

Episode: Paul's Letters Series No. 01

Narrator: Demetrius the Silversmith

Primary Scriptures: Acts 17:1-8, 19

Story Summary: Paul's stay in Thessalonica and Ephesus; the effects of Christianity

Location: Roman Empire; Galatia, Macedonia, Greece

Time: AD 30 Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48 Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50 Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey
AD 50-67 Time period of when Paul wrote his letters in the New Testament

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Acts 17:6; 19:26-27

Most modern Christians probably think the people of the Roman Empire were thrilled to have Christianity come to them. After all, the Gospel means "good news." That was true for many people, but for many others the Gospel was bad news. Jesus aptly described what Christianity would do when He said, "Don't think that I've come to bring peace on earth; I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, the daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And, a man's foes shall be those in his own household."¹

Throughout virtually all the Empire, the historical purpose of religion and gods was to provide protection and prosperity. In the time of Jesus, emperor worship had become more common; the emperor became the religious entity to provide that protection and prosperity. Christianity completely up-ended the way people behaved and believed, encouraging Christians to act against the social norms, which often had an effect on family stability, community behavior, and economic circumstances.

Acts 19 is the beginning of Paul's Third Missionary Journey. He arrived in Ephesus, baptized twelve new believers, taught about Jesus in the synagogue for three months, and taught for two years in the hall of Tyrannus. The results were astounding. Everyone in the province of Asia heard the Gospel, extraordinary miracles were done through Paul, and many people were converted to Christianity.

The effects of Paul's teachings were so extraordinary that a vast number of people quit worshipping the main local god, dramatically affecting the local economy as incomes dropped for workers who supported the local temple and served the worshipers. On an economic basis, the coming of Christianity was not good news to them and their families; it was horrible news. Keep that point of view in mind as you read the letters Paul wrote.

¹ Mat. 10:34-36

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you previously perceived that Romans and Greeks typically were thrilled when Paul introduced them to the Good News? Are you thrilled when people introduce new religious ideas to you? How do you react when Christians pose new ideas about Christianity to you that don't automatically fit your entrenched beliefs and perceptions?
2. Assuming you are a Christian, why have you stayed a Christian instead of converting to another major religion such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam? Why do adherents to those religions stay with them instead of converting to Christianity?
3. Early Christians were known as atheists because they did not believe in Roman gods or the gods of local communities. How are modern Christians perceived by non-Christians? Why are Christians perceived that way? Is this a good thing?
4. In the modern world, companies use brand names and images to convince consumers about issues of quality, price, social status, and other purchasing criteria. How might Christians do the same thing? Should Christians take a page out of the advertising norms in sharing the Good News?
5. Has being a Christian ever helped or hurt you (or someone you know) economically? Have you ever tried to take advantage of it helping you economically?

4. By how churches are named, denominations portray themselves, slogans are used, and how they portray themselves in public.

Application Questions:

1. How can you "brand" yourself so that your name becomes shorthand for being an ambassador for Jesus?
2. Many people feel threatened when Christians try to talk with them about Christianity. How can you help people feel less threatened when you discuss your faith?
3. Name some aspects of living in your nation or community that pressure you to behave in a way contrary to how Christians should behave. How can you keep from bowing to those pressures?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. In your school, are Christians admired or criticized? How can you personally improve the reputation that Christians have?
2. What are some of the "idols" that kids at your school worship? How do they worship them? Have you ever fallen prey to temptation to worship these "idols"? How can you guard yourself against that temptation?
3. Do you expect Christians will endure more criticism in future years by the media and educators? How will you deal with it if that happens?