

# ACTS | Kingdom Authority | Story 29

## Acts 19:11-20

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### Introduction

Acts 19 is the story of the gospel continuing to spread throughout the city of Ephesus.

As we said last week, it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia,

- Ephesus was the **richest city** in the richest region of the Roman Empire.
- It was the regions primary **port**—all the region’s trade come through it.
- It was **pluralistic and multi-ethnic**.
- It had the **world’s largest temple**, dedicated to the goddess Artemis. She was also known by her nickname Diana.
- This temple was **4 times bigger** than the Parthenon in Rome. It was one of the **7 wonders** of the ancient world.
- She was viewed as the **protector of the city**, the one whom they believed guaranteed their prosperity.

The Apostle Paul was on mission, preaching the gospel, bringing people into the kingdom, glorifying Jesus, and working miracles all throughout the city of Ephesus. The story we’re going to look at today is the result of some level of notoriety spreading about Paul and the name of Jesus. We’ll learn what happens when some people hear about what Paul is doing and try to mimic the power of God. It doesn’t go so well for them.

### Acts 19:11-20

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, <sup>12</sup> so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. <sup>13</sup> Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. <sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but **who are you?**” <sup>16</sup> And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. <sup>17</sup> And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. <sup>18</sup> Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. <sup>19</sup> And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. <sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

**Today**, one of the first things we see in this passage is that handkerchiefs that Paul touched would then be delivered to sick people and these people would receive healing!

Something we see throughout the book of Acts, is that these miracles were a divine confirmation of the spiritual authority of the apostles. Almost like a confirmation of the messenger and their message. Think of it like God’s approval of Paul as his representative.

In this story, you have these itinerant Jewish exorcists.

### **Acts 19:13-14**

<sup>13</sup> Then some of the **itinerant Jewish exorcists** undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.

Seven sons of Sceva were doing exorcisms. These guys witnessed the miracles that God is doing through Paul and tried replicating what Paul did without the authenticating power of God!

**EXAMPLE:** Years ago in Dalton, Georgia, there was a ministry that began with a claim that a NKJV bible was oozing oil and this oil was producing all kinds of miracles in people’s lives — before long, thousands and thousands of people would travel from all over the country to get a vial of this oil. Hundreds of thousands of vials of this oil were being given away but services were held, and the singular focus of those services was not the Word of God, it wasn’t Christ and Him Crucified, it was magical oil that could work miracles...

Thousands and thousands of people were swept up into this and 2 years after this phenomenon started, through an official investigation it was discovered that the man at the center of this had been purchasing gallons and gallons of mineral oil from Tractor Supply. The whole thing was a scam.

- Now, whether he started with that level of deception or not— he ended up there. This is the warning for us and the danger for us.
- Does God still do miracles? **ABSOLUTELY!** Should we believe Him and pray for the miraculous! Absolutely! I just talked to a man that was miraculously healed of stage 4 cancer that had spread throughout his entire body, he was given 3-6 months to live and 2 years later, He’s still cancer free!
- If the center of our focus ever shifts to the miracle and off of the miracle worker, we are in big trouble!
- The moment we begin to chase after the sensational rather than the Savior Himself, we’re in big trouble.

That’s what we see in this passage. These 7 sons, pretending to have the power of God, trying to replicate what God was doing through their own strength.

We do have to understand the broader context of what’s happening in this passage and how that relates to us today.

This passage is talking about exorcisms, evil spirits, demonic oppression, and possession —which a lot of modern people look at with an enormous amount of skepticism and unbelief.

1. To explain where evil comes from, and why it exists in the world, a Harvard psychologist named BF Skinner wrote extensively about the idea that **every single problem** you face in life is a result of your **environment**, the way you were raised. It’s the conditions you grew up in, it’s your environment, it’s the world, it’s how you were trained to think and view life itself.
2. Other experts in that same field say — no, it’s not your environment, the problems in your life are a result of your biological makeup. It’s your genes. It’s your flesh. People have predispositions toward violence, or addiction and your choices will make you or break you.
3. And then there are those that say, there’s a force of evil that we can’t see at work in the world — how else do you explain all the pain and suffering that exists. There is a belief in some religions that behind every bad thing, there is a supernatural force causing it.

So, which is it? Who is right? Who is wrong? Well, they're all right and all wrong because the truth is, it's not just psychological, it's not just biological, and it's not just supernatural. It's all three, all at once. Evil comes at you from every angle it can.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesian church, where this story is taking place and tells them, *"Look, I want you to know what you're dealing with here."*

### **Ephesians 6:12**

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers**, against the **authorities**, against the **cosmic powers** over this present darkness, against the **spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly places.

- There is a very real spiritual battle going on all around you that you cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or smell — you can't perceive it with your physical senses, but that doesn't make it any less real.

*"There is no neutral ground in the universe.  
Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God,  
and counterclaimed by Satan."*

*-CS Lewis*

Paul writes to the church in Corinth...

### **2 Corinthians 10:4-5**

For the **weapons of our warfare** are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.

Paul says that the weapons of our warfare have divine power, supernatural explosive potential, and ability—but along with the spiritual battle; there is another principle at work here that we must understand as relates to the spiritual battle. That is **Spiritual Authority!**

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## **Spiritual Authority**

Exousia is the Greek word for Authority — it means legal right to act.

### **Acts 19:13-15**

"I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. <sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but **who are you?**"

What I love about this passage, even though it's a bit terrifying, is the fact that even the demon recognizes spiritual authority. He commands the demon out and it replies by saying, "Well, I know Jesus, and I know Paul but, I don't even know who you are."

This passage is a warning. It's a warning that the name of Jesus is incredibly powerful, but that God is not a tool to be used for selfish purposes. The name of Jesus isn't to be used as a tool by those who aren't known by Jesus.

This passage is also simultaneously an encouragement as well. Because one of the dangers we can fall into as followers of Christ is not stepping into the authority that God has given us— Not recognizing that God has given us Kingdom authority as His representatives on the earth.

And as sobering as it is — I love what we learn when the evil spirit speaks.

### **Acts 19:15**

But the evil spirit answered them, “**Jesus I know**, and **Paul I recognize**, but **who are you?**”

**Question:** Follower of Jesus, do you realize what that’s saying?

**What this means is that if you belong to Jesus, your name is known in hell. It means that when your feet hit the ground every single morning, the enemies of God scramble to disrupt what God wants to accomplish through you that day! It means that when you pray to God in heaven, the hordes of hell tremble in fear— if you belong to Jesus — God has given you legal authority over all the power of hell! You son, and daughter of God are a powerhouse in the spiritual realm!**

**Children of God, walk in the authority that God has given you.**

### **2 Timothy 1:7**

For God has not given us a **spirit of fear**, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

- Don’t be timid about the authority that God has given you. Walk in confidence, not in your own strength, not confidence in your abilities, nor your talents —but confidence in the reality that Jesus Himself, who has all authority over heaven and earth, has given you authority over the powers of hell!

Now, the danger on the other side of walking in Kingdom authority is that we end up walking in overconfidence or confidence in the flesh, look at what happens to these men.

### **Acts 19:16**

And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house **naked and wounded**.

**Question:** How many of you have ever been in a physical fight?

If you’re in a fight and that happens— you’re not just physically wounded. It will also be emotional and mental humiliation.

### **Acts 19:17**

And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks.

- That’s 300,000 people who know the story of these boys getting beat by a demon. There goes their exorcism business.

Church, we don’t want to walk in spiritual timidity — but we don’t want to walk in spiritual vanity either. Thinking that we’re the reason the hell is trembling in fear.

It's very easy to glance over this but at the very beginning of the passage it tells us something incredibly significant as it relates to spiritual authority.

### **Acts 19:11**

And **God was doing extraordinary miracles** by the hands of Paul,

You know what that means?

**Paul wasn't doing miracles... God was! God did the miracles; Paul was a vessel.**

The only reason why we have any authority at all is because He is the one who has given it. Not because of anything we've done, not because we've earned it somehow — not because we're something great, but because God is! It's not because of our gifting, it's simply by God's grace.

The balance there is — We don't want to walk in Spiritual timidity, or spiritual vanity, but in the sweet spot of **Spiritual Authority**.

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## **Conclusion**

Now the question is... how do you do that? How do you stay on the narrow road of Spiritual Authority?

There's a moment in the Luke's gospel, where Jesus sends out 72 of his followers, 2x2... and they're doing ministry work and they come back to Jesus and report.

### **Luke 10:17-19**

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" <sup>18</sup> And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you **authority** to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over **all the power of the enemy**, and nothing shall hurt you.

Jesus is doing leadership training — There are two enormous challenges in this passage.

First, He sends them out to do exactly what He's doing. He sends them out with the same power, the same ability, they're doing everything that Jesus had been doing. They come back shocked that they had not been given second-tier authority — but the full authority that Jesus has.

Secondly, they come back, and they're exhilarated. They're saying, "*Lord, can you believe it!? Even the demons are subject to us in your name.*" They're celebrating and rejoicing!

Look at Jesus's response:

### **Luke 10:20**

"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

What He is saying, "Dear friends, I once knew somebody who was far more holy, far more beautiful, and far nobler. I once knew somebody much greater than you. He made the same mistake you're about to make, and it destroyed him — and not only him, but a 1/3 of the angels with him. His destruction was catastrophic. I don't want you to make that same mistake.

He's looking at His followers and He's warning them... *"You're about to misunderstand the power I've given you, real spiritual power that builds up and does not destroy.*

**Spiritual authority is not about what you can do,  
it's about who you are.**

The real secret to spiritual authority is knowing who you are!

Rejoice that your name is written in heaven! You have a brand-new identity as a son, as a daughter of God —you're known by the creator of heaven and earth and He doesn't call you His subject, His slave... He calls you, His friend!

So many of us are running around trying to make a name for ourselves, trying to build our identity through our gifts, rather than acknowledging that we've been given a brand-new identity, and heavenly authority, not because of our gifts, but by His grace!

Jesus Christ says to the 72, and He is saying to us today, "To the degree you're overwhelmed by your name being written in heaven, because of everything that I've done for you — to that degree is the degree that you'll walk in the power I'm giving you.

All these abilities will just go crazy and will turn the world upside down and will heal people, but if instead of rejoicing in grace you rejoice in your gifts, if you rejoice in what you can do rather than who you are — it's not going to go well for you.

A lot of us are out there, and we're trying to earn ourselves a name in our blood, sweat, and tears.

**Jesus says,  
"I've already done it  
in my blood, sweat, and tears."**

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## **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the tools that you may be idolizing vs. utilizing to point you and others to God?
2. Discuss how architecture that was built to the glory of a god, has impacted how we view these buildings today? Do you recognize their roll in paganism or do you celebrate them?
3. What spiritual battle are you struggling with today?
4. Walking in spiritual authority, what did you learn about it through this lesson?
5. Spiritual timidity or vanity, what is God showing you about your walk?
6. How do you stay grounded in who you are in Christ vs making name for yourself? Do you find it difficult? If so, what can you do differently, starting now?

## NOTES