

Paul's Third Missionary Journey Continues At Ephesus

Acts 19

Acts 19:1-10: *“And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples² he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”³ And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.”⁴ Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”*

⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. ⁷ Now the men were about twelve in all. ⁸ And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

Background Notes

The apostle Paul had visited Ephesus briefly on his second missionary journey. He left Priscilla and Aquila there to lay the groundwork for his promised return on his third missionary journey. In Acts 19, Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey.

Ephesus was a prominent city in the ancient world. It was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Paul spent between two and three years in Ephesus, teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord. He started teaching at the synagogue, which was his normal procedure, but after 3 months of opposition from the hardened and obstinate unbelieving Jews, Paul moved to a lecture hall owned by a man named Tyrannus.

For two full years Paul taught at TBS – Tyrannus Bible School. As a result, the word of the Lord went out to Jews and Greeks who lived throughout the entire Roman province of Asia. If you visit the ruins of ancient Ephesus today, you can see the remains of the open theater (v29) and some remains of the Temple of Diana (or Artemis) (v35). This temple was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, and was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

When Paul came to Ephesus, he found some disciples who, like Apollos, were only acquainted with the teaching of John the Baptist, and who had undergone John’s baptism of repentance. Paul baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and after Paul laid his hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gift of tongues and prophecy,

confirming that this was the work of God. This confirmation by signs was important to show that Paul was just as much an apostle as Peter and the other apostles.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Word of the Lord is confirmed by signs.

Acts 19:11-17: "Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. ¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

Extraordinary miracles were done by God through Paul, and God confirmed the preaching of the apostle Paul with these signs. There was no magical power in the handkerchiefs or aprons carried from Paul to people who were sick, but they were tangible symbols of God's power through the apostle Paul. Notice that God was performing the miracles, not Paul (v11).

Another sign by which God confirmed His word through Paul was the case of the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish priest. They were Jewish exorcists who attempted to use the name of Jesus to cast out an evil spirit from a man, because they saw that Paul was so successful. But the evil spirit spoke through the man, and refused to submit to these Jewish exorcists who were just using the name of Jesus. Instead, the evil spirit drove the man to attack the exorcists, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (v16).

It's hard to know whether or not to laugh at the thought of this spectacle, but God used it as a sign to confirm the word of the Lord that Paul preached (v17)! The Lord still confirms the preaching of His Word even today by signs. The signs today may not be extraordinary miracles, such as in Acts 19, although we should never take the position that God can't use miracles and signs today. But the Lord will always confirm His Word with some kind of evidence that His Word is the truth.

For example, I've seen totally dysfunctional families transformed into wonderful Christ-centered homes when the Word of the Lord is believed and put into practice. What better sign would you want in today's world? The Word of the Lord is confirmed by signs.

2. The Word of the Lord is confirmed by revival.

Acts 19:18-20: *“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. ¹⁹ Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”*

As a result of Paul's ministry of the Word at Ephesus, there were conversions. Those who had been involved in occult practices brought their books of magic and burned them. Notice that the early Christians did not say, “Let's sell these books about the occult and give the money to the Lord.” No, they burned this evil material - and so should we, if we have any ungodly (but valuable) trash around. If you sell it, the devil can keep using it. Burn it. Destroy it.

We know a Christian teenager who destroyed (rather than selling) a valuable collection of ungodly music when the Lord brought revival to his life. Getting rid of ungodly material is an indication of revival, and revival confirms the Word of the Lord.

3. The Word of the Lord is confirmed by opposition.

Acts 19:21-34: *“When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” ²² So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.*

²³ And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. ²⁴ For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. ²⁶ Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. ²⁷ So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.”

²⁸ Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” ²⁹ So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. ³⁰ And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. ³¹ Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. ³² Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ³³ And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. ³⁴ But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

Anywhere there is fruit and blessing in the work of the Lord, there will be increased opposition from the enemy. Satan doesn't bother opposing unproductive ministries! So in that sense, opposition confirms the word of the Lord, as here in Acts 19. The preaching of the Word of the Lord at Ephesus showed the futility of believing in the pagan gods, including the famous goddess Diana (or Artemis) of the Ephesians. Sales of the silver shrines of Artemis dropped off because of Paul's preaching, so the merchants stirred up opposition to Paul and his team. The city was filled with confusion, and they dragged Gaius and Aristarchus into the theater. All of this confusion and opposition was the result of the preaching of the Word of the Lord at Ephesus.

Satan will always oppose the work of the Lord, and attempt to bring it down using chaos, confusion, and disruption - but this simply shows the proof and power of God's Word. The Word of the Lord is confirmed by opposition.

Practical Application

Let God use clerks and courts, if He so chooses.

Acts 19:35-41: *"And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus?"³⁶ Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.³⁷ For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.³⁸ Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another.³⁹ But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly.⁴⁰ For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering."⁴¹ And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly."*

To our way of thinking, Ephesus would have been a perfect place for God to step in with an earthquake, as He did at Philippi. The Temple of Artemis could have been brought down, the theater destroyed, the crowd dispersed, and Paul and the others delivered. But God chose to use the judicial court system – the city clerk and his logical arguments - to deal with this situation. Would we have agreed with God's decision - or would we have held out for an earthquake?

The clerk reminded the people that the authorities in Rome took a dim view of disorderly conduct and mob rule anywhere in the Empire. All this chaos didn't happen by chance. God was working behind the scenes to have this city clerk and this legal system readily available to handle this situation.

God can use non-Christian city clerks and non-Christian judicial courts today to accomplish His purposes and protect His people! So don't deter God from the method He chooses to use. Let God use clerks and courts, if He so chooses!