

18:24-21:16 - Paul's Third Missionary Journey (part 2)

Paul in Ephesus – Acts 18:24-19:41 (cont'd)

19:8 *And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.*

19:9 *But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.*

19:10 *This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*

The response of the Jews was typical for them. Nothing about Tyrannus is known, although he appears to be an educator or philosopher.

What is clear is that Paul's ministry resulted in all of Asia hearing the gospel.

19:11 *God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,*

19:12 *so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.*

Miracles are almost exclusively restricted in the Bible to times of new revelation. Miracles tended to come in clusters. For example, there are numerous miracles around the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. Next, about 500 years later around 1000BC, there is another cluster of miracles at the beginning of the prophetic movement in the times of Elijah and Elisha validating the power of God. Another 500 years pass, and there are miracles around the time of Daniel when Israel is uprooted from the land of promise and exiled from her land. Then another 500 years pass until the coming of Christ, and during the period of the formation of the church there is another cluster. Other than these four clusters, miracles are almost non-existent in the pages of the Bible. In fact, after this miracle in Acts 19:11-12, no other miracle is recorded by Luke in the remainder of the years covered by the book.

The miracles that God was performing by Paul are described as extraordinary; that is, they were not typical even for miracles. Four observations can be made:

1. Luke views these miracles as *extraordinary*. He does not regard them as typical even for a miracle. Miracles by nature are extraordinary; they are the invasion of the power of God into our world in ways that we have not experienced. But these were extraordinary even among extraordinary events. This had no parallel, or no frame of reference, to help explain what was going on. It was unusual even in an age where miracles had been occurring by Christ and His apostles.
2. Luke does not view these as magic. He purposefully contrasts the miracles done at the hands of Paul to the magical practices that the Ephesian believers renounced in verses 18 and 19.

3. These miracles of Paul should be seen for what they actually were. They were the signs of an apostle; they were Paul's apostolic credentials. Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 12:12 where he says, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." Likewise, in Romans 15:18-19 Paul says, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me. . . in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit. . ." In other words, these signs were Christ's validating seals of Paul's apostolic credentials.

If we were to speculate as to why the Spirit worked this way through Paul, it may be because Ephesus was a prominent center of idolatry; it was a noted center of magical practices. These extraordinary miracles had the effect of demonstrating the superiority of the power of the risen Christ over their magic. In other words, it was a clash of power that allowed the people to see before their eyes the power of the Christ whom Paul preached.

4. In Acts 19:12, as in the Gospels, demon possession is distinguished from illness. The peoples' illnesses were cured and evil spirits left them.

In conclusion, the wisest attitude to take toward the miracles is neither to deny them nor try to imitate them as some attempt to do today. Rather, we should see them as Paul's apostolic credentials and as the display of Christ's power over the kingdom of darkness. In fact, as Chapter 19 continues we see this as a theme. The casting out of evil spirits in verse 12 leads to the story of some Jewish exorcists who believed that they could tap into the power of the name of Jesus to perform their exorcisms.

19:13 But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches."

19:14 Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.

19:15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

19:16 And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Verses 13-16 present the scene of seven exorcists in contrast to the one missionary, Paul.

Exorcism was a common practice among Jews in the ancient world. In practice, it was believed that the use of a correct and powerful name was needed to overpower a demon. The fact that Paul had cast out demons via handkerchiefs and aprons left an indelible impression about the extent of Jesus' power.

The seven sons of a Jewish chief priest (that is, a priest who was a member of the high priestly family) who were exorcists, decided they would use the name of Jesus to cast out a demon. The formula they chose was to cast the demon out "in the name of Jesus *whom Paul preaches.*" That is, they didn't preach Christ themselves; they just thought they could access His power. But receiving Jesus' power is not mechanical, nor can people use it secondhand. Their attempt backfired; the evil spirit didn't acknowledge them but instead the demoniac jumped on them and beat them to the point where they

ran out of the house naked and bleeding. The shame of having been stripped of their robes and left naked, and the fact that they fled having been beaten heightens the total failure of their efforts.

Experiences with the demonic was what led Paul to write to the Ephesians, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

19:17 This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.

19:18 Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

19:19 And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

19:20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

The incident became so well-known that it resulted in many believing in Christ.

Three effects can be seen from these power encounters:

1. They were seized with fear (19:17). They began to take the living God seriously. God, when rightly understood, is feared.
2. The name of the Lord Jesus was extolled (19:17). It wasn't Paul's name that was held in high honor; it was the name of Jesus. This is the ultimate evidence of a genuine work of God. Jesus is extolled for who He is; the preacher fades in the background. In Philippians 3:3, Paul says that the mark of a true Christian is one who worships by the Spirit of God, who *glories in Christ Jesus*, and puts no confidence in the flesh.
3. Believers were given the strength to publically confess their sinful, idolatrous practices and burn their books in front of everyone.

God had so opened their eyes that they could see darkness for what it was. This was so significant that Luke mentions that the burned books were worth 50,000 pieces of silver. A piece of silver was a day's wage, so about 50,000 days' wages worth of books were burned, or about 137 years worth of wages!

Their willingness to throw them on the bonfire instead of just selling them was a sign that they were truly converted. What is being described is repentance; it is turning our backs on everything that is dishonoring to Christ and walking in His ways. 2 Corinthians 5:17: “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

These were the effects of the preaching of the word and these extraordinary signs performed by Paul. Thus, the word of the Lord kept increasing among the people: “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” Luke's selection of the words “mightily” and “prevailing” (lit. to be strong, have

power) were no accidents for what has been described, beginning from verse 8, is a power struggle. Through the radical transformation of lives the word of God prevailed and grew.

19:21 Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

19:22 And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

Paul decided to go to Jerusalem after passing through Macedonia and Achaia. According to Acts 24:17, Romans 15:25ff, and 1 Corinthians 16:1-8, he went that way to collect offerings from the churches there for Christians in Judea who were poverty-stricken. Thus, he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to make preparations. His desire was ultimately to go to Rome, another great metropolis.

19:23 About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way.

19:24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;

19:25 these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.

19:26 "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.

19:27 "Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence."

19:28 When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

19:29 The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.

19:30 And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him.

19:31 Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.

19:32 So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.

19:33 Some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly.

19:34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Artemis (or the Roman equivalent, Diana) was an extremely popular goddess in Ephesus. She was goddess of the hunt, wild animals, the wilderness, the moon, virginity, and the protector of childbirth. She was the daughter of Zeus, the king of the gods, and her twin brother was Apollo. The temple

dedicated to the goddess was one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world being four times the size of the Parthenon. It had pillars 60 feet high and was about 425 feet by 225 feet. It was the largest building in the Greek world. Travelers to Ephesus would come and buy small shrines to take home with them. However, the gospel had come to dethrone every false god and re-establish the throne of God in the peoples' lives. This happened in dramatic ways in verse 19: "many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone." In speaking to the Thessalonians Paul said, "you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (I Thess. 1:9). Paul's preaching was so influential that people were not buying as many idols as they did before. As a result, there was an economic loss to those who made the shrines and statues of the gods, particularly those of goddess Artemis.

Demetrius, the silversmith, therefore stirred up the other craftsmen to riot against the Christians. Of course, he didn't appeal to their covetousness, but said that the goddess herself was falling into disrepute and that she would no longer be worshipped. The ordinary people didn't care if Demetrius went out of business, but they were concerned about the possibility that the Temple of Artemis might lose its prominent position, and the goddess herself be dethroned.

Soon the people were shouting in the streets "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

In 19:31 Luke rightfully calls the leading citizens "Asiarchs." These were prominent members of the provincial Council of Asia, some of whom were friends with Paul (19:31).

As more and more people gathered, it became more and more muddled as to why they were there.

The appropriate place for a public meeting of any size in many Greek cities was the open air theatre. In Ephesus one has been excavated that is estimated to be able to hold about 25,000 people.

The goal of the mob was to persuade city officials to take action against the missionaries. Therefore, they laid hold of whomever they could; in this case, they grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus who traveled with Paul.



Paul wanted to appear before the mob, but was restrained by his friends from doing so.

Due to the confusion of the crowd, the Jews had Alexander represent them to make sure that the crowds understood that the Jews had no part with the Christians. He motioned for the crowd to be quiet,

but they would have nothing to do with the Jew lecturing them. Instead they chanted for two hours "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."

19:35 *After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven?"*

19:36 *"So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.*

19:37 *"For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.*

19:38 *"So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another.*

19:39 *"But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.*

19:40 *"For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering."*

19:41 *After saying this he dismissed the assembly.*

The city clerk had a position of some importance.

Ephesus had certain freedoms as a city, but the freedoms could be revoked if Rome felt that there was a tumult. If the stability of society was being threatened, Rome could withdraw these privileges so the town clerk stepped in and began to speak.

God used the city clerk providentially to preserve the proclamation of the gospel and protect the people of God.

So the crowd was quieted and the Christians continued to preach the gospel.

Paul's experience can be summed up in his letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 he said, "I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."

Paul was willing to risk his life to go through open doors.