

# ACTS

## Chapter 19

### *Paul in Ephesus*

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples <sup>2</sup> and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when <sup>a</sup> you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup> So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. <sup>4</sup> Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized into <sup>b</sup> the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues <sup>c</sup> and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all. <sup>8</sup> Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, <sup>12</sup> so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. <sup>13</sup> Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. <sup>15</sup> One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” <sup>16</sup> Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. <sup>17</sup> When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. <sup>18</sup> Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. <sup>19</sup> A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. <sup>d 20</sup> In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. <sup>21</sup> After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.” <sup>22</sup> He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

**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).

*through the interior.* 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). – 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 Phryia. 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.* See note on 18:19. – 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 (see note on 18:25).

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

**19:4** *John's baptism.* See notes on Mt 3:11, 15.

*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 (see note on Mk 1:4).

**19:6** *placed his hands on them.* See note on 6:6.

*Holy Spirit came on them ... spoke in tongues and prophesied.* † The same experience the Gentiles had in Caesarea (10:46). Cf. note on 2:4.

**19:8** *three months.* Much longer than the three Sabbaths in Thessalonica (17:2), but the same approach: Jews first, then Greeks (see note on 13:14).

**19:9** **REFUSED TO BELIEVE...MALIGNED THE WAY** – The word of God will eventually cause division between those who believe it and those who do not. (PBC)  
*the Way.* See note on 9:2.

*lecture hall of Tyrannus.* See map of "Ephesus"; 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.

**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). – 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).

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

**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). – 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)

**19:16** 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)

**19:19** *scrolls*. Such documents bearing alleged magical formulas and secret information have been unearthed. Ephesus was a center for magical incantations. – 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 drachmas*. The high price (see NIV text note) was not due to the quality of the books but to the supposed power gained by their secret rigmorole of words and names.

**19:21** MACEDONIA AND 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)

**19:22** *Erastus*. An important figure at Corinth, “the city’s director of public works” at one time (see note on Ro 16:23). He is located later at Corinth also (2Ti 4:20). Just now he returns to Corinth by way of Macedonia with Timothy.

LITTLE LONGER – 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)

### *The Riot in Ephesus*

<sup>23</sup> About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. <sup>24</sup> A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. <sup>25</sup> He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: “Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. <sup>26</sup> And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. <sup>27</sup> There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.” <sup>28</sup> When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” <sup>29</sup> Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. <sup>30</sup> Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let <sup>31</sup> Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. <sup>32</sup> The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. <sup>33</sup> The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. <sup>34</sup> But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” <sup>35</sup> The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: “Men of Ephesus, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? <sup>36</sup> Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. <sup>37</sup> You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. <sup>38</sup> If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. <sup>39</sup> If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. <sup>40</sup> As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today’s events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.” <sup>41</sup> After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

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

*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. – 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)

**19:25** *a good income*. 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.

**19:27** *temple of the great goddess*. See map of “Ephesus”; 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.

**19:29** **WAS AS IN AN UPROAR** – 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)

*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).

**19:31** *officials of the province*. † Greek *Asiarchai*, 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.

**FRIENDS OF PAUL** – 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)

**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.

**19:35** *city 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.

**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)

**19:38** *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.

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