

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study

Complete on your own or with your small group.

Personal Reflection

Song for the week: Proof - Seth Addison

Song links: <https://youtu.be/OKSwk2Cmhf0?si=kTzkMMLzyzK8wAKQ>

Read Acts 19:11-41 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

The book of John “might be called the Book of Signs, as it recounts Jesus’s performing miracles ... These miracles illustrate His identity as the Son of God (insight.org/resources/bible).”

In Acts, some people were healed through handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul. He did not “adopt or recommend these methods, but the faith of the converts was such that it manifested itself in this way, and God was pleased to bestow blessings because of their faith (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges).”

As the miracles John recorded were signs pointing to Jesus as God, to Whom are the signs in Acts pointing to as God?

Read *Matthew 9:20-22*, *Luke 4:31-41* and *Acts 19:11-12*. What similarities are there between what Jesus did and what Paul did?

What is the difference between what they each did? (hint: by Who’s power?)

Vagabond Jews practiced sorcery and exorcisms as a profession, like Simon of Samaria and Elymas of Cyprus did earlier in Acts. “Practitioners of magic believed they could control spirits by invoking their names and they sometimes summoned more powerful spirits to deal with lesser ones (Cultural background study Bible).”
Optional, read Acts 8:9-24, Acts 13:5-12

“Exorcism is a ritual of power performed in order to drive an evil spirit, whether demonic or ghostly, from a possessed person, location, or object. The Christian scholar Origen credits Jews with a special talent for exercising demons (myjewishlearning.com).”

Sceva was a Jewish chief priest whose seven sons were participating in driving out evil spirits. “What a contrast one could see between Paul and the sons of Sceva and all like them. Paul worked with his own hands and ministered freely to men. These exorcists undoubtedly charged a substantial fee for their services, living off of the misery of those to whom they “ministered.” In the case of Paul, the power of God was at work through him, even when he did not seem to be aware of it (bible.org).”

Read *Acts 19:13-16*. What did the spirits say to Sceva’s sons?

How would the evil spirits - how would others - be able to know you know Jesus by watching you?
What evidence is there of the Holy Spirit in your life?

The seven sons of Sceva had a wake up call to the omnipotent power of God when the evil spirit attacked them. The event caused people in Ephesus to have a fear of God. People confessed sin openly and publicly and believed in Jesus. Many who were already believers and were secretly sinning not only confessed their sin but burned the books that supported that sin - books that would be worth millions of dollars today. Their confession with action could be seen as a promise of doing better. Instead of selling the books and recouping value, they chose a drastic undertaking to show the levity of their sin and their seriousness to remove it and move past it.

One of the messages of *Acts 19* appears in verse 20 which says, "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

Is there anything in your life that you need to get rid of that supports a sin in your life?

How might your actions of turning from sin help with your spreading the message of Jesus?

While Paul was in Ephesus, he "decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia...and Rome also (*Acts 19:21*)."

Find Ephesus on the map to the left. Which direction would Paul need to go to Jerusalem?

Find Macedonia, Achaia and Rome on the map. Which direction are they?

Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him to Macedonia to prepare.



Read *Romans 15:26*, *1 Corinthians 16:5-10* and *2 Corinthians 8:1-15*. Why did Paul take this route to go to Jerusalem? What did he do in these cities?

Read *Exodus 16:18*. Exodus was about gathering manna. What lessons might Paul have been conveying by quoting this verse? How could you apply these verses to your life today?

The Ephesians had "built a city of marble. They built a stadium that sat tens of thousands of people. They built a two-story teaching hospital. They built a sprawling library. But most importantly, they built the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the World (N.T. Wright)."

Artemis, known for her cruel behavior, is the goddess of the hunt, wild nature and the moon. She is considered the mother to the world and is also associated with childbirth, care of children and virginity. She is the daughter of Zeus and has a twin sister. The silversmith named Demetrius made shrines of Artemis. He argued that what Paul was teaching discredited and robbed the goddess of her majesty as well as affected his trade.

Before telling the story of Demetrius, Luke inserted the two verses about where Paul was headed, which provided a teachable contrast. In Ephesus, “economies, built by the Demetriuses of the world, who traded expensive idols for spiritual hope, (contrasted) a shared economy where the poor and the rich took care of each other (N.T. Wright).”

Do you think Demetrius was more concerned for the goddess Artemis, for himself or both? Why?

What businesses can you identify today that provide income but do not honor God?

When the people in trades heard Demetrius’s speech, they shouted, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Most of the people did not know why they were there, yet for two hours they shouted.

Paul’s companions Gaius and Aristarchus were seized during the mob action and brought to the theater (see image). “The theater could hold about 20,000 people and was easily visible even from the harbor (Cultural Background Study Bible).” It was the largest outdoor theater in the ancient world until the Colosseum in Rome was built about 15-20 years later in 70 AD.



Read *1 Corinthians 1:14* and *Romans 16:23*. What does Paul tell us about Gaius?

Read *Colossians 4:10* and *Acts 20:4*. What does Paul say about Aristarchus?

How might these men have felt in the theater? How might this experience have shaped them for their continued work with Paul?

The theater in Ephesus also exhibited fights between wild beasts and between beasts and men. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that he fought the wild beasts in Ephesus. “Paul seems to be using this as a metaphor for facing overwhelming and dangerous circumstances, perhaps including being attacked by angry mobs (Bibleref.com).” *Optional, read 1 Corinthians 15:30-35*

Putting it into practice:

Read *Matthew 7:21-23*. The word ‘knew’ (Greek: ginosko) means to come to know, recognize, or perceive. It does not mean intellectual knowledge but relational knowledge. Our relationship with Jesus must be personal. We must go beyond knowledge of Jesus to faith in Jesus and relationship with Him.

What are you doing to cultivate your relationship with Jesus? How are you continuing to ginosko Him?

Further Study

The Clerk in the theater said “you have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.” They had not spoken against the goddess but rather for Jesus as God.

When you are witnessing to someone who believes differently than you, how might this same approach of speaking for Jesus as God - and not coming against the other person’s beliefs - be helpful?

“Many of us in the West ... are inclined to look at the riot in Ephesus, shudder, and thank God that we don’t do things like that any more ... We should think again about the way in which wickedness gets a grip on a society ... someone needs to take their courage in one hand and their Bible in the other, throw to the winds any caution about their own prospects, and say what needs to be said (N.T. Wright).”

“... there are still women and men around the world who make Jesus their King. Today, just like then, making Jesus king has a way of changing the balance of power. Today, King Jesus is still giving hope, for life now, and after death (N.T. Wright).”

Consider the political split in our country today. Do not debate either side as you talk about this - instead discuss how you can take your courage in one hand and your Bible in the other and speak the truth from the Bible to BOTH sides honoring King Jesus and sharing His love with others.

Luke contrasted gods and God repeatedly. The evil spirits had physical power just as the gods did. “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them (C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*).”

In *Genesis 3* Moses wrote that “the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.” The Greek word translated as serpent is nachash can also be translated as “the shining one” which is how the International Standard Version of the Bible translates it. Paul’s description of Satan matches “the shining one” in *2 Corinthians 11:14* “For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

The root of a word for deception, comes from nachash, “meaning the serpent can also be understood as a deceiver or diviner. In fact, even in modern Hebrew, we will still use the word nahash to describe someone who is deceitful. Interestingly, Eve was not alarmed when conversing with the ‘nahash,’ probably because she was aware of other angelic beings. However, she could not have known about the Shining One’s malicious intent until it was too late (eitan.bar/articles/hebrew-word-study).”

Read *Deuteronomy 18:10-14*. What did Moses warn against?

According to Webster’s Dictionary, an omen is “to divine or to foreshow by signs, to predict” and divination as “the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means.” Tarot cards and horoscopes would be two examples of these. What other ways can you think of that people today are still knowingly or unknowingly participating with such things, showing an unhealthy interest in powers that are not from God?

The Greek word translated omen is umenachesh, (containing the root word nachesh) which means divination or enchantment. What connections are there between “the shining one” and omens and diviners?

Prayer

Read the following verses together. *1 Peter 5:8*, *James 4:7*, *Luke 10:19*, *2 Corinthians 10:4-5*, *Ephesians 6:11-13*

Spend time together in prayer for your families, One Hope and our country. End your time together praising God for what He is doing and will do.