

ACTS

Chapter 19

Paul in Ephesus

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland[a] country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 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.” 3 And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John's baptism.” 4 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.” 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. 7 There were about twelve men in all. 8 And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9 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. 10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

19:1 *Apollos was at Corinth.* Apollos was introduced at Ephesus (18:24) in the absence of Paul; he moved to Corinth before Paul returned to Ephesus. But later Apollos came back to Ephesus during Paul's ministry there (see 1Co 16:12). (CSB)

through the inland country. Not the lower direct route down the Lycus and Meander valleys but the upper Phrygian route approaching Ephesus from a more northerly direction. If Paul got to northern Galatia, which is unlikely, it must have been on one of these trips through the interior (see 16:6; 18:23). (CSB)

Lit, “upper country”; Paul traveled through the mountainous regions of Galatia and Phrygia on his way to Ephesus. (TLSB)

Meanwhile, after resting several months, Paul undertook yet a third mission expedition, once again taking the highway northwestward from Antioch, through the Cilician Gates, and onward to the churches he had founded in Galatia and Phrygia. This was now the third time he had visited Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in the interior regions of Asia Minor, which showed their importance to Paul. Perhaps it was for this reason that the die-hard Judizers made a last, determined effort to undermine his message in these churches shortly after he left them. When Paul learned of it, he promptly wrote his most impassioned Letter to the Galatians, skewering work-righteousness and affirming the doctrine of justification by faith alone. (LL)

Ephesus. It sheltered the wildest collection of pagan priest, magicians, exorcists, cultists, religious prostitutes, and charlatans in the Roman Empire. Since the great marble Temple of Artemis was the pride of Ephesus and one of the fabled Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the city annually played host to hordes of pagan pilgrims from all over the East during the festival of Artemis in March-April. These facts were not lost on Paul of Tarsus, and his mission strategy seems clear: win for Christ in Ephesus and he could win anywhere. (LL)

some disciples. These 12 (v. 7) seem to have been followers of Jesus, but indirectly through John the Baptist or some of his followers. Or perhaps they had received their teaching from Apollos himself in his earlier state of partial understanding (see 18:26). Like Apollos, they had a limited understanding of the gospel. (CSB)

They appeared to be fellow Christians. Their understanding of the Christian faith is described in vv 2–3. (TLSB)

19:2 *receive the Holy Spirit.* Paul finds that they were not informed about the Holy Spirit at all (vv. 3–6). (CSB)

If they were Christian, they would have received the Spirit, because He creates faith in Christ (1 Cor. 12:3; Titus 3:5-6). Paul might therefore be asking if they were baptized in the triune name of God, which refers to the Spirit (Mt. 28:19), or if any special signs occurred when they were baptized, as had happened with other Christians in Acts (4:31; 8:17; 10:44-46; 11:15). Chemnitz: “It is impossible to understand this passage to mean that the disciples of John the Baptist had never heard of the person of the Holy Spirit in his sermons” (Lth 1:141). (TLSB)

19:3 Paul seeks to determine what type of baptism these men received. (TLSB)

19:4 *baptism of repentance.* A summation of John’s teaching. It was preparatory and provisional, stressing man’s sinfulness and thus creating a sense of need for the gospel. John’s baptism looked forward to Jesus, who by his death would make possible the forgiveness of sins. (CSB)

Luther: “This is the difference between the Baptism of Christ and that of John: John neither gives nor brings forgiveness of sin; he only points people to Him who does bestow it. In John’s Baptism forgiveness is promised; in Christ’s Baptism it is given. Thus John’s Baptism is no longer valid now” (AE 22:177). (TLSB)

19:5 On the basis of further instruction by Paul (v. 4), these disciples received Christian Baptism, which removed any doubts about their status as Christians. (TLSB)

19:6 Sign of blessing (cf Gen. 48:14; Num. 27:23; Acts 6:6). (TLSB)

Holy Spirit came on them ... spoke in tongues and prophesied.† The same experience the Gentiles had in Caesarea (10:46). (CSB)

A special outpouring of the Holy Spirit accomplished through God’s appointed apostle (cf. 2:4; 10:44-46; 11:15). (TLSB)

19:8 *three months.* Much longer than the three Sabbaths in Thessalonica (17:2), but the same approach: Jews first, then Greeks. (CSB)

19:9 *continued in unbelief* – The word of God will eventually cause division between those who believe it and those who do not. (PBC)

hall of Tyrannus. Probably a school used regularly by Tyrannus, a philosopher or rhetorician. Instruction was probably given in the cooler, morning hours. One Greek manuscript adds that Paul did his instructing from 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. This would have been the hot time of the day, but the hall was available and the people were not at their regular work. (CSB)

Possibly a lecture hall or school where Paul taught about salvation through Jesus. The disciples may have rented the building (cf Lk 22:11–12). (TLSB)

19:10 *two years.* Two years and three months (see v. 8) was the longest stay in one missionary location that Luke records. By Jewish reckoning, any part of a year is considered a year; so this period can be spoken of as three years (20:31). (CSB)

During this time Paul wrote the letter which we call First Corinthians to the church at Corinth. Through people coming to hear him and through the work of his assistants the word of the Lord was spread through the whole province. The churches at Colosse, Hierapolis and Laodicea were probably founded at this time. (PBC)

all ... in the province of Asia heard. One of the elements of Paul's missionary strategy is seen here. Many of the cities where Paul planted churches were strategic centers that, when evangelized, served as focal points from which the gospel radiated out to the surrounding areas. Other examples are Antioch in Pisidia (see 13:14), Thessalonica (see 17:1), Athens (see 17:15) and Corinth (see 18:1). (CSB)

Luke expresses how widespread the Word of the Lord became during Paul's time in Ephesus. Assistants of Paul undoubtedly helped spread the Word in the surrounding area, as many congregations were started (such as those mentioned in Rv 2–3). (TLSB)

19:1–10 Paul arrives at Ephesus and begins a very productive period of his ministry. Apart from Christ, there is no salvation. The Word of God clearly shows that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises of eternal salvation for all. Through Holy Baptism, He consecrates us as His beloved people. • Lord Jesus, help us always to believe in You for eternal life. Help us also to share Your Good News. Amen. (TLSB)

The Sons of Sceva

11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 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. 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." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are 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. 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. 18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 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.

19:11–12 As the Lord had worked through Peter, He now worked powerfully through Paul, even through the agency of clothing that had touched him. The purpose of these miracles was to attest to the truth of Paul's preaching (cf Rm 15:19). The Lord may have worked these special miracles because of the Ephesians' interest in exorcisms and magic. (TLSB)

19:12 handkerchiefs. † Probably used by Paul in his trade: one for tying around his head, the other around his waist. Cf. 5:15. (CSB)

19:13 itinerant Jewish exorcists. Among the many practitioners of magic and sorcery in Ephesus were traveling Jewish exorcists. According to Josephus, men like these may have used a technique for casting out demons that was attributed to Solomon (*Ant* 8:45–48). Cf Tob 6:2–8, 14–19; 8:2–3. (TLSB)

the name of the Lord Jesus. Instead of whatever name they may have used to cast out evil spirits before, they began using Jesus’ name because it appeared to be more powerful. Ancient magical papyri are filled with names of deities from all manner of religions. (TLSB)

19:14 Sceva, a Jewish chief priest. May have been related to the high priestly family of Jerusalem. But more likely he took this title himself to make further impression with his magical wiles. Drawn by Paul’s ability to drive out evil spirits, Jewish exorcists wanted to copy his work (cf. 13:6). (CSB)

Could mean Sceva called himself “high priest,” not that he served at the temple in Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Either he was a member of the priestly family, or “chief priest” was a title he took for himself to add to his prestige. Neither he nor his sons necessarily lived in Ephesus, since people of their type moved from place to place preying on superstitious people. (PBC)

19:15–16 Because Jesus is God, He is known to the demons (cf Lk 4:34). Because Paul was one of Jesus’ powerful workers, the evil spirits knew him also. Because the sons of Sceva did not believe in Jesus as God, they were simply using Jesus’ name as part of a formula; thus they had no power over the evil spirit. (TLSB)

19:16 BEATING – Anyone taking Jesus’ name into his mouth for earthly gain or unspiritual purposes ought to realize that even the devils look down on him. Their plan miscarried, but God used their misuse of his name for his good purposes. Even those who did not trust the Lord Jesus as their Savior had to respect his name. Paul used that name, and extraordinary miracles took place. (PBC)

19:17 The residents of Ephesus recognized the great power of Jesus’ name: from Paul’s lips, Jesus’ name worked miracles, but used by the Jewish exorcists, His name brought a demonic attack. (TLSB)

19:18 confessing and divulging their practices. Acts of repentance. Ephesus was rife with those who practiced various forms of magic. The practices here refer to magical spells. Those who had become followers of Jesus no longer wanted to take part in a way of life they now recognized as sinful. (TLSB)

19:19 books. Such documents bearing alleged magical formulas and secret information have been unearthed. Ephesus was a center for magical incantations. (CSB)

Those who practiced magic owned small papyrus scrolls that contained magical formulas and spells. Such books were quite valuable; burning them publicly demonstrated complete rejection of such a lifestyle. (TLSB)

Among those who were young in the faith there were some who not completely given up their superstitious practices. Now they publicly acknowledged their wrongdoing. The Greek word for “evil deeds” was sometimes used in the special sense of “magic spells.” That meaning seems to fit very well here. It would have taken 160 workmen a year of six-day weeks to earn the price of the scrolls which were destroyed. (PBC)

fifty thousand pieces of silver. The high price was not due to the quality of the books but to the supposed power gained by their secret rigmarole of words and names. (CSB)

A piece of silver was the daily wage for a common worker. (TLSB)

19:20 The power of God’s Word is recognized by all. (TLSB)

Paul’s teaching and miracles, the driving out of evil spirits and the victory of Jesus’ truth over sorcery all made for the widespread and growing influence of the gospel. (PBC)

The verb “prevail” is the same one used for the “overpowering” of the exorcists by the demonic spirit. (Sacra)

This refrain highlights the success of Paul’s mission to this point, especially in Ephesus. (Tannehill)

It is also worth looking at Acts 2:42-27.

19:11–20 God continues to work through mighty miracles and His Word. Magic, the occult, and even using our Lord’s name as an expression of good luck are all sins against the Second Commandment. By the power of Jesus’ name, you have been forgiven of all sin (2:38) and rescued from the fiercest evil, the devil himself! Jesus gives you life in His name alone. • “Create in me a new heart, Lord, That gladly I obey Your Word. Let what You will be my desire, And with new life my soul inspire.” Amen. (LSB 704:3) (TLSB)

A Riot at Ephesus

21 Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” **22** And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. **23** About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. **24** For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. **25** These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. **26** And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. **27** And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.” **28** When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” **29** So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. **30** But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. **31** And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent

to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. 32 Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. 33 Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. 34 But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 35 And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? 36 Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. 37 For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. 38 If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. 39 But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. 40 For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." 41 And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

19:21 *resolved in the Spirit.* Or, "in the spirit" (referring to Paul's determination). Either way God directs Paul's decisions.

Macedonia...Achaia...Jerusalem – Part of his purpose in Macedonia and Achaia was to encourage the churches to complete the collection which they were gathering for the needy Christians of Jerusalem and Judea. Part of his purpose in going to Jerusalem was to deliver that collection. Then, he felt, he would be free to go to Rome. We know about the collection for the saints of Judea from references in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. (PBC)

Rome. Cf Rm 1:9–15. The preaching of the Gospel in Rome is the goal toward which Luke's account is moving. (TLSB)

19:22 *Erastus.* An important figure at Corinth, "the city's director of public works" at one time. He is located later at Corinth also (2Ti 4:20). Just now he returns to Corinth by way of Macedonia with Timothy. (CSB)

for while – Paul's reason for staying a little longer is found in 1 Corinthians 16:8,9: "I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me." (PBC)

19:24 *Demetrius a silversmith.* Each trade had its guild, and Demetrius was probably a responsible leader of the guild for the manufacture of silver shrines and images. (CSB)

Common name; difficult to determine exact identity. Apparently he was a leader of the guild of the silversmiths. (TLSB)

Probably sold to worshipers for use as votive (dedicated) gifts in the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. (TLSB)

Artemis. The Greek name for the Roman goddess Diana. The Ephesian Artemis, however, was very different from the Greco-Roman goddess. She had taken on the characteristics of Cybele, the mother goddess of fertility worshiped in Asia Minor and served by many prostitute priestesses. A meteorite may be the basis of the many-breasted image of heavenly workmanship

claimed for Artemis (v. 35). (Some have identified the objects that cover the torso of the image as ostrich eggs.) Reproductions of the original image from the time of the emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96) have been found in Ephesus. (CSB)

Probably sold to worshipers for use as votive gifts in the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Artemis of the Ephesians was a fertility goddess, worshiped throughout Asia (vv 27–28). (TLSB)

The temple of Artemis was three times as large as the Parthenon at Athens. The people of Asia Minor worshipped Artemis as a fertility goddess, and her temple was served by priestesses who were also prostitutes. (PBC)

craftsmen. Refers to Demetrius’s fellow silversmiths. (TLSB)

19:25 *workmen* – Refers either to those who made shrines out of some other material or to the less-skilled laborers of the silver shrine trade. (TLSB)

Refers either to those who made shrines out of some other material or to the less-skilled laborers of the silver shrine trade. (TLSB)

we have our wealth. Since the temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, people came from far and wide to view it. Their purchase of silver shrines and images produced a lucrative business for the craftsmen. (CSB)

19:26-27 Demetrius presents two primary concerns if Paul is not stopped: the industry of silver Artemis shrines will continue to suffer; and people may begin disregarding Artemis herself, along with her temple. (TLSB) (They both really come down to money.)

19:27 *temple of the great goddess.* The glory of Ephesus: 425 feet long and 220 feet wide, having 127 white marble columns 62 feet high and less than 4 feet apart. In the inner sanctuary was the many-breasted image supposedly dropped from heaven. (CSB)

19:28 *enraged.* Demetrius’s speech had the desired effect of working the tradesmen into a fury. (TLSB)

19:29 *were enraged* – A general uproar followed, in which many of the citizens rushed over to their massive 24,000-seat theater carved into the side of a mountain looming up from Ephesus. No one can sit in any of the 24,000 empty seats today and fail to hear a speaker plainly in the orchestra below. (LL)

The theater in Ephesus could hold c 25,000 people and was often used for large public gatherings. (TLSB)

Aristarchus. Traveled later with Paul from Corinth to Jerusalem (20:3–4), and also accompanied Paul on the voyage from Jerusalem to Rome (27:1–2; Col 4:10). (CSB)

Otherwise unknown, unless Aristarchus is the man mentioned in 20:4. (TLSB)

19:31 *Asiarchai.*† Greek members of a council of men of wealth and influence elected to promote the worship of the emperor. Paul had friends in this highest circle. (CSB)

who were friends – The disciples were sure that Paul’s life was in danger. Paul had other friends dissuading him, too, friends in very high places. The officials, known as *asiarchs*,” were elected from the most influential families of the province. They were supposed to encourage the official religion of Rome. We do not know they became Paul’s friends, but it is difficult to imagine that Paul would ever withhold the gospel from anyone. They may have not been believers, but they were fair-minded men, and they cared enough for justice and for Paul that they did not want him to fall into the hands of a mob. (PBC)

Asiarchs. Men of substance and influence; Paul’s friends among them did not think it wise for him to enter the fray, even to defend his companions and the Christian faith. (TLSB)

19:32 The confusion inadvertently fulfills the purpose of Demetrius: to save the livelihood of the craftsmen by counteracting Paul’s preaching. (TLSB)

19:33 *Alexander*. Pushed forward by the Jews either to make clear the disassociation of the Jews from the Christians and/or to accuse the Christians further of an offense against the Greeks. The crowd recognized that the Jews were not worshipers of Artemis any more than the Christians. (CSB)

A Jew (v 34) who is not known otherwise but whom Luke’s readers must have known. The Jews probably wanted Alexander to defend their reputations so the assembly would not associate them with Paul. (TLSB)

19:35 *town clerk*. The secretary of the city who published the decisions of the civic assembly. He was the most important local official and the chief executive officer of the assembly, acting as go-between for Ephesus and the Roman authorities. (CSB)

Principal municipal officer of Ephesus, whom the Roman government would hold responsible for civic disorder.(TLSB)

temple keeper. This designation brought great honor to the city. Ephesus was widely known as the special seat of Artemis worship (TLSB)

sacred stone. According to legend, the statue of Artemis had fallen from the sky (it may have been a meteorite) and now resided in the temple dedicated to her. (TLSB)

19:36 *be quiet* – He was determined to prevent any situation that would make it appear as though Ephesus could not handle local matters, lest Ephesus lose the degree of self-rule which it enjoyed? (PBC)

19:37 *sacrilegious*. Lit, “temple robbers.” Worshipers of false gods sometimes levied this charge against the Jews. The town clerk assures the assembly that Paul and his companions are not guilty of this serious charge. (TLSB)

blasphemers of our goddess. He also makes the claim that Paul and his companions had not spoken harsh words against Artemis simply by preaching about Christ Jesus. (TLSB)

19:38 *courts ... proconsuls*. Probably general terms, not intended to refer to more than one court or one proconsul. As capital city of the province of Asia, Ephesus was the headquarters for the proconsul. (CSB)

Town clerk emphasizes that if a legitimate complaint against Paul is to be made, there is a proper and legal method to follow. *proconsuls*. Roman administrators of senatorial provinces, such as Asia, were given this title. They were also the supreme judges of their territories. (TLSB)

19:39 *regular assembly*. The regular civil meeting ordinarily held three times a month. (CSB)

19:40 Roman government took a dim view of rioting, and the town clerk warns the crowd that it is close to crossing the line from assembling into rioting. (TLSB)

19:21–41 Another episode shows that opponents of the Gospel cause the troubles associated with the Christian faith. Believers in Christ may suffer unjustly or, at times, justly because of their sins. In either case, the Lord brings us through suffering to His eternal kingdom, even while giving us opportunities to serve. Christ, who suffered for us, is always with us. • “Jesus, lead Thou on Till our rest is won. Heav’nly leader, still direct us, Still support, console, protect us, Till we safely stand In our fatherland.” Amen. (LSB 718:4) (TLSB)