

*<sup>1</sup> And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.* Acts 19:1a At the close of the last chapter, Aquila and Priscilla had stayed in Ephesus to strengthen the church. Apollos had felt led by the Spirit to leave Ephesus and go to the region of Achaia. Our chapter starts with Apollos now preaching in Corinth. Paul had been away from the area for about a year and now is returning to Ephesus over an inland route. He had previously preached in the synagogue there and was invited to come back.

*There he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."* Acts 19:1b-2 Upon arriving, Paul met a group of men who were "disciples," which is to say learners or students of a rabbi. KJV mistranslates Paul's question as "since you believed." Paul is asking when they came to faith did it result in the infilling of the Spirit? We have seen already in Acts that those who believe are filled with the Spirit at the time they believe or when they are baptized. Paul's question was to determine what exactly they believed and if it was saving faith. Was their faith in Jesus as the ransom for their sins? Was it sealed by the infilling of the Spirit (Eph. 1:13<sup>i</sup>).

It is obvious from the following verses that they had no knowledge of Jesus or what He had done. Apparently, they had met John the Baptist sometime during his ministry and were baptized by him. John's baptism was one of repentance to prepare one's heart for the coming Messiah. But these men did not know the Messiah had come and fulfilled the prophecies concerning the suffering servant (Isaiah 53:5-6<sup>ii</sup>). They must have left John and returned to Ephesus before John proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29<sup>iii</sup>). John proclaimed that Jesus would baptize people with the Spirit. They must not have heard that message either, for they said they didn't know there was a Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16<sup>iv</sup>). The sentence could also imply that they had not yet heard the Spirit had been poured out. That is more likely the meaning as Jews acknowledged the Spirit of God at that time in history.

*<sup>3</sup> And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism."* Acts 19:3 Into what were you initiated? There were many types of baptisms. When a person was baptized into something, it was a belief that superseded all previous beliefs. Paul said the Jews were baptized into Moses when they passed through the sea (1Corinthians 10:2<sup>v</sup>). John baptized people into repentance to prepare their hearts for the Messiah. But when we are baptized into Jesus, it means we trust His death was judgment for our sins. They responded that it was John's baptism.

*<sup>4</sup> And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."<sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* Acts 19:4-5 Paul shared with them the main part of John's message that they had missed. John preached that we were to believe in the One who was to come after him, that is, Jesus (Luke 7:19<sup>vi</sup>). If they believed John the Baptist was a prophet then they should accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Paul certainly would have gone on to explain what Jesus' death and resurrection meant to them. Then they believed and were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

*<sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.* Acts 19:6-7 These twelve men also had the gift of tongues confirming that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. In addition to the gift of a prayer language, they also prophesied, which is to speak forth the Word of God for a given people in that moment. More than just expounding on the Word, it is a timely word from the Holy Spirit which confirmed the Spirit's presence in them.

The fact that the Holy Spirit infills those who have faith in Jesus has been often underemphasized and in some cases overemphasized. Some believers downplay the role of the Holy Spirit because they don't want their lives interrupted by His conviction and direction. The overemphasis is sometimes seen in a dependency on feelings with little guidance from the Word of God. **The balance every believer should strive to find is to yield our lives to the Holy Spirit's guidance while checking what we believe the Spirit is leading us to do or say with the Word of God.** We should all discover the gifts that God has given us so that we can build one another up. That is the purpose of all the gifts except the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:4<sup>vii</sup>).

*<sup>8</sup> And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.* Acts 19:8 The synagogue had invited Paul to come back and he promised he would if the Lord was willing. God was willing. This is the longest he was permitted to preach Jesus as the Messiah in any one synagogue. During those three months, he certainly would have been able to fully explain from the Scriptures how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies. We see the same words we have seen several times before, reason and persuade. His subject was the kingdom of God, a kingdom of the people of faith who are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20<sup>viii</sup>), just like Abraham the father of faith (Hebrews 11:10)<sup>ix</sup>. It is an eternal kingdom with an eternal King, Christ Jesus. His reign is predicted throughout the Old Testament (Isaiah 9:7<sup>x</sup>; Psalm 89:4<sup>xi</sup>). Paul preached Jesus with boldness. The previous persecution and suffering did not cause him to water down the message.

*<sup>9</sup> But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.* Acts 19:9-10 Some of the Jews refused to have an open debate and instead became hardened against the Spirit and started to call the gospel, referred to as the Way, "evil." In other words, trusting Jesus as our way to God, counting on His death as the atonement for our sins and the types and shadows of the Messiah in the Law, was being called a deception by those who were too stubborn to hear the Good News. That is when you know your work is done and people will make up their minds for or against the gospel (Ezekiel 3:19<sup>xii</sup>).

The disciples in Ephesus now began meeting at a public place of teaching. It was called the hall of Tyrannus. Tyrannus probably taught there in the cool hours of the day and rented it to Paul during the hot hours. Tyrannus name means tyrant. It makes one wonder if his students gave him that name?

One manuscript adds that Paul taught every day between 11am to 4 pm. I suppose anyone could come during their mid-day break and hear Paul teach and dialog with him and ask questions. It went on for two years! Imagine if there was a hunger like that to hear the Word in our city. What if Jordan Hall was open to the public for lunch hour and crowds came to hear Paul teach and ask questions. That might give us a sense of what it was like during Paul's time in Ephesus.

Ephesus was the commercial center of Asia. By teaching the Word in a public setting, merchants who went throughout the region then referred to as Asia took the Word with them. That is not what we call Asia today, but was a province of Asia Minor. Both Jews and Greeks in that region heard about the gospel. There was a large Jewish population in that city and Paul was as likely to meet Jews as to meet Greeks in the city streets. This was the climax of Paul's ministry as a free man (1 Corinthians 16:9<sup>xiii</sup>). He spent more time in Ephesus than any other single location (Acts 20:31<sup>xiv</sup>), and because he did, churches were planted throughout the region by those he discipled.

Since this method was so successful, we might think a public Bible school led by a Christian apologist should be opened in New York. Never try to use a method that someone else found successful unless you are led to do so by the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit that led Paul to do something different in Ephesus, and when we obey the Spirit, God produces the fruit (John 15:5<sup>xv</sup>). God knows what is most effective in every place and time (Isaiah 55:9<sup>xvi</sup>). Don't limit God to a method. Obedience is the method!

*<sup>11</sup> And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,* Acts 19:11 Notice the wording, "God was doing..." not Paul, though it was through Paul's yielding of himself to the Holy Spirit. The stubborn Jews needed more evidence, and so did the idol trusting Gentiles. The witness of the miracles should have helped them to stop and consider Paul's message. It was also evidence of his apostleship (2 Corinthians 12:12<sup>xvii</sup>).

*<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.* Acts 19:12 This is similar to the power that was present with Peter in Acts 5:15<sup>xviii</sup>, where even his shadow passing over someone would heal them. God allowed what was probably the sweat towels worn around Paul's head and his work aprons to bring healing to those who in faith touched those materials. It reminds us of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment (Luke 8:43-44<sup>xix</sup>). It was evidence that Paul's message was true and should be heeded. This was an extraordinary time when the church was being planted and the gospel was making inroads into the world. I don't think there has been anything quite like it since, except perhaps the great missionary thrust at the beginning of the 1900s. The word "extraordinary" in Greek implies it was a special or

singular event. The Holy Spirit is still working miracles to help people come to faith, especially in regions where darkness of false faiths hinders people from believing. It shows us the extent God will go to help people receive His love.

*13 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.* Acts 19:13-14 There is an important difference in the description of Paul and these itinerants. Verse eleven says that God was doing extraordinary miracles. Verse thirteen says these itinerants undertook to invoke the names of Jesus and Paul. God was not doing the work through them. They thought that just the use of the names had a kind of magical power. These men are referred to as Jewish exorcists and were the seven sons of a man named Sceva, a chief priest. (High priest may be a mistranslation as there is no article before the title or record of a high priest with that name).

*15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"* Acts 19:15 They were presuming to have power that was not granted to them. The demon was irate that these with no power would presume to command him. The evil spirit insulted them. Normally he would be working along with them and all who resisted the Gospel, but since they were invoking Jesus' name without His authority the demonic world was confused as well as being enraged at their set back in Ephesus. They know Jesus is the Lord (Matthew 8:29<sup>xx</sup>; James 2:19<sup>xxi</sup>), and they know Paul is the Lord's servant. But these men were nobodies in the spiritual realm. "Who are you?" the evil spirit asked. The sons of Sceva could not answer, "We are sons of the living God, bought and sanctified by the blood of Jesus!" Can you?

*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.* Acts 19:16 There are numerous accounts of the demon possessed having unnatural power (Mark 5:4<sup>xxii</sup>). That is because the person has no sense of personal safety or fear of tearing muscles or other pain. The evil spirit used the person to overpower the brothers and strip and wound them. Nakedness would add to their shame. What a difference between those in whom God works and those who presume to work in Jesus' name. Just adding Jesus' name to a prayer or command does not make it magical. You must have His authority to invoke His name, the name above all names (Philippians 2:9<sup>xxiii</sup>). If your life is hid with Christ in God, then you have that authority!

*17 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.* Acts 19:17 News of this spread quickly. It wasn't a laughing matter. It caused great fear to fall on all the people of the city. Demonic power was being confronted and it was angry and violent, but those with the authority to invoke Jesus' name were in touch with the greatest power. Suddenly, the spiritual realm became very real to the citizens of Ephesus, and the dark side was not as benevolent as they thought. The result backfired on the realm of evil in that the name of Jesus was extolled.

*18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.* Acts 19:18 The syncretists, those who wanted to follow Christ but hang on to their magical arts, were convicted and knew they couldn't dabble in both worlds. It was too dangerous. One world is love and grace, the other is violent and destructive (John 10:10<sup>xxiv</sup>). It is no different today. I have personally witnessed people in this town who asked for help but didn't want to let go of the demon that was tormenting them. And by the way, one of them referred to her spirit by the same Greek word we saw behind the fortune telling woman in Philippi, the python spirit (Acts 16:16<sup>xxv</sup>).

*19 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. 20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.* Acts 19:19-20 Ephesus was famous for selling magical incantations. The dollar value of those burned is estimated to be between two to six million dollars, and we should note that they did not sell them. They destroyed them so others would not be deceived. That sent a clear message to the demonic realm! We had a sister come out of the new age who destroyed her library and occult objects worth thousands of dollars rather than to put the lies into another's hands. When I came out of the cult I had been in, I burned their books, some of which I had helped publish. We don't just renounce evil. We destroy any of it that is in our possession.

Our passage today has shown us two major lessons. We will meet those with some knowledge of Jesus. They may even claim to be a Christian, and yet the Holy Spirit is not evident by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (Galatians 5:22-23<sup>xxvi</sup>). They need the full message of dying with Jesus and being raised with Him (Romans 6:4<sup>xxvii</sup>). We need to know that by placing our lives in His hands we *will* receive the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to live as witnesses of Jesus (Acts 1:8<sup>xxviii</sup>).

That leads to the second point. Once we come to faith, all other things we placed our trust in should be abandoned once and for all (Luke 14:33<sup>xxix</sup>). If the love of money has ruled our lives, we must practice generosity (1 Timothy 6:17-18<sup>xxx</sup>). If some other religious practice that is not about Jesus remains, it must be rejected. Books and charms and horoscopes or anything that we place faith in other than Jesus must be removed from our homes. It is good that God is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14<sup>xxxi</sup>), for all other things we can place trust in will let us down and keep us from a Spirit filled life.

#### Questions

- 1 Why did Paul go to Ephesus? Who had prepared the soil there?
- 2 How did Paul know the disciples of John were not born again?
- 3 What did Paul do in the synagogue?
- 4 What was the pattern we see when Paul preached there?
- 5 What new tactic did Paul employ? What was the fruit of it?
- 6 Why don't we do the same? 7 What is the purpose of the extraordinary miracles?
- 8 Why didn't the demon obey the Jewish exorcists?
- 9 What convicted the Christians to sell their magic books?
- 10 How can we apply these passages?

---

**<sup>i</sup> Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

**<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah 53:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

**<sup>iii</sup> John 1:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

**<sup>iv</sup> Luke 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**<sup>v</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

**<sup>vi</sup> Luke 7:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

**<sup>vii</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

**<sup>viii</sup> Philippians 3:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

**<sup>ix</sup> Hebrews 11:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

**<sup>x</sup> Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

**<sup>xi</sup> Psalm 89:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah

**<sup>xii</sup> Ezekiel 3:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

**<sup>xiii</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

**<sup>xiv</sup> Acts 20:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

**<sup>xv</sup> John 15:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

**<sup>xvi</sup> Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

---

<sup>xvii</sup> **2 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Acts 5:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.

<sup>xix</sup> **Luke 8:43-44 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone.

<sup>44</sup> She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased.

<sup>xx</sup> **Matthew 8:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

<sup>xxi</sup> **James 2:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

<sup>xxii</sup> **Mark 5:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Philippians 2:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

<sup>xxiv</sup> **John 10:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Acts 16:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Romans 6:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

<sup>xxix</sup> **Luke 14:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

<sup>xxx</sup> **1 Timothy 6:17-18 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

<sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Exodus 34:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God),