

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Keith Chuvala, Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com

The Third Missionary Journey: Ephesus

1. Twelve Ephesians receive the Holy Spirit ([19:1-7](#))
2. Paul's long ministry in Ephesus ([19:8-10](#))
3. Unusual miracles in Ephesus ([19:11-15](#))
4. The seven sons of Sceva ([19:16-20](#))
5. Riot in Ephesus ([19:21-41](#))

Twelve Ephesians receive the Holy Spirit ([19:1-7](#))

Paul was last in Ephesus on his way back from Corinth on his second missionary journey. In the previous chapter he promised he's be back, and now we see him making good on that promise.

Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?: Something about this small group of disciples prompted this question. There's no indication that it was typical for him to ask this question. It was likely something about the way they talked about their faith, or perhaps the way they responded to what they were hearing from Paul.

We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit: With this reply, these disciples showed that they didn't yet know much about God's nature, as revealed in – and talked about by! – Jesus. Some have suggested that this group were not really Christians yet. I'm not convinced of that, though, and think that they were indeed followers of Jesus by faith, because they are identified as disciples. But they clearly didn't know about all Jesus did for us, in particular in His promise to send the Holy Spirit at the time of His Ascension.

So, this appears to be a group other than the one that Paul originally spoke to in Ephesus in chapter 18, whom he'd left Aquila and Priscilla there to serve. You'll recall that Aquila and Priscilla were with Paul for a year and a half in Corinth, and it from his letters to the Corinthians we know that Paul taught them about the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit. This group of "some disciples", then, was probably newer converts, not the larger group that started the church in Ephesus.

... John's baptism: These disciples had a basic understanding about Jesus being the Messiah, and of His ministry, from the message originally preached by John the Baptist. They were in the same place as Apollos before Aquila and Priscilla "explained the way of God more accurately" in chapter 18. We don't know if any of them received baptism from the hands of John himself; it seems more likely that they heard the message from some of John's disciples who continued on in his ministry after his beheading.

John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance: Paul points out that John's baptism was one of repentance, pointing ahead to the atoning sacrifice Jesus ("Behold, the Lamb of God!"), but was distinct from baptism into Christ.

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus: Having been prepared by the preaching of John the Baptist, and now more fully informed by Paul's message, and wanted to be baptized in Jesus' name.

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. Paul wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians during his stay in Ephesus, and 1 Corinthians in particular has a lot to say about person and work of the Holy Spirit. No doubt encounters like this informed Paul's inspired writing.

Now the men were about twelve in all: So that's an interesting number, isn't it? If nothing else, this reminds us that people in the church in Ephesus were in very different places in their knowledge and maturity in the Gospel – just like every other church! However, I don't think the fact that the size of this group is specifically mentioned -- and specifically identified as 12 -- is a coincidence. The Holy Spirit was going to work through these 12 now. Sound familiar? Hmmmm?

It's also interesting and informative, that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not fully given to people until or unless they understand and/or are baptized in "the name of Jesus."

Gratuitous navel-gazing question: How do you think would your life be different without the influence of the Holy Spirit? Or about your awareness of His gifts?

"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." -- Spurgeon

Paul's long ministry in Ephesus ([19:8-10](#))

He went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months: We might think it would be a mighty blessing to hear Paul preach and teach for such an extended time, but eventually the influence of the Jews who rejected the Gospel of Christ drove him out. He resumed teaching in the school of a Gentile teacher named Tyrannus.

One extra-Biblical source 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 we later learn worked to support himself while in Ephesus (Acts 20:34-35). These were also the “off hours” for the school of Tyrannus. (<https://www.israeljerusalem.com/school-of-tyrannus.htm>)

And this continued for two years: Considering this long stay in Ephesus, this meant Paul preached and taught for hundreds of hours. It is no wonder, then, that the work in Ephesus was so broad and effective! Of course, by himself, there was no way that Paul could reach this entire region. But he could equip Christians (e.g., the 12 baptized above!) to carry out the work of the ministry, just as he describes in Ephesians 4:11-12.

Unusual miracles in Ephesus ([19:11-15](#))

Now God worked unusual miracles: Luke specifically states that 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.

It was unusual for God to use objects in such a way. We don’t really know how this worked. But we are reminded that the shadow of Peter (Acts 5:15), and the hem of Jesus’ garment (Matthew 14:36) were used to heal. So while unusual, it’s not necessarily unprecedented.

Superstitions, and the practice of magic and sorcery were prevalent in Ephesus. So word of this sort of “magic” would spread quickly. Perhaps this is an example of God stooping down to meet people even in their crude superstitions. In any case these are identified as unusual miracles; we should not expect that God continues to use this method for healing in the regular course of life. He can, of

course but it's solely His decision to do so! So we gratefully receive gifts that are proven to be from the hand of God, but we pursue only that which He promises to us in His Word.

The seven sons of Sceva ([19:16-20](#))

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.

We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches: This appeal to authority fails because these men themselves had no personal faith in or relationship with Jesus. They knew that Jesus was the God of Paul, not their own God. Rites, ceremonies, and invocations are in and of themselves useless and meaningless when practiced outside of faith in Christ alone.

...The evil spirit answered... "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

Apparently, evil spirits know who their real enemies are (those who confront them in the Name and power of Jesus), but don't waste their effort knowing those who aren't a threat to them. Because these sons of Sceva had no faith in Jesus, they had no spiritual power against the evil spirit. They left the encounter naked and wounded. It was – and is -- dangerous to take the reality of spiritual warfare lightly!

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, and as a result, the Name of the Jesus was magnified, people came to believe the Gospel, confessed their sins, and generally seemed to understand their faith in a more immediate and profound way.

...Those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them:

The incident with the seven sons of Sceva also prompted Christians to renounce any remaining connection to the demonic. They removed temptation and the trappings of their previous superstitions. And this was no mere token of pseudo-religious "repentance". "Fifty thousand pieces of silver" today would have a value somewhere between \$1 million and \$5 million!

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.

Riot in Ephesus ([19:21-41](#))

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. Luke doesn't mention it here, but we know that one reason 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).

I must also see Rome: This reflects Paul's determination visit and serve the Christian community building there. His passion for this is mentioned in Romans 1:8-15.

He sent into Macedonia... Timothy and Erastus: Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead to Macedonia, while he stayed in Ephesus (Asia) for a time. A significant part of Timothy and Erastus's work was simply to help Paul. They were Assistants to The Apostle (okay, I just made that up), helping Paul in the ministry of the Gospel.

About that time there arose a great commotion about the Way: Just as the work was going so well, and Paul was thinking about leaving Ephesus, more trouble arose (Paul must have been used to this by now!). This is the third time in Acts (the second time in this chapter) that the Christian movement is called the Way.

This temple to Diana (also known as Artemis) in Ephesus is regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by 127 60-foot-high pillars, and was decorated with tremendous sculptures. It was lost to history until it was discovered in 1869, and its main altar was unearthed in 1965.

"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."

-- Longenecker

The temple was famous around the world. The trinkets and idols from it no doubt generated substantial trade. But Paul had disrupted this trade. We might say that the opposition of Demetrius and the other idol makers was a great compliment to the effectiveness of Paul's ministry!

Paul was not on a campaign to close down the temple of Diana per se, of course; he was just doing the Lord's work. But business was down at the pagan shrines like this because of the transforming work of the Jesus Christ. This sort of thing happened not just in Ephesus, but everywhere the Holy Spirit does His work. Years after this, Pliny, a Roman official, wrote a letter to Trajan (another official), describing how people were not going to shrines anymore because of Christian influence. Pliny wanted to know what he should do about it.

And 14 centuries later. A monk named Martin Luther became infamous in part because his message damaged and diminished in that region, then far more widely, the Roman Catholic Church's errant practice of collecting indulgences to fund building projects.

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!"). "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 can be powerful.

Yet 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.

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.

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.

...You ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly: The city clerk (effectively the mayor of Ephesus) spoke sensible and politically correct words here to settle things down. It's interesting that this is included in the account. It demonstrates that rational people saw nothing to fear or oppose in Christianity.

He dismissed the assembly: God used the city clerk to calm the mob and end the immediate threat to Paul and the other Christians. The Holy Spirit had preserved His work, and His people, once again!

The word “assembly” here is the Greek word ἐκκλησία (“ekklesia”), the same word often translated as “church.” Broken down it literally means “those called out”. In the Christian sense we interpret it as those “called out” from the world as a special assembly of God’s people. In the secular sense, it is simply used to describe a gathering of people “called out” from, say, their homes, to meet for some purpose.