

## Thoughts on Acts Nineteen

The Holy Spirit had forbidden Paul to preach in Asia on his second tour (Acts 16:6). But on his third tour, Paul returned to Ephesus as he had promised (Acts 18:21). As he approached the city, he found students of John's baptism who, like Apollos did not know about Christ's teachings. A. T. Robertson points out that there is nothing in the text to connect these disciples (learners) to Apollos except their limited knowledge of the kingdom. Paul's actions, teaching, and passing on the abilities of prophecy and tongues enabled them to spread the whole gospel of the remission of sins through Christ's blood.

The giving of the gift of speaking in foreign tongues to men by the Holy Spirit is recorded in Acts 2, Acts 10, and here in Acts 19. The three separate occasions had three different reasons and were not to be applied to all Christians. In Acts 2, the chosen 12 were provided with all the Holy Spirit had to offer, supplying the apostles of Christ with all they would need to teach and prove the Gospel. In Acts 10, Gentiles were given the gift of tongues to demonstrate to the Jews that Gentiles were subject to the Gospel and fully acceptable to God based upon their faith in Christ. And in Acts 19, the gift was given to provide a group of traveling scripture teachers with the whole truth so that they could teach Christ to those they encountered in their travels.

Moving on to Ephesus, Paul began teaching as he usually did in the synagogue. The result was also the same as usual. So, after three months, Paul departed and began teaching in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9). Verses 11 and 12 mention *"extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul."* All miracles are extra-ordinary in that they are beyond the range of physical possibility. Jesus had healed without being present with the sick. But the magnitude of miracles, signs of Godly power, that occurred during Paul's preaching in Ephesus was overwhelming. *"So that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out"* (Act 19:11-12).

Verse 13 mentions "exorcists," who claimed to expel demons using magical formulas. Many Jews were especially addicted to those who practiced spells of sorcery. In Ephesus, the "Sons of Sceva" practiced this mystic deception and seemed to have regarded Paul just as Simon had regarded Peter and John in Samaria (Acts 8). The difference with the seven sons appears to be that they thought they could use the names of Jesus and Paul as part of their magic words to cast out demons. But the demons did not recognize them because the Holy Spirit was not acting through them. Many other people who practiced the dark arts for money repented by confessing their deceptions and obeying the gospel message.

Acts 19:21 is like an itinerary, planned out by the Holy Spirit, for Paul to follow from Ephesus to Rome, as Luke describes in the remaining chapters of Acts. Paul wrote the letter to Rome from Corinth not long after this, and later in Jerusalem, Jesus showed Paul in a vision that Paul would go to Rome (Acts 23:11). The trouble starting in Ephesus marked a time of crisis when Paul had to move again to escape those who would cause his death. People making souvenirs of the goddess of Ephesus were losing their livelihood because of Paul's preaching. People were turning from idols to Christ and no longer buying their statues. The strength of the smith's guild came to the side of the silversmith, Demetrius. They created a mob and caused confusion among the people, creating an unlawful assembly in the 24,000-seat theater. The town clerk restored order by reminding the people they were in danger of being punished by Rome's army for disturbing the peace. They had no

excuse for their actions and were *"in peril of being accused of insurrection in regard to this day, there being no occasion by which we will be able to give an account of this concourse"* (Acts 19:40). It may well have been during this troubled time that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and began his journey back to Corinth.

Paul remained in Ephesus for two years, teaching and demonstrating the gospel message. Many took the gospel and carried it to others until all of Asia heard it (Acts 19:10). The church in Colossae, also in Asia, was probably started by those going out from Ephesus (Colossians 1:5-8). Paul's conclusion to the Colossian letter shows that other Asians had taught in the area where Paul had not ventured. The converts he made probably brought the gospel message to the six cities in Asia addressed by John in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, starting the church in each (Acts 19:9-12). In writing to the church in Colossae, Paul indicates that he never preached there but that they heard the word from others (Colossians 1:1-7).

How do we spread the Word today?