

Sermon #17

"Twelve Men, Seven Men & A Mob"

Acts 19

Introduction: We are not sure how long Paul remained in Antioch before leaving on his third missionary journey, but perhaps it was as long as a year. As in his second journey, he visited the churches and strengthened the believers. Luke does not describe this journey in detail because his main purpose is to get Paul to Ephesus. He wants to share with his readers the marvelous ministry God gave to Paul in that strategic city so steeped in idolatry and the occult.

Twelve Men

When Paul arrived back in Ephesus, he met twelve men who professed to be Christian "disciples" but whose lives gave evidence that something was lacking. Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2). The question was important because the witness of the Spirit is the one indispensable proof that a person is truly born again (Rom. 8:9, 16; 1 John 5:9–13), and you receive the Spirit when you believe on Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:13). Their reply revealed the vagueness and uncertainty of their faith, for they did not even know that the Holy Spirit had been given! As disciples of John the Baptist, they knew that there was a Holy Spirit, and that the Spirit would one day baptize God's people (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:32–33). It is possible that these men were Apollos' early "converts" and therefore did not fully understand what Christ had done.

Paul sensed that these men did not have the witness of the Spirit in their lives, and therefore they were not converted men. Something was missing. Alas, we have people just like them in our churches today! Paul

Seven Men

It is remarkable that Paul was able to witness in the synagogue for three months before he had to leave. No doubt the faithful ministry of Aquila and Priscilla played an important part in this success. However, hardness of heart set in (Heb. 3:7ff.), so Paul left the synagogue and moved his ministry to a schoolroom, taking his disciples with him. He probably used the room during the "off hours" each day (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.), when many people would be resting. Paul ministered in this way for about two years and "all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). What a victorious ministry! It appears that everybody knew what Paul was saying and doing (see Acts 19:17, 20)!

Even Paul's enemies had to admit that the Word was spreading and people were being saved (Acts 19:26). Two factors made this possible: the witness of the believers as they went from place to place, and the "**special miracles**" that God enabled Paul to perform in Ephesus (Acts 19:11).

In Bible history, you will find **three special periods of miracles**:

- (1) **The time of Moses**;
- (2) **The time of Elijah and Elisha**; and
- (3) **The time of Jesus and His apostles**.

Each period was less than one hundred years. Depending on how some of these events are classified, **the total number of miracles for all three periods is less than one hundred**. Of course, not all the miracles were recorded (John 20:30–31). When our Lord performed miracles, He usually had at least three purposes in mind:

- (1) To show His compassion and meet human needs;
- (2) To teach a spiritual truth; and
- (3) To present His credentials as the Messiah. The apostles followed this same pattern in their miracles.

Satan imitates whatever God's people are doing, because he knows that the unsaved world cannot tell the difference (2 Cor. 11:13–15). It was not unusual

for Jewish priests to seek to cast out demons (Luke 11:19), but it was unusual for them to use the name of Jesus Christ. Since these men had no personal relationship with the Savior, they had to invoke the name of Paul as well, but their scheme did not work. The demon said, "Jesus I recognize, and Paul I am acquainted with; but who are you?" (literal translation). The demonized man then attacked the seven priests and drove them from the house. Had this exorcism succeeded, it would have discredited the name of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the church in Ephesus. (Paul faced a similar situation in Philippi. See Acts 16:16ff.)

However, God used the scheme to defeat Satan and to bring conviction to the believers who were still involved in magical arts. Instead of disgracing the name of Jesus, the event magnified His name and caused the Word of God to spread even more rapidly. The tense of the verbs in Acts 19:18 indicates that the people "*kept coming ... kept confessing ... kept showing.*" These believers apparently had not made a clean break with sin and were still practicing their magic, but the Lord had dealt with them. The total value of the magical books and spells that they burned was equivalent to the total salaries of 150 men working for a whole year! These people did not count the cost but repented and turned from their sins.

A Mob (19:21–41)

It was at this point that Satan attacked again, not as the deceiver (2 Cor. 11:3–4), but as the destroyer (1 Peter 5:8) and the murderer (John 8:44). Satan incited the guild of silversmiths to stage a public protest against Paul and the gospel. Paul may have been referring to this riot when he wrote, "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor. 15:32). The enemy had been repeatedly defeated throughout Paul's three years of ministry in Ephesus. It would have been a master stroke on Satan's part to climax that ministry with a citywide attack that could result in Paul's arrest, or even his death.

Wherever the gospel is preached in power, it will be opposed by people who make money from superstition and sin. Paul did not arouse the opposition of the silversmiths by picketing the temple of Diana or staging anti-idolatry rallies. All he did was teach the truth daily and send out his converts to witness to the lost people in the city. As more and more people got converted, fewer and fewer customers were available. "*For the love of money is a root of all evil*" (1 Tim. 6:10). Demetrius and his silversmiths were promoting idolatry and immorality in order to make a living, while Paul was declaring the true God and pointing people to cleansing and purity through

the free grace of God. The silversmiths were really more concerned about their jobs and their income than they were about Diana and her temple, but they were wise enough not to make this known.

Benjamin Franklin said that a mob was "*a monster with heads enough, but no brains.*"

How sad it is when people permit themselves to be led by a few selfish leaders who know the art of manipulation. Demetrius made use of the two things the Ephesians loved the most: the honor of their city and the greatness of their goddess and her temple. Without the help of radio, TV, or newspaper, he got his propaganda machine going and soon had the whole city in an uproar.

Max Lerner wrote in *The Unfinished Country*, "*Every mob, in its ignorance and blindness and bewilderment, is a League of Frightened Men that seeks reassurance in collective action.*"

It was a "religious mob" that shouted "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" to Pilate, and eventually got its way. Had this Ephesian mob succeeded in its plans, Paul would have been arrested and executed before the law could have stepped in to protect him. The confused crowd, some 25,000 shouting people, finally filled up the amphitheater; most of them did not know what was happening or why they were there. Since the mob could not find Paul, they seized two of his helpers, Gaius (not the Gaius of Acts 20:4; Rom. 16:23) and Aristarchus (Acts 20:4). Paul wanted to enter the theater— what an opportunity for preaching the Acts 19 385 gospel!—but the believers and some of the city leaders wisely counseled him to stay away (Acts 19:30–31).

Before long, race prejudice entered the picture, when a Jew named Alexander tried to address the crowd (Acts 19:33–34). No doubt he wanted to explain to them that the Jews living in Ephesus did not endorse Paul's message or ministry, and, therefore, must not be made scapegoats just to satisfy the crowd. But his very presence only aroused the mob even more, and they shouted for two more hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The crowd knew that the Jews did not approve of idols and would not honor Diana. The only thing that protected the Jews was the Roman law that gave them freedom of religion. It was the city clerk who finally got matters under control, and he did it primarily for political reasons. Ephesus was permitted by Rome to exist as a "free city" with its own elected assembly, but the

Romans would have rejoiced to find an excuse for removing these privileges (Acts 19:40). The same tactics that the silversmiths used to arouse the mob, the clerk used to quiet and reassure them—the greatness of their city and of their goddess. Luke records the official statement that the believers were innocent of any crime, either public (Acts 19:37) or private (Acts 19:38). Paul had this same kind of “official approval” in Philippi (Acts 16:35–40) and in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17), and he would receive it again after his arrest in Jerusalem. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke makes it clear that the persecution of the Christian church was incited by the unbelieving Jews and not by the Romans. If anything, Paul used his Roman citizenship to protect himself, his friends, and the local assemblies. The crowd was dismissed, and no doubt the people went home congratulating themselves that they had succeeded in defending their great city and their famous goddess. It is doubtful that many of them questioned the truthfulness of their religion or determined to investigate what Paul had been preaching for three years. It is much easier to believe a lie and follow the crowd. But Ephesus is gone, and so is the worldwide worship of Diana of the Ephesians. The city and the temple are gone, and the silversmiths’ guild is gone. Ephesus is a place visited primarily by archeologists and people on Holy Land tours. Yet the gospel of God’s grace and the church of Jesus Christ are still here! We have four inspired letters that were sent to the saints in Ephesus—Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation 2:1–7. The name of Paul is honored, but the name of Demetrius is forgotten. (Were it not for Paul, we would not have met Demetrius in the first place!) The church ministers by persuasion, not propaganda. We share God’s truth, not man’s religious lies. Our motive is love, not anger; and the glory of God, not the praise of men. This is why the church goes on, and we must keep it so.