Paul and the Dark Powers at Ephesus



Scripture Reference: Acts 19:1-41

Suggested Theme: Jesus is more powerful than any power in heaven or earth. Trusting in practices such as sorcery, magic, witchcraft, or horoscopes is trusting in another power above Jesus.

Memory Verse: “God made Christ more important than all rulers, authorities, powers, and kings. Christ is more important than anything in this world or in the next world. God put everything under his power. And God made him the head over everything for the church.” Ephesians 1:21-22, ICB

Story Overview:

During his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Ephesus and spent three years there. He taught about Jesus in the synagogue and a city school. Some of the most unusual miracles in the Book of Acts occurred during Paul’s stay in Ephesus. They were so convincing that magicians and sorcerers burned their expensive sorcery books and turned to God. So many people stopped worshipping idols (and buying idol statues) that a silversmith named Demetrius led a riot against Paul.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts



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Paul was both an apostle and a missionary. After spending time with his sending and sponsoring church (Antioch), he set off over land for what has come to be called his 3rd Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23). Before arriving in Ephesus, Paul passed through places where he had established churches on his earlier journeys.

Today, the excavated ruins of ancient Ephesus are located near modern-day Selcuk, Turkey. Ephesus was known as the city that contained one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World"-the Temple of Artemis. In some versions of the Bible, the alternative name of the Roman goddess, Diana, is used in this passage as she was sometimes equated with the Greek goddess Artemis.

Paul's message about the power of Jesus proved to be a challenge to the city of Ephesus. Even the followers of Jesus were confronted by a message about spiritual matters. Twelve of the followers were still teaching the baptism of John the Baptist. Years earlier, when John the Baptist had taught about baptism, he taught people to repent in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival. John said that one greater than he would follow him. Years had passed since that time. Now, after the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah (Jesus), baptism has taken on a new meaning. John's baptism was now obsolete.

In a city where "spirits" were discussed a lot, followers of Jesus needed to understand that the Holy Spirit was a gift from God. The Spirit was bestowed on Christians at baptism. This is the same message Peter had preached in his Sermon at Pentecost.

> "Peter said to them, 'Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you. It is also for your children and for all who are far away. It is for everyone the Lord our God calls to himself.'" Acts 2:38-39, ICB

Many Jews did not accept what Paul was teaching. After three months, Paul moved on to a public lecture hall (Hall of Tyrannus) and taught for two years. Ephesus was a busy port city with many visitors passing through. Preaching in this public place allowed many to hear the message of Jesus.

The "Good News" was actually "Bad News" for the evil spirits and many practitioners of false worship in Ephesus. Some people accepted the good news, and some did not.

- (Acts 19:13-17) A group of priests were humiliated when they attempted to use the name of Jesus like an incantation to cast out a demon.
- (Acts 19:18-20) Many sorcerers and those who followed this practice renounced the powers of darkness and confessed that Jesus was the world's true king. Many made their confessions public by burning their sorcery scrolls.
- (Acts 19:21-41) Led by a silversmith, Demetrius, artisans began to revolt against this competition for their trade. Who would want to purchase silver images of Artemis if Jesus was more powerful? This culminated in an angry and loud crowd gathering at the city amphitheatre. Eventually, a city clerk calmed the crowd and dispersed it.

Following this uprising, Paul met with the disciples and then left Ephesus.

These events in Ephesus show that we do not have to live in fear. God is above all powers and gives us what we need to fight any trick Satan throws.

- Ephesians 6:10-18
- Romans 8:37-39
- Ephesians 1:18-23

Special Note to the Teacher:

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The Bible is clear about God's supremacy. Still, even within the same family or church, there may be different interpretations of how that applies to various literature, television shows, or movies that children are exposed to. What one family might allow as a "harmless fantasy," another might steer their children away from as actually spiritually harmful or wrong. So be respectful of this and apply discernment and diplomacy.

Wherever one places boundaries, it would be wrong to deny or avoid the important subject of spiritual warfare. As a teacher, become familiar with the subject through articles like this one at christiananswers.net , especially if you teach older or very curious children.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Find examples of horoscopes in magazines or newspapers and show them to the children. You might think of other examples that are familiar to the children (psychics, crystal balls, etc. Discuss the fact that people who use these try to predict the future. "Some people say that there are hidden powers or that the stars can tell them what will happen in the future. Let's read what the bible says about the future–read Ecclesiastes 8:7. No one knows future events except for God. In today's story, we will learn about a time when Paul visited a city where lots of people thought they could do sorcery and magic and predict the future."

The Story:

(Note: This story contains many elements, and too much information in a small amount of time can be overwhelming. If you are teaching younger children, I suggest choosing only one part of the story to concentrate on. Perhaps only tell the part about the silversmiths being angry because they couldn't sell their idols.)

Paul was a missionary. The church in the city of Antioch sent Paul on several "Missionary Journeys" to tell people about Jesus. Today, we will learn about something that happened on Paul's "Third Missionary Journey" when he was in the city of Ephesus.

As Paul entered Ephesus, he met a small group of people who followed Jesus. While they were talking, Paul realised that these men only knew part of the truth about baptism. They had only heard about what John the Baptist used to teach. Paul told them that since Jesus had died on the cross and returned to life, baptism had a new meaning. When baptised in the name of Jesus, people received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would come and live in them. The Holy Spirit would always be with them, helping them follow God.

The men were so happy to hear about this and were baptised in Jesus' name. After their baptism, an amazing thing happened. The Holy Spirit displayed his wonderful power to them through miracles.

By the power of the Spirit, the men immediately began to speak in other languages that they had never studied or learned. This is called "speaking in tongues."

Then, they began saying messages straight from God. This miracle is called "prophesying." These extraordinary miracles helped these men understand that God's Spirit was for everyone who followed and obeyed him.

For two years, Paul continued to tell the people of Ephesus about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He wanted everyone to understand that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were stronger than any other power. Paul performed many miracles in the city of Ephesus.

Some people took the handkerchiefs and clothes that Paul had used and touched sick people with them. The power of God was so strong that just the touch of these clothes made them well. Evil spirits would also

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leave people when the clothes touched them.

But some people tried to use God's power in bad ways. They thought they could just SAY the name of Jesus and they could make bad spirits leave people. But that did not work. Jesus's name is very important and special, and it cannot be used like a magic trick.

Other people in Ephesus listened to what Paul was teaching. They realised the power of God was stronger than their false gods and spirits. They began to follow Jesus.

God does not want Christians to treat other powers like they are as good as or better than Him. So, some people who had practised sorcery lit a fire and burned their dark magic and sorcery instruction books. They trusted only in God's power now.

The city of Ephesus was very famous for worshipping a false goddess named Artemis. Everyone, even from faraway cities, had heard of the big, beautiful temple in Ephesus. People would go to the temple to worship, but they did not go to the temple to worship Jesus or God. This whole building and its big statues were built in honour of Artemis.

People thought Artemis of the Ephesians had power, and they worshipped and bowed down to her.

Some silversmiths made statues of Artemis or the temple and sold them at the marketplace. These statues were very popular, and the silversmiths could make a lot of money selling them.

When Paul began telling people it was wrong to worship Artemis, the silversmiths began to worry that no one would want to buy their statues anymore. One silversmith, Demetrius, became so angry that he started telling all the other silversmiths. He said that if people started believing what Paul said about Jesus, all the silversmiths would become poor and go out of business.

More and more people started listening to Demetrius, and soon, a big, angry crowd gathered at the city stadium. This was becoming a very dangerous situation for Paul and his friends.

They grabbed two of Paul's friends and brought them into the stadium. Paul wanted to go and help them, but his other friends told him he must stay away from the angry crowd.
When one Jewish man tried to talk, the crowd got so angry that they responded by chanting over and over for two hours straight, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

The entire city was in an uproar. Finally, the city clerk calmed them down enough so they could hear him speak. He reminded them that there were city courts where Demetrius and the other silversmiths could make their complaints. He also told them that if they had a riot, he would have to report it to the Romans. (That meant Roman soldiers would come, and everyone would be in big trouble.)

Finally, everyone calmed down and began returning to their homes.

Paul knew the time had come to leave Ephesus. There were now many Christians in Ephesus, and they could continue telling people about Jesus.

Paul met with his friends and then left the city. He would continue his mission work in other places.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What was the name of the city where Paul spent two years teaching in a school? (Ephesus)
- What did the sorcerers and magicians in Ephesus do with their expensive scrolls and books when they heard about Jesus? (Burned them)
- Why did the sorcerers and magicians in Ephesus burn their scrolls and books? (They learned that God is the highest and only good power)
- Why is it wrong to trust in sorcery, horoscopes, witchcraft, and things like that? (God is the highest and only good power, and He wants us to trust Him alone)
- Should we be afraid of dark powers? (No. We belong to Jesus, and Jesus is way more powerful than any other power. God will always win against dark powers.)
- Why were Demetrius and other silversmiths upset with Paul? (If people kept following Jesus after hearing Paul preach, people wouldn't buy the idols they made anymore. Then the silversmiths would lose money.)
- What does this story show you about God or Jesus?
- What does this story show you about people?

Reflection:

- What do you think it smelled, looked or felt like when the Ephesians burned their books and scrolls about magic?
- How do you think the people in the huge crowd at the city stadium felt?
- Can you imagine saying the same thing for two hours? Why do you think the Ephesians in the crowd chanted "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" for so long?
- When have you seen God do powerful things? Have you heard a story of God doing something powerful?
- If you ever feel afraid or frightened, or you think there might be dark powers nearby, what can you do? (Pray and tell the dark powers to leave in the name of Jesus, sing worship songs, declare true things about God, Jesus and yourself out loud, ask God to be with you, find another Christian or trusted adult, read the Bible)
- Do you trust in Jesus and believe He is the most powerful in the world? Why?
- What questions do you have about this story? What question do you have for God about this story?
- What is something you want to know more about from this story?

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Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- My God is So Big Song
- He's Got the Whole World in His Hands Song
- Oh, Be Careful Song
- Shake the Devil Off
- Roll the Gospel Chariot
- I Can Be a Missionary
- This Little Light of Mine
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Our God is an Awesome God Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Enlarge a map of Paul's third missionary journey and circle the city of Antioch, where the journey began. Then circle Ephesus. This map can be developed more in the next lessons.
- Use a Bible concordance, research online, or find books at the local library that discuss the ancient city of Ephesus.
- Discuss modern forms of sorcery, magic, etc. Make posters depicting some of these. You might glue on horoscope columns from magazines. Have the children use large lettering to write the following verse on the poster. *"They do not know what the future holds. No one can tell them what will happen." Ecclesiastes 8:7, NIV*

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- To review, you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson, ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing, you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have covered as well as you could have when you were teaching.



- If you prefer, you can download and print the illustration of Paul provided here and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.
- Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Make a relief map of Paul’s Journeys featuring the place in today’s story. If you are studying Paul’s journeys over a few lessons, you could add more details to the map each time you learn about another stop on the journey. Instructions for salt dough map here.
- Make a scroll. Click here for instructions. Have children write “God is the Only True Power” on it. They could write other powers (sorcery, magic, horoscopes) around the edges in small lettering and then cross them out.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Craft: Doorknob hanger of Paul (sundayschoolcrafts.net)
- Online Map of Paul’s 3rd Journey (deeperstudy.com)

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- Review: Create a “passport” that covers Paul’s life. Good visual ideas and activities. It could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul found at (kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz)

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