

ACTS CHAPTER 19

PAUL IN EPHEBUS

A. Ephesian disciples are baptized in the Holy Spirit.

1. ([Acts 19:1-2](#)) In Ephesus, Paul finds some disciples who had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”

- a. **Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus:** Paul was last in Ephesus on his way back from Corinth on his second missionary journey. Now he came from the east, arriving in Ephesus from the region of Phrygia. He came back to Ephesus as he had promised in [Acts 18:21](#).
- b. Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you **believed?** Apparently there was something about these **disciples** that prompted this

question from Paul. We don't have any indication that it was his custom to ask people if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed.

c. **We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy**

Spirit: By their reply, these Ephesian **disciples** showed they didn't know much about God's nature as revealed in Jesus. They knew enough to be saved and to be students of Jesus (they were called **disciples**), but they didn't know much about all Jesus did for us, especially in His promise to send the Holy Spirit when He ascended to heaven.

i. It may be that this was not the core group of disciples that Paul originally spoke to in Ephesus ([Acts 18:19-21](#)) and whom Aquila and Priscilla were left behind to serve. Aquila and Priscilla were with Paul for a year and a half in Corinth, and it seems from his letters to the Corinthians that Paul taught them about the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit. These "**some disciples**" may have been new or young **disciples**, not the core group at Ephesus.

2. ([Acts 19:3-4](#)) Paul distinguishes between the baptism of John and baptism in the name of the Jesus.

And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

a. **Into John’s baptism:** These Ephesian disciples had only a basic understanding of the Messiah Jesus and His ministry, only what could be gained through the message of John the Baptist. They were in the same place as Apollos before Aquila and Priscilla explained *the way of God more accurately* ([Acts 18:24-26](#)).

i. They could have received **John’s baptism** from the hands of John himself; or perhaps from some of John’s disciples who continued on in his ministry after John’s death.

b. **John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance:** Paul points out that John’s baptism was one of **repentance**, not

necessarily faith unto salvation. John's message pointed to Jesus but did not take men there itself.

i. One can imagine that these Ephesian disciples heard about the coming of the Messiah through John's message, and they heard their need to be ready through repentance to receive the Messiah. Yet they actually do not seem to have heard that the Messiah *had* in fact come and had not heard of their need to trust in His specific person and work.

ii. Some have suggested that these Ephesian disciples were not actually Christians yet. The problem in this is that they are called *disciples*, which almost always refers to Christians, genuine followers of Jesus Christ. However, it must be said that the word *disciple* does have a broader understanding and application than its most frequent usage — describing a follower of Jesus.

iii. However, Bruce makes the point: "When the men are called *disciples* without further qualification, that...seems to mean that they were disciples of Jesus. Had Luke meant to

indicate that they were disciples of John the Baptist... he would have said so explicitly.”

3. ([Acts 19:5-7](#)) The twelve Ephesian disciples believe on Jesus, are baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit with His gifts. When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.

a. **They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus:** Having been completely prepared by their response to the preaching of John the Baptist, they were ready to embrace Jesus fully, and were **baptized in the name of Jesus**.

b. **The Holy Spirit came upon them:** After they were baptized, **Paul... laid hands on them**, and they were filled with the **Holy Spirit**, and received His gifts.

i. Paul wrote the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians during his stay in the city of Ephesus at this time, and 1 Corinthians has much to say about the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

c. **Now the men were about twelve in all:** This reminds us that not the entire church in Ephesus had this incomplete understanding and embrace of Jesus' person and work, but only a small group.

i. An often-debated question is, "Were these 12 Ephesian disciples actually Christians before this remarkable filling of the Holy Spirit, or not?" On the one hand, they were called *disciples* — and appeared to part of the company of Christians in Ephesus, things that would not usually be said of them if they were not actually Christians. On the other hand, they knew so little about Jesus; and they were baptized in water again, this time in the name of Jesus. It is difficult to say with certainty if they were already Christians or not, but one can say with certainty that Paul perceived they lacked something of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

ii. It is fair for each Christian today to consider if someone were to look at their own life, would they notice a conspicuous absence of the Person and power of the Holy Spirit?

iii. These Ephesian disciples sensed their need to get right with God, and knew the answer was in God's Messiah — but they had gone no further than that. They need to go all the way, to trust in everything Jesus is and everything He had done, and to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

iv. "Have ye then received the Spirit since you believed?

Beloved, are you now receiving the Spirit? Are you living under his divine influence? Are you filled with his power? Put the question personally. I am afraid some professors will have to admit that they hardly know whether there be any Holy Ghost; and others will have to confess that though they have enjoyed a little of his saving work, yet they do not know much of his ennobling and sanctifying influence."

v. God always wants us to go deeper. We tend to sip where we could drink deeply; we drink deeply where we could wade in, and we wade in where we could plunge in and swim. Most of us need to be encouraged to go deeper and further into the things of the Holy Spirit.

vi. If someone doesn't seem to *know* if they have the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in their life, it's fair to assume that they *don't have it*. If you have it, you should know it. "Give a man an electric shock, and I warrant you he will know it; but if he has the Holy Ghost, he will know it much more." This isn't something to *hope* about; we can *know* — one can *know* they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

B. Paul's continuing ministry in the city of Ephesus.

1. ([Acts 19:8-10](#)) Paul eventually leaves the synagogue and begins teaching in a borrowed school building.

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

a. **He went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three**

months: Paul had an extended time of preaching in the synagogue, but eventually, the influence of the Jews who rejected the message drove him out. He then resumed his teaching in the hall of a Gentile teacher named Tyrannus (**reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus**).

i. One ancient, though not inspired, writing says that Paul held his meetings at the school of Tyrannus from eleven in the morning to four in the afternoon. This was the time most people rested from work, including Paul, who worked to support himself while in Ephesus ([Acts 20:34-35](#)). These also may have been the “off hours” for the school of Tyrannus.

ii. Paul did this **daily**, meaning every day. Considering his extended time in Ephesus, this meant many hundreds of hours of teaching. It is no wonder that the work in Ephesus was so broad and effective.

b. **And this continued for two years**: Paul carried this on for two years, and his effective teaching equipped believers, who got the word of God out to **all who dwelt in Asia**.

i. By himself, there was no way that Paul could reach this region. But he could equip Christians to do the work of the ministry, just as he described in [Ephesians 4:11-12](#).

2. ([Acts 19:11-12](#)) Unusual miracles in Ephesus.

Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

a. **Now God worked unusual miracles**: Luke states these were **unusual** miracles and gives an example; that Paul's **handkerchiefs or aprons** (literally, "sweat-bands") could be laid on a person even without Paul present, and that person was healed or delivered from demonic possession.

i. It was unusual for God to use **handkerchiefs or aprons** in such a way. "The pieces of material were presumably those which Paul used in his tentmaking or leather-working — the sweat-rags for tying around his head and the aprons for tying around his waist."

b. Handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to

the sick: We don't really know how this worked, other than the same way that the shadow of Peter ([Acts 5:15](#)) or the hem of Jesus' garment ([Matthew 14:36](#)) might heal: the item became a point of contact by which a person released faith in Jesus as healer.

i. We can imagine this happening at first almost by accident — perhaps a person in need of healing took a handkerchief from Paul in a superstitious manner and was healed. But it became a pattern that others imitated. As we will see, the superstitious practice of magic and sorcery was prevalent in Ephesus. So, it should not surprise us that some took a quite superstitious view of the miracles done through Paul.

ii. God will stoop down to meet us even in our crude superstitions. This never means that God is pleased with our superstition, but that in His mercy He may overlook them to meet a need.

iii. I remember seeing what looked to be loosely rolled up newspapers on a pulpit in Bulgaria, being told they were pieces of fabric (wrapped in newspapers) that the pastor prayed over, and they were taken home to sick people. This was a common practice in these Bulgarian churches.

c. **God worked unusual miracles**: This phrase could be translated, *miracles not of the ordinary kind*. Even if we should expect miracles, these were the unexpected kind of miracles.

i. Note that these were *unusual* miracles; we should not expect that God would continue to use this method to bring healing.

ii. God seems to like doing things in new and different ways.

Therefore, we *receive* whatever is proven to be from the hand of God, but we *pursue* only that which we have a Biblical pattern for.

iii. Significantly, it does not say that *Paul* did these unusual miracles, but that **God worked** them **by the hands of Paul**.

3. ([Acts 19:13-16](#)) A rebuke to the seven sons of Sceva, the hopeful Jewish exorcists.

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

a. **Some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists:** At that time, there were Jewish exorcists who practiced their trade with a lot of superstition and ceremony. Here, a group of **itinerant Jewish exorcists** tried to imitate what they thought was Paul’s formula for success.

b. **We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches:**

The **Jewish exorcists** failed because they had no personal relationship with Jesus. They only knew that Jesus was the God of Paul, not their own God.

ii. We could say that the sons of Sceva did not have *the right* to use the name of Jesus, because they had no real personal connection to Him. In the same pattern, there are many people — many churchgoers — who will perish in hell because they have no personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They only know “the Jesus the pastor preaches” or “the Jesus my spouse believes in” instead of the Jesus of their own salvation.

c. **And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”** The evil spirit knew exactly who Jesus was, and knew exactly who Paul was. But they didn’t know who the **seven sons of Sceva** were. Apparently, evil spirits know who their enemies are (in this case, **Jesus** and **Paul**), and they don’t waste their effort knowing those who aren’t a threat to them (in this case, the **seven sons of Sceva**).

d. **Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them:** Because the **seven sons of Sceva** had no real relationship with Jesus, they had no spiritual power against the **evil spirit**. They left the

encounter **naked and wounded**. It was dangerous for them to take the reality of spiritual warfare lightly.

4. ([Acts 19:17-20](#)) Many in Ephesus renounce objects associated with the demonic.

This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. So, the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

a. **This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all:** The incident with the sons of Sceva impressed the people with the reality of the demonic realm. It made them fear the Lord and the demonic (both in healthy ways). As a result, **the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.**

i. “Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan. Here many evil things both superstitious and satanic were practiced. Books containing formula for sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city.”

b. **Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds**: Apparently, before the sons of Sceva incident, many believers did not *know* they were involved in the demonic. They saw their actions in a far more innocent light, until they knew the reality of demonic activity.

c. **Many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all**: The sons of Sceva incident also prompted Christians to renounce any remaining connection to the demonic. They renounced the demonic by **confessing** and by burning their magic books, disregarding whatever value they had.

i. It is significant that these practitioners of magic **came confessing and telling their deeds**. It was thought that the

power of these magic spells was in their *secrecy*, which was renounced in the telling.

ii. These **books** and scrolls full of magic charms, amulets and incantations were well known in Ephesus, and they were valuable. The value of **fifty thousand pieces of silver** today has been estimated at anywhere between \$1 million and \$5 million.

iii. Christians must do this also today, removing books, images, computer files, statues, charms, games, or whatever else might have connection with demonic spirits. They should also destroy them so they are of no use to others.

iv. “You will have enough temptation in your own mind without going after these things. Is there any habit, any practice, that you have got that defiles your soul? If Christ loves you, and you come and trust in him, you will make short work of it. Have done with it and have done with it forever.”

d. **The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed**: This demonstrates that the end result was obviously worth it all. The

work in Ephesus and the region of Roman Asia continued in a remarkable way.

C. The riot in Ephesus.

1. ([Acts 19:21-22](#)) Paul's companions leave him alone in Ephesus.

When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.

a. **Paul purposed in the Spirit:** Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul determined his itinerary. He decided to travel through Macedonia and Achaia, then to Jerusalem, then to Rome.

i. Luke doesn't mention it here, but we know that one reason why Paul wanted to go through Macedonia and Achaia, then to Jerusalem was to collect and deliver a fund he had been

collecting from other churches to help out the church in Jerusalem ([Romans 15:25-31](#); [1 Corinthians 16:1-4](#)).

ii. **I must also see Rome** reflects Paul's passion to visit and serve the Christian community that was already there. That passion is also mentioned in [Romans 1:8-15](#).

b. **So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus**: Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead to Macedonia, while he stayed in Ephesus (**Asia**) for a time.

c. **Who ministered to him**: A significant part of the work of Timothy and Erastus was simply to help Paul. They were truly assistants to the apostle, helping Paul to maximize his ministry.

2. ([Acts 19:23-28](#)) **Demetrius, a maker of idols, opposes Paul because his business has suffered.**

And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our

prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.” Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, “Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!”

a. **About that time there arose a great commotion about the**

Way: When the work was going so well, and when Paul was thinking about leaving Ephesus, another **commotion** arose.

Again, for the third time in Acts (and the second time in this chapter) the Christian movement is called **the Way**.

b. **This trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised**

and her magnificence destroyed: This tremendous temple to Diana (also known as Artemis) in Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by

127 pillars, each 60 feet high, and was decorated with great sculptures. It was lost to history until it was discovered in 1869, and its main altar was unearthed in 1965.

i. “The epicenter of Artemis worship was a black meteorite that either resembled or had been fashioned into a grotesque image of a woman. The lower part was wrapped like a mummy...the idol was covered with breasts, symbolizing fertility.”

ii. “The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.”

iii. **Whom all Asia and the world worship:** The temple of Diana in Ephesus was indeed famous around the world. The trinkets and idols from it must have been a substantial trade, no matter how immoral the worship of the sex-goddess was.

c. **This Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands:**

The opposition of Demetrius and the other idol makers was a

great compliment to the effectiveness of Paul's work in the region. Paul was not on a campaign to close down the temple of Diana; he just did the Lord's work. As people came to Jesus, they naturally stopped worshipping Diana and buying shrines associated with the temple.

i. Christianity should affect the economy — not just personally, but in a community as well. This effect will not always be welcomed. In Ephesus, business was down at the pagan shrines because of the transforming work of the Jesus Christ. This happens again and again as Jesus does His work. For example, a Roman official named Pliny later wrote a letter to another official named Trajan, describing how people were not going to shrines anymore because of Christian influence. Pliny wanted to know what he should do about it.

ii. This is how we should endeavor to change society. "I wish the gospel would affect the trade of London; I wish it might. There are some trades that need affecting, need to be cut a little shorter...Not by an Act of Parliament! Let Acts of

Parliament leave us alone. We can fight that battle alone. But may it come to an end by the spread of the gospel...I have no faith in any reformation that does not come through men's hearts being changed."

d. **Also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship:** Demetrius was clever in how he spoke to the crowd. He first appealed to them both on the basis of financial self-interest, and then on the basis of civic pride ("How dare Paul insult and despise our great temple!").

i. **Whom all Asia and the world worship** is the "everybody does it" argument. "Everybody does this" and "everybody thinks this" are not eloquent arguments, but they are powerful.

ii. Yet in [Acts 19:37](#), the city clerk specifically said that Paul had *not* blasphemed the goddess Diana. Paul was on a pro-Jesus campaign more than an anti-everything else campaign.

3. ([Acts 19:29-34](#)) The riot builds momentum.

So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!"

- a. **The whole city was filled with confusion and rushed into the theater with one accord:** Considering Rome's iron-fisted attitude towards such civil disorder, things were rapidly getting out of hand.

i. It has often happened in the history of Christianity that when God moves among His people and they become very serious about their Christianity, that it affects the livelihood of those who trade in vice or immorality. For example, in the early years of the Salvation Army, they were so effective that pimps and bar owners organized a “Skeleton Army” to oppose them with threats and violence — and even a few Salvation Army workers were murdered.

b. **They drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews**

putting him forward: Alexander wanted to make sure that the mob knew that the Jews did not approve of Paul either; but he accomplished nothing before the angry crowd.

c. **Great is Diana of the Ephesians!** This repeated chant must have sent a chill up the backs of the Christians, including Paul who no doubt could hear it from outside the theater.

i. “The noise must have been deafening. The acoustics of the theater are excellent even today and at that time were even

better because of bronze and clay sounding vessels placed throughout the auditorium.”

ii. For two hours they shouted, “**Great is Diana of the Ephesians!**” Think of how this echoes to our own time, and see the strangeness of our world. People say today, in words, actions, time or dollars spent:

- “Great is my sports team!”
- “Great is my political party!”
- “Great is the consumer economy!”
- “Great is internet porn!”
- “Great is material wealth!”
- “Great is getting drunk or getting high!”

And yet if one says, “Great is the Lord Jesus Christ” — *they* are regarded by many as strange.

iii. For all the supposed greatness of Diana of the Ephesians, no one worships her today (at least directly). Yet there are

millions and millions today who live for and worship Jesus Christ, and who would willingly die for Him. Idols and false gods all have expiration dates — Jesus of Nazareth lives forever.

4. ([Acts 19:35-41](#)) The city clerk is able to calm the passion of the crowd.

And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: “Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. For we are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar, there being no reason which we

may give to account for this disorderly gathering.” And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

a. **Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly:** The **city clerk** (something like the mayor of the city) spoke sensible words. Luke wanted to show that rational people saw nothing to fear or oppose in Christianity.

i. God worked mightily in Ephesus, but so did the devil. This may be one reason why Paul wrote so specifically about the spiritual battle each Christian faces against powers of spiritual darkness in his letter to the Ephesians ([Ephesians 6:10-20](#)).

ii. “This chapter teaches us all a permanent lesson: that when disciples have a true *revival*, society gets a *revolution*. When the Spirit moves mightily upon children of God we may look for other mighty movements among unbelievers, and need not be surprised if the devil himself comes down, having great wrath, as though he knew that his time were short.”

b. **He dismissed the assembly**: God used the city clerk to calm the mob and end the immediate threat to Paul and the other Christians. God had preserved His work, and His people, again.

i. **Assembly** in [Acts 19:41](#) is the Greek word *ekklesia*, the same word used for “church.” It was a non-religious term used to describe a gathering or association of people.