

The Silversmith's Business in Ephesus

Key Verse:
“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires...”

1 Timothy 6:9

Extra: Can you think of any modern day equivalents to this religious persecution?

Level 5 lesson 29

Read: Acts 19:23-41

THE GOSPEL VERSUS IDOLATRY: A silversmith has always been a respected and skilful professional, fashioning all sorts of useful and beautiful items from silver. The silversmiths in Ephesus, in addition to the normal household items of their trade, had a very profitable business. They made and sold many items of silverware related to the worship of the goddess Diana, whose temple was in Ephesus. Idol worshippers throughout Roman Asia bought the silver images of Diana, set them in their houses, and worshipped them. Business was booming!

Then Paul arrived in town preaching Jesus' life-changing message of the Gospel! By the grace of God, many people had their eyes opened to the folly and wickedness of their idol worship and stopped buying the expensive silverware. Before long, the silversmiths began to notice a dramatic decline in their business. Demetrius, one of the local silversmiths decided something must be done. Calling a meeting of all "the workmen in related trades," he stirred them up to fury and anger, as he told them the effect of the preaching of "this fellow Paul."

"Not only here in Ephesus," he said, "but throughout Asia, many people have been persuaded and turned away because "this fellow Paul" had told them "that they are not gods at all" (v26). Of course, Paul's statement was quite true, as 'gods' made by the hand of man cannot be real gods - they are lifeless and powerless, with eyes that can't see, hands that can't touch or do anything, and ears that can't hear. However, it is doubtful whether Demetrius was really concerned about the decline in the worship of Diana as he claimed in v27. His opening line to the crowd in v25, gives away his true motive: "Men you know we receive a good income from this business." What really worried him was the effect upon his income of money!

SATAN INSPIRES A RIOT: However, Demetrius' impassioned claims were used by Satan to great effect.

The workmen, filled with indignation, began shouting angrily, "Great is Artemis (or Diana) of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Soon a huge crowd was drawn to the scene and things quickly got out of control. The Scriptures record that many taking part in the riot, "did not even know why they were there!" We too, need to be very careful not to be drawn into "following the crowd in doing wrong," as God warned in Exodus 23:2. Unfortunately, two of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, were seized by the mob and pushed into the Theatre (an enormous square capable of holding about 25,000 people).

Paul, hearing of this, wanted to go into the theatre and address the people. However, some important officials of the city, fearing for his life, advised him not to attempt it, and Paul wisely listened to their advice. In the meantime, a man named Alexander stepped forward to speak on the Jews' behalf. He tried to explain that they were not responsible for insulting Artemis (Diana), and to clear them of any blame for the present riot. However, when the crowd realised he was a Jew and not a fellow Diana-worshipper, they refused to listen and for about two hours kept shouting in unison, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

THE STORM SUBSIDES: At this point, the Town Clerk managed to quieten the foolish mob and in effect, told them not to be silly! "Everyone knows all about the great Artemis (Diana) and her worship," he said. "What then was the purpose of all the noise and unrest?" After all, he reminded them, Paul and his friends "had neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess." If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen had any grievances against them, they should be handled through the courts, which were open to all. He went on to point out that their own conduct was totally out of order and they were in danger of being punished by the Roman authorities themselves. In light of this, he warned, they had better behave themselves and go home, which they soon did. So the 'storm subsided' and order was restored without harm to Paul and his companions.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What really caused Demetrius to get angry?	.....
2. What is the connection between the Key Verse and the lesson?	.....
3. What was the effect of Alexander's attempted defence?	.....
4. What did the Town Clerk say Demetrius should do?	.....
5. How did the Town Clerk restore order?	.....

My Name is Age

Paul's Passionate Preaching

Key Verse:

“For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.”

1 Thessalonians 3:8

Extra: How can your life be an encouragement to others?

Level 5 Lesson 30

Read Acts 20:1-16

ENCOURAGING THE BELIEVERS: After the riot in Ephesus, Paul said farewell to the Ephesian disciples, and along with Luke, crossed the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. What a tremendous amount of work though, lies behind the simple statement, “He travelled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people!” This would have included a visit to Philippi and contact with the jailer, his wife and family; along with Lydia and the other believers there. He would have encouraged and urged them all to remain faithful to God. Then he probably went to Thessalonica where he would be sure to stay with Jason, and get in touch with many of the Greeks and women who had been converted earlier. Then on to Berea to look up those people who believed in “testing everything by the Scriptures.” We can be quite certain that his visit and Godly instruction did much to encourage and assist them all in their Christian walk.

Leaving Macedonia, he worked in Greece for three months, probably making a brief visit to Athens to find out how Dionysius, and Damaris and the few “others” were getting on (Acts 17:34). As younger believers, they too would have appreciated Paul’s help and instruction, and his visit would be a blessing to them.

From there, it was on to Corinth, where he would see many old friends, including Justus, Crispus, and Sosthenes. However, here Paul was faced with a difficult task. We know from his two letters to the Corinthians, that the Church there had suffered from poor leadership and was in a bad state. Many of the believers had not been behaving themselves, both inside and outside the Church fellowship, and Paul had to correct them and teach them to behave as Christians. We can sense something of Paul’s frustration with these believers lack of maturity in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, where he refers to them as “still mere infants!”

To add to Paul’s trials, there were always devout Jews on his track, looking for an opportunity to kill him and stop him preaching about Jesus Christ.

Hearing that Paul was about to sail from Corinth to Syria on his way back to Jerusalem, they hatched a plot to capture him. However, Paul was warned of this and escaped them by returning to Macedonia, where along with Dr Luke (as the little word “we” in v6 shows) he sailed from Philippi to Troas instead. There he met a number of his friends again, including Timothy.

HONOURING THE LORD: The whole group stayed at Troas for seven days and on the first day of the week they met with the local disciples “to break bread,” i.e. celebrate “the Lord’s Supper” (see also 1 Corinthians 11:20-32). This particular meeting took place in the evening in a well-lit upstairs room of a three-storied building. Paul, knowing this would be his last visit to these dear people, preached passionately for some hours, right up to midnight! What a privilege to sit under the godly instruction of God’s special Apostle to the Gentiles!

A NEAR TRAGEDY: However, the late hour became too much for one young man, Eutychus, who fell asleep leaning on the open window of the crowded room. It seems every eye in the room was fixed on Paul because no-one seemed to notice, until Eutychus “fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead” (v9). What a tragedy! It could well have so distracted Paul’s audience that his words would be forgotten. Instead, God used it to further encourage and establish their faith; Paul immediately stopped preaching and went down to the lad and threw himself on him. To the surprise and comfort of all, the young man was restored to life!

After this incident, Paul had a meal and a chat with the disciples and then at daylight he set off to a place called Assos, where he was met by the rest of his company who had gone ahead by ship. They all travelled on to Miletus, from where Paul sent for the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why would Paul want to visit Philippi?	.....
2. What difficult task faced Paul in Corinth?	.....
3. Why was Paul frustrated with the Corinthian believers?	.....
4. Why did the Jews want to kill Paul?	.....
5. What was the purpose of the special meeting Paul attended at Troas?	.....

Paul's Final Words to the Elders

Key Verse:
“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.”

1 Corinthians 16:13

Extra: What practical steps can you take in response to the Key Verse?

Level 5 Lesson 31

Read Acts 20:17-38

We know that Paul was anxious to continue on to Jerusalem as quickly as possible and felt he could not spare the time to travel to Ephesus. So in response to Paul's request, the Ephesian elders travelled down to Miletus to meet him there before he continued on his journey. Paul sensed this would be his last meeting with these dear Christian brothers and delivered a powerful and poignant message, revealing his deep love and concern for them and the future of the fellowship at Ephesus.

Let's consider his message under the following headings:

- **His Example:** Paul began his message by reminding them of how he had earlier lived among them for three years. "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you... I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although severely tested by the plots of the Jews" (v18-19). What a terrific testimony to a Godly, holy life, lived for others to God's glory! And what a challenge to each of us! Could we point to our lives as a testimony and witness to the truth of our message?
- **His Faithfulness:** Paul had consistently and faithfully called on both Jews and Greeks to repent and to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He preached the messages they needed to hear, both publicly, as well as in their own homes; helpful things to strengthen their faith and increase their knowledge (v20-21).
- **His Prospects:** His immediate future looked bleak, he told them. Although he did not know all that would happen to him as he went to Jerusalem, he knew by the Holy Spirit's witness, that prison and hardship awaited him. Still he was determined to finish his course with joy and to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (v24).
- **His Commission:** To the Elders he said, "I am innocent of the blood of all men, I have proclaimed to you the whole Will of God. Guard yourselves and all the flock (the Christians) over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (Shepherds)."

He reminds them that the Church of God was purchased by the precious blood of Christ, so they must be alert and care for it well (v28).

- **His Reason:** There was danger ahead! Paul warned them of human "wolves," waiting their opportunity to spring in amongst them, just like a wolf amongst a flock of sheep without a shepherd to protect them. Paul wanted these elders to be on their guard against those who would destroy 'the flock.' Worst of all, he told them that these sorts would even come from among their own selves, to scatter the disciples. These ones would be "wolves in sheep's clothing" (posing as protectors but in reality, destroyers) and so they would be difficult to detect. Yes, the enemy without was dangerous, but the enemy within was even more so!

- **His Charge:** He urged them again to be watchful, on their guard; to remember how he had warned them "night and day with tears," for three years (v31).

- **His Commendation:** Paul commended them to God and His Word. They must trust in God and live by His Word. Their safety lay in clinging to the authority of Scripture and not departing from it. In so doing, the church would be built up and strengthened to resist the attacks of these 'wolves' and receive her inheritance among the sanctified (v32).

CONCLUSION: Paul closed his speech by referring again to the blamelessness of his life. He had never wanted their silver, gold or clothes. They knew how he had worked with his own hands to supply his own and others' daily needs. So he gave them a wonderful example to encourage them to serve others and he reminded them of the unrecorded words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (v35).

These were his last words before he said goodbye. And what a tender farewell! Kneeling down, Paul prayed with them all. Then with much weeping and hugs of genuine Christian love, they accompanied him to the ship with sorrowing hearts - and he was gone! How wonderful that the parting words of this mighty Apostle to them have been recorded for our benefit and careful consideration.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What had Paul called both Greeks and Jews to do?

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2. Why did Paul warn the Christians to be on guard?

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3. How were they to protect themselves from 'wolves'?

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4. Why do you think Paul reminded the Christians of the Lord's words?

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5. What wonderful reminder did Paul conclude with?

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From Miletus to Jerusalem

Read Acts 21:1-26

Key Verse:

“To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that... I might save some.”

1 Corinthians 9:22

Extra: What place did prayer have in Paul's life?

Level 5 Lesson 32

A TEARFUL FAREWELL: Following his tearful farewell from the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Paul left for Jerusalem, sailing via Cos, Rhodes, and Patara. From there they boarded another ship bound for Phoenicia and sailing around the south coast of Cyprus finally landed at the port of Tyre, in Syria, where they disembarked. Paul stayed there seven days with the local disciples, who, as others had also done (see chapter 20:23) urged Paul not go to Jerusalem.

However, despite these preparatory warnings, Paul remained convinced, indeed “compelled by the Spirit,” that he must continue on to Jerusalem in order to fulfil “the task the Lord has given me.” This refers probably to the Lord’s words in Acts 9, that Paul would be His “chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”

Certainly, the events that were to transpire in Jerusalem would eventually lead to prison and hardship for Paul, but also opportunity to write many of the letters which now form a substantial part of the New Testament and to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ before Roman governors and kings. Seeing that Paul’s mind was made up, the disciples (with their wives and children) accompanied him and his friends to the seashore, where they all knelt down and prayed together before Paul boarded a ship sailing for Ptolemais.

A SOLEMN WARNING: Following a day spent with the Christians of that place, Paul and his companions continued on to Caesarea, about 100kms from Jerusalem. At Caesarea they stayed with that good man Philip the evangelist, who God used for the conversion of the Samaritans and also the Ethiopian in the desert, over 25 years before. How good to see Philip still working for God, and ably assisted by his four daughters who had prophetic gift.

While they were waiting at Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus came down from Jerusalem with another warning message for Paul.

He was aware of the depth of feeling in Jerusalem against Paul, and dramatically warned him of danger ahead. Taking Paul’s belt, he bound his own hands and feet with it and told Paul that the Holy Spirit had shown him that the Jews at Jerusalem would so bind the owner of the belt and hand him over to the Gentiles.

Naturally, the disciples were greatly concerned. With tears, they tried to persuade Paul not to go to the Capital, but Paul’s only response was to say he was prepared to go - whatever the cost! He was willing, he said, “not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (v13). What a devoted man of God he was!

A GLAD REUNION: Unable to dissuade Paul, his friends could only resign themselves to the will of the Lord. Paul and his company then went on to Jerusalem where they stayed with “one of the earlier disciples” named Mnason (v16). Despite the many predictions of trouble ahead, the Christians at Jerusalem received the visitors gladly, and the next day Paul and his friends contacted James and the Elders of the Jerusalem church. Paul shared with them what God had done among the Gentiles through his service, and they were glad and praised the Lord when they heard this report (v20).

They also had a proposal for Paul (see v21-24) which they hoped would pacify the believing Jews who had heard that his attitude to the law of God was wrong. Of course these ones were mistaken; they did not understand Paul’s teaching on the true object of the Law, and how Christ was “the end of the Law for righteousness to every believer.”

The Jewish believers wanted Paul to associate himself with four men who had taken a vow, which meant carrying out certain ceremonies in the temple. It was suggested that Paul pay for the expense involved and so prove that he was sympathetic to the temple worship and the Law of God. Paul agreed to this, hoping to promote peace and remove suspicion. So to the Jews he became a Jew if by all means he might win some. We will see what this led to in the next study.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why do you think Paul was convinced he had to go to Jerusalem?

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2. How did Agabus demonstrate his message to Paul?

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3. How did this message affect the disciples?

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4. Why do you think Paul was so strong to face persecution?

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5. At Jerusalem, how was Paul received by the Christians, and how did the Elders respond?

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