

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 19:13-22 | Session 53 | More *Signs* in Ephesus for the Jews

A.D. 56

In today's passage, Paul is in Ephesus where he has been *disputing and persuading the Jews concerning the kingdom of God*. The Kingdom of God is *physical, future, and fraternal* (e.g. Isaiah 63:1-6; 66:15,16; Zech 14). The Kingdom of God is not *in our hearts*, and we are not building the kingdom of God on earth; these are simply not Scriptural teachings. When Jesus Christ returns, He alone will establish his everlasting kingdom. There is nothing man can do to *usher in the kingdom*. Often, churches will join forces with governments to attempt to bring in the kingdom. This is never the purpose of the body of Christ (the Church). We cannot join with godlessness and expect the result to be godliness. Paul's Ephesus teaching is highly Jewish in nature. He doesn't appear to be teaching the gospel of salvation by grace through faith. He desires the Ephesian Jews to believe on Jesus as their Messiah and if they will, the Lord has promised to return to establish His kingdom. The Jews in Ephesus rejected Paul's teaching so he left the synagogue and began teaching, over a period of two years, in the school of Tyrannus.

Verse 13—

Certain of the vagabond (Greek: *perierchomai*, to wander about) **Jews, exorcists**. These were men who travelled around expelling demons from people, most likely for profit. Some historians have argued that Ephesus was well known for its magical practices. Their presence could indicate the Jews in Ephesus had slipped over to the *dark side* which may be why Paul had little or no success convincing them in the synagogue about Messiah and His kingdom (See verses 8,9).

According to ancient writings regarding exorcism one popular method of exorcising or controlling spirits was to invoke a more powerful spirit to expel the lower spirit. Earlier in Acts 16:18, Paul used Jesus's name in exorcism, but without magical incantations. Perhaps because of Paul's use of the name Jesus Christ, the name of Jesus grew popular with magicians and charlatans alike in order to make a buck? It appears that is what happens here as these Jews **took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus**. They tried to mimic Paul, **We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth**.

Verse 14—

The *vagabond Jews* attempting exorcisms in Jesus's name are identified as **Seven sons of one Sceva...chief of priests**. It is unknown who **Sceva** was, but that he was **chief of the priests** may indicate he was part of the Jewish religious leadership in Ephesus, known as *Sanhedrin*. There was *The Sanhedrin* in Jerusalem, but every town, if they had 120 Jews in place, had a Sanhedrin of twenty-three members. If there were less than 120 Jews, there were three members. Sceva was a member of the Ephesus Sanhedrin. These **seven** were **Sceva's sons** who were using the name of Jesus to call out evil spirits.

Verse 15,16—

Evidently, evil spirits are no pushovers. This one spoke, **Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?** Notice the two uses of the word, **know**. The first, pertaining to Jesus is *ginosko* in Greek. It means to **know** by experience. The second use of **know** is *epistamai* which is to **know** by proximity. This evil spirit had some sort of encounter with Jesus, but only a mere acquaintance with Paul. The seven sons of Sceva were unknown to the evil spirit, **but who are ye**, probably indicating they were frauds and could not really exorcise any demons at all.

And the man in whom the evil spirit it was leaped on them...they fled out of the house naked and wounded. This evil spirit was stronger than seven men. The Greek word for **wounded** is *tramatizo*.

Verse 17—

The people of Ephesus saw the success of Paul's exorcism (vs. 11,12) versus the failure of the *sons of Sceva* which caused **the name of the Lord Jesus** to be **magnified**.

Verse 18—

And many that believed in the Messiah, **confessed, and shewed their deeds**.

Confession and deeds (works) do not sound like the grace gospel. We should be careful in our thinking that we have to *show our deeds* after we believe in order to be truly saved, or to prove we are saved. If salvation is a free gift, then all that is necessary is to accept the gift, since grace is not of yourselves, is belief. Often Christians get trapped into thinking they must prove they are really saved. We are *justified* by belief alone (Acts 13:38,39). Yet for these Jews and Greeks (Greek: *Hellen*), during this transition from Law to Grace, in order to enter the kingdom of God, they had to confess their sins and do an outward work. Turning from the old life after believing should be something to be desired, and perhaps expected, but it varies for different people.

Verse 19—

Here is a description of just how superstitious and magic prone the people of Ephesus were (see note on vs. 13). **Curious arts** have to do with magical practices. It is difficult to know if these, **many of them also**, refers to the believers in verse 18, or was everyone in the city awed by what had happened to the *seven sons* and realized their magical paraphernalia and **books** were of no use and they had been conned?

Verse 20—

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. In other words, the Word of God was stronger than the magical words. This is going to cause a great stir among the business owners in Ephesus who specialized in making trinkets and false idols. When you mess with someone's financial livelihood, it typically doesn't turn out too well.