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## **ASIA HEARD THE WORD OF THE LORD**

– ACTS 18:23: 19:22. – *AUGUST 15.* –

**Golden Text:** – "The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." – Acts 19:17.

OUR present lesson connects up St. Paul's experiences during a period of about two years and a half. He left Corinth probably six months after writing his letter to the Thessalonians, journeying to Jerusalem, determined, if providence permitted, to attend the next feast of Passover in the Holy City – not the Jewish feast, of course, but the substitute; as St. Paul explains, "Christ our Passover is slain; therefore let us keep the feast." (1 Cor. 5:7.) With the Apostle traveled Aquilla and Priscilla, who were about to make Ephesus their home. St. Paul himself stopped there briefly and, according to his custom, went into the synagogue and addressed the Jews. He was well received and urged to remain, but he hastened onward, promising, if possible, to return.

When he did return on his third missionary journey he made a two-year stop at Ephesus, one of the principal cities of the world at that time, reputed to have been next to Athens in its culture and art and surpassing it in painting. Its temple of Diana was reckoned one of the seven wonders of the world. Thus it was a religious city after the heathen ideal.

## **INSTRUCTED HIM MORE PERFECTLY**

After St. Paul was gone from Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a convert to Christianity, came there and preached Christ with considerable boldness, knowing only the baptism of John, the baptism of repentance, which was for the Jews only. Aquilla and Priscilla were attracted to [R4420 : page 190] this eloquent man and privately instructed him in the way of the Lord more perfectly,

more fully explaining to him, doubtless, respecting the Pentecostal blessing and the unction of the holy Spirit possible to all believers. Their course was commendable in that they did not publicly oppose Apollos but appreciated the work that he was doing and sought to assist him to a more complete, a more thorough ministration of the Gospel. It is the word spoken in season, not only the proper word, but in the proper manner, that the Lord is pleased to bless and to own. Let us each remember this and seek and pray to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in the dispensing of the bread of life.

Evidently Apollos had not been sufficiently convinced to lead him to attempt a further elaboration of the Gospel, and so when St. Paul returned for his stay of two years at Ephesus he found certain Christian brethren there earnest but lacking certain of the usual evidences of that time – the holy Spirit as a gift, as a power to speak with tongues, to heal, etc. Considering the case peculiar he inquired whether they had not received the holy Spirit since believing. The reply was that they had never understood it. Apollos had not taught them; and Aquilla and Priscilla, although clear in the matter themselves, had not been recognized as authoritative teachers. They were very ready to be taught of St. Paul, however, and gladly received his message and further demonstration of the Gospel. St. Paul directed that they be baptised again because the baptism which they had received was merely John's baptism for remission of sins. That was not sufficient for these men, because they were by nature Gentiles, and John's baptism was only for the Jews. Hence St. Paul directed that they be baptized afresh with the correct understanding – first, that they be justified, and second that baptism meant to them an immersion into the Body of Christ as members. Following the directions of the Apostle they were made sharers in the gifts of the holy Spirit.

## **HARDENED AND BELIEVED NOT**

For three months the Apostle had liberty in the synagogue amongst the Jews and used it in ably presenting Christ as the Fulfiller of the demands of the Law Covenant, the Messiah, the Redeemer, and the glorified Head of the Church, at whose Second Coming the promised Kingdom of God under the whole heavens would be established. "He spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God." He did not stop to dispute heathendom nor to dispute Greek philosophies. He had a message from the Lord and delivered it – the message of the Kingdom, understood today by so very few of the Lord's dear people.

St. Paul testified that the Truth is a "savor of life unto life and of death unto death." Either it has a tender, a softening, a lubricating effect upon the mind and the life and the character, making it more loving and Christ-like, or, reversely, it has a hardening effect, an embittering effect, turning the opponent away from the Lord and his message. It does not surprise us that this was the effect at Ephesus; yea, and everywhere today, as well as then, wherever the Truth is spoken clearly, thoroughly, intelligently.

Today, Catholics can preach in Protestant Churches; so can Jews. Unitarians and Trinitarians, believers in Election and Free Grace, believers in something and believers in nothing, can all mingle in so-called Christian harmony and fellowship and without a thought of persecuting one another. Why? Because, while they differ one from the other, they have a sufficiency of error in harmony with each other to constitute a basis of agreement. The evidence of this is that as soon as the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth is proclaimed in their midst it is denounced by every one of them, opposed, slurred, falsified, vilified, lied about; and all associated with it come more or less under a social ban, a spirit of persecution. They do not like the savor of the Truth. To them it has

an odor of [R4421 : page 190] death, of self-sacrifice, which is contrary to all of their hopes, aims and desires. Some of the opponents of the Truth today are hardening their own hearts by their attitude, just as did Pharaoh thirty-five hundred years ago, and just as did the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees eighteen centuries ago. We are sorry for them, but what can we do?

### **HE DEPARTED FROM THEM**

When the opposition in the synagogue became unkind and bitter, malevolent, the Apostle departed, not from the city, which had not persecuted him, but from the synagogue, which was opposing his teaching. Here we have our suggestion also as to our own course. First we should be faithful to God; secondly, when our message is rejected, we should not stay to bore people with it, but go to those who have an "ear to hear." We should "preach the Gospel to the meek."

Tyrannus had a school near the synagogue which, under the Lord's providence, by rental or in some other manner, became available as a preaching place for the proclamation of the Word, and St. Paul used the opportunity faithfully for about two years. The result was that from Ephesus "the gateway of Asia Minor," or, as it is sometimes called, "The eye of Asia," the Word of the Lord was carried to various cities by the traveling public, including Jews and proselytes.

We remember that some two years before this St. Paul had endeavored to go into Asia Minor; but, "the Spirit suffered him not," is the explanation of his not going. The time for the message to reach Asia Minor had not yet arrived. How evidently God knows the conditions; not only the conditions most favorable for the character development of his faithful Apostle, but also the times and seasons most suitable for his own work in every place, including the arrangements of matters so as to draw out the various epistles which for centuries have proven so great value to the Household of Faith!

## **MIRACLES BY THE HANDS OF ST. PAUL**

When we think of the gifts of the Spirit conferred upon this great Apostle, the gifts of tongues, healing, etc., we appreciate these evidences that he was a servant of God, yet these do not arouse our highest esteem. Accepting them as of the Lord we nevertheless appreciate still more highly as from the same source his gift of interpretation of the Divine Plan of the Ages, his elucidation of the philosophy of the same, his exposition of the types and the prophecies, his admonitions and exhortations along the lines of character-building. By these miracles through the pen of the Apostle, God has given us rich blessing – far more than natural sight and physical healing. Our faith has been made stronger, as well as our hope and our love for God and for the brethren.

There were evil spirits then, as there are today, the difference being that today such obsessed ones are styled insane and treated accordingly, whereas probably one-half of the inmates of the insane asylums are really obsessed of the evil spirits, whose brains are not physically disordered. As St. Paul, amongst other miracles, cast out evil spirits in the name of the Lord, some of his opponents claimed that he did so merely by hypnotic influence, and that others could do the same if they would. Carrying out the thought they attempted to exorcise an evil spirit, with disastrous results. They commanded the spirit to come out of the man in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached. But "the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped upon them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." As these opponents were prominent men the matter became generally known both to Jews and Greeks at Ephesus and the result was a spirit of reverence, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

## **BOOKS OF MAGIC, WITCH-CRAFT AND HYPNOTISM**

We read that "many that believed came and confessed and showed their deeds." They exposed the fact that many of their deeds

were by occult or hidden power and injurious. They brought their books and burned them openly. They did not sell them to others and thus permit the evil influence to spread, but did their share towards its [R4421 : page 191] destruction. So should it be still. Those who turn to the Lord from darkness and sin should publicly confess the transformation of their hearts and lives and should destroy everything calculated to exercise an evil influence, either upon themselves or upon others. It is the thorough-going convert – converted from center to circumference – who has taken a radical stand for righteousness, as he previously took it for sin, that the Lord permits to honor him; and sometimes at the sacrifice of earthly interests. The testimony is, "So (thus) mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed."

The Apostle's diversified experiences as a servant of the Lord are remarkable. At the beginning of his ministry he was beset and persecuted in nearly every city, while subsequently, as we have seen, he was comparatively without persecution for nearly four years. Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Faith assures us that all of the steps of the Apostle were Divinely, wisely ordered. Perhaps he needed the rougher experiences at the beginning of his ministry to polish him, to prepare him for his further service, the writing of his epistles, etc. Doubtless we shall understand his experiences better, and our own experiences better, when, by and by, beyond the veil, we shall see as we are seen and know as we are known. Until then the Lord requires that we exercise faith and confidence in him, nothing doubting.

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