

PAUL IN EPHESUS

Acts 19:1-41 / Sept. 53 A.D. – May 56 A.D.

The “church” is most often cast in a negative light in modern literature and entertainment. But historically, wherever the gospel and the true church has spread, she brings blessing. Marriages and families are strengthened. Schools are established and people are taught to read. Hospitals are built and the sick are treated with compassion. Social morals improve. Fair business practices lead to prosperity.

But wherever the gospel and church spread, there will be a fight. Satan doesn't give up territory easily.

Acts 19:1-7 Confusion at Ephesus

Ephesus was a large city with a population estimated to be 300,000 at the time of Paul's arrival in the fall of 53 A.D. It was a beautiful city on the shore of the Aegean Sea. Ephesus was known as the center of the worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana). Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. As a result, Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan and his demons. Paul's arrival with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit guaranteed a confrontation with Satan's forces.

Upon arriving at Ephesus, Paul encountered this rather odd group of disciples. These men were disciples of John the Baptist who had accepted John's call to repentance and been baptized. The Spirit graciously guided Paul to tell these men the rest of the story of Jesus of Nazareth and they readily believed and were baptized in the name of Jesus. Speaking in tongues and prophesying assured them they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

This was an anomaly. These men were caught in a time warp; they had been prepared by John the Baptist to receive the Messiah, but then had not heard the full of account of Jesus of Nazareth. Their experience is not the norm, particularly their reception of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of Paul's hands. Paul, himself, will teach in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that every believer receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation and is baptized by the Spirit into the church at that very moment as well. Spirit baptism is not accompanied by or indicated by speaking in tongues. Only four times in Acts is receiving the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues: Pentecost, Samaria, Cornelius' home and these disciples of John. In each case, speaking in tongues was an affirmation that members of each of these four unique groups had received justification salvation through faith in Jesus, were indwelt by the Holy Spirit and were full-fledged members of the Church.

As was his custom, Paul began his ministry in the Jewish synagogue of Ephesus returning to the synagogue he had visited on his second missionary journey (18:19-21).

Acts 19:8-12 Ministry at Ephesus

Paul taught in the synagogue of Ephesus for three months without any trouble – a record for Paul. What caused Paul to leave was just plain stubbornness in a refusal to believe what the Scriptures taught about Messiah and bad-mouthing Christianity (the Way).

Paul left the synagogue and found a lecture hall to rent. For two years Paul taught unmolested. It was an incredibly fruitful time. During this time missionary teams planted churches in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Through what Luke describes as *extraordinary* miracles the sweat towels and work aprons Paul used when leather working brought healing and deliverance to the people of Ephesus and obviously reflected positively on the gospel. After watching Paul's miracles, a group of Jewish exorcists came up with the idea they might be able to carry out their business of casting out demons using the name of Jesus.

Acts 19:13-22 Sorcery at Ephesus

What the seven sons of Sceva attempted is called *syncretism*. It is the attempt to blend Christianity with non-Christian religions. Ironically, it's the demon who teaches the lesson; Jesus' name is to be revered and respected. This incident caused even unbelievers to be more respectful of Jesus and caused believers to repent of practices they had been hanging on to from their pre-Christ lives. This repentance came about as a work of the Spirit not as an edict from the church.

The work of the Holy Spirit through Paul and the church in Ephesus was a direct attack on Satan's kingdom in Ephesus. As people got saved and came out of idolatry, the number of people worshipping Artemis decreased. Sales of statues and shrines decreased and eventually this led to a riot.

Acts 19:23-41 Riot at Ephesus

Why did Luke give so much space to this riot in Ephesus? It is very possible that one of the purposes for which Luke wrote the book of Acts is as an *amicus* (friend of the court) *brief* on behalf of the Apostle Paul when he was put on trial in Rome. The riot in Ephesus and particularly the words of the city clerk showed that the preaching of the gospel and the behavior of Christians broke no civil laws in the Roman Empire. Luke demonstrated that from the viewpoint of Greco-Roman authorities all around the Mediterranean world, Christianity was a subset of a legal religion (Judaism) and deserved no punishment as an illegal cult.

As a matter of fact, wherever the true church has been planted, it brings good to its community. But wherever the gospel and the church spreads there's going to be a fight. Even though they are no match against the power of the Holy Spirit, evil spirits will do what they can to intimidate people and keep them in spiritual bondage. Fred and Ruthie Sammons experienced that warfare in Paraguay; Nate and Megan experienced it on Barangonan Island. And Matt and Jeannine will experience it in Papua New Guinea. And I believe we are seeing more of this warfare as our culture rejects God's truth.

We don't need to be afraid of demons because greater is He Who is in us (the Holy Spirit) than he who is in the world. We need to walk in the truth of God's Word even though we are mocked and rejected for it. We need to walk by faith in the promises of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to pray for our missionaries and for one another that God would strengthen us to be faithful and to be skillful in resisting the devil (1 Peter 5:6-11).

Voice of the Martyrs Needs for November: bath towels, wash cloths, disposable antiseptic wipes.