

Dark Arts Forsaken; Mob Violence Subdued

V 1-3 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.”

“The upper regions.” That is, the more highly elevated “region of Galatia and Phrygia” (18:23). After “strengthening all the disciples” there, Paul went on to Ephesus, fulfilling his promise made in the previous chapter, “I will return again to you, God willing.” (18:21)

“Ephesus.” As the world’s center of Diana worship, Ephesus was best known for its magnificent temple to the goddess - one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was also an important political, educational, and commercial center with a population of about a quarter million people. It lay on the Imperial Highway, about halfway between Rome and the eastern borders of the empire.

The training center established here was probably the most fruitful accomplishment of Paul’s ministry. It later became John the Apostle’s headquarters. The church in Ephesus likely got its start under Priscilla and Aquila after Paul left them there while on his way to Jerusalem. (Acts 18:19-21,26)

“Some disciples.” Followers of John the Baptist who didn’t fully understand the Christian faith. This little sub-group of believers, who existed also in other cities, actually continued right on until the 2nd Century A.D. Apollos may have been a member of such a group before meeting Aquila and Priscilla. The passage here about these disciples seems to show that John the Baptist’s message about Messiah’s soon coming had spread far and wide among the Jewish people throughout the Roman empire.

V 4-7 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.

These *“disciples”* had already taken a step in the right direction by embracing the teachings of John the Baptist. John’s *“baptism of repentance”* ministry was designed to prepare the people for the coming of their Messiah: *“he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children’, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* (Luke 1:16-17)

John’s preaching helped to turn people away from their smug satisfaction about being followers of Moses and to search their hearts and consciences as to whether they were really following the spirit of the law. For example, he gave some very concrete advice on unselfishness: *“He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none.”* (Luke 3:11) This was not something the law required a person to do, but the people needed to learn to step beyond mere dutifulness to the law and to be guided by the spirit of unselfishness.

Obviously, there was great need for change in the Jews’ religion. Obeying the law of Moses did not mean that people had a heartfelt conviction to do the right thing. For this reason, God introduced the *“baptism of repentance”*, and later the *“baptism of the Holy Spirit”*. These have been a great benefit to mankind, empowering us to listen more to our consciences, to feel a greater love for God and others, and to have a greater sensitivity to His Spirit to guide us.

So when Paul came along, these disciples of John the Baptist were more than ready to receive the Lord after being reminded (or informed if they hadn’t heard it yet) that *“John indeed baptized. . . saying to the people that they should believe on Him (Jesus) who should come after him”* ; and so *“they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”*. They now became

full believers, and their water baptism was a proclamation of their new-found faith. Then after this, *“the Holy Spirit came upon them”* when Paul *“laid hands on them”*.

V 8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

“Three months.” This was the longest time Paul was able to spend in a synagogue with the possible exception of the Corinth synagogue. *“Reasoning and persuading.”* Some Bible translations use the terms *“arguing/disputing”*, which is probably not accurate. Paul, as a wise spokesman, was teaching and contending for the faith without indulging in quarrelsome, provocative remarks; a negative approach like that would have undermined his efforts to bring the Gospel to this new group of potential believers.

V 9 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.

“Hardened.” This word in Greek usually referred to defiance against God.

“The Way.” Jesus said, *“I am the way”*. (John 14:6) He is the road to the Father and to eternal life. Likely, the unbelieving Jews were hardening themselves against certain aspects of the new *“Way”* that they didn’t like, such as inclusion of the Gentiles without recourse to the Law.

Whatever it was, their attitude was a bad influence - they were even speaking out publicly *“before the multitude”* - and Paul realized there was no other course of action but to *“withdraw the disciples”*. They could no longer *“be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what. . . communion has light with darkness?”* (2Corinthians 6:14) Thankfully, the Jews who had become *“hardened”* did not go so far as to raise persecution as far as we know.

“The school of one Tyrannus.” Tyrannus was either the owner of the lecture hall or the philosopher who taught there. If the latter, Tyrannus could have been a nickname given by the students - *“our tyrant”*. Perhaps

Paul used the hall during the afternoon break - 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

V 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

“Two years” in Tyrannus’ school, but total time in Ephesus was longer (at least three years according to Acts 20:31).

“All. . . in Asia heard the word.” That meant throughout Asia Minor, what is now western Turkey (although it’s quite possible the Word spread to more distant corners of Turkey as well). During Paul’s sojourn in Ephesus, churches in Colosse and Hierapolis were founded, and possibly some of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3.

(Jesus speaking:) Often it is in following My footsteps in the course of your day, simply doing what you know you should, being persistently faithful in that which I have called you to do, that you have great success. When I called Paul to Ephesus, I led him to settle down and teach, and it was difficult for this roving apostle of Mine to do so. But as he did, and as he spent two years there, doing the things I told him to do, many of those in Asia were reached through that school and those who passed through it, far more than if he had spent that time only traveling and personal witnessing (Acts 19:1-12). (from publication of [The Family International](#) - Nov/2007)

V 11-12 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.

“Unusual miracles.” The meaning of *“unusual”* is “not ordinary” (from *Young’s Concordance*). Any miracle that the Lord does always seems out of the ordinary. However, it appears that at this particular time the Lord greatly augmented His power in Paul the apostle. It was an example of those extra surges of power that infills God’s servants at special times when it is needed. Jesus had promised, *“I will give you the keys of heaven,”* and it would appear that this was one of those occasions when Paul held the “key” to that boundless reservoir of heavenly power. (Matthew 16:19)

“Handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body.” In old time it was commonly believed that spiritual power could be transmitted in such ways. It seems as though God capitalized on this peculiar custom or “faith” to bring healing to people. He worked according to their faith. (Matthew 9:29) Examples are the woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, or the people who were healed by the shadow of Peter. (Matthew 9:20-22, Acts 5:15)

Of course, healing doesn’t have to depend on anything at all except faith. Several times Jesus healed without seeing the afflicted person. All He did was decide that it should happen, and it did. This happened especially for those people like the Centurion and the woman of Canaan, people who manifested great faith in Jesus’ power. (Matthew 8:13, 15:28)

V 13 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.”

“Itinerant (wandering) Jewish exorcists.” In those days the mentally ill or insane, people who were pestered by evil spirits, were not locked away in institutions. Neither did there exist hospitals or advanced medical knowledge to care for those who were physically ill. This kind of social situation created a “market” for free-lance practitioners, those who had some knowledge of healing methods. And in those days that meant, not just knowledge of physical treatments, but a certain amount of spirituality, being able to invoke the aid of the supernatural. Because their “patients” were not locked away in institutions but scattered amongst the populace, these exorcists had to shift from place to place to carry on their trade.

These traveling exorcists were not in the same league as the higher-level ***“sorcerers”*** like Simon the magician (Acts 8) and Bar-Jesus (Acts 13). They may not have been as committed to the dark kingdom. Nevertheless, likely they tended to straddle that borderline territory between the Light and Dark kingdoms, simply because they were not very discerning where their “spiritual power” came from. Sometimes it came from good spirits, and sometimes from the dark side, depending on which direction their spiritual antenna was pointed. The name “Jesus” to them was just another charm, and it seems that it had become a new practice that the ***“Jewish***

exorcists took upon themselves” - to use the name of Jesus in the exorcism trade.

“We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Their faith was in Paul’s faith in Jesus, not their own - a rather weak faith. Nevertheless, some exorcists, if they were sincere enough, could have had success commanding demons in this way. Even in the Gospels, it appears that some exorcists had caught on to the power of the name of Jesus and had begun using it (much to the annoyance of the disciples): “We saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him. . . But Jesus said, Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.” (Mark 9:38-40)

But no doubt some exorcists (like those mentioned in the next verse) fell more into the category of those like Simon the magician who, in Acts 8, was trying to buy the Holy Spirit so he could use the power merely for his own advantage.

Needless to say, there was a big difference between those who were gearing their “spirituality” towards a vainglorious or money-making enterprise and those men and women of God, like Paul, who were on a genuine mission to reach the lost and were using their spiritual gifts humbly for the glory and cause of God.

V 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.

“Sceva, a Jewish chief priest.” Sceva was not the high priest of the Jews but was, it seems, a “chief priest” in that area. His “seven sons” may have been drawing on their father’s reputation. A little borrowed spirituality was always helpful in the business of exorcism. Perhaps their father was instigating them in the trade.

V 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” “The evil spirit” knew that Jesus and Paul had the authority to command him. They were

like powerful heavyweights in the spirit world, and the evil spirit was afraid of them. But the *“seven sons of Sceva”*, by comparison, were just pipsqueaks. Their ploy of using the name of Jesus didn’t work because they didn’t have the connection to the Source that was required.

The disciples once said, *“Even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”* (Luke 10:17) But they were true followers. By comparison, these seven sons of Sceva were just opportunists - pretenders whose commitment to Christ probably extended no further than the monetary gain they hoped to acquire through using the name of Jesus in their exorcisms.

Perhaps because of their connection to the Jewish priesthood, the Lord had to let them be exposed as cheap fraudsters, not worthy of the people’s allegiance. It was wrong for those who knew the ways of the true God, and should have known better, to be dabbling in this low-level form of spirituality - with one foot in the Dark kingdom and the other in the Kingdom of Light. Had these sons of Sceva been non-Jewish and ignorant about the laws of the Old Testament, which clearly forbade dabbling in witchcraft (Deuteronomy 18:9-14), the Lord might have turned a blind eye to what they were doing.

It seems that most exorcisms were done by persuading the bigger evil spirits to call off the lesser ones who were causing the sickness or insanity in their victims. This was what the Pharisees tried to accuse Jesus of. *“This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”* (Matthew 12:24-28, Mark 3:22) Of course, it was a false accusation, but this does show that this manner of exorcising spirits was a known practice in those days.

The Pharisees looked down on it because the practice did not glorify God; it only advanced the interests of the exorcists, and since the arts of witchcraft were being used, their activities were actually advertising the Devil and his work. Even if people did get healed, those involved in such “exorcisms” did not really move out of the Enemy’s sphere of control and were often healed only temporarily or partly. But through the influence of Paul, the people in Ephesus realized that the power of Christ was much stronger and more effective, for both physical and spiritual healing, and brought full deliverance from the power of the Enemy.

So, as soon as the *“seven sons of Sceva”* tried to invoke the name of Jesus, a name that the evil spirit truly hated, it flew into a rage. The spirit must have known they didn’t have the “backup”; they weren’t really the servants of the Almighty, so it wasn’t worried about attacking them.

We don’t know the full story, but it is possible that the *“seven sons of Sceva”* who, as sons of a Jewish chief priest, had too much influence in the area and were drawing the Gentile Ephesians away from what Paul was teaching, just by their example if nothing else. As a result the Lord had to let them serve as a bad example; He could not bless them with His protection.

The end result was that the people realized that these *“seven sons of Sceva”* were the wrong Jews to be following. It was time to get off the road of compromise and follow Paul’s example of wholehearted commitment to Christ.

V 16 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.

“Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them.” The evil spirit knew they were just toying around with the name of Jesus, that he didn’t have to obey their command, so it imbued the man it was inhabiting with demonic strength to rough up the seven unfortunate brothers. (Evidently, this *“evil spirit”* was one of the more powerful demons in Satan’s realm.) And *“they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”* (Mark 5:1-20 contains an interesting account about another person who also had superhuman strength until the Lord took authority over the demons that were possessing him.)

The exorcists could not claim the kind of heavy-duty spiritual power that Jesus and the apostles were using because they had the wrong motives and were not closely connected to the Source. Christ had promised His followers, *“I will give you the keys of heaven.”* (Matthew 16:19)

But to unlock this kind of power that can work miracles (such as having authority over powerful demons) requires certain conditions: respect for

God's words; willingness to be instructed; sincerity of heart; deep love, dedication, and yieldedness to God (even in everyday life); proper sense of timing in accordance with God's will (e.g. don't expect to part the Red Sea unless the situation calls for that kind of miracle.)

V 17 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.

"Known both to all Jews and Greeks." It sounds as though Sceva and his sons were well known and as a result probably had much (too much) influence in the Ephesian community. In those days no distinction existed between Jews and Christians; both were assumed to adhere to the same belief system. The Ephesians may have thought it was fine to follow the watered-down example of the sons of Sceva (that is, continue to dabble in their "dark arts") because, after all, weren't the sons of Sceva on the same team with the apostle Paul?

"Fear fell on them all." Getting a full frontal look at the maliciousness of the Enemy, while at the same time realizing the power of Christ through His true servant Paul, instilled "fear" among the Ephesians, but not the kind of fear that could be called a negative experience.

(Jesus:) Positive conviction and positive fear of the Lord will always leave you feeling shaken up, but still challenged and hopeful, and usually quite secure in My love for you. (from publication of [The Family International](#) - Feb/2004)

This incident was reminiscent of what happened after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira: *"great fear came upon all the church"*. (Acts 5:11) The exorcists' sorry plight became big news in Ephesus and caused people to realize there was no middle ground. Like Ananias and Sapphira, the exorcist *"sons of Sceva"* were trying to have the best of both worlds, but it nearly killed them. It exposed the futility, even danger, of trying to combine the ways of the Lord with their *"curious arts"* (as the KJV puts it). For *"what communion has light with darkness?"* (1Corinthians 6:14)

People realized there was no point in trying to hang on to their old belief systems. The best thing to do was make a clean break. The believers knew that Jesus' power was the real thing; they had seen it

working vigorously in Paul. But now they realized that the name of Jesus could not be taken lightly or used for personal gain as the exorcists had done (and as Ananias and Sapphira had done some years earlier); they couldn't expect to use God just for their own benefit, but they had to expect to let God use them for His and others' benefit; it became clear that the new "Way" that Paul was teaching was in a totally different class as opposed to all the new fads, trends, and charms that had come and gone over the years. And as a result of this incident *"the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."*

V 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.

"Many. . . came confessing and telling their deeds." It was a time of cleansing, and the believers desperately wanted to get their hearts right with the Lord. They could identify with the *"sons of Sceva"* who had tried having one foot in the Dark kingdom and one in the kingdom of Light. They saw that it didn't work and were ready now to throw away their other *"lifesavers"* - their spells and charms and so on - and hang on to Jesus alone. \

It is natural for people who have for years thrashed about in the waters of ignorance, fear, and superstitions to be hesitant to let go of their *"lifesavers"* of other gods, dark arts, or good works. But that hadn't stopped Paul from ministering to the Ephesian believers. Eventually, the Lord honored his patient tolerance, and through the catalyst of the *"sons of Sceva"* incident, the new believers gained the inner conviction to abandon their former lifesavers as they clung, firmly now, to the only True Lifesaver.

Inevitably, we all face times of renewal during our lifetime. For believers this means getting their hearts right with the Lord, shedding the weights and sins that have been holding them back. The Corinthian church, which Paul had just finished pioneering, experienced such a time of renewal, as did the Ephesians; it was precipitated by an encounter with some false teachers.

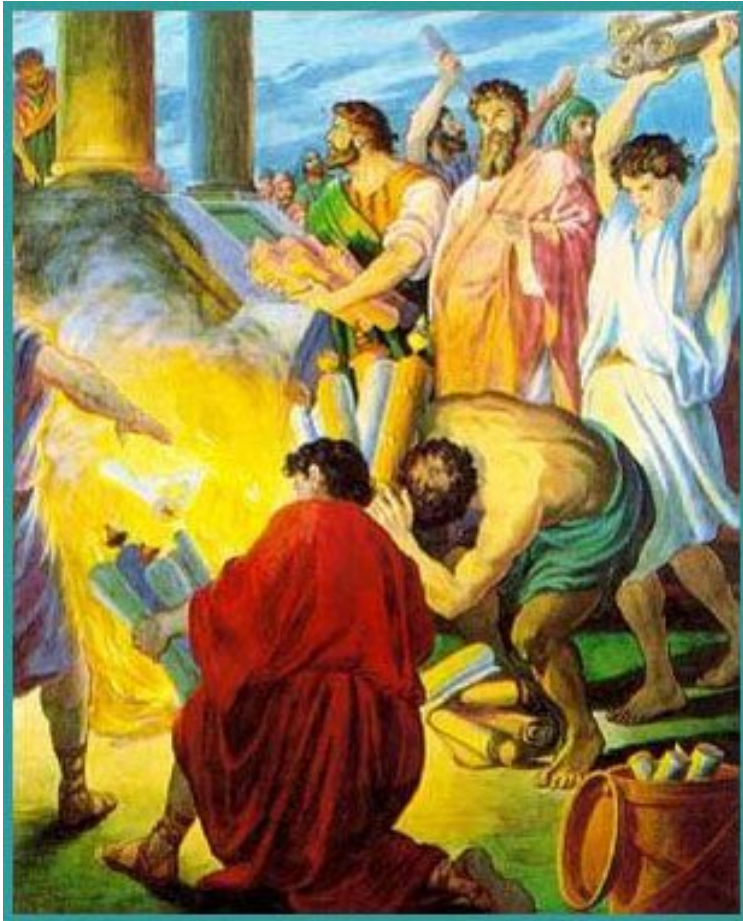
Many in the Corinthian church were swept off their feet by the eloquence and seeming wisdom of these *"false apostles"* and their minds

had been, as Paul put it, *“corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”* (2Corinthians 11:13,3). And most of the second epistle to the Corinthians dwells on what had become almost a mutiny in the church at that time.

The end result of Paul’s exhortations and admonishments resembled very much what happened to the Ephesians: a great repentance. To the Corinthians Paul said admiringly, *“You sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”* (2Cor 7:11)

In our spiritual lives there is a time for self-cleansing. But the purpose of such “inward focus” is not self-improvement only. The “outward focus” is just as important. Because it strengthens them spiritually, such times of inner cleansing and repentance empower individuals and the church to do a better job of engaging in their mission of reaching the world in whatever way they feel called to manifest the love and truth of Christ.

In Psalm 51 king David asks God to *“wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. . . Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts. . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.”* But then towards the end we learn the purpose of his desperate prayer for inner cleansing: *“Then will I teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.”* (Psalm 51:2,7,13)



V 19 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.

“Brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.”
 Burning the books was proof of the genuine repentance of those *“who had practiced magic”*.

“50,000 pieces of silver [drachmas].” Equal to 50,000 days’ wages for a common laborer, a huge sum (about \$6 million in today’s currency), which indicates how widespread the practice of magic was in Ephesus. (Books, of course, were a lot more expensive in those days; they had to be copied by hand and used sheepskin for paper. To get rid of them was no small sacrifice.)

Burning the books accomplished two things: it removed a major

temptation to slip back into that corrupted spirituality; secondly, it protected others from getting ahold of the books and being led astray by their deceptive influence.

V 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

“The word of the Lord grew mightily.” The Ephesians’ inner cleansing had the desired outward results. Without the blockages of pseudo-spirituality in these magic practices, a great vacuum arose in people’s hearts for the truth, strength, and instruction of the Word. The *“word of the Lord”* now *“prevailed”* instead of the various doctrines of “dark arts” that had once bedevilled the Ephesian church.

Great spiritual power was generated once the deadening effects of compromise had been uprooted. They had learned from the *“sons of Sceva”* incident how compromise might prevent them from having the kind of spiritual strength they would want to have when it would be most needed.

There is an interesting parallel here, by the way, to our modern cultural environment: the *“curious arts”* of the Ephesians could be compared to the wide array of “New Age” ideas and practices that have become popular in recent years. The world - the Western world especially - is heading in the opposite direction to how the city of Ephesus was moving back then under Paul’s guidance. It is falling away from faith in the true God, which has brought a corresponding rise in the amount of “New Age” spirituality to fill the spiritual void.

Sadly, many spiritual seekers have become disillusioned with what they have experienced in some mainstream churches - a lack of spirituality and dedication. This has caused them to feel the answers to their quest for enlightenment must be found elsewhere. Many Christians, in rejecting false spirituality such as what characterized the Ephesians, have gone too far in that direction and have limited themselves to a point where any form of spirituality is considered wrong.

But it stands to reason that if there are evil spirits whom we must reject, there must also be good spirits whom we are supposed to accept and channel into our lives. In the Bible there are several examples of

encounters with angelic beings, so it shouldn't be thought surprising or wrong for believers to come into contact with and be guided by the good spirits of God, as well as the Holy Spirit.

V 21 When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

"Purposed in the Spirit." This verse merely sets forth Paul's future plans: *"to go to Jerusalem"*, but on a roundabout route back *"through Macedonia and Achaia"*. (He did this partly for the purpose of collecting money for the Jerusalem church - Romans 15:25-27, 1Corinthians 16:1-4.) And then after Jerusalem, *"I must also see Rome"*, a place of strategic importance for the church. Paul also wanted to use Rome as a jumping-off point for Spain. (Romans 15:22-24) Having done so much to evangelize the eastern Roman empire, Paul now wanted to forge ahead into the central and western portions of it.

There is no record of whether or not Paul ever got to Spain. If he had, it would have been very different and much less familiar territory for him. In the eastern part of the empire, to which Paul was well accustomed, the Romans were not able to impose much of their language and customs on the already well-established civilizations of the Middle East and Greece.

But amongst the less advanced cultures that lay to the west, he would have had to operate much differently in those areas where the Latin language and Roman culture had taken over to a much greater extent.

A similar kind of differentiation existed in the British colonial empire. English customs and language took over completely in the less advanced cultures of the Americas but made much less headway in more established societies like that of India.

V 22 So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.

"Timothy and Erastus." Nothing much is known about Erastus. In preparation for the journey (probably to assist in collection of funds), Paul sent them ahead *"into Macedonia"* while he stayed in Ephesus for the

time being. The epistle of First Corinthians was written in Ephesus, so possibly, their mission included delivering that epistle to the church there.

V 23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.

“A great commotion about the Way.” Besides giving the Ephesians a new set of beliefs, *“the Way”* had also led them into a brand new way of life, one in which there was no interest in idol-worship. The new customs threatened to affect negatively the fortunes of the Ephesus business community. Among Gentiles, very often the profit motive was the reason behind opposition to the Gospel - as was the case with Simon the magician and Elymas the sorcerer, and now with the Ephesian idol manufacturers; among Jews it was jealousy and envy.

V 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen.

“Demetrius, a silversmith. . . brought no small profit to the craftsmen.” This suggests he may have been head of the silversmiths’ guild. He *“made silver shrines of Diana.”* Diana-worship, widespread throughout the Roman world, was centered in Ephesus, and her temple was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. *“Diana”* was the Roman name for the Greek goddess of the Moon, Artemis.

V 25-27 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.”

As we might say nowadays, Demetrius knew how to “press all the right buttons”. He cleverly played on the craftsmen’s fears of financial ruin (*“We have our prosperity by this trade. . . this trade of ours is in danger”*); on their religious zeal (*“this Paul has. . . turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands”*); and their concern for

the city's prestige (*"not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia. . . the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship"*). Money, religious zeal, and patriotism were all packaged together in this speech to the silversmiths.

"Saying that they are not gods which are made with hands." These words spoken through the mouth of an enemy might have been an actual witness to some who were discerning enough and receptive to the truth tucked away in Demetrius' distorted version of what were supposed to be the "subversive" teachings of Paul.

V 28 Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

"They were full of wrath." Demetrius' words had the desired effect: the crowd, whipped into frenzy, started chanting, *"Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"* The ensuing riot likely happened during the annual spring festival in honor of Diana.

V 29 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.

"The whole city was filled with confusion, rushed into the theater with one accord." A mob spirit was brewing, and once it had gripped the crowds, the situation became very dangerous. Brutal passions were taking over; all reason and common sense had vanished.

V 30 And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him.

"Paul wanted to go in." Concerned for *"Gaius and Aristarchus"*, his *"travel companions"*, Paul would have entered the theatre, but *"the disciples would not allow him"*, out of concern for Paul's safety and that his presence there would only make the situation worse.

V 31 Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater.

“Some of the officials of Asia.” Also known as ***“Asiarchs”***, these men were members of the aristocracy who were dedicated to promoting Roman interests in Asia Minor. They were ***“friends”*** in high places whom Paul must have ministered to and favorably influenced. (This may be why no persecution from the Jews had arisen yet in Ephesus.)

Although only one Asiarch ruled at a time, this title was held by them for life. The fact that they were Paul’s ***“friends”*** shows they were favorable to his message and didn’t consider it criminal or threatening as did Demetrius and his followers. In fact, they may have pulled a few strings behind the scenes to protect the apostles’ work and restore order in the city, as we learn in the next few verses. They also would not allow Paul, a Roman citizen whom they were duty-bound to protect, to wander into the mouth of danger and counseled him to ***“not venture into the theater”***.

It was commendable that Paul wanted to ***“venture into the theater”*** for the sake of his friends who had been ***“seized”***. Still, one cannot help but wonder if Paul was being a little overconfident in this situation. He was quite determined to jump into it, it would seem, and to dissuade him required the restraining hand of, not only the disciples, but also the officials of Asia.

Having experienced the Lord’s hand in saving him from so many dangerous and dire circumstances, it would have been easy for him to take the Lord’s protection for granted and, like Samson of old, wander into a situation that could have seriously wounded or killed him. Fortunately, the Lord did not allow him ***“to be tempted beyond what he was able”*** and made a ***“way of escape”*** via the firm warnings of his friends, the ***“officials of Asia”***. (1Corinthians 10:13)

V 32 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.

“Some therefore cried one thing and some another.” People were attracted simply because something exciting and controversial was going on. But ***“most of them did not know why they had come together.”*** Like some kind of hyped-up political rally, no one understood the real issues.

V 33-34 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!”

“Alexander. . . the Jews putting him forward.” Now the Jews were getting into the act. It seems their motive was to disassociate themselves from the Christians and thereby avoid any possibility of a massacre of the Jews. Whatever the Jews intended by putting Alexander forward only backfired, and the crowd shouted him down *“about the space of two hours”* in a mindless display of religious frenzy, chanting *“Great is Diana of the Ephesians”*. The whole situation, if it wasn’t for the danger, could be seen as a rather comical one.

Like it or not, the Jews were still being linked in most people’s minds with the new and growing movement of Christianity. It is ironic that many Jews, who did not know about Jesus or who had rejected Him, still ended up in the same boat, persecution-wise, as the Christians. Like the Christians, the Jews also were known by the crowd to be opposed to foreign gods. Of course, it wasn’t long before the distinction was made, and the Roman empire started persecuting Christians only.

V 35-36 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.

“The city clerk.” The equivalent now of a city mayor, he was the liaison between the town council and the Roman authorities, and therefore responsible to explain this riot. Just as Demetrius knew how to incite the people to riot, this man seemed to know just what to say to calm everyone down.

“What man. . . does not know that the city. . . is a temple guardian of the great goddess Diana.” A little flattery helped to soothe the enflamed passions of the crowd and get their attention.

“Image which fell down from Zeus.” They believed that the image of Diana in the temple had descended ***“from Zeus”***, the chief of the gods. (Whether the townclerk actually believed this or not himself, we don’t know.) Of course, if the image came from Zeus, that meant the image was not made with hands, and therefore, there was no need to be so upset about Paul’s teaching ***“that they are not gods which are made with hands”***.

“These things cannot be spoken against.” Diana worship had such universal approval of the status quo and was so self-evident (they believed) that there was no need to feel threatened or get into such a frenzy about it. And if this is the case, the city clerk went on to say, ***“you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly”***.

V 37 “For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.”

“Neither robbers of temples, nor blasphemers of your goddess.” Paul and company had not committed any crimes against the Ephesians’ religion. Of course, they did teach, as Demetrius had declared, that ***“they are not gods which are made with hands.”*** This could be seen as an indirect criticism of Diana worship, but it was a far cry from the offensive crime of blasphemy. Paul had been very careful in Athens not to offend the religious sensibilities of the people there, and no doubt he had continued the same wise policy here in Ephesus.

V 38-39 “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.”

“If Demetrius, and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open.” The city clerk correctly places the blame where it belongs. Demetrius and his crew should have followed judicial proceedings, going through the proper channels, instead of trying to take matters into their own hands. For personal grievances there were legal channels to follow. For ***“any other inquiry”***, such as this one involving a public grievance, then the matter should be ***“determined in the lawful***

assembly” of the town council. (Of course, the Devil knew that course of action would never work to accomplish his purposes and tried everything he could to get around the usual legal proceedings.)

V 40 *“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.”*

“For we are in danger of being called in question.” The city clerk made the crowd aware of the danger they were putting the city in. The Roman authorities might, as a result of *“today’s uproar”*, decide to declare Ephesus a seditious city, to revoke its charter and whatever privileges the city had been granted.

Here was one very good example of several in the Book of Acts where the advantages of the strong, well organized Roman administration were proven: the Lord used the Roman system to provide protection for the Early Church during those beginning, vulnerable stages of growth when the Devil was doing his utmost to prevent the new movement from launching out with the Gospel message. *“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. . . For he is God’s minister to you for good. . . he does not bear the sword in vain: for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath upon him who practices evil.”* (Romans 13:3-4)

V 41 *And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.*

“He dismissed the assembly.” The crowd by now realized they could not carry on any further, for they had in fact gone too far already, and they were easily dismissed. With the specter of Roman retribution hanging over them, the crowd wisely came to its senses. As happened in Philippi, “Rome” proved to be quite effective in overriding the blustering passions of the people and protecting the Church in those crucial, early stages of its growth.



Map of Third Missionary Journey

[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 20\)](#)