

### THE BOOK OF ACTS

#### Lesson 43, Chapter 19

We just got started in Chapter 19 of Acts last week when we ran out of time. We have much to discuss today that comes from what is written in this chapter; things that most of us have perhaps not considered.

The historical significance of this chapter is that (as Darrell Bock puts it) it is the story of Paul's final missionary swing through the Greco-Roman world. Paul is mostly revisiting areas in which he has had previous contact and had established some number of Jewish and gentile Believers. But as the trust in Yeshua is beginning to take root in foreign lands what we see is the increasing polarization of those who embrace the truth of the Gospel that Paul is teaching versus those who reject it. Such polarization causes not just discord but also division and separation. It is a fascinating irony that institutional Judeo-Christianity has at its core a stated desire for unity (at almost any cost). And yet the God we worship has at His core a desire to divide, elect and separate. The Synagogue and Church does not want to winnow the harvest; rather it wants to find ways to allow the wheat and the chaff to remain united. Our Lord constantly demands of His true followers to "be ye separate". So what is happening with the contentious division and separation we are reading about is that it is actually God's plan brought about in ways most folks resist mightily.

What often happens when something as new and impactful as the Gospel of Christ begins to take hold is that it can assume various forms, many of which were not intended, especially when **the founding** leadership is not present to keep things on track. Or as we see happening at the outset of chapter 19, people get only partial information about Yeshua and the Good News and act on it, not realizing that there is much more to know to get a fuller and more accurate picture. Thus in Acts 19 verses 2-7 we're a bit taken aback when we read that there were a number of new Believers in Ephesus that Paul encountered who had no idea that the Holy Spirit was to be an integral part of their faith experience. In fact Luke says that some claimed that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit! I am compelled to assume that these particular new Believers who said that they knew nothing about a Holy Spirit were gentiles since Jews certainly would have at least known about the existence of the ***Ruach HaKodesh***, even if they didn't understand what role He played in their salvation.

This highlights several critical faith issues, so let's review. The manner in which this ignorance of the Holy Spirit is framed is that these new Believers had been immersed into the baptism of John, but they had not been immersed into the baptism of Jesus. First understand that speaking about being baptized into a particular person is common Hebrew cultural expression. What is interesting is that we have foreign gentiles uttering it. These gentiles had to have learned about The Way from Jews at synagogues so whatever terms and expressions they learned to define and explain their new faith would naturally be Hebrew terms and expressions since these concepts didn't exist outside of Judaism. But this also is such excellent evidence of how misleading it is for us to speak of those who followed Yeshua in Paul's day as

“Christians” or that the religion that they were following is called “Christianity”. What makes it so misleading is that the Church invariably sets Judaism up as the boogeyman who opposes Christianity; and that is because Judaism is a religion for Jews while Christianity is a religion for gentiles. In time this is precisely how it would be organized; but that time is not yet at the point we are in the Book of Acts. In fact we shouldn’t even look for such a thought in the entire New Testament because it’s not there. This next phase of the Jesus Movement that would eventually result in a gentile dominated entity called Christianity doesn’t happen until several years after all the books that form the New Testament were completed. That is, Christianity existing as a named, separate and distinct religious institution that was led by gentiles didn’t happen until sometime after the late 90’s A.D. So what we need to grasp is that The Way, which consisted of Jews and gentiles, was still being led by Jews (as we continue to see throughout the Book of Acts), and they were still mostly meeting in synagogues, they were perceived within Judaism as a sect of Judaism, and were seen similarly by gentile outsiders. Thus when persecutions began to arise against The Way, it was actually regarded as persecutions against Jews and Judaism since pagan gentiles as of yet made no real distinction between The Way and other factions of Judaism. This is because culturally all the forms of Judaism, including that of The Way, looked about the same to gentiles. It is a little like Islam is for us today because while within Islam there are long-held and well understood distinctions among various sects of Islam (and they war against one another over these distinctions), most non-Muslims don’t understand those nuances (or even know that they exist) and so we tend to lump all the sects together as one and give them one overarching identity; Islam. That is quite like the stage of development that Yeshua worship is at in Acts chapter 19.

The second issue for this small group of new Believers in Ephesus regarded being immersed into John but not into Christ; however this is not about setting one against the other. That is, this is not that the new Believers thought that you chose one name to be immersed in and rejected the other. Rather they didn’t comprehend that John’s baptism was NOT about salvation per se, but rather it was a preparation for becoming saved. Remember: the Biblical concept of immersion was for a person to take on the qualities of whatever they were being immersed into. So to be immersed into John meant that a person was absorbing and taking on whatever qualities that John preached and stood for. John was not the Savior; he was the prophet that announced that the Savior was about to reveal Himself. So to make oneself ready for the Savior, John taught that the first step was to repent of sins. Then when the Savior was made known one was prepared to take step two, which was to accept Salvation in the name of the Savior, Yeshua. Although since the moment Yeshua revealed Himself the required baptism is now a single immersion and not two immersions, nonetheless we still cannot seek salvation until we first realize our sins and repent of them. But how do we repent of something if we don’t know we’re doing anything wrong? How can we know what sin is and is not? Jews generally knew what things were sins (although especially in the Diaspora it had become greatly watered down), but how about for gentiles?

**CJB 1 John 3:4 *Everyone who keeps sinning is violating Torah- indeed, sin is violation of Torah.***

What is sin? The Apostle John says it clearly: it is breaking the Torah. For those who are somewhat new to Hebrew Roots, I shall also quote the King James Bible.

**KJV 1 John 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.***

So the New Testament definition of sin is the same as the Old Testament definition of sin: violating the Law. What law? Roman law? Obviously not. It is the only law that exists in the Bible: the Law of Moses. The Apostle John wrote these words decades after Christ's era, so clearly he still thinks that the Law remains as the standard for defining sin. We'll get back to that in a moment.

But also notice something else interesting that Acts 19 points out: we cannot accept Christ as Savior and expect that to be effective for us at the same time we have no repentance of our sins; and it works the other way around as well. We cannot repent of our sins but yet **not** accept Christ as Savior and be saved. Repentance by itself does **not** save; repentance is an admission of sin, but now payment for those sins is required by God. So determining to be a better person and sinning no more, while needed, does not save. Repentance **PLUS** trust in Christ as our atonement for sins are both needed, and ideally they ought to occur in the correct order. Is that the Tom Bradford doctrine, or a Hebrew Roots doctrine? Hardly.

### **1Corinthians 6:9-11 CJB**

***<sup>9</sup> Don't you know that unrighteous people will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't delude yourselves- people who engage in sex before marriage, who worship idols, who engage in sex after marriage with someone other than their spouse, who engage in active or passive homosexuality,***

***<sup>10</sup> who steal, who are greedy, who get drunk, who assail people with contemptuous language, who rob- none of them will share in the Kingdom of God.***

***<sup>11</sup> Some of you used to do these things. But you have cleansed yourselves, you have been set apart for God, you have come to be counted righteous through the power of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and the Spirit of our God.***

Notice that this passage does NOT say that if you've ever done, or identified yourself with, any of these prohibited things that you are forever excluded from the Kingdom of God. In fact Paul says that "some of you USED to do these things but you have cleansed yourselves...." What he is describing is repentance, because repentance is not merely a thought process, a state of mind, or an admission of the conscience; rather it means to actively, physically, stop doing what is wrong to start doing what is right. Thus a person cannot be actively engaged in these things that Paul lists (which are all sins of course, and grievous enough that the Lord may not accept you), and at the same time call upon Christ and count yourself as saved. Repentance first, then afterwards salvation in Yeshua. No repentance, no salvation. Note that even though you have NOT repented, this doesn't mean that you can't sincerely believe that Yeshua lived and did what He did and said what He said. You can insist all day long that you "believe" in Christ; but if you continue to embrace those sins, refusing to see them for what they are instead of repenting from them, then you are probably not saved. As Paul said: "do not deceive yourselves" into thinking that you are saved if you are unrepentant.

Let me also nuance that a bit further. We can repent from all of our sins, sincerely, and then we can accept Christ for who He is, sincerely, and be saved. But we can also still sin some of these same sins after our salvation; and in fact I think it is fair to say that most Believers do. So do we remain saved if that's the case? The issue is that we acknowledge those sins as sin, and don't try to defend them as OK. In other words, in our weakness we sometimes fail as Believers and we need to recognize it as such. The reality is that this is as much what Messiah died for as for the sins we committed before we came to trust Him.

Now let me address what might be the most contentious and sensitive issue in this regard for our day and age: salvation and sexual immorality. While I cannot stand in God's place and judge anyone, by everything the Scriptures plainly say one cannot be an **unrepentant** homosexual and be saved. One cannot glory in what the Lord calls sexual immorality and an abomination to Him, and still expect eternal life with God. Can a person have been formerly engaged in homosexuality or other forms of sexual immorality and now renounces it and be saved? Yes! Can that same person possibly relapse and commit a serious act of sexual sin and fall on their knees before God and admit their sin and ask for His help to stop committing it, and remain saved? Yes! Please understand, I am well aware that there are many other sins that Paul listed than only sexual sins that we must repent from to be a member of God's Kingdom. However because of the deteriorated state of modern Christianity (and even some sects of Judaism) whereby many denominations now accept homosexuality and other Biblically defined sexual deviances as OK in God's eyes and even speak of it as good, normal and moral, this is the glaring issue of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century for Believers and it must be rebuked. Rebuked not just for the sake of the health of the Believing institution, but for the sake of those individuals who are deceived into falsely thinking that they are at peace with God while still embracing sexual immorality. They may feel safe, but in fact they are in the greatest eternal danger, and much of this is due to some Church factions who are more interested in human tolerance and a greater acceptance by the world, than divine truth.

Brothers and sisters, those of us who have been charged with leadership in the Body of Christ have been letting you down for a long time. We have been charged with teaching you God's Word and helping you to observe it; and we've **not** done so vigorously enough. It is our fault that the world is falling to pieces in all sorts of sexual immorality because we have not had the courage to speak out boldly against it. We are supposed to be the keepers and protectors of God's Word because He has set us apart just for that purpose. And when we don't bother to know God's Word, or we back down due to societal pressures, any hope of secular society or even God's people remembering God's Word and obeying it is greatly diminished. Repentance of sins is mandatory before we can be saved in Messiah Yeshua and we can't determine for ourselves what sin is and is not, because as human society evolves so does humanity redefine right and wrong, good and evil to suit us. Any doctrines that teaches that sin for me isn't sin for you (the idea being that the Holy Spirit customizes sin for each Believer), is probably one of the biggest culprits behind the collapse of sexual morality because it makes the definition of sin a moving target. The Lord, not His followers, defines sin; it does not, has not, and never will change. And our source for an extensive authoritative definition of sin is the Torah.

Thus (as this connects to our Acts 19 lesson) we read that once Paul explained to the

Ephesians that even though they had repented from their sins and were immersed in public profession of that, they had not received the Holy Spirit because they had **not** been immersed into Christ. The good news is that they quickly understood the deficiency and were immersed into Yeshua by Paul. The evidence of their sincere repentance, and now their trust in Yeshua, was the visible coming of the Holy Spirit upon them.

Let's re-read part of Acts 19.

### **READ ACTS CHAPTER 19:8 – end**

Paul was given a relatively long time (3 months) to persuade the members of this particular synagogue in Ephesus before an all-too familiar pattern of events began to unfold. In Thessalonica he only had 3 weeks before the trouble started. Many believed Paul, but many more hardened their hearts against the Gospel message. When that happened Paul took the bold path of not only leaving that synagogue but even taking with him a number of members who trusted in Yeshua. He essentially moved his new congregation into a building right next door to the synagogue. I'm not sure how wise that was, but I imagine availability had something to do with it.

The building was apparently some type of school or lecture hall owned by a fellow named Tyrannus; we don't know whether he was a gentile or a Jew. Therefore I think it is highly speculative in our CJB to call this place a **yeshiva**(a **yeshiva** is essentially a Jewish religious school usually meant for training up Rabbis). Even so Paul spent 2 years in this place teaching and preaching. I'll remind you that just because Paul stayed in Ephesus for over 2 years doesn't mean that evangelizing in other places came to a halt; we have learned in earlier chapters that other Believers were roaming around presenting the Gospel (and apparently all that they taught wasn't necessarily complete or correct).

Verses 11 and 12 tell us something that is not just hard to understand, but is even harder to accept, for modern Believers. It seems that ordinary cloth items that Paul touched were taken to sick people and they were healed by them. In some cases it was enough to exorcise demons from people. What are we to make of this?

First, let's go back to a God-principle that we learned in the Torah: ritual purity and impurity are contagious. Even holiness can be transmitted from person to person, person to object, and object to object. We find something similar happening with Yeshua.

**Matthew 9:20-22 CJB** <sup>20</sup> *A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years approached him from behind and touched the tzitzit on his robe.* <sup>21</sup> *For she said to herself, "If I can only touch his robe, I will be healed."* <sup>22</sup> *Yeshua turned, saw her and said, "Courage, daughter! Your trust has healed you." And she was instantly healed.*

We also read of this strange sequence of events in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings.

### **2Kings 4:29-34 CJB**

***29 Then Elisha said to Geichazi, "Get dressed for action, take my staff in your hand, and be on your way. If you meet anyone, don't greet him; if anyone greets you, don't answer; and lay my staff on the child's face."***

***30 The mother of the child said, "As ADONAI lives, and as you live, I will not leave you. He got up and followed her."***

***31 Geichazi went on ahead of them and laid the staff on the child's face, but there was no sound or sign of life. So he went back to Elisha and told him, "The child didn't wake up."***

***32 When Elisha reached the house, there the child was, dead and laid on the bed.***

***33 He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to ADONAI.***

***34 Then he got up on the bed and lay on top of the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands. As he stretched himself out on the child, its flesh began to grow warm.***

So first off there was a belief among Jews that objects touched by a holy man could become infected by his healing power and be transmitted to them. While part of this was pure superstition, another part of this belief was based in fact and it came from the Torah. But second, Luke insists that this actually happened; Paul came in contact with a cloth, and someone used it to get healed....and it worked!! What happened was not a misinterpretation of events. In all cases, of course, this was God doing the miraculous healings and not actually humans or objects. But what God was doing from a human perspective was operating within a culture who looked for such supernatural power to be exhibited in certain expected ways; and the purpose of those strange miracles was always to teach and persuade people about God's power and presence. We in the West tend to be a bit allergic to any kind of potential miracle that seems out of the ordinary from our cultural perspective. But when God is operating in Africa, or in the South American jungles, or anyplace not at all Western, why would He **not** do things within their cultural perspective so that real understanding could happen?

Interestingly, Luke next tells about some Jewish exorcists. This no doubt is recorded here as a means to contrast what they did with what Paul did. And it seems that what these 7 exorcists did was looked upon by them and by the public as essentially the same as what Paul did. In fact in the Ephesian culture (a culture that abounded in magic and sorcery) no doubt many viewed Paul as an exorcist. So what we are witnessing is a sort of one-sided rivalry playing out. Paul was healing and expelling demons, something that these 7 sons of Sceva did professionally and made a lucrative income from it. They certainly could not ignore the competition. Before we discuss this, let me clear something up. Many Bibles will say that the father of these 7 exorcists was a Jewish High Priest; that is incorrect. The Greek word is **archiereus** and it more means CHIEF priest as opposed to HIGH priest. So whatever this Jewish man Sceva was a priest of, he was one of the upper echelon of priests; this did not intend to refer to the Hebrew High Priest that served at the Temple in Jerusalem (nor likely even one the more senior common priests). This is especially proved in that he was apparently a local, and there is no chance that a chief priest of the Jerusalem Temple could live far away

in Ephesus.

Now the fun starts. These 7 Jewish exorcists have been watching; and they see that the name that Paul calls upon to heal and expel demons is Yeshua. These exorcists aren't proud; if it works, use it. In exorcism the correct use of a powerful name is vital; it is important as both the power that expels demons, and as discovering the name of the demon that inhabits his host. But when they called on Yeshua's name to expel a demon, the demon wasn't terribly impressed. In fact the demon acknowledges that he was aware of Yeshua and of Paul and implies that had Paul ordered him out he would have gone; but he had no idea who these 7 were, so the thought is that he has no intention of doing what these exorcists say just because they pronounce the same name.

Thus in reality neither Yeshua's nor Paul's name are invoked over the possessed person and instead the demon's host jumps on these unwitting exorcists and beats them to a pulp. In fact he tears their clothes off (which would have marked them with great shame). Let's pause here for a moment. By this time in history a great deal of syncretism had crept into the religious lives of the Jewish Diaspora. That is, much pagan mysticism and magic had infiltrated otherwise holy and pure Torah practices. Why? Usually because it was profitable or convenient in some way or another.

There is ample evidence of just how infected with paganism that Judaism had become by looking at the sarcophagi of many venerable Rabbis buried in a system of burial caves at a place called Beit Shearim in Israel (I've taken many people there). We find their tombs decorated not only with menorahs but also occult symbols. How did this happen? It was yet another devastating result of the Babylonian exile. Roughly 95% of the Jews who went into exile to Babylon decided on their own free will NOT to return to the Holy Land but rather to continue their lives in the gentile world. By now 5 centuries had passed since the Jews were freed by Persian King Cyrus, the Jews' numbers had greatly increased, they had scattered all over Asia to make their way in life, and many found prosperity and status. In other words, they liked living amongst gentiles and enjoyed all the benefits that it brought to them. But the bargain was more costly than they would ever know. If they were going to live among gentiles and profit from it economically, compromise was essential. Many Jews refused compromise; but many more embraced it. Sceva and his 7 Jewish exorcist sons are a perfect example of this syncretism and blending of Jewish with gentile identities. And one of their great compromises was to adopt (or at least openly condone) the morals, ethics, and religious practices of their gentile neighbors. These religious practices inevitably involved sorcery. To have **not** done so would have, of course, been seen by gentiles as the Jews being aloof and unfriendly. Who would want to associate with someone like that?

Pockets of more pious Jews were everywhere among the myriad Jewish settlements; but they were only pockets. The majority chose the easier more practical route and as time passed the gap between Jewish life and gentile life shrunk, because too much difference interfered with political correctness and social acceptance. I'll go no further with that line of thought because if you want to understand it better simply look around you today. Christianity and large segments of Judaism have determined that compromise with the world is a better course of action than being separate from the world and bringing with it the abuses, disdain, and

economic disadvantages that being different and being intolerant of sin and immorality always does. The Church itself is full of pagan symbols that have been borrowed and Christian-ized; the 2 most holy days of the year for Christians were originally pagan holy days and many of the symbols and icons that are used to this day as centerpieces of these holidays are the same ones used by the pagans before these days were borrowed and renamed.

The superstitious Ephesians were greatly impressed with Paul, and similarly impressed with the demon's violent reaction upon these 7 exorcists, all because of the name Yeshua. This got their attention, Jews and Greeks, and so they began to venerate Our Savior's holy name (not always for the right reasons unfortunately). What we see happen starting in verse 18 is truly awesome; a reverent fear of Yeshua begins to spread. Finally lifestyle begins to change to match profession of faith in Messiah. It seems to have taken these strange healings from objects that Paul contacted, along with the comically scary scene of these 7 Jewish exorcists getting disassembled by an unimpressed demon, for God to make the point that His Son Yeshua was powerful, and that He was present, and that none could match Him. And rightfully, after witnessing these happenings the local Believers came and admitted their sins and repented. They went so far as to take their precious books of occult magic (an expensive staple of Ephesian households), and throw them into a pile and burn them. Thus they were making a public profession that they were through with sorcery. But I want to also point out that although these Believers who brought these magic books to destroy them were sincere followers of Yeshua (so far as we know), they were probably what we today might label as baby Christians; until now they simply had never connected faith in Christ with God's commandment to not participate in sorcery because sorcery in Ephesus was as much a normal part of daily life as stopping to buy gasoline is to ours. Not everyone would have appreciated such a display because essentially these Believers were dramatically renouncing the accepted lifestyle of most of the citizens of Ephesus. We are told that the value of these books amounted to 50,000 drachmas. To give you some idea of how much money this was, generally 1 drachma was the pay for 1 day's labor.

As a result of all this turmoil, attention and drama, contrary to what one might think ought to happen, the Gospel began to spread even more powerfully. I've said it before, and I'm afraid it is not terribly comforting: the Gospel of Christ is never more effective, nor does it spread more rapidly, than when the Body of Believers is under tribulation.

We'll continue with Acts chapter 19 next time.