

# The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

## Lesson 63 – Acts 19-20 – Paul's Third Journey Part 2

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### INTRODUCTION

Paul's third journey, spanning approximately 53-57 AD, represents the final and most extensive phase of his apostolic travels as recorded in the book of Acts. This journey solidifies the Gospel's establishment in key urban centers of Asia Minor and Greece, following the foundational work of his first two journeys. After concluding his second journey and briefly returning to Antioch, Paul embarks on this new phase, revisiting the churches he previously planted and establishing a home base in Ephesus.

This period of ministry is characterized by a powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit's empowerment, leading to both widespread belief and fierce opposition. In Ephesus, the influence of the Truth was so extensive that it challenged the city's economic and religious foundations, culminating in a major riot. We will also follow Paul on his farewell journey toward Jerusalem, marked by a poignant farewell.

Through these events, the narrative highlights the ongoing expansion of the early Church, the deep bonds between Paul and the communities he served, and the persistent challenges faced by believers in a hostile world.

### ACTS 19 – ESTABLISHMENT AND MINISTRY IN EPHESUS

The beginning of Acts 19 provides insight into the foundation of the ministry in Ephesus, but it also gives us the proper understanding of what baptism is and is not.

Acts 19:1-7

1. John's disciples – On his way to Ephesus, Paul ran into a group of 12 men who were called disciples. The word "disciple" in Greek is "μαθητής mathētēs." All this means is someone who is a dedicated learner.

Like Apollos, these disciples were only acquainted with the baptism of John. The conversation was undoubtedly longer, with much more detail than we have recorded in Acts. But the main point is that Paul questions whether they received the Holy Spirit when they believed.

What does this question mean? Paul is not anticipating the answer, which leads us to understand that a believer may or may not receive the Holy Spirit.

This is not about the sealing or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is about receiving the Holy Spirit with power (Acts 1:5, 8). The power of the Holy Spirit is a sign and an empowerment for ministry. Paul's question reflects whether or not they have already been commissioned by God for the administration of the Gospel.

When they said no and even clarified that they had not heard of the Holy Spirit, this is not in connection to His existence but rather to the function and empowerment. A better understanding is "we have not heard if the Holy Spirit is (given)."

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Being associated with John's baptism indicates that these men were Jews and dedicated ones at that. Like Apollos, they were probably ministering in their area, spreading John's message, and when Paul found them, he gave them the message more clearly.

2. Baptism means identification, saturated in, immersed in. This is clear in this exchange. "What were you baptized in?" The expected answer for most in Christendom should have been "water." But here, we see that they answer according to which message or which leader: John's baptism.

John's baptism was a message of preparation, telling people to believe in the one who would come after him ~ Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:3-18 (verse 15\*).

In Acts 19:5 – Having heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. What kind of baptism was this? This was an immersion into the doctrines of the person, work, and message of Jesus Christ. Now that they are identified with Jesus, Paul commissions them for service, and the Holy Spirit in power comes upon them, and the signs are given to them, indicating God's administrative use for these twelve men.

Acts 19:8-41

### Historical Context

Acts 19:8-41 occurs during Paul's third missionary journey (53-57 AD), as he establishes a base in Ephesus, a major Roman provincial capital in Asia Minor with a population of around 250,000. Ephesus was a commercial hub at the mouth of the Cayster River, known for its harbor, agora, and the grand theater that sat up to 25,000, and it is where the riot unfolded.

- **Context in Paul's Ministry:** Following his time in Corinth and a brief prior visit to Ephesus (Acts 18:19-21), Paul returns via inland routes. His two-year stay (v. 10) aligns with archaeological evidence of early Christian presence in Asia Minor, influencing the seven churches later addressed in Revelation 2-3. The mention of Timothy and Erastus (v. 22) corresponds to their roles in Paul's letters (1 Corinthians 4:17), with Erastus possibly linked to a Corinthian inscription identifying him as a city official.
- **Jewish Community and Synagogue:** Ephesus had a significant Jewish diaspora, with privileges under Roman rule. Paul's initial three-month synagogue ministry (v. 8) follows his pattern (Acts 13:14, 17:2), but opposition leads to separation, mirroring divisions in other cities like Corinth (Acts 18:6-8). "The Way" (v. 9) was an early designation for Christians, used in legal contexts (e.g., Acts 24:14).
- **Miracles:** The era was rife with magic and superstition; Ephesus was famed for "Ephesian letters" (magical spells). The sons of Sceva (v. 14) represent Jewish exorcists, common in Josephus' accounts (Antiquities 8.45-49), who blended Judaism with Hellenistic practices. The book-burning (v. 19), valued at 50,000 drachmas (equivalent to 137 years' wages for a

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laborer), highlights the prevalence of occult texts, corroborated by discoveries of magical papyri in the region.

- **The Riot and Artemis Worship:** Demetrius' guild of silversmiths (v. 24) produced miniature shrines for the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, rebuilt in the 4th century BC and housing a meteorite ("sacred stone that fell from the sky," v. 35, likely a cultic object). Artemis of Ephesus was a syncretic fertility goddess, distinct from the Greek huntress, with her temple employing thousands and serving as a bank. Annual festivals drew pilgrims, boosting the economy. The riot (vv. 23-41) reflects real economic threats from monotheism, similar to Pliny the Elder's later complaints about declining idol sales due to Christianity (Epistles 10.96). The town clerk's role (v. 35) matches inscriptions describing officials as maintainers of order in Ephesian assemblies.
- **Roman Legal Framework:** The clerk's appeal to courts and proconsuls (v. 38) evokes Roman provincial administration; Asia had a proconsul in Ephesus. Fear of riot charges (v. 40) alludes to Roman suppression of unrest, as seen in Claudius' edicts against Jewish disturbances (circa 49-50 AD). The dismissal prevents escalation, allowing Paul's ministry to continue briefly.

This historical backdrop illustrates how Christianity challenged entrenched polytheism and commerce, yet navigated Roman tolerance, facilitating its spread.

### Literary Analysis

The narrative in Acts 19:8-41 is a historical account. As a narrative, it follows a classic plot structure with exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution, emphasizing the advancement of the gospel amid opposition.

- **Setting:** The primary setting is Ephesus, an influential port city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The location shifts from the synagogue (v. 8) to the hall of Tyrannus (v. 9), private homes or public spaces for miracles (vv. 11-12), and culminates in the public theater (v. 29). This progression from Jewish religious spaces to secular and pagan venues illustrates the typical Pauline motif as we have seen in all his missions thus far.
- **Characters:** Paul, once again, is the point of emphasis; he is bold, effectual, and God uses miracles to validate his message and authority. Paul is strategic; he withdraws from conflict but persists in ministry.

Supporting allies include the disciples he separates and who become influential in Ephesus, Timothy and Erastus, and others who serve and advise Paul.

The antagonists include stubborn unbelieving Jews in the synagogue, Jewish exorcists: the sons of Sceva, and Demetrius the silversmith, who incites the riot. The crowd acts as a collective character, chaotic and irrational. God is an undertone in the narrative, but we see Him clearly through the actions and words of Paul.

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### Plot Structure:

- **Establishment (vv. 8-10):** Paul's initial ministry in the synagogue establishes his method of reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God, leading to a two-year extension in the hall of Tyrannus, resulting in widespread dissemination of the word across Asia.
- **Rising Action (vv. 11-22):** Miracles authenticate Paul's message, contrasting with failed exorcisms by the sons of Sceva, prompting belief and extreme measures due to the realization of the truth of God and rejection of the darkness of this world. This builds tension as the Gospel's influence grows. Nearing the end, he states his plans for his next trip to leave for Jerusalem and Rome.
- **Climax (vv. 23-34):** Before Paul leaves, Demetrius rallies craftsmen against Paul, sparking a riot. The mob seizes Paul's companions and fills the theater with chants, highlighting economic and religious threats posed by the truth of God through Jesus.
- **Falling Action and Resolution (vv. 35-41):** The town clerk calms the assembly, defends legal processes, and dismisses the crowd. This dissolves the conflict without direct intervention from Paul.

### Literary Devices:

- **Irony:** The failed exorcism elevates Jesus' name (v. 17), and the riot, meant to suppress the gospel, instead amplifies its power (v. 20).
- **Contrast:** Paul's authentic miracles versus the exorcists' imitations; orderly reasoning versus mob chaos.
- **Foreshadowing:** Paul's resolve to go to Jerusalem and Rome (v. 21) hints at future trials.
- **Theme:** The early spread of the Gospel as a light into the darkness makes huge progress, and the impact is unsettling for unbelievers (Jew and Gentile alike).

### Key Vocabulary:

- "Reasoning" (dialegomai, vv. 8-9): From "dialogue," implying interactive debate, not monologue. It underscores Paul's Socratic-style engagement.
- "Persuading" (peithō, v. 8): Connotes convincing through argument, highlighting intellectual appeal.
- "The Way" (hē hodos, vv. 9, 23): A metaphorical term for Christianity, used nominally to denote a path or movement, contrasting with Jewish traditions.