

## **THE GOSPEL PREACHED AT EPHESUS.**

– *AUGUST 29.* – *ACTS 19:21-34.* –

"Take heed, and beware of covetousness." – Luke 12:15.

THIS lesson stands related to the history of Paul's evangelistic service amongst the Gentiles, connecting with our lesson dated August 1; and the intervening verses should be considered. Leaving Corinth, the Apostle made a short stop at the important city of Ephesus, parting there with Aquila and Priscilla who accompanied him that far. He proceeded to Jerusalem that he might be in time for the feast of the Passover, purposing no doubt a visit with the Church there, amongst whom were several of the apostles and James our Lord's brother. The account of the visit to Jerusalem is briefly summed up by Luke in the statement that Paul "saluted the Church." (Acts 18:22.) Apparently, the reception accorded the great Apostle was a rather cool one, the believers there having not yet learned so thoroughly as had Paul that but a "remnant" would be gathered from the Jews, and the remainder of the elect Church be selected from the Gentiles. Cannon Farrar makes a remark on this visit by Paul to Jerusalem which is well worth repeating; he says, –

"Had James and the circle of which he was the centre, only understood how vast for the future Christianity would be the issues of these perilous and toilsome journeys,...with what affection and admiration would they have welcomed him? So far from this, St. Luke hurries over the brief visit in three words that he 'saluted the Church;'...there is too much reason to fear that his reception was cold and ungracious; that even if James received him with courtesy, the Judaic Christians who surrounded 'the Lord's brother' would not; and even that a jealous dislike of that free position towards the Law, which he established amongst his Gentile converts, led to that determination upon the part of some of them to follow in his track and to undermine his influence, which, to the intense embitterment of his later days, was

so fatefully successful. It must have been with a sad heart, with something even of indignation at this unsympathetic coldness, that St. Paul hurriedly terminated his visit. But none of these things moved him."

Oh, how much some of the "brethren" missed it, when they failed to recognize the leading of the Lord's providence in connection with the work of the Apostle Paul. John-Mark, as we have already seen, and afterward his uncle Barnabas failed to see their great privilege in being co-workers together with that servant whom the Lord was pleased specially to use in the presentation of the gospel message at that time. And afterward we note how some "false apostles," not sent on any such errand, followed the Apostle into various cities where he by the Lord's grace had planted the truth and there sought, and to some extent succeeded, in overturning his work – "teaching the people that they should keep the Law of Moses," etc. But we are not to understand that they really did injury to the Lord's work; for the Lord himself is behind his own work. Their teachings served as siftings to draw off those who were not Israelites indeed, and who had not received the perfect Law of liberty through Christ. And they gave occasion for the writing of certain parts of Paul's epistles to counteract these errors, which have proven a blessing and a great help to the Lord's people for the eighteen centuries since. Thus does the Lord overrule the work of evil for good to those who love him and who are in the proper attitude of heart to be "taught of God." – See 2 Cor. 11:13; Gal. 2:4; 5:4.

Returning to Ephesus the Apostle remained there for three years, finding it an excellent field from which the influence of the gospel would radiate through all Asia-Minor. Ephesus was one of the most important cities of that time, its population being chiefly Greeks. It was called "one of the eyes of Asia." It had a colosseum or place for public gatherings, capable of accommodating fifty thousand people, and one of its chief attractions was an immense and grand temple erected to the honor of the goddess Diana, and it was the centre of her cult, whose influence and numbers extended throughout all Asia-

Minor. The temple was built of the purest marble: the historian says of it: –

"It was 425 feet long and 220 broad; its columns of Parian marble were 60 feet high, and 36 of them were magnificently carved. The porticoes in front and rear consisted each of 32 columns; the entire number of columns, 127, being given each one by a king. The hall was adorned with the most wonderful statuary and paintings."

From this description we readily see that the character of the idolatry with which the Apostle had to contend was very widely different from that of the South Sea Islanders. Its majestic temples were not out of harmony with its priesthood and general features, all of which were evidently on an impressive scale, quite in harmony with its devotees, – intelligent and cultured people, as the Ephesians were.

The account shows that in the interim of Paul's visit to Jerusalem the Lord prepared the way at Ephesus for the greater work of the three years' ministry which followed; for Apollos had in the meantime visited Ephesus, – mighty in the Scriptures as far as he understood them, but "knowing only the baptism of John" unto repentance, and faith in Christ as the Messiah. Apollos, apparently had not learned particularly respecting the new dispensation, and the gifts of the spirit by which it was being introduced. But Aquila and Priscilla, altho not themselves gifted so as to be able to speak in public, hearing of Apollos and his good work, sought him out, invited him to their home and there found quiet opportunity for imparting to him a clearer knowledge of the new dispensation: thus they **[R2206 : page 251]** became sharers in the fruits of his subsequent efficiency.

When Paul arrived at Ephesus Apollos was gone, but some whom he had interested were soon found and instructed respecting the gifts of the holy spirit; then being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus they received some of the gifts. The real baptism of consecration to the Lord Jesus as his servants, was no doubt part of the Apostle's explanation; but this was followed by instruction with reference to

baptism in water, and these brethren, twelve in number, being of proper and teachable spirit, were not only willing but anxious to render obedience to every feature of the divine will; and having by their immersion in water publicly confessed Christ and themselves as his servants "dead with him," they were blessed with a share of the gifts, some of which were granted to every believer in that time; – as we have already seen in the lesson preceding.

As usual, wherever the truth is preached there is a division; not merely a division as between those who respect God and his Word and those who deny the true God, but further than this, amongst those who acknowledge the true God and the Scriptures; – a division respecting Christ, and especially respecting the work of Christ, the value of the cross and the blessings which now and hereafter shall flow therefrom, to the blessing ultimately of all the families of the earth. The Apostle was not surprised at the division; he expected it. He doubtless remembered the Lord's words, "I am not come to send peace but a sword" and to cause division: it was better that the sincere followers of Christ should meet by themselves than that they should meet with others whose opposition to the truth would make continual disturbance, or else hinder their advancement into further knowledge and grace. It was for this reason that the Apostle secured, probably by hire, for use on certain occasions for meetings, the school-room of Tyrannus.

Ephesus was a great city for magic, incantations, divinations, etc. The worship of Diana and the delusions connected therewith, "black art," etc., were (like all the heathen religious practices) devices of Satan and the fallen angels, whereby the people were made to believe in the power of Diana for good and evil, for health and sickness, for safety or accident. A vessel going to sea in order to have a prosperous journey it was thought must have on board a miniature "shrine of Diana." The individual who wished for luck repeated certain words or prayers to Diana and wore upon his breast a charm or amulet marked with her likeness or with a prayer to Diana (much after the manner that

Roman Catholics wear upon their bosoms what are termed "scalpel," blessed with prayers to the Virgin Mary, with holy water, masses, etc.). As we have already seen,\* the powers of darkness (Satan and the fallen angels) have liberty and ability to perform wonders of certain kinds under certain circumstances, just as Jannes and Jambres had power from the same source as recorded in Exodus 7:11. In consequence we are not surprised that the Lord greatly blessed the Apostle Paul in Ephesus with powers of the holy spirit which enabled him to more than meet the powers of darkness. The record is, "God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul: so that from his body were brought handkerchiefs and aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." This naturally attracted the attention of all classes to the gospel which Paul preached, and to the power of God which was with him – whose manifestation was so different from the power which was with the workers of magic and incantations. The attempt of certain vagabond Jews to do the same miracle of casting out demons, using the name of Paul, their failure and the fact that they were worsted, the demons **[R2207 : page 251]** having no respect for them, helped to convince some respecting the gospel, – the very object intended by the Lord in the giving of "gifts."

\*See "Spiritism – Demonism" in our issues [June 15](#) to [July 15](#).

"Many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their evil deeds [acknowledging that their works of magic were evil and from an evil source]. Many of them also which used curious arts [magic] brought their books together, and burned them before all." And when we are informed that the value of those books was 50,000 pieces of silver, estimated to be \$9,300 in our money – but if calculated in proportion to the rate of wages then and now, equivalent to a very much larger sum – it will be manifest that the work of grace was moving mightily in Ephesus. When the gospel so takes hold upon the lives of believers that they are willing not only to abandon evil ways, but to destroy the instruments of evil which previously had brought

them gain, it proves that it is a genuine work and not a mere emotion. It is worthy of note also that these believers did not *sell* their books and merely go out of business of evil, but destroyed them, lest the work of evil should propagate itself further through this agency. "So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed." – Acts 19:20.

With this connection we are the better enabled to understand the opposition which now arose; and why those who were engaged in making small images of Diana, and miniature copies of the temple, and charms, and amulets, and "Ephesian spells" should become so excited and realize that their craft was endangered, not only in Ephesus but throughout all Asia-Minor.

Having spent about three years in Ephesus, Paul's purpose of mind was to return again to Jerusalem after visiting the Churches of Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi and Corinth; and his courageous heart was meditating a visit to the City of Rome, the seat of empire, where the gospel would have an opportunity of reaching another intelligent class and be brought more particularly in contact with the governmental and military influences and perhaps be even more liable to provoke persecution than in his previous experiences; for Aquila and Priscilla had been expelled from Rome for being Jews: in harmony with this plan he sent two of his co-laborers before him into Macedonia.

But the Lord saw best to permit the adversary to raise up a persecution about this time, and, of course, Paul would in a large measure be the centre of it. This persecution was on strictly business lines. The manufacturers and workmen engaged in the producing of the images, amulets, charms, etc., of Diana, were gotten together by one of their craft, Demetrius, who pointed out to them that the progress of Christianity meant the destruction of their various trades and that now was the time to put a stop to it and to reenkindle amongst the people a fervor of sentiment for Diana. The scheme worked well, and

soon a furor was created: the less intelligent [R2207 : page 252] masses being easily aroused by the cry, "Great is Diana."

It has been surmised that this riot occurred in May, the month of Diana's Festival, when usually there was the largest demand for the charms, amulets, etc., and that on this occasion business being less brisk than usual, the depression was laid to the charge of Christianity, whose influence was by this time considerable, and certainly every item of it in opposition to Diana. Ephesus was not only the shrine of Diana, but it was a great mercantile centre for Asia, as Corinth was for Greece, and the May Festival of Diana was accompanied by not only sacrifices in her temple and processions in her honor and prayers for her protection, but with these were associated wonderful displays in their theater or Colosseum, – gladiatorial combats, athletic feats, hippodrome races, etc. These drew people from far and near, and for a time, commercially, the city was a fair, and a large amount of business was done with the strangers. It was doubtless in order to have an opportunity of presenting the gospel to these multitudes from round about, that the Apostle delayed taking his journey into Macedonia until after the Feast of Diana.

Paul being the prominent leader in the promulgation of Christianity was of course the central figure against whom the rioters moved. It is supposed that he still made his home with Aquila and Priscilla and that the mob made directly for their lodgings: apparently, however they missed getting Paul, and as the next best thing took Gaius and Aristarchus, two of his co-laborers. It is probable that it was at this time that Aquila and Priscilla, as Paul's faithful friends, risked their lives in his protection, as intimated by the Apostle's statement in his epistle to the Romans (16:4) where he says of them that they "laid down their necks" for his life. When the mob got Gaius and Aristarchus they took them to the Colosseum (theater), the general place of rendezvous for large gatherings. Here Paul, full of courage, purposed to attempt to speak to the mob in defense of the Christian cause, but the Ephesian converts would not permit him, knowing

better than he the vicious and unreasoning spirit of the superstitious lower classes of Ephesus.

When the mob got to the theater it was much confused, and of different opinions respecting the object of the gathering. Many of them evidently supposed that it was a tumult against the Jews, – a very likely mistake, since the Apostle and some of his co-laborers were Jews, and since the common people would probably only distinguish Christians as being a Jewish *sect*. Realizing this the Jews put forward Alexander. (Probably Alexander the copper-smith, mentioned by the Apostle in 2 Tim. 4:14, possibly a convert to Christianity who subsequently apostatized. – 1 Tim. 1:20.) Alexander was put forward by the Jews evidently for the purpose of explaining to the mob that the Christians were *renegade* Jews, and that the Jews proper would thoroughly approve of and support their persecution as disturbers of the general peace; that the Jews in general were a commercial people, interested, therefore, in the festivities of Diana, and the associated business prosperity. However, the Lord did not permit so insidious an attack, Alexander not being permitted to speak.

The account here given is very brief, but is supplemented by the Apostle's own statement of the matter. (2 Cor. 1:8-10.) "Concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life: Yea, we ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raised the dead: who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver."

It was probably the intention of the ringleaders of the mob to have a "spectacle" in the Colosseum, – to have the Apostle cast into the arena to be devoured by the wild beasts in the presence of the multitude. The Apostle refers seemingly to this persecution saying, "If I have fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor. 15:32) which would imply that if he did not have a combat of the kind intended for him, it came so near being such a conflict that it amounted to practically the



same thing so far as his trials were concerned; – or it is barely possible that he referred to the Ephesian mob itself, as "beasts" seeking his life.

Two important lessons to be drawn from this narrative are (1) that thorough conversion to the Lord means a thorough abandonment of evil, whatever the cost, the self-denial, financial or social. (2) That the love of money is the root of all evil and a frequent cause of opposition to the Lord's Word and plan.

These principles, at work eighteen centuries ago, are still the same, and exercise similar influences to-day. And this is the very object of the truth during this Gospel age, – to be a test of our love for truth, for righteousness, for God. Sufficient evil is still permitted to test the Lord's people, to prove who are "overcomers." Those who are fully the Lord's are ready to lay down everything in his service – the service of righteousness. Just as the converts in Ephesus were willing to burn their once highly esteemed and commercially valuable books on magic, so to-day those who become the Lord's are ready to change their business if they find it inconsistent with righteousness and truth; and to lay down even life itself in the service of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And there is a class to-day, like Demetrius and his fellow craftsman, who, as the Scriptures express it, "look every one to his own quarter for gain." It will be noticed that the business of Demetrius and his associates might be considered a *religious business*, inasmuch as they were forwarders of the worship of Diana: and so it is with a certain class to-day who are financially identified with the worship of "the image of the beast." (Rev. 13:14-17.) These support various religious systems from which also they draw goodly compensation of honor, praise, titles, money and respect. These likewise often oppose the truth, and go as far as public sentiment and civil government will permit in opposing the truth and those who serve it, and in inciting opposition among the masses. Their reasons therefor are similar to those which influenced Demetrius and his companions; they realize

that their "craft is in danger." It is for each individually to be on guard lest he be "led astray with the error of the wicked," and fall from his own steadfastness, and be found to fight against God either for financial interests or earthly ambition.

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