel versus Curious Arts

[Acts 19:13-20](#) ¹³ Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. ¹⁴ And there were seven sons of *one* Sceva, a Jew, *and* chief of the priests, which did so. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? ¹⁶ And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus;

and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. ¹⁸ And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. ¹⁹ Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all *men*: and they counted the price of them, and found *it* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. ²⁰ So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

The Gospel versus Idolatry

[Acts 19:23-28](#) ²³ And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. ²⁴ For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; ²⁵ Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. ²⁶ Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: ²⁷ So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. ²⁸ And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians.

[Acts 19:32](#) ³² Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

[Acts 19:35-36](#) ³⁵ And when the town clerk had appeased the people, he said, *Ye* men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter? ³⁶ Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

[Acts 19:40-41](#) ⁴⁰ For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. ⁴¹ And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Questions for Study

The Gospel versus Jewish Unbelief

1. What did the Gospel have to offer the Jews?
2. When the Gospel is presented, can there be a neutral response? Explain.
3. What are some evidences today that continue to confirm the Gospel and its effectiveness?

The Gospel versus Curious Arts

4. Why did the evil spirits have greater authority than these men?
5. What are some "books" that we must continue to avoid?

The Gospel versus Idolatry

6. What are some results of rejecting the truth?
7. What are some present-day evidences of confusion among those who have rejected truth?

Analyzing the Passage

Note the three ways Paul taught (Acts 19:8). He spake boldly, meaning "openly, assuredly, freely, without fear." Disputing means "to reason with, to discuss, to lay out in a logical way, to establish point by point," and persuading means "to convince by argument."

Three responses are also recorded in Acts 19:9. Some were hardened; some believed not; still others "spake evil of that way." That way refers to the believers, their practice, and their teaching.

The vagabond Jews (Acts 19:13) were simply men who traveled about rather than establishing permanent homes. The imposters' failure to overcome these demons, who instead overpowered them, contrasted with Christ's power as evidenced through the work of Paul. This caused men to fear and Jesus' Name to be glorified. It also moved the new believers to make a clean break from their past, ridding themselves of their evil books.

The town clerk (Acts 19:35) was the chief magistrate of the city. He was accountable to higher authority.

Principles and Applications

The Gospel versus Jewish Unbelief

1. God's messengers must proclaim the Gospel clearly and earnestly (Acts 19:8-9). The message must be presented to all without regard to whether it will be well received or not. The majority will reject truth, but the Gospel must go forth because some will respond favorably.

When some set themselves against the Gospel, Paul directed his teaching toward those who were receptive. This included instructing new believers.

2. Refusing to believe the Gospel begins a hardening process (Acts 19:9). When the Gospel is presented, men are forced to make a choice; there is no neutral ground! Rejection dulls the conscience and quenches the Spirit. Unless one who has rejected the truth repents and accepts the Gospel, the hardening process will continue and even accelerate. We cannot afford to resist or ignore the voice of the Spirit when He reveals new truth to our hearts or shows us where we need to improve.

3. God affirmed the Gospel with miracles and continues to confirm it through changed lives and answered prayers (Acts 19:11-12). God gave testimony through the miracles Paul was able to perform that his message was truth. Unless men today can see by changed lives that we also carry the Gospel message, we have nothing to offer. The Gospel continues to be confirmed by the fact that God's work moves forward in the face of difficulties. The persecuted are faithful. The Christian day school and publication efforts have been abundantly blessed.

4. The Gospel has the answer to man's deepest needs (Acts 19:11-12). Man's deepest need is the need of the soul. The only answer to the sin problem in the heart of man is the cleansing power of Jesus.

The Gospel versus Curious Arts

5. Those who do not truly have the power of Jesus have no power over evil spirits (Acts 19:13-16). Rather, evil spirits control them. Only the power of Christ can break the powers of

darkness because He alone has conquered Satan. When people who obviously are not obeying the Bible make great claims of power over evil spirits, we can be certain that they are deceived.

6 Believing the Gospel must involve a thorough repudiation of all evil powers (Acts 19:17-19). We must be separate from the world. We do not have radio or television, but are we free from similar influences through music, books, and modern psychology? We must reject claims of miraculous healing outside of prayer or anointing as taught in the Bible. We must guard our homes from the influence of games and toys that have any ties to the occult. Computer games may not be considered innocent or harmless.

The Gospel versus Idolatry

7. As the Gospel shakes the established norms and values of society, men feel threatened (Acts 19:23-26). Today's society places a high value on education and high-paying jobs. Leisure and sensual pleasure rule the day. Many have given up their Christian life when they realized that it will cost them prestige, wealth, or other things they trust in or value highly. We also can become entrenched in a life of freedom and prosperity and fail to respond to the call of God through His Word and the church.

8. Those who reject the Gospel often lash out in anger against truth (Acts 19:28). "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Many have suffered persecution and even death for the sake of the Gospel. Satan incites man to oppose God, the Gospel, and all the faithful. Just as the mob at Ephesus, many do not realize who or what they are really fighting against.

9. Confusion reigns when the Gospel is rejected (Acts 19:32). Many who once believed and practiced as we do have exchanged the Biblical practice of separation and regulated church life for the confusion of broken homes. Slavery to fashion, lust, and pleasure brings its own confusion as well. And when did it begin? It began when men decided that full obedi-

ence was too radical.

Some have gone on a campaign against traditional practices that have served the church well, advocating that such forms militate against true spiritual life. Not surprisingly, one often cannot tell a difference between their children and their fundamentalist counterparts. Obviously, confusion has taken over.

10. God has His way of disarming those who oppose the Gospel (Acts 19:35-41). "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Psalm 76:10). That is our infinitely wise God. Surely we can commit to Him the conflict and any adversity the conflict may bring to us as we embrace the Gospel.

Important Teachings

1. God's messengers must proclaim the Gospel clearly and earnestly (Acts 19:8-9).
2. Refusing to believe the Gospel begins a hardening process (Acts 19:9).
3. God affirmed the Gospel with miracles and continues to confirm it through changed lives and answered prayers (Acts 19:11-12).
4. The Gospel has the answer to man's deepest needs (Acts 19:11-12).
5. Those who do not truly have the power of Jesus have no power over evil spirits (Acts 19:13-16).
6. Believing the Gospel must involve a thorough repudiation of all evil powers (Acts 19:17-19).
7. As the Gospel shakes the established norms and values of society, men feel threatened (Acts 19:23-26).
8. Those who reject the Gospel often lash out in anger against truth (Acts 19:28).
9. Confusion reigns when the Gospel is rejected (Acts 19:32).
10. God has His way of disarming those who oppose the Gospel (Acts 19:35-41).

Answers to Questions

1. What did the Gospel have to offer the Jews?

The Gospel is the story of Israel's Messiah. Through it they could have received power to live the higher law of the New Covenant.

2. When the Gospel is presented, can there be a neutral response? Explain.

No. To not accept it is to reject it, which begins the hardening process. There may be a short time of counting the cost, in which period there has been neither acceptance nor rejection as such.

3. What are some evidences today that continue to confirm the Gospel and its effectiveness?

It changes lives. Men find grace and power to live in victory.

4. Why did the evil spirits have greater authority than these men? The men were serving the master of the evil spirits. They were not serving God; neither were they prepared to do God's work.

5. What are some "books" that we must continue to avoid?

We certainly must avoid all books that relate to satanic powers, fortune telling, magic, and so forth. Protestant, New Age, and humanistic emphases, whether through books or other means, have great potential to mislead us. We must reject modern psychology with its self-esteem emphasis and erroneous child-training methods. We must also beware of back-to-nature and earth-preservation fanaticism.

6. What are some results of rejecting the truth?

First comes hardening; then comes decreased openness to the message. Finally the Spirit's call is no longer heard. Others are influenced to turn away from the Gospel, and eventually judgment falls unless men repent.

7. What are some present-day evidences of confusion among those who have rejected truth?

In society, broken marriages and abused children have followed in the wake of moral laxness. Uncontrollable youth are

the result of erroneous concepts of child behavior and discipline. Political unrest follows greed.

In the church, departure from truth has resulted also in broken homes, women usurping authority, and children growing up without a sense of spiritual identity. A shunning of safe traditional practices in the name of more spirituality has often resulted in the next generation becoming assimilated into nominal Christianity.

Summarizing the Lesson

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Research Guide

1. See 1 Corinthians 15:32 and Revelation 1:11; 2:1-7.
2. You might benefit from research on the city of Ephesus.