**The Apostle Paul Goes Back To School**

(Acts 19:8-22)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A schoolteacher was teaching her class about whales one day, when a little girl raised her hand and told the teacher what she’d learned about Jonah in Sunday School. The teacher smiled and told her that Jonah couldn’t *really* have been swallowed by a whale, because whales don’t have throats large enough to swallow a man, so she shouldn’t believe all the myths she read in her Bible. The little girl replied, “Well, when I get to heaven, I’ll ask Jonah if that story is true.” The teacher asked, “What if Jonah went to hell instead?” The little girl said, “Then you can ask him.”

Speaking of schools and Sunday Schools, here in Acts 19 the apostle Paul is about to establish a *Bible* school in the city of Ephesus, and go back to school as a *teacher*. The story begins in the first two verses of our text, where we read of Paul,

**“And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.**

**“But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus” (Acts 19:8,9).**

As we begin, we see the *reason* Paul went back to school was that he didn’t seem to be getting anywhere in the synagogue in Ephesus, and he needed a place to instruct his disciples. It’s hard to believe that this was the same synagogue we read about in an earlier lesson, where we saw what happened when Paul *first* arrived in Ephesus:

**“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.**

**“When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not” (Acts 18:19,20).**

The Ephesian Jews *originally* were so interested in what Paul had to say, they begged him to stay and tell them more! He couldn’t, but he promised to return—and now he has! And to their credit, they listened to Paul talk about the kingdom of God *for three months.* I’m sure he explained to them that because they’d rejected their *King,* God put the kingdom program *on hold.* But evidently they still didn’t want to believe that the lowly carpenter from Nazareth was their king, so verse 9 says they were “hardened.”

That means they hardened *their hearts,* just like one of the kings of Israel did in IIChronicles 36:11-13:

**“…Zedekiah…did that which was evil…*and humbled not himself* *before Jeremiah the prophet* speaking from the mouth of the LORD…*he*...*hardened his heart* fromturning unto the LORD God of Israel.”**

Zedekiah didn’t *want* to turn to the Lord, so he didn’t let his heart believe what Jeremiah was telling him. Instead, he *steeled* his heart *against* the truth. And these unsaved Jews here in Acts 19 didn’t want to believe what *Paul* was telling *them,* so they hardened their hearts as well.

So verse 9 says they began to speak evil of “that way.” And *that way* is what the followers of Christ were called, ever since the Lord told them that He had to die in John 14:5,6:

**“Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; *and how can we know the way?* Jesus saith unto him, *I am the way,* the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”**

If you’re not saved, you need to understand that the Lord Jesus Christ isn’t one of *many* ways to get to God the Father, as the world would have you believe when they say that all religions lead to heaven. Christ is the *only* way to the Father.

And after the Lord said that, His followers began to be called *the way,* as we see when, earlier in Acts, it says that

**“...Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against *the disciples of the Lord,* went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any *of this way,* whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1,2).**

So here in Acts 19, when Paul heard those Jews speaking evil of that way, verse 9 says he separated his disciples from them and departed. Of course, if he had disciples, that means *some* of those Jews believed. But if the rest of them were going to speak evil of the Lord’s way, it was time to pull up stakes and go teach elsewhere.

And the “elsewhere” he chose was the school of a man named Tyrannus. This is the only time he’s mentioned in the Bible, so we don’t know anything about him, other than that you’d think his full name would be Tyrannosaurus Rex.

And we’re not told if this school was right next door to that synagogue, like the church Paul started in Corinth. But no matter where it was located in Ephesus, it provoked those Jews to envy when they saw how *successful* Paul’s new school was. And we know it *was* successful, for it says in the next verse of our text,

**“And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).**

Paul continued to teach in that school for two years, a ministry that resulted in all of what we call Asia Minor hearing the word of the Lord. I’m sure that provoked those Jews to envy and, as we’ve seen in our prior studies, that was Paul’s mission during the transitional period of time covered by the Book of Acts. He was doing his level best to get the Jews to be envious enough of his ministry among the Gentiles to get saved and *join him.*

Now here it’s interesting to remember that *Asia* was the same area we read about back in Acts 16:6 where, speaking of Paul and his entourage, we see that

**“…they…*were forbidden of the Holy Ghost* to preach the word in Asia…”**

Back when Paul was just going from one small town to the next to try to reach the world, the Holy Ghost looked down and shook His head and said, “He’s never going to reach the world that way.” So He sent Paul to some big cities and let the gospel radiate out from those big cities to all the smaller towns and cities around them. And that worked out *much* better, as we’ve been seeing.

But *now* it was time to teach Paul an even *better* way to reach the world—a way that we still use today. Today we do what Paul did here. We start Bible schools, like this one in Ephesus, and once men learn the Bible, and learn the grace message in those schools, they go out and *preach it.* Even if those schools are just the kind of one on one Pastor/Timothy training that men can receive in our local churches. And that’s the way it’s been for nearly 2,000 years now.

But now, once Paul’s gospel got to be *this famous* in Asia, God knew that men would start to try to *capitalize* on Paul’s success by claiming to be affiliated with him while they taught their various false doctrines. So to make Paul stand out from the crowd, God gave him the ability to do some things that they couldn’t do, as we see in Acts 19:11,12, where it says,

**“And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:**

**“So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:11,12).**

Here I should point out that Paul wasn’t an effeminate man who wore the kind of apron that women wear while doing housework. Paul was a tentmaker, and he wore the kind of apron that a man who used to work for my father in his tool and die shop wore to keep his work clothes from getting too soiled from the cutting oils and other lubricants that are part of the trade.

I don’t know anything about ancient tentmaking, but he perhaps also wore the brief sort of apron that carpenter’s wear to hold their nails, an apron that’s more closely akin to a utility belt. I can remember my father wore one like that when he did carpentry work. On hot days, Dad would *also* carry a big red handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his brow.

But healing these folks by proxy from a distance like this is what made these miracles that Paul worked “special.” And the reason God gave Paul the power to do things like this was that these were the kinds of things men couldn’t *duplicate,* unlike the miracle some guys were duplicating in the very next verse of Acts 19, where it says,

**“Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth” (Acts 19:13).**

Now this is the reason God suddenly decided to start doing special miracles by Paul. You see, once Paul’s gospel got so popular that it spread throughout Asia, there was *money to be made* by associating with Paul. You didn’t think these exorcists were casting devils out of men out of the goodness of their hearts, did you? They were in it *for the money.* So to make Paul stand out from that crowd, God had Paul do miracles *they couldn’t do.*

It’s kind of like how God made Moses and Aaron stand out from the crowd of Pharaoh’s magicians. When God turned Aaron’s rod into a serpent, Pharaoh’s magicians yawned and did the same thing. Then, every miracle that Moses and Aaron did, the magicians were able to duplicate. So finally, God had enough of them, and worked a *special* miracle by them:

**“...Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, *and it became lice in man, and in beast;* all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, *but they could not....*Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, *This is the finger of God”* (Exodus 8:17-19).**

The one thing those magicians couldn’t do was *create life out of the dust—*but God could—*and did:*

**“...the LORD God formed man *of the dust of the ground,* and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; *and man became a living soul”* (Genesis 2:7).**

God created *a human being* out of the dust, with all of the unfathomable complexities of our fearfully and wonderfully made bodies. But when Pharaoh’s magicians reached down for some dust, they couldn’t even create *a lousy louse.* Here it helps to recall that the singular form of “lice” is *louse.*

But that’s how God made Moses and Aaron stand out from the crowd of magicians—by giving them the power to do something *those magicians couldn’t do.* And that’s how God made Paul stand out from the crowd of religious hucksters like these guys as well.

Now these Jews were symbolic of *the nation Israel.* Did you notice that Acts 19:13 calls them *vagabonds?* By this time in the Book of Acts, the Jews weren’t supposed to be vagabonds. They were supposed to be back in their land in the kingdom of heaven on earth! The dictionary defines a vagabond as a sort of a *nomad,* someone who has no place to call home. The first word it uses to define it is *wanderer.* Have you ever heard the expression, “the wandering Jew”? Well, that’s what the Jews became when they refused to let God gather them into their land in the kingdom, as He promised in Ezekiel 36:24,25, where the prophet quotes Him as saying to Israel,

***“I will take you from among the heathen,* and gather you out of all countries, *and will bring you into your own land.* Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”**

When the Jews *refused* to be gathered into their homeland for the kingdom, God made them vagabonds who *had* no homeland.

Cain was a type of this. Do you know why Cain killed his brother? Because he was able!

All kidding aside, he killed his brother, and then

**“...the LORD said unto Cain...a fugitive *and a vagabond* shalt thou be in the earth” (Genesis 4:9,12).**

Well, didn’t the Jews kill *their* brother Jesus? That’s why God cursed them to wander the earth, as He cursed Cain when he killed *his* brother. And the Jews here in Acts 19 are a type of that vagabond nation.

Do you know who *else* was a type of that vagabond nation? Judas! Do you remember what David prayed about Judas:

**“Let his days be few; and let another take his office...*Let his children be continually vagabonds,* and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places” (Psalm 109:8,10).**

We know that that psalm is about Judas, for Peter *quoted* it when the apostles were selecting a replacement for Judas.

**“...in those days Peter...said...this scripture must needs have been fulfilled...David spake before concerning Judas....in the book of Psalms, *Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.*...and... Matthias...was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:15,16,20,26).**

Judas’s days *were* few, as the psalm said. He died a young man. But as far as we know, Judas didn’t *have* any “children” to become vagabonds. So I think David was talking about his *spiritual* children—the children of Israel! *They’re* the ones who became vagabonds after Judas sold the Lord out.

Look back at the *end* of that Psalm 109 reference, where it says that Judas’s children would live in “desolate” places. That should remind you of what the Lord told the Jews after they rejected Him, when He cried,

**“O Jerusalem...how often would I have *gathered thy children together*...and ye would not! Behold, your *house* is left unto you *desolate*....Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:37-39).**

The Lord wanted to gather Israel *into their homeland for their kingdom,* but they wouldn’t have it. So he left their house “desolate.” And he wasn’t just talking about the temple that He walked out of a few moments later in Chapter 24. He was talking about *the house of Israel,* Judas’s “children.” He left *them* desolate as well.

But all of that means that the Jews went from the having the chance *to rule the world from their homeland in the kingdom* to having to *wandering* the world looking for bread where they could find it, as we see pictured by these vagabond Jews, who were wandering the world looking to earn their bread wherever they could find it by casting devils out of men. That’s how low they’d sunk!

And just when you thought they couldn’t sink any lower, spiritually speaking, we find these Jews here in our text were using the names of *the Christ they crucified* and *the apostle they persecuted* to make money! Now that’s low! But as we’ve been seeing in our studies, that’s one of the purposes of the Book of Acts, to show how low the nation of Israel had fallen.

But before you start looking down your nose at the Jews, I remind you that since Paul’s day, it’s been *Gentile* preachers who’ve been using Jesus and Paul to make money! These Jews may have *started* it, but Gentile preachers have *perfected it* down through the centuries. If you’ve never seen the religious charlatans on TV, it’s probably because you’re watching something more worthwhile, like old episodes of Hogan’s Heroes, like Pastor Jim Tollar likes to watch.

We learn more about these exorcists in verse 14, where it says of them,

**“And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so” (Acts 19:14).**

Now you’ll notice that these Jews were all the sons of one of the *chiefs* of Israel’s *priests.* Do you know what line of work the sons of priests were *supposed* to go into in Israel? Well, let’s just say *it wasn’t exorcism.* They were all supposed to be priests like their daddy, for they were of the priestly *tribe* of Levi.

And here we have *another* picture of what the nation of Israel should have been doing by this time in the Book of Acts. They should have been God’s priests to the rest of the world *in the kingdom.* Look what Isaiah told his countrymen in Israel about the kingdom in Isaiah 61:6:

**“...*ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD:* men shall call you the Ministers of our God: *ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles...*”**

By this time in Acts, the sons of this priest should have been priests themselves in the kingdom, *with the Gentiles bringing them riches,* instead of going around scrounging for bread among the Gentiles like these Jews here, who were exorcising for their supper instead of singing for it. All because they rejected God’s plan for their lives.

You know, God has a plan for *your* life that’s found *in Paul’s epistles.* If you reject it, you’ll find yourself sunk as low as these Jews. You’ll sink so low in life, you’ll have to look up to tie your shoes. You’ll sink lower than “Bildad the Shuhite,” the shortest man in the Bible—he was only shoe-height!

Now verse 13 of our text says that these Jews were exorcists *before* they tried to use Jesus to cast out devils. And they’re about to find out that using “Jesus whom Paul preacheth” was *not a good move:*

**“And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” (Acts 9:13).**

That wicked spirit wasn’t about to let those charlatans get away with associating themselves with Jesus and Paul!

By the way, that shows you that Paul was *famous in hell.* The Lord was too, of course. but that was because He was the Son of God. But Paul was just as famous among Satan’s fallen host.

How about you? Are you famous in hell? You are if you preach Paul’s gospel! And that’s the only kind of fame you should be looking for in life. Satan lives in fear that you’ll open your mouth and share Pauline truth with somebody, so why not share it today and make sure he has a bad day!

But that evil spirit did *more* than just *embarrass* those Jewish exorcists. Verse 16 says,

**“And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:16).**

The odds were 7-1 in favor of the exorcists in this melee, but that old boy whopped up on all seven of them! As my friend James Sirmons put it, he stomped mud holes in their livers. That’s just how southerners talk.

The reason that possessed man could beat those 7-1 odds is that, in the Bible, demon-possessed men all had *superhuman strength,* as we see in Mark 5:2-4:

**“...there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, *no, not with chains:* Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, *and the chains had been plucked asunder by him,* and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.”**

Now that guy was *one bad dude.* He was *one mean hombre.* As Jim Croce once sang, he was meaner than a junkyard dog. Do you know what else Jim would sing about him? “You don’t mess around with *him.”* But these Jews in our text messed with a guy *just like him!* And they ended up looking like another guy Jim sang about, a man named Leroy Brown. According to the song,

“Well the two men took to fightin,’ and when they pulled them from the floor, Leroy looked like a jigsaw puzzle *with a couple of pieces gone!”*

And that’s how these exorcists looked when they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

Now it doesn’t say what *kind* of wounds they had, but I’m going to go out on a limb here and say that that devil probably didn’t fight fair, and those Jews ended up “wounded *in the stones”* (Deut.23:1). That’s the kind of injury a man is prone to sustain when his opponent doesn’t fight fair. If I’m right, then his wound made those sons of that priest *ineligible for the priesthood,* as we learn when Moses stipulated,

**“Whosoever...hath any blemish, *let him not approach to offer the bread of his God...*a blind man, or a lame...or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded...*or hath his stones broken*...” (Leviticus 21:17-20).**

A broken foot or a broken hand were *also* injuries that a man might sustain in a fight with a demon-possessed man. So as you can see, no matter *how* that demoniac tore up those sons of Sceva, it disqualified them from being priests.

And that’s a picture of where the nation of Israel stands today—defeated by the devil and his host, and disqualified from being the priests in the kingdom that God planned for them to be.

Now after the Rapture, and after the Tribulation, the Jews *will be* God’s priests in the kingdom, something we see pictured in Job.

**“There was a man...whose name was Job...And there were born unto him *seven sons*....Job...offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all” (Job 1:1,2,5).**

Back in the days before Israel’s priesthood, the father of the family was the *priest* of the family, and offered sacrifices on behalf of the members of his family, as Job did here. And Job was a priest *with seven sons,* just like Sceva!

Then what happened to Job?

**“...there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, *and they are dead...”* (Job 1:19).**

Job *lost* his seven sons. But after he went through forty chapters of trials and tribulation, God rewarded him in Job 42:12,13, where we read:

**“...the LORD blessed the latter end of Job...for he had...*seven sons...”***

God gave Job *seven more sons* in his latter end. And that’s a type of how, in Israel’s latter days, after *she* goes through a lot of tribulation, she’ll get her priests back and be God’s priests to the world.

And when you factor in how verse 16 of our text that these Jews fled out of that house *naked* as well as wounded, that typifies how the nation of Israel was just reaping what she sowed. You see, that combination of nakedness and woundedness is only found in one other place in the Bible. It’s when the Lord told a guy in Luke 10:30-33,

**“...love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...and thy neighbour as thyself....he...said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus...said, A certain man... fell among thieves, *which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him,* and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down *a certain priest* that way: and when he saw him, *he passed by on the other side....*But a certain Samaritan...when he saw him...had compassion on him...and bound up his wounds...”**

Now that’s what these priests were supposed to be doing by this time in Acts—ministering to the *spiritual* sounds of their neighbors in the world of the Gentiles! But when they said no to their King, and no to their kingdom, they left their neighboring Gentiles naked of God’s righteousness *and spiritually wounded.* So they reaped what they sowed when God allowed *them* to be left naked of God’s righteousness and spiritually wounded, as we see pictured with Sceva’s seven sons.

Well, as you can imagine, when news of what happened to these Jewish exorcists got around, it had quite an effect on the community. Acts 19:17 says,

**“And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”**

So here we see the same thing we saw back in Acts 13: Jews being judged and Gentiles being saved—*another* picture of what’s going on today in the dispensation of grace.

We know they got saved because it says they believed as we read on:

**“And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.**

**“Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.**

**“So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (Acts 19:18-20).**

As you can see, when news of what happened to those exorcists got around, “many” folks believed and confessed what they’d been doing. And what they’d been doing was trafficking in “curious arts”—what we would call the *black* arts, or the *dark* arts. You know. The same kind of devilish stuff that those exorcists trafficked in.

“Why are they called *curious* arts?” you ask? Well, do you own a curio cabinet with little figurines in it? Did you ever wonder why it’s *called* a curio cabinet? It’s because those cabinets were originally supposed to display *curios* or *curiosities—*things people would be *curious* about—like the black arts! People have *always* been curious about the dark arts.

So what these Jews and Greeks were trafficking in, what they were selling, was magic curios, what we would call *talismans.* A talisman is a ring, or a stone, or some similar object, or an *amulet,* a piece of jewelry, that’s supposed to work like a good luck charm *to ward off evil spirits,* the kind of evil spirits we’re talking about here in this passage. That’s how these people “shewed their deeds” in verse 18. They showed the magical *charms* they made to sell.

That means when it says they “confessed,” they weren’t confessing to sleeping with their neighbor’s wives, or to cheating at pinochle. The judgment that fell on those exorcists wouldn’t make them fearful about things like that. No, they were fearful because they were doing the same things the exorcists were doing!

Follow me here. Those folks must have been practicing curious arts for a long time to have that many books on the subject, right? But once Paul made Jesus so popular throughout Asia, they decided to capitalize on Him like those exorcists were doing, and combine their curious arts with the Jesus whom Paul preached!

How? Well, the church of Rome would never call a crucifix a *talisman—*but that’s what it is. Their priests mean well, but they hold up a crucifix to someone they think is possessed with a devil as some sort of *Jesus good luck charm* that’s supposed to *ward off evil spirits.*

And Rome would never call a rosary an amulet, but it’s a piece of jewelry. Listen, once Paul made Jesus popular, these Jews and Greeks in Ephesus realized there was money to be made in Jesus. And down through the centuries, Rome’s been *raking it in* trafficking in things of that nature.

But once the people of Ephesus heard how that devil *turned* on those exorcists when they tried to use the name of Jesus, they feared that the same thing would happen to them. This caused them to do a complete 180, for they had to admit—or *confess—*that they were doing the same thing, and that it was only a matter of time before the devils turned on *them.* That’s what they were so fearful of!

Now, if *you’re* afraid of evil spirits, take a careful look at that word “prevailed” in verse 20, where it says God’s word mightily prevailed as a result of what happened. That’s the same word we just saw in verse 16 of this passage, where it says that the evil spirit “prevailed” against the sons of Sceva. If you fear that evil spirits can prevail against *you,* I hope you find it comforting to see that God’s Word mightily prevailed against *them.*

You may also find it comforting to know that today in the dispensation of grace, evil spirits aren’t prevailing against men in the way that this wicked spirit did. To learn what they are up to today, take a look at what Paul wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 3:8:

**“*as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses,* so do these also resist the truth: *men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith”***

Jannes and Jambres were evidently the names of Pharaoh’s magicians who withstood Moses by duplicating his miracles. So Paul was telling Timothy that today Satan withstands us by duplicating what *we’re* doing. And what we’re doing today is *preaching Paul’s gospel.* So Satan’s devils withstand us by using men of corrupt minds who are reprobate concerning the faith to duplicate what we’re doing by adding what we’re doing to whatever nonsense *they’re* teaching.

And Timothy would know exactly what Paul was talking about, because Timothy had been in Ephesus when all of these things went down (cf.ITim.1:3). That means he would fully understand the point of comparison.

But Paul didn’t leave him thinking that there was nothing he could *do* about this Satanic opposition. He finished that passage by saying ,

**“...Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these...But...their folly shall be manifest unto all men, *as theirs also was”* (II Timothy 3:8,9).**

The folly of Jannes and Jambres was manifested when they couldn’t create *life,* and the religious charms and amulets and talismans of men who would combine such things with the Jesus whom Paul preached can’t created *eternal* life. And even if their folly is never manifested in this life, it will be in the next life, where God will make sure it is manifested to all His creation.

And I’m looking forward to that day, how about you?