

Acts Chapter 19

Verses 1-5: This incident is unique in that here are 12 men whom the text presents as believers who are, nevertheless, rebaptized. They, like John the Baptist, had received Christ and were baptized. But they knew nothing of the church age or the coming of the Holy Spirit, even though these had happened 20 years earlier.

Paul deems it necessary to rebaptize them. The evidence that they had already been saved is substantial. First, Luke refers to them as “disciples.” Second, Paul speaks of them as those who have “believed.” Third, if they were saved through Paul’s witness here, it would be fitting that they receive the Holy Spirit and the demonstration of tongues at the moment of belief (as with Cornelius; 10:44), rather than after their baptism.

It seems best to understand these disciples of John as men who had been saved before Pentecost, but who had never been informed of its occurrence. Hence, they would not have received the baptism of the Spirit when saved back then. And no later event brought it about as Pentecost did for the 120 in the Upper Room.

Obviously therefore, John the Baptist did not initiate the church age; otherwise, the rebaptism of these men would have been unnecessary, as well as the demonstration of tongues.

Acts 19:1 "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,"

“Upper coasts”: The area of Asia Minor north of Ephesus, where Luke left Paul before the interlude describing Apollos’ ministry (18:23). By going through that area, Paul took the direct route to Ephesus, not the more common trade route

“Ephesus” was located halfway up the western coast of Asia Minor. Situated on the Aegean Sea at the mouth of the Cayster River, it lay 250 miles due east of Athens. Though Pergamum was the capital of the province of Asia, Ephesus was its most important city. With its one-third million people, Ephesus was impressive.

“Certain disciples”: They were of John the Baptist (verse 3); hence Old Testament seekers. That they did not yet fully understand the Christian faith is evident from their reply to Paul’s question (verse 2).

The word “disciple” means “learner,” or “follower”, and does not always refer to Christians (Matt. 9:14; 11:2; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 7:18-19; 11:1; John 1:35; 6:66). Followers of John the Baptist, like this group, existed into the second century.

A 70 foot-wide colonnaded street (Arcadian Way), ran through the city down to the sea. Ephesus was also the home of the fertility goddess, Diana (Artemis). The temple of Diana was described by ancient writers as four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens and was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

During New Testament times however, the city experienced economic decline as its harbor began to be shut down. Today Ephesus lies in ruins. Paul initiated the work of the gospel in Ephesus when he placed Aquila and Priscilla there at the end of his second missionary journey.

He returned shortly (third journey), and spent three years (20:31), establishing the churches throughout the province of Asia (verse 10). Several prominent men ministered in Ephesus during the New Testament era: Paul, Apollos (18:24), Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3), and John the apostle (according to Irenaeus and Eusebius).

We know that we studied in the last lesson that Apollos taught the Scriptures. He was not acquainted with the baptism of the Holy Ghost himself, so he did not bring the teaching of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

He was a teacher of the Word of God, not the Spirit of God. These people were strong believers in Jesus Christ, but they had not been taught about the power of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 19:2 "He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost."

"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" The question reflects Paul's uncertainty about their spiritual status. Since all Christians receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (see notes on Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13), their answer revealed they were not yet fully Christians.

They had not yet received Christian baptism (having been baptized only "into John's baptism"), which further evidenced that they were not Christians (see note on 2:38).

Paul's question here is better translated, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" The manner and time of the receiving of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts does not follow a set pattern. Therefore, to base one's beliefs on any one passage in this transitional book must listen to what the apostles understood concerning these circumstances.

Follow the consistent teachings of the apostles rather than their diverse experiences. Every person at the moment of his salvation receives the Holy Spirit without the laying on of hands and without any outward sign (see Romans 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13; 1 John 3:24; 4:13).

When Paul asks them, had they received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, they were confused, because they did not know about it. The only answer they could give was that they did not even know if there was a Holy Ghost.

Acts 19:3 "And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism."

We see here that these people in all sincerity have been baptized in John's baptism. They did all they knew to do.

Acts 19:4 "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

“Baptism of repentance ... believe on him ... Jesus”: These disciples did not realize Jesus of Nazareth was the One to whom John’s baptism pointed. Paul gave them instruction not on how to receive the Spirit, but about Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist had gone through the land crying, repent and be baptized. The Lord (Messiah), is coming. These people here at Ephesus had done all of this in obedience to Apollos' teaching. They had just stopped short of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19:5 "When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

“Baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”: They believed Paul’s presentation of the gospel and came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (2:41). Although required of all Christians, baptism does not save (see note on 2:38).

We see here, that they now have been buried in the watery grave (water baptism), and will rise to new life in Jesus Christ.

Acts 19:6 "And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

“Paul ... laid his hands upon them”: This signified their inclusion into the church (see note on 8:17). Apostles were also present when the church was born (chapter 2), and when the Samaritans (chapter 8), and Gentiles (chapter 10), were included. In each case, God’s purpose was to emphasize the unity of the church.

“Spake with tongues, and prophesied”: This served as proof that they were part of the church (see note on 8:17). They also needed tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit now indwelt them, since they had not heard that He had come (verse 2).

The experience of “tongues” is found only three times in Acts. It may have occurred at other times. Certainly, the text suggests that it did not occur commonly (see the note on 11:15-16). Even if it did occur more commonly, Luke through the Holy Spirit has preserved for us only the occurrences at Pentecost (chapter 2), Cornelius’s house (chapter 10), and here at Ephesus.

In each of these situations, tongues serve as a sign to Jews who seem slow to believe all that God is doing. Also, each of these three occurrences relates to one of the geographical regions involved in the spread of the church. First at Jerusalem, God gives this gift of tongues as a sign to the unsaved Jews to show that they need to heed the message of the apostles, three thousand do.

Second, in Judea and Samaria God uses tongues through Cornelius to convince the Jews there with Peter and later those in Jerusalem that the Gentiles have received everything that the Jews have, and that they are equal in the church of God.

Third, in the distant city of Ephesus, God grants this gift of tongues for the benefit of the speakers themselves. It is a sign to all those who have followed John's message, showing that these teachings are incomplete and much more can be had, so listen to Paul.

We see here, that the fire of the Holy Ghost (the baptism of the Holy Ghost), came upon them as Paul touched them. This is the baptism that John the Baptist spoke of when he said, there was one among them that would baptize them with the Holy Ghost and fire. The speaking in tongues was evidence that they had been baptized in the Holy Ghost.

Acts 19:7 "And all the men were about twelve."

It appears there were twelve men who received this baptism of the Holy Ghost here at Ephesus.

Acts 19:8 "And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God."

"Synagogue" (see note on 13:5).

"Three months": Paul's longest stay in any synagogue, with the possible exception of the one at Corinth.

"Kingdom of God" (see note on 1:3).

It seems there were some things that were not pleasing to Paul in this church, because we see the word (disputing). For three months, Paul taught doctrine to these people. This you remember, was in the day when they were establishing the church.

Acts 19:9 "But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus."

"Hardened": The Greek word always refers to defiance against God (Rom. 9:18; Heb. 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7).

"That way" (see note on 9:2).

"The school of one Tyrannus": Tyrannus was either the owner of the lecture hall, or a philosopher who taught there. If the latter, his name, which means "our tyrant," may have been a nickname given him by his students. Paul used the hall during the afternoon break (from about 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.), when it would otherwise be un-occupied.

We see here, that many people did not accept this message of Paul. Many of the people were already settled in the way they believed, and they were not anxious to change. The word Tyrannus means tyrant. It seems this Tyrannus had a school here and Paul lectured at the school. Somehow this difference of opinion separated these disciples.

It seemed this argument went on every day. When Paul could not win them over, he just left this area. It seems as if Paul stopped these disciples from going to Synagogue with their unconverted friends.

Acts 19:10 "And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."

“Two years”: The length of time Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus, not the total length of his ministry at Ephesus (20:31).

“All ... in Asia heard”: Though Paul probably never left Ephesus, his converts (2 Tim. 2:2), spread the gospel throughout the province of Asia Minor. This two-year period saw the founding of the churches at Colossae and Hierapolis, and possibly some of the 7 churches mentioned (in Rev. 2 and 3), beyond the one at Ephesus.

“Asia” identifies three geographical areas:

- (1) The Roman province of New Testament times encompassing the western third of Asia Minor;
- (2) The westernmost peninsula of the Asian continent, known as Asia Minor (roughly equivalent to modern-day Turkey); and
- (3) The continent.

All of the 21 references to Asia in the New Testament involve the Roman province, of which Ephesus was the prominent city.

Ephesus and Asia was the target of Paul’s third missionary journey (chapter 19). When Luke records that “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word” (verse 10), during Paul’s two-year ministry, he certainly has reference to the province, not the continent.

It was not uncommon for the rulers of the Jews to get together and debate a Scripture that was giving them problems.

He did talk to both Jew and Greek alike and it does say all who dwelt in Asia. That would make you believe he ventured out to other cities (unnamed), but made his headquarters here in Ephesus.

Verses 11-12: At Ephesus God worked “special” or unusual “miracles” so that even “handkerchiefs” were used in healing “the sick.” But this was very unusual even for the apostles. At other times Paul was unable to perform even a single healing (see. 2 Cor. 12:8; 2 Tim 4:20).

Acts 19:11 "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:"

“Special miracles”: These confirmed that Paul was God’s messenger, since there was no completed New Testament to use to determine the truth of his message (2 Cor. 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Acts 19:12 "So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them."

“Handkerchiefs ... aprons”: The headbands and outer clothing Paul wore while making tents. The belief that mystical power could be so transmitted was widespread in the ancient world, e.g., believing that Peter’s shadow could heal. (5:15; Matt. 9:21).

Paul prayed over these items of clothing, and God healed and delivered the people these articles were sent. God is not limited.

This is just a show of God's power, just as Jesus spoke the word and healed the demoniac girl at home when her mother came to Jesus for help (in Matthew 15:21-28). God's power is not limited to a certain location. This power of God in Paul was very great, and Paul was not afraid to use it.

Acts 19:13 “Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.”

“Jews, exorcists”: Simon Magus (8:9-25), and Barjesus (13:6-12), were other possible examples of such charlatans (Matt. 12:27). In contrast to the absolute authority exercised by Jesus and the apostles over demons, those exorcists sought to expel the demons by attempting to call on a more potent spirit being, in this case the Lord Jesus.

These vagabond Jews were similar to Gypsies, who traveled around in covered wagons with no certain dwelling place. They cast spells and supposedly delivered people from evil spirits. They did not know Jesus, or believe in Him.

They had heard that Paul preached of Jesus, but they really did not know any details about this either. They knew that Paul used Jesus' name to heal and deliver people, but they had no idea where the power came from. They were really practicing magic.

Acts 19:14 "And there were seven sons of [one] Sceva, a Jew, [and] chief of the priests, which did so."

“Sceva, a Jew and chief of the priests”: Since there is no record of a Jewish High-Priest by that name, he probably assumed that title falsely to impress people.

These were not even devout Jews, much less believers in Christ. They had a chief priest, because they were of Jewish birth, for no other reason. They were not even living for either Judaism or Christianity. They were trying to make money with this.

Acts 19:15 "And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?"

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know”: Recognizing that the exorcists had no authority over him (unlike Jesus and Paul), the demon rejected their attempt to expel him from his victim. This confirms that the power to cast our demons belonged to Jesus and the apostles and no one else. Even the demons give testimony to that.

This is true. These demons knew Jesus in heaven before they became demons, while they were angels. They knew Paul because he delivered demons from many people. They actually were afraid of Jesus' name and of Paul, because of the power of Jesus in him.

They didn't know, and certainly were not afraid of, this priest of Sceva or his seven sons. Many times, the demons called out Jesus' name when they encountered Jesus, such as (in Mark chapter 5, especially verse 7).

Acts 19:16 "And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

See (Mark 5:1-4).

Now remember, this is one man against seven men. The problem is that this one man with the demons has super-natural strength. He could have several thousand demon spirits inside him, as the insane man did that Jesus cast 2,000 demons out of.

Even one demon has tremendous power, but someone with a number of them could cause a whole city a problem. It would be no problem for him to destroy seven men.

Acts 19:17 "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

This would certainly get your attention. You can easily see how this would cause a great move of the church. It leaves absolutely no doubt who has the power. You see the only name that can cause deliverance and healing is the name of Jesus Christ. You can see why everyone magnified the name of Jesus Christ.

Acts 19:18 "And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds."

We see here, that these who heard believed and they repented of their sins.

Verses 19-20: The burning of these occult “books,” valued at over one million dollars by current standards, might be considered a senseless waste by some (1 Sam. 15:1-3, 9-22). The sale of these scrolls could only provide financial resources. The rejection of and separation from them resulted in God’s blessing, and “so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

Acts 19:19 "Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all [men]: and they counted the price of them, and found [it] fifty thousand [pieces] of silver."

“Books”: Of secret magical spells. Burning them proved the genuineness of the magicians’ repentance (see note on 2:38); having destroyed these books, they could not easily resume their practices.

“Fifty thousand pieces of silver”: fifty thousand day’s wages for a common labor, an astonishing sum of money given to indicate how widespread the practice of magic was in Ephesus.

We see that these people are willing to give up all of their witchcraft books to be burned. They are serious about believing in Jesus Christ. We could take a lesson from them. They didn't worry about the cost; they just didn't want to have anything displeasing to God.

So many people who claim to be Christians today, are reading their horoscope in the paper, they are contacting familiar spirits. Many have Ouija boards, tarot cards, totem poles, Buddha’s, and all other sorts of witchcraft paraphernalia.

If we are a Christian, we ought to have a good old fashioned, spiritual house cleaning. Silver means redemption.

Acts 19:20 "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

This is not because of the fear that the word grew, but because of the teaching. The fear just caused the people to be more receptive to hear. The Word grew, because it was the Truth.

Acts Chapter 19 Questions

1. While Apollos was at Corinth Paul passed through and went where?
2. What question did Paul ask the disciples here?
3. How did the disciples answer Paul?
4. Why did these disciples not know about the Holy Ghost?
5. What kind of teacher was Apollos?
6. Paul asked to what then were ye baptized, and they answered what?

7. What was the baptism of John's?
8. Who had Apollos taught them to believe on?
9. In verse 5, they were baptized in whose name?
10. What came on them when Paul touched them?
11. What was their evidence that they had been baptized in the Holy Ghost?
12. How many men were baptized?
13. How long did Paul speak boldly in the synagogue?
14. What did Paul teach for this time?
15. What one word lets us know that Paul was not pleased with what was going on?
16. Why did Paul separate from them?
17. What school did he dispute in daily?
18. What does Tyrannus mean?
19. How many years did Paul teach in Asia?
20. Who heard the word of the Lord?
21. "And God wrought _____ by the hands of Paul:"
22. What was carried from his body, which healed the sick and caused evil spirits to go out?
23. What kind of Jews were the Exorcists?
24. What were these Jews doing?
25. Whose name were they using?
26. How many sons did the Jew, Sceva, have?
27. What was Sceva?
28. How did the evil spirits answer them, when they tried to cast them out?
29. What did the man filled with evil spirits do to the seven sons of Sceva?

30. What effect did this have on the Jews and Greeks at Ephesus?
31. Verse 18 says they did what, because of what had happened?
32. These books of curious art that were burned cost how much money?
33. What are some of the things that we should get out of our houses, if we are Christians?
34. Verse 20 tells the results of all of these witchcraft items being destroyed, what was the result?