

Acts

Part 48 – “A Clash of Kingdoms”

Acts 19:1-20

Paul's second missionary journey saw several highly significant developments. During this period he went both to Corinth and Ephesus. He spent close to two years in Corinth and three in Ephesus. Both were large and important cities in terms of commerce and regional impact. Ephesus was a center for pagan religious observance famous for its temple to Artemis, one of the wonders of the ancient world. Paul's ministry in Corinth gave us the apostle's most personally revealing epistle (2 Corinthians). His ministry in Ephesus led to, along with Romans, his most theologically rich epistle (Ephesians).



Through Paul's ministry of preaching to both Jews and Gentiles the Kingdom of God broke into a major center of pagan worship with life changing power.

Main Idea: The proclamation of the Kingdom of God, that is Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen, will bring about opposition from the kingdom of Satan.

Setting the Stage

Vv. 1-7

Paul meets “some disciples” who had not yet been baptized according to Jesus’ command nor had they received the Holy Spirit. It should not be surprising that at this moment in redemptive history there were pockets of individuals still possessing an Old Testament, anticipatory faith that had not yet received the news of Jesus’ redemptive work and the giving of the Holy Spirit. So Paul brings them up-to-date in their knowledge of the Kingdom of God. They responded obediently to the apostle’s call to believe and were baptized properly. Paul then laid hands upon them whereupon they received the Holy Spirit which was accompanied with the confirmation of certain manifestations.

It is important to remember that these events take place during a unique moment in redemptive history. Therefore we should not make normative what the Scriptures present as exceptional. For instance John 2 is not an instruction on how to get wine at a wedding. It is about who Jesus is. This event was in part a means toward establishing Paul’s status as a genuine apostle (There were those who consistently challenged Paul’s status as an apostle). Just as Peter and the others were present at Pentecost, this event in Ephesus acts a sort of “little Pentecost” verifying that Paul should be considered in the same “league” as Peter.

Vs. 7 – The relationship between baptism and the demonstration of the Spirit’s presence is varied in Acts. Sometimes the signs of the Spirit’s presence are given **at** baptism (2:38; 8:38-9 and here in 19:6), sometimes **before** baptism (10:47), and sometimes **after** baptism (8:15-16). What is more, it is important to remember that these charismatic manifestations of the Holy Spirit apparently occurred only spasmodically and there are conversions and baptisms in Acts without them (8:39 — the Ethiopian eunuch — 16:34 — the Philippian jailer).

1. The First Priority

Vv. 8-10

Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was successful even though he is forbidden from meeting in the synagogue. He simply moves to a public hall and teaches for two years.

Paul the Pastor

Luke highlights Paul's ministry of preaching in three descriptions (Vs. 8):

- Bold speech
- Reasoning
- Persuasion about God's Kingdom

Rather than allow these young converts to be continually exposed to the slanders of the unbelieving Jews Paul moves his ministry to a public hall. There he taught them for two years. This probably amounted to thousands of hours of instruction.

The Sufficiency of the Word

This episode, just like we have seen repeatedly in Acts, demonstrates the sufficiency of the Word for the conversion of sinners and the building up the church.

2. The Inevitable Opposition

Vv. 11-16

- Where the Kingdom of God advances, the kingdom of Satan resists, often violently. In this episode, the real enemy is unmasked. Behind all opposition to Christ's church and his gospel is Satan.
- Ephesus was a pagan city dominated by the world famous Temple of Artemis. Around this cult was built up a large and profitable complex of financial and social structures. It must also be acknowledged that this false and perverse religion represented a spiritual beachhead for the kingdom of Satan.
- Power is a prominent theme of this section. God grants to Paul "extraordinary miracles" (Vs. 11). At this moment of redemptive history it was vital that 1) God's Word be established as having all authority, 2) Paul's credentials as an apostle be confirmed, and 3) the god Artemis be exposed as false.
- But God will not allow his power to be used by human manipulation. While God accommodates our weakness through gracious self-disclosure he will not surrender his power to the whims of man. The sons of Sceva sought to use the names of Jesus and Paul as magical talismans in order to command spiritual forces. God's power may never be used in such a way. And even the demons possessing that poor soul in Ephesus understood that.
- Ironically, the fact that Jesus' name could not be used as magic word prompted the citizens of Ephesus to praise him all the more.



3. The Necessary Change

Vv. 17-20

- Disruption is the always the result of conversions in a pagan world. We will see this especially in the following passage (19:21ff) where the city's economy is disrupted by mass conversions to Christ. Here we are told that those being converted out of their pagan practices brought the symbols and trinkets of their paganism to be burned (vs. 19). This was a necessary act of repentance. We cannot follow Jesus and keep a grip on our idols.
- The growth of the church is synonymous with the growth of the Word of God (6:7; 9:3; 12:24; 19:20).