

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Twenty-Four
Acts 19:13-41

Day One

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15[One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

vs. 13&14 – There were some Jews who specialized in casting out evil spirits. But because they didn't have the authority of Jesus' name, the best they could do was resort to incantations and rituals to deliver people from evil spirits. In other words, they had to use higher ranking evil spirits to cast out lower ranking spirits. In all probability, these Jews watched Paul cast out spirits in the name of Jesus, so they decided to incorporate the name of Jesus into their repertoire.

This is the only biblical mention of anyone from the Jewish community trying to set people free from evil spirits. I guess this shouldn't surprise me, for the Pharisees didn't take issue that Jesus was casting out spirits, but that his source of power was the kingdom of darkness.

“But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons’” (Matthew 12:24).

So the Jews must have had some theology and experience with evil spirits and trying to set people free. But without the name of Jesus, it must have been hard work! **Is there some issue in your life, family or business that can only be explained and solved by recognizing that you are dealing with an evil being with intelligence. You can't counsel or advise an evil force; you can only cast it out in the name of Jesus.**

v. 15 – The evil spirit answered these sons of the priest. We see here that spirits are intelligent, with the ability to communicate, reason and occupy human beings. There are some who don't believe that this happens in the 21st century. I am not among them. I think that evil spirits influence people today just as they did 2,000 years ago.

This is an interesting statement the demon makes. He said that he knew Jesus, was getting to know Paul, but had no awareness of these seven sons. Paul's ministry was so successful that the forces of hell knew about and communicated with one another about him. **Do you want to be used by God in such a way that the forces of hell know your name? Don't answer too quickly!**

v. 16 – The man who had the spirit jumped on all seven sons and overpowered them all, and I'm sure he had supernatural help from the evil spirit to do so. The Greek tells us that some of the sons were beaten so badly that they had broken bones protruding from their skin. This indicates the power of an evil spirit but this power is neutralized completely by the blood and name of Jesus. Thank you, Lord.

Day Two

17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. 18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

v. 17 – Fear seized the Ephesians after this incident. I have heard many people say that the fear of the Lord is not terror, but rather reverential honor. And I'm not sure I agree with that. When you behold God's power and the reality of good and evil, and when you consider that God maintains us when He could judge us, it does create a fear for the power of God. When the Ephesians saw how powerful the name of Jesus was and considered their own sinfulness, they held Jesus' name in high honor.

When the Church manifests the power and love of God, some of those outside the Church are impacted and changed. The devil isn't afraid of the Church's words but of the power behind the words. **Does your church have power? More importantly, do you have power behind your words? Are you enhancing God's reputation through your deeds and witness?**

vs. 18&19 – Notice here that it was those who had already believed who came and confessed their dark deeds. I have preached a message out of this story entitled, "Out With The Old; In With The New." In that message, I made the point that often we must get rid of something before God gives us something fresh and new. This is consistent with the principle of repentance, which requires that we turn to God and away from our sins before we can receive God's blessings.

But often, this principle doesn't even apply to sinful practices, but how we use our time. **You may want to read more, but first you will have to give up watching so much television—out with the old, in with the new. Is there anything you need to put aside so that you can embrace the new thing that God has for you?**

When I first came to the Lord, I remember taking all my rock music albums and dumping them into the trash. I cleaned out my books, artwork and anything else that didn't glorify God. I had invested no small amount of money in those things, but I realized that I had found something much more valuable in Jesus. And the Ephesians came to the same conclusion and got rid of their magic books and other things related to their former life of

darkness. **Is there anything you need to get rid of today? Are you hesitating because what you have is valuable in monetary terms? I urge you not to put anything ahead of God and your relationship with Him. Sell or give away whatever is coming between you and Him. Do it today; don't wait.**

We don't know how much 50,000 drachmas would be in modern currency. We can be sure, however, that it was a lot of money or Luke would not have commented on the worth of the books. Remember what Jesus said:

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24).

v. 20 – The Ephesians gave something up but got something infinitely better in return. But God doesn't ask you to give something up just so you can get something better. He requires you to give things up because He is God and He requires absolute obedience. This is basic and refers back to the Ten Commandments:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

Day Three

21 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." 22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. 23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. 24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.

v. 21 – It is generally believed that Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthian church from Ephesus and then determined to visit Corinth to try and sort out some of the problems they had. After that, feeling that his work in Ephesus was completed, Paul wanted to keep moving and advancing after a trip to Jerusalem. **Paul was always planning and thinking ahead concerning his purpose. Are you doing the same? What is your plan (keeping in mind your need for God's help and your inability to plan perfectly) for the next year? Three years? Five years?**

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For

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Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. (Rom 15:20-28).

v. 22 – As Paul prepared to go, he sent his two trusted servants ahead of him to prepare for his visit. **Can you be counted on to carry out the instructions of those who are over you? Are you faithful to do what you are asked to do, especially where the Lord's work is concerned?**

Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters (Proverbs 25:13).

For you to carry out any service, you must die to your way of doing things and enter into the preferred way of those you are serving. I have often said service isn't a matter of inconvenience; rather it is a death process as you die to self and live to others. **Does this make sense?**

vs. 23&24 – While Paul was in Ephesus without his helpers, the progress of the gospel came into conflict with local economic interests. God is always bad business for those who don't serve Him; He often represents economic loss that emanates from idolatry or sin. The silversmiths are set in contrast here to those believers who had brought their magic books and burned them. The one group endured economic loss for the sake of gaining Christ. The other group was not willing to make those sacrifices and they then caused trouble to protect their economic interests.

Ephesus was the location of Diana's Temple, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Pilgrims came from all over the world to worship her and the silversmiths had a good business making and selling silver likenesses of the goddess. This was a battle between King Jesus and the supposed queen of heaven, Diana. Jesus won the battle then and He still wins the battle against any god or entity that exalts itself against Him.

Day Four

25 He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. 27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

vs. 25&26 – Demetrius was the ring leader of this uprising and he called together the silversmiths and others from related trades. He wanted to discuss a strategy of how they could combat the growing interest in Jesus in their city. This was about money and nothing else here, although I’m sure that some of the artisans were committed to the worship of Diana.

Paul was the focal point of Demetrius’ presentation, blaming the apostle for the business downturn. Paul had done such an effective job that large numbers of people were turning to Jesus. Of course, hell would not just allow this to happen without any response whatsoever. And hell won’t allow you to make progress without some opposition as well. It is our opposition that enables us to learn to trust the Lord and to worship Him more completely and purely. If you don’t think that’s true, just read some of the psalms and see how those believers poured their heart out to the Lord to save them from their enemies. You can’t understand what the psalmists were talking about until you experience the pain of suffering yourself.

What is your favorite psalm? Do you have one? Why is it your favorite? Do you read the psalms just to read, or do you let them speak to you and your situation? If you are going through a tough time, may I recommend Psalms 13, 35 and 86.

v. 27 – Demetrius would have made a good preacher for the Lord. He was passionate, articulate and persuasive. But he was on the wrong side in this dispute. But I have a question: how did Luke find out what he said? Was Luke there? Did he interview someone who was? Could Demetrius converted at a later date and told this story? I’m not sure, but somehow Luke got hold of the transcript of his remarks.

Luke was a detailed, orderly writer. I’m sure this came from his scientific, medical background. God was able to use the personality of each writer of Scripture, keep their style, yet inspire His word to be written. He did not dictate what they wrote, nor were they “taken over” as those in a trance or as robots. They exercised freewill, yet God directed their every word.

Notice how Luke described the process that produced his writing:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, **since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you**, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4 emphasis added).

Luke didn’t say the Lord moved him to write; he just investigated and wrote an orderly account. Did he know that the Spirit was inspiring his work? I’m not sure, but I doubt it. He was just being Luke and God used Luke to produce His inspired word.

I am not equating what you and I do today to writing the inspired word of God. That was a unique event that will never be duplicated. Yet God today still uses you and me to do His will, but in such a way that it sounds, looks and tastes like us to those who encounter us. **Are you spending time trying to change who you are so God can use you? I have news for you: God can use you as you are right now.**

Day Five

28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. 30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. 32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.

v. 28 – Demetrius' address achieved its purpose, for the artisans were angry and began a demonstration in favor of the goddess. They chanted and shouted to an inanimate, mute idol:

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them (Psalm 135:15-18).

Today's idols are not made of wood and stone in western cultures. Today, materialism, greed, prosperity and comfort are idols that the people worship. The effects, however, are the same, for the people who worship those things become just like what they worship. And we too become like the Lord whom we worship.

v. 29 – Perhaps Gaius and Aristarchus were the ones who reported the speech to Luke, since they were in Ephesus with Paul during that time. There is always an element of danger when you are involved in advancing the kingdom of God. I just returned from Kenya with seven students who went with me. We had a great trip, but we prayed every day for safety and protection. We were preaching and teaching and there are spiritual forces that are angered when you do that. But God protected us.

They rushed into the theater, which was a large, open-air amphitheater that is still functional today. It has a seating capacity of 23,000 people. This is where the mob went after Demetrius' speech. I'm not sure how full the theatre was, but it must have been a significant crowd to head for the theater, which would have been the only place in town that hold a large number of people.

vs. 30&31 – You have to love Paul. There is a frenzied crowd of thousands rioting and screaming, and Paul wanted to go out and face them. He was so confident and

courageous and had such trust in God, that he felt he could take on that crowd and hold his own. Fortunately, more rational minds prevailed and the disciples prevented Paul from going out to face Diana's supporters. As usual, God allowed circumstances to unfold in such a way that Paul was forced to move on, even when he wanted to stay. Paul had some friends in high places and they also sent word for Paul not to approach the theater.

Do you see God's hand in your circumstances? Is God in control of your life, or can things happen that are outside His domain and will? Is God just in the good things that happen to you (as you perceive good) or is He in all the things? Does God rule over all, even those who don't know Him?

He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations — let not the rebellious rise up against him (Psalm 66:7).

The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19).

v. 32 – There were some there who didn't even know why they had come to the theater. Confusion was the rule of the day as the mob chanted and rioted. Don't ever think that everyone is against you when you encounter opposition. Most people don't care that much. So keep your eyes on the Lord, for you plus God constitute a majority no matter how many may oppose you.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31).

Day Six

33 The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash.

v. 33 – I doubt if this Alexander was a believer. Rather he was pushed forward by the Jews to probably try and explain that Paul did not represent the Jews in his evangelism. Remember, at this point Christians were considered an offshoot of Judaism in the minds of the Gentiles—and that indeed is what they were. But the Jews were not comfortable with this definition and worked to distance themselves from Paul and the disciples. Eventually, Jews would condemn as heretics any Jew who converted to Christianity. And Paul would go on to make an important distinction of his own:

It is not as though God's word had failed. **For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.** On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son" (Romans 9:6-9 emphasis added).

v. 34 – The Jews would also have opposed Diana worship, so when the crowd realized that Alexander was a Jew, they drowned him out with shouting for the next two hours. That's a long time to shout and rally on behalf of anyone or anything. You might say that they had a two-hour worship service for their goddess.

v. 35&36 – As in Corinth, the Roman legal system came once again to the defense of the Christians—or at least to the dispersal of their opponents. The city's mayor stepped forward and urged the people not to go further in their demonstration, for they were in danger of breaking the law themselves. He reminded them that the entire world knew that Ephesus was the recipient and guardian of Diana's image and her reputation. (The Ephesians believed that an actual image in her temple fell from heaven as a gift from the god Jupiter.

Diana was often portrayed as a goddess with many breasts, symbolic of her ability to nurture and provide for creation. The mayor stated that the whole world worshipped Diana and this was a true statement, for both Romans and Greeks honored her name. This is what made Ephesus such an important city, for many came to pay homage to this goddess—and also bought souvenirs when they came. And this is what caused the demonstration to break out in the first place.

The early church did not confront the pagan world from the safety of a building, but face to face in the public square. God calls us today to do the same. **What are you doing to confront the nature of secular society with the reality of Jesus? What am I doing? Those are important questions to ask ourselves.**

Day Seven

37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. 38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." 41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

vs. 37-41 – The mayor's words were prudent and received. He restored order, which was what Rome expected him to do. He urged the protesters to file charges if any wrong had been done and urged them all to go back to work or home. For now, Rome had

protected the believers. But there would come a day when the Roman government would not protect them, but would rather stir up the crowds to persecute the believers. We can never expect peace from the world system—a temporary truce is possible, but never peace. As we close this study, let's look at a few passages warning us that we are to forever be at war with the world system:

1. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you (1 John 3:13).
2. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:4-6).
3. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:21-23).
4. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man (Luke 6:22).