



Ministry in Ephesus Acts 18:23 - 19:41

Introduction

Paul's second missionary journey had taken him through Syria, Cilicia, Galatia, and Phrygia as he visited and strengthened the churches which had been established in those regions. He then followed the call of the Holy Spirit into Macedonia where he preached the gospel to a women's prayer group in the city of Philippi and founded the first Christian church on the continent of Europe. He experienced persistent persecution as he preached the gospel in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, (although the Berean Jews welcomed Paul's message and confirmed the truth of it by studying the Scriptures) and was finally forced to leave Macedonia. From there he journeyed to Athens where he had the opportunity to preach to the philosophers and the wealthy, elite Areopagus council, although with little success. Traveling on to Corinth, he received great encouragement from God and had many converts, including the ruler of the synagogue and many of the Gentiles. He stayed in Corinth for over a year and a half before heading back to his home church at Antioch.

Paul rested from his travels for *some time* (18:23) before heading out on his third missionary journey. His plan was to visit the Galatian and Phrygian churches for the third time and then keep his promise to return to Ephesus (18:21). He stayed in Ephesus for over two years, during which time the gospel message was spread throughout the whole province of Asia. Paul also wrote his first letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus.

In describing the Christian ministry at Ephesus, Luke paints several pictures to show what the city was like religiously, commercially, and politically. Four vivid stories - the eloquent Apollos, the 12 Ephesian disciples, the Jewish exorcists, and the angry silversmiths - establish the background and draw the reader into Paul's very successful ministry in Ephesus.

Outline of Acts 18:23 - 19:41

- I. Priscilla and Aquila Correct Apollos - Acts 18:23-28
- II. Paul Corrects the Ephesian Disciples - Acts 19:1-7
- III. Paul Continues Preaching - Acts 19: 8-12
- IV. Paul's Ministry Conflicts with Paganism - Acts 19:13-41

I. Priscilla and Aquila Correct Apollos - Acts 18:23-28

Sometime between Paul's first and second visits to Ephesus, either while he was at Antioch or setting out on his third missionary journey, a Jewish man from Alexandria, Egypt arrived in Ephesus.

A. Apollos in the synagogue - Acts 18:24-26a

Apollos was an educated Jew who spoke boldly with eloquence and effervescence. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures well, he also knew about the Lord, and he used his gifts and knowledge in speaking in the synagogue at Ephesus.

B. Apollos corrected - Acts 18:26b

When Priscilla and Aquila (who had been taught by Paul and traveled from Corinth to Ephesus with him) heard Apollos speak, they realized that he needed further instruction. He taught accurately as far as his knowledge went, but he was limited because he only knew about the baptism of John. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Moody Press) explains how this happened to be: *Jewish pilgrims who came to Jerusalem during the days of our Lord's ministry heard John the Baptist preach that the Messiah was soon to come. They recognized in the person and works of Jesus the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies. Such pilgrims would carry back home a report of the preaching of John and the life and ministry of Jesus, although they would not know of his death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.* It was probably from such a pilgrim that Apollos learned about the Lord.

Priscilla and Aquila did not criticize or ostracize Apollos because his knowledge was incomplete. Instead they took him aside privately and taught him what he needed to know about Christ's death, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is how it should be in the church. Knowledgeable and mature Christians should always endeavor to *speak the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15) and help newer and untaught believers grow in their faith. Who can you help to grow in faith?

C. Apollos refutes the Jews in Achaia - Acts 18:27-28

With his instruction complete, *the brethren*, probably the church which met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (1 Corinthians 16:19), sent Apollos on to Achaia

(specifically to Corinth) with letters of recommendation. He proved to be a great help to the believers there, reinforcing the work Paul had done. Because of his education, eagerness, and eloquence, he was able to debate the Jews and answer fully all their objections by proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

II. Paul Corrects the Ephesian Disciples - Acts 19:1-7

Paul had begun his third missionary journey by going through Galatia and Phrygia encouraging the churches he had established in those provinces (Acts 18:23). Then he traveled west through the province of Asia to keep a promise he had made to return to the Jews in Ephesus.

Ephesus, a leading city in Asia, became Paul's home base for over two years during his third missionary journey. Ephesus was a trade center which connected the East and West, a place of religious pilgrimage in the worship of the goddess Artemis, and a chief city for the promotion of emperor worship.

A. Paul meets the *disciples* - Acts 19:1-3

Soon after arriving in Ephesus, Paul met 12 men whom he perceived to be disciples. To make sure that their knowledge and faith were complete, Paul asked them, *Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?* He learned that they had not even heard that the Holy Spirit had been given. (Surely they knew about the promise of the Holy Spirit. John had taught that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. They just did not know that the promise of the Holy Spirit had been fulfilled.) They had received the baptism of John the Baptist, *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (Luke 3:3), but they had not been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. These disciples were like Apollos in that they were believers with incomplete knowledge who needed further instruction.

B. Paul teaches the *disciples* - Acts 19:4

Paul explained that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance in preparation for the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. John was only preparing the way for the, *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!.....who baptizes with the Holy Spirit..... the Son of God* (John 1:29-34). Now that Christ had come and fulfilled all things (Luke 24:44), John's baptism was no longer sufficient.

C. Paul baptizes the *disciples* - Acts 19:5-7

The men were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and Paul laid his hands on them as a special act of welcoming them into the unity of believers, the church

(1 Corinthians 12:13). The fact that they were filled with the Holy Spirit was evidenced by their speaking with tongues and prophesying. This incident with the 12 Ephesian disciples parallels the experience of the apostles in Acts 2:4 and 11, the Samaritans in Acts 8:14-17, and the God-fearing Gentiles in Acts 10:44-46. *This is an extension of the Pentecost experience to another group of people* (New Geneva Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers). Speaking with tongues and prophesying were not the general rule with new believers. The only instances are the ones cited above, and there was always a specific purpose. At Pentecost, it was a testimony to all the Jews of Jerusalem that God had poured out His Spirit (Acts 2:5-10 and 14-18). In Samaria, it was a confirmation to the apostles that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17). In the case of the God-fearing Gentiles, it was evidence to the Jews that God had accepted the Gentiles and given them the gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-48). In the case of the Ephesian disciples, it was a validation of Paul's teaching and a sign to them that they were now a part of the church.

III. Paul Continues Preaching - Acts 19:8-12

A. In the synagogue - Acts 19:8

Paul had spoken briefly in the synagogue at Ephesus on the return leg of his second missionary journey. He returned at their request (Acts 18:20) and ministered for three months without opposition. His message was *the kingdom of God* -- the Lord Jesus Christ, His advent, death, resurrection, and exaltation. This was Jesus' own message (Matthew 4:23; Luke 8:1; Acts 1:3). It was through Jesus that God *delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His Love* (Colossians 1:13).

B. In the school of Tyrannus - Acts 19:9-10

Some of the Jews hardened their hearts and refused to believe Paul's message. When they openly opposed the Christians, Paul and his disciples moved to the school of Tyrannus. This was probably a hall that was rented out to visiting philosophers. Most likely Tyrannus taught there during the morning hours and then allowed Paul to use it between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. when people ate their mid-day meal and rested during the heat of the day. This worked for the benefit of the gospel in at least two ways: Paul could preach every day, not just on the Sabbath, and both Jews and Gentiles could receive the benefit of his teaching.

Paul continued teaching in Ephesus for two more years while the surrounding area was evangelized. It was during this time that churches were started in Colosse, Laodicea and Hieropolis (Colossians 1:2 and 4:13).

C. Attesting miracles - Acts 19:11-12

During his ministry in Ephesus, God confirmed Paul's work and words with miracles, just as he had done with Peter (Acts 5:15-16). The sick were healed and evil spirits were cast out.

IV. Paul's Ministry Conflicts with Paganism - Acts 19:13-41

Luke gives two pictures of the disharmony between Paul's Christian ministry and the pagan environment in Ephesus. One involved Jewish exorcists and the other local businessmen whose trade depended upon the worship of the goddess Artemis.

A. Jewish exorcists - Acts 19:13-20

The practice of magic in Paul's day was fairly common, as described by I. Howard Marshall in his commentary, *Acts*. *There were people who went around making a living by various kinds of pseudo-scientific or clairvoyant powers, including the practice of exorcism. They were ready to call on the names of any and every god or divinity in their invocations — and often they recited long lists of names so as to be sure of including the right god in any particular case.* Jewish practitioners were particularly well-respected because their spells were thought to be effective.

Having heard Paul preach about Jesus and perform miracles in His name (as Peter did in Acts 3:6 and 9:34), some traveling Jewish exorcists who happened to be in Ephesus, tried to copy what Paul did. They invoked the name of Jesus to drive out evil spirits.

1. The sons of Sceva - 19:13-16

A certain man named Sceva, who claimed to be a chief priest, had seven sons who practiced exorcism. Historically, there is no known high priest by the name of Sceva. He may have been a member of a high-priestly family, but more likely he falsely claimed to be a priest in order to impress and deceive people.

When Sceva's sons used the name of Jesus, *Like an unfamiliar weapon wrongly handled, it exploded in their hands* (*The Book of Acts*, F.F. Bruce). The man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and sent them running for their lives, naked and wounded. The name of Jesus cannot be used magically!

2. The outcome - 19:17-20

The story spread quickly through the city of Ephesus. It was clear that the name of Jesus, which Paul had used with miraculous results, was not a name to be

used lightly. Jews and Gentiles alike were filled with new reverence and respect for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Furthermore, some of the converts who had continued to practice magic came forward and confessed. They had thought they could be Christians and still get away with continuing their pagan pursuits, but the incident involving the sons of Sceva put the fear of the Lord in them. They publicly renounced their magic and burned their books on magic. *So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed* (19:20).

B. Silversmiths - Acts 19:21-40

The incident with the silversmiths occurred after Paul had already decided to leave Ephesus. He planned to go back through Macedonia and Achaia to visit the churches and take up a collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem. (See Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-26 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.) After delivering the offering to Jerusalem, his plan was to go to Rome, the center of the empire. Paul sent Timothy and Erastus, co-workers in ministry, ahead to Macedonia to prepare the way. It was at this time that the problem arose.

1. Demetrius' complaint - Acts 19:23-27

Demetrius was a silversmith who made his living crafting and selling silver shrines of the goddess, Artemis (NASB).

NOTE: The New King James uses *Diana*, the Latin form of the Greek *Artemis* (NASB.) Artemis of the Ephesians was an Asiatic fertility goddess represented by a female figure with many breasts and had been worshiped in the area long before the city of Ephesus was built.

Paul's ministry had caused a decline in the sales of the silver shrines which were bought by local worshipers as well as religious pilgrims from all over Asia who had them dedicated in the temple and then took them home as souvenirs. Very upset at the prospect of a ruined business, Demetrius called together all the silversmiths of the city, along with others of similar occupation (those also involved in businesses depending upon the worship of the goddess Artemis), and presented his case against Paul. He identified two dangers.

a. Danger of their business *falling into disrepute* - 19:26-27a

Paul's message that gods made by hands were not gods at all had spread throughout the province of Asia. This was a definite threat to those who made their living by manufacturing silver idols.

b. Danger of Artemis being discredited -
19:27b

Worshippers of Artemis came to Ephesus from all over the world. Paul's teaching threatened to dethrone Artemis from her magnificence and cause her to be *regarded as worthless* (NASB).

2. Angry response - 19:28

Demetrius' discourse had its desired effect. His fellow workers who depended upon the worship of Artemis for their livelihood were filled with rage and cried out *Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*

3. Confused response - 19:29 and 32

The whole city was filled with confusion and rushed to the *theater*, the largest place in the city for public assembly. The theater in Ephesus held 25,000 people. Along the way they grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's traveling companions. Some people were yelling one thing and some another, and in the midst of the confusion, most of them did not even know why they were there.

4. Paul's response - 19:30-31

Paul was eager to go into the theater and speak to the crowd but was kept from doing so by his Christian friends and some of the wealthy officials of the province of Asia who had become his friends.

5. The Jews' response - 19:33-34

The Jews were anxious to disclaim any connection with Paul and the Christians. There were enough anti-Jewish feelings in the Roman provinces and they did not want the anger of the mob directed at them. They sent a man named Alexander forward to speak to the people. When the people found out he was a Jew, they refused to listen and shouted in unison for two hours, *Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*

6. City clerk's intervention - 19:35-40

The *city clerk* was the chief executive officer of the city and a liaison between Ephesus and the Roman governor. When he spoke the people listened. He calmed the crowd by affirming the importance of Ephesus and the greatness of Artemis. He referred the angry silversmiths to the proper legal channels for their complaint.

a. Affirmation of the goddess worship -
19:35-36

The city of Ephesus was the *temple guardian of the great goddess*, Artemis. Her image, which was believed to

have fallen from heaven, was kept behind a purple curtain in the magnificent Temple of Artemis. The temple was one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World and its foundations and great altar have been uncovered by archaeologists and can be seen today.

The greatness of Artemis and her temple were undeniable. Therefore, the people should remain calm and do nothing rash.

b. Directing the complainants to proper
channels - 19:37-39

Gaius and Aristarchus (19:29) were innocent. They had not robbed the temple or blasphemed the goddess. Therefore, anyone who had a valid complaint should follow legal procedure through the courts.

c. The real *danger* - 19:40

There was really no danger of the silversmith trade or the goddess worship falling into disrepute (19:27). The danger was that the citizens of Ephesus might be charged with rioting, a crime that Rome did not tolerate.

d. The dismissal - 19:41

With order and calm reestablished, the people were sent home.

Applications

1. Apollos and the 12 Ephesian disciples had repented of their sin but lacked the knowledge of the Holy Spirit. They needed to be taught in order to grow and minister more effectively. All believers need to be growing in their knowledge of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the working of the Holy Spirit. As we study the Scriptures, we need to apply God's word to our lives. As you study your Bible daily, do you seek to apply the truths you are learning to your life? What change will you make in your life this week as a result of new knowledge of God?

2. Some of the Christians at Ephesus who had been involved in the practice of magic had continued in their pagan ways after becoming Christians. However, the frightening experience of the sons of Sceva was a wake-up call which led them to renounce their demonic involvements and burn their books of magic spells. What worldly habits or pursuits are you still clinging to? Will you let this lesson be a wake up call to rid your life of anything which is not pleasing to the Lord?