
SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 19****“EVANGELIZING EPHEBUS”**

“Ephesus is the best preserved classical city of the Eastern Mediterranean, and among the best places in the world enabling one to genuinely 'soak in' the atmosphere of Roman times.” So says a current travel brochure, attempting to lure travelers to this ancient city of architectural wonders.

In the Roman period, it was for many years the second largest city of the Roman Empire, ranking behind Rome, the empire's capital. Ephesus had a population of more than 250,000 in the 1st century BC, which also made it the second largest city in the world. It was the “Big Apple” of Asia Minor, which is now known as Turkey.

Ephesus was the crossroads of commerce, the melting pot of mankind. Here mingled the faces from 100 lands. This big city was the capital of Ionia and was called “The first Metropolis of Asia” and “The Treasure House of Asia.”

Here was one of the seven wonders of the world, the Temple of Diana, with its 127 marble pillars. The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide and 60 feet in height. Here in Ephesus also was a great amphitheater that would seat nearly 25,000 people. Ephesus was a city of wealth, culture and power. Into it came a humble disciple of Jesus Christ, an unimpressive physical specimen of humankind, a man named Paul, shuffling along in scuffed sandals.

He remained in this city for three years (Acts 20:31) preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Temple of Diana is gone, the glory of Ephesus has disappeared, but the Good News that Paul preached continues to bless the world! It is good news for any city when God's Word is introduced to the citizens and the Spirit of God does His work in the hearts of the citizens.

Here in Ephesus one of the strongest churches mentioned in the New Testament was established. Ephesus was the site of one of the seven churches of Asia Minor to which the Lord Jesus sent a letter which He dictated to the Apostle John on the island of Patmos. Paul, the evangelizer of Ephesus, later wrote a letter to the Ephesian church which continues to be an epistle of encouragement to us today.

Three years of Paul's ministry in Ephesus are covered in Acts chapter 19. Not everything that transpired during that three year period is recorded. We have only the highlights of a very effective ministry written here. However, the variety of experiences in planting a church in a pagan culture are very instructive and inspirational. Let us begin our bird's eye view of the events beginning with verses 1 through 7.

A DOZEN IN THE DARK vs. 1-7

“And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when

you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all."

When Paul came to Ephesus he came into contact with a dozen fervently religious men. These men were followers of John the Baptist. Why Paul asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit we do not know. Perhaps their lifestyles did not reflect the change that is effected in Spirit indwelt persons. It does not appear that they were born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 8:9 says, *"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."* Paul sensed that there was a lack of saintliness and power in their lives.

He could not understand this for every true believer possesses the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. Something was wrong here so Paul further questioned them and found that they were followers of John the Baptist. John they knew, but Jesus Christ they did not know. John had said, *"There comes One after me....."* (John 1:27-30) The One who had come after John they did not know.

Since these men had never heard of the Holy Spirit is quite possible that they had never heard of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death for their sins upon the cross. Paul updated them concerning Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. They received the person of the Christ Jesus, were baptized in His name and consequently received the Holy Spirit as Paul laid his hands upon them. When they exercised saving faith in Christ, the Spirit of Jesus came to indwell them even as He does everyone who is born again.

There are many like these twelve disciples in the pews of Christian churches today. We can look into their lives and see no evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit, recorded in Galatians chapter 5, is missing. If the apostle Paul were alive today and met you, would he say to you, "I have been watching your life and I am forced to ask you, does the Holy Spirit live within you?" If there is no fruit, that means one of two things: either such a person has never been saved, or if they have been saved, sin and a worldly lifestyle have quenched the Holy Spirit.

THREE YEARS IN THE BIG APPLE vs. 8-12

"And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them."

The Good News comes to the Big Apple! When Paul came to a new town his custom was to go to the synagogue and there begin proclaiming the gospel message. He spent three months teaching in this synagogue, the longest period of time he spent in any synagogue, before opposition marshaled against him and became so antagonistic that he moved his base

of operations into the school building of one named Tyrannus and taught there every day for two years.

So effective was his teaching that news spread far and wide “*so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*” We have heard it said that “Bad news travels fast.” “Bad news” means news about “bad” things like accidents, death, illness etc. People tend to tell this type of news quickly. But “good news” travels more slowly. We have also heard the proverb, “A lie will go round the world while truth is pulling its boots on.”

Well, not always! Travelers came to Ephesus from all over Asia Minor. They heard the Good News about Jesus Christ there and when they returned to their hometowns they carried it with them. Paul was preaching to a parade of foreign visitors and the “Good News” spread fast. The fact that God “*worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul*” no doubt attracted attention to him. God credentialized His messenger and His message by granting Paul this unusual power which authenticated his teaching and accelerated the spread of the Good News.

SEVEN SINFUL SONS OF SCEVA vs. 13-17

“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”

Pretenders! That’s what the seven sons of Sceva were. Pretense is “The act of pretending; a false appearance or action intended to deceive.” The Roman author, Publilius Sytus, in the first century wrote, “He who has a mind to do mischief will always find a pretense.” Sceva’s sons certainly had in mind to do mischief by duplicating Paul’s ministry. Jesus they did not know, but in trying to cash in on what Paul was doing they tried to use “*the Jesus whom Paul preaches*” and it backfired upon them!

Role playing is fun for children who often pretend to be cowboys or nurses, etc. But sometimes people do this for personal gain which was the motivation of the sons of Sceva. Many are the persons who want to be seen acting like Christians but are not God’s children. The seven sons tried to do that and were exposed for who they really were! Why? They were only pretenders and both God and the devil knew it.

The evil spirit knew Jesus and Paul, but he said, “Who are you?” These boys were interested in self-aggrandizement, not the glory of God which is a serious offense. Many times Christians operate on the same principle. Someone has said that the average Christian does so little for the glory of God that Satan doesn’t know them! They pretend to be God’s servants, but really they are working for their own advancement. Jesus said that our works should glorify our Father in heaven. It is wrong to use God, but right to let God use us!

BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES vs. 18-20

“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had

practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."

Historically, "Bonfire of the Vanities" refers to the burning of objects that are deemed to be occasions of sin. One of the more famous bonfires took place in February 1497, when supporters of Savonarola, a Dominican priest, collected and publicly burned thousands of objects in Florence, Italy.

However, the first recorded "Bonfire of Vanities" occurred in Ephesus many years earlier. According to Acts 19, those who heard the gospel preached by Paul in Ephesus not only believed but made a public confession and by their deeds demonstrated to an unbelieving world that their profession of faith was evidence of a genuine possession of a faith. They had a public bonfire, bringing their evil books and destroying them *"in the sight of all."*

Having accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, they "burned their bridges behind them," doing that which was right even though it meant death to pride, a dent in their pocketbooks and denunciation by the public! In these days of pornography, trash literature, and cheap magazines, the believer must be especially alert in regard to his reading. Like the conscientious Ephesians, he should consider the appropriateness of some "book burning." As long as we are engrossed, ensnared and enslaved by man's literature, we will have no time for God's Word. God wants to have a Word with us!

A CRAFTY CRAFTSMAN vs.23-28

"And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship." Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

After Paul had been preaching in Ephesus for some time, his message began to impact the false concepts and practices of the culture, as truth has a way of doing. Preaching Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life will draw opponents out of the woodwork. And that is what happened in Ephesus. It started when the silversmith's sale of silver shrines began to show a serious shrinkage. God's business was picking up and the devil's business was falling off! There was a contest going on in the city, it was greed or God; Diana or Christ; the temporal or the eternal; the material or the spiritual. The pot had reached the boiling point.

A man named Demetrius, perhaps the leader of the silversmiths union and spokesman for the craftsmen who made silver statues of Diana and which were sold in the marketplace, stirred up quite a commotion. The contention was that the rapidly growing Jesus sect was creating a serious threat to the economic and religious interests of the community. He said that a radical fellow named Paul was spreading hate-teaching that could hurt the tourist traffic coming to the temple of Diana. This would eliminate the sale of silver idols and diminish the

livelihood of the craftsmen. He accused Paul of saying "*that there are no gods made with hands.*" That would be humorous if it were not so serious. He was fervently and publicly defending "handmade gods." What irony!

THEATRICALS IN THE THEATRE vs. 29-41

"So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly."

Confusion dominated the scene. A mob mentality prevailed. Demetrius was encouraging the uproar in an effort to silence Paul. The whole city was filled with confusion and the mob rushed into the theater where for two hours the citizens angrily cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

"Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together." As the religious scene is viewed today, the one word which best describes it is "confused." Many just do not seem to know what or why they believe the way they do. Lacking conviction and a solid biblical foundation, they are drawn this way and that, or as Paul expresses it later when he wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus: "*tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*" (Ephesians 4:14)

His words concerning the pagans in Ephesus are equally fitting today. Confusion results from jumping to conclusions, rather than digging for facts in the Word of God.

Alexander, the town clerk, finally succeeded in quieting the people. He reminded them that their unruly actions were out of order, and that the entire matter could be handled much better peacefully and through lawful procedure. The stampede to stamp out the young church in Ephesus failed. Whenever and wherever we attempt to deliver souls from Satan's grasp, we meet with difficulty, but deliver them we must! Knowing that there are no gods made with hands, we must tell people of the God who made us with His hands and Whose Son's hands were nailed to the cross to deliver us!

Conclusion

The Gospel had been firmly planted in the city of Ephesus and this strategic center had been penetrated by the power of the Spirit of God. Superstition, sorcery and sophistry were

exposed as inadequate sources of confidence. The preaching of Christ crucified, risen and present in power had made inroads into a city gripped by materialism, cults, idolatry and every imaginable evil.

The "Treasure House of Asia," as Ephesus was called, now had real treasure for the first time. It was the treasure of truth residing in earthen vessels of very unlikely people called the followers of The Way who constituted a church in what had previously been an unchurched city. The evangelizing of Ephesus had begun, but did not end with the exit of the apostle Paul who moved on toward Jerusalem. (19:21-22)

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