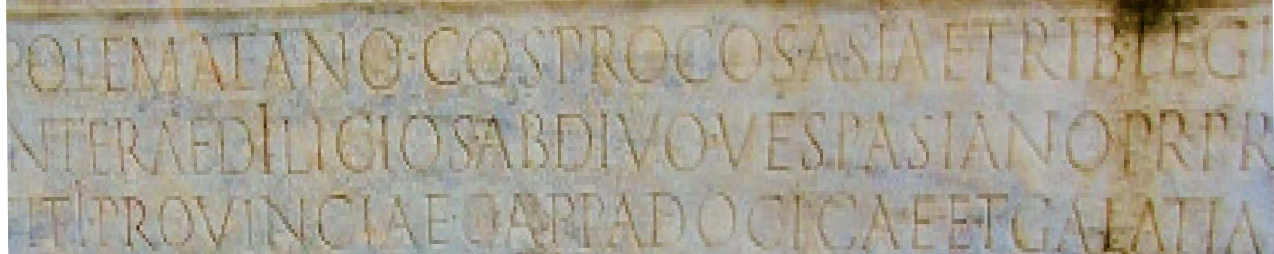




FOUNDATIONS

Lessons in Discipleship
from the New Testament Church



Study Guide



CENTER FOR
HOLY LANDS STUDIES

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Didyma The World and the Church

Do you ever feel that as your faith and devotion to the gospel increases, opposition in your life also increases? We hear that saying yes to Jesus is the hard part, and life gets easier from there. This is nothing more than a fallacy and stands in stark contrast to what we find in the biblical text.

It can be argued that no one understood this better than the apostle Paul. Before his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was a hotshot up- and-coming Pharisee. It seems he had a level of respect from the members of the Great Sanhedrin, the leading Jewish ruling body in Jerusalem, as well as the ear of the high priest himself (Acts 9:1). This was a rarity for a young Pharisee. Yet, following his conversion into a new relationship with Jesus, we find that Paul's easy life disappeared. His life became one of constant opposition due to his actions and the power of the gospel message that he preached and carried with him.

Though Paul faced adversity multiple times, no event seems to be on as grand of a scale as the riot in Ephesus in Acts 19. This event exemplified the effects that just one individual can have when operating with the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The riot in Ephesus shows us the genuine truths of the world, truths that we as believers stand in contrast to, truths that also give insight into potential outcomes.

WATCH THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH VIDEO



When we look at the Greek and Roman ancient pagan temples in the New Testament world, it can be difficult to imagine the finances that each temple secured. Looking at the columns of the temple of Didyma, it is evident that each one would have taken years to carve. It has been estimated that the cost of any of these temples, with all of the art and adornment, would match the cost of a modern-day NFL stadium (many of which are surpassing the one billion dollar price tag). The temple in the video was not even the largest in its region of the ancient world. There

are countless temples similar to it throughout the areas of the New Testament world.

Acts 19 does not serve as the only time when Paul's proclamation of the gospel had weighty results. In Acts 16, while in the city of Philippi, Paul and his companion Silas cast a demonic spirit out of a young slave girl who acted as a fortune teller. Verses 19 and 20 read, *"Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. 'The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!' they shouted to the city officials."*

For fear of the pagan community turning against them, the city officials illegally flogged the men and threw them in prison. Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and legally should not have been subjected to brutal prison treatment without due trial. The officials were fearful of the power of the pagan crowd, showing once more the true might of wealthy individuals who profited off pagan sinful practices.



Think of the courage that the church had in the face of such wealthy opposition! Acts 4:32, 34&35 gives us a little insight into the financial status of the church: *"They shared everything that they had... those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need."* How could such a group of individuals who had so little to their name have the boldness to stand against the pagan world like that of the temple of Didyma? It is easier than we might think. They were prepared for it.

The opposition that the world holds against those faithful to God is no hidden secret. It is something that if we open our eyes and look, we should come to expect the world to rise up against us. Psalm 34:19 *tells us that: "The righteous person faces many troubles."* Likewise 1 Corinthians 4:8-9 says, *"We are pressed on every side by troubles...We are perplexed...We are hunted down...We get knocked down."*

Due to history and the biblical text, we have adequate warning of what to expect. Even Jesus did not try to hide this fact from His followers, warning them in John 16:33, *"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows."*

We must be primed for what is coming at any given moment. However, being expectant of what is to come only makes up half the equation. Each verse mentioned has an addendum. As much as the verses serve as a warning, each one serves as a reminder that God is still in control and will ultimately have the final victory.

“The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.” Psalm 34:19, “We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed but not driven to despair. We are hunted down but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.” 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth, you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart because I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

We can stand against a world and its systems that become more and more hostile because we know that we serve the God who overcomes and raises us up to face all adversity for the glory of His name.

What is the reality that we face?

Every day, wealthy and powerful entities in our world try desperately to pull us away from the foundations of our faith. The gospel, the Word of God, its teachings, and the Holy Spirit’s power stand at odds with the current natural order of the world as it is corrupted by sin. The reality we face stands in contrast to the fundamental truths that remain constant. When we take a stand for the gospel and for righteous living, those who seek to live in and profit off the sinful nature of this world are threatened.

Though we can see the impact of the ministry of the church of Ephesus and Paul in Acts 19, Paul, an apostle full of the Spirit, had to flee the city for his life. This is the same city where he lived for as long as three years. He had friends in high places. He had arguably the most vigorous church of all those he had planted. Yet his flight may spark fear in any of us! “I am not an apostle, I don’t think I have quite the faith of Paul, and if this is what happened to him, maybe it will be worse for me!”

For any of us, like for Paul, there was still more to come. Second Corinthians 11:23-27 provides us with Paul’s own account of what he had endured up to that point for the sake of the gospel:

I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times

without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

It is fair to assume that Paul's sufferings on account of the gospel continued until his final act, his execution. This served as the bookend to what the world could do to silence the gospel lived out by Paul. Even still, the world ultimately failed in silencing the gospel. *"For to me [Paul], living means living for Christ, and dying is even better."* Philippians 1:21

Paul's life served and continues to serve as a witness to the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any of us who could suffer like Paul also glorify Christ in suffering. *"Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later."* Romans 8:18

These examples build a firm foundation. No matter the circumstances that may arise against us, the powers of the world will be defeated, and we will overcome.

From the fall of man in Genesis 3, the world has fallen prey to the one thing that it will never be able to overcome, death. But if death has been defeated by Christ, how much more so can we hold on to the blessed hope that the victory is ours!

When we can adopt this mindset and make it a part of our identity as disciples of Christ, we will be an unstoppable force, filled with faith, ready to conquer the world that desires to conquer us, all for the glory of the kingdom of God.



PERSONAL REFLECTION
