

Lesson 18
Acts 18:23 - 19:41
EXCITEMENT IN EPHEBUS

Memory Verse: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."
(Acts 19:20)

We don't know how long Paul remained in Antioch before leaving on his third missionary journey into Galatia, but perhaps it was as long as a year. As in his second journey, he visited the churches and strengthened the believers. Luke does not describe this journey in detail because his main purpose is to get Paul to Ephesus.

Ephesus had 300,000 inhabitants and a large harbour. It was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia and its most important commercial centre. Ephesus grew wealthy on trade and with the temple of Diana it attracted hosts of visitors who wanted to see this building, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

On arriving in Ephesus, Paul meets a group of twelve people who had repented and been baptized as taught by John the Baptist. But they did not know that since the death and resurrection of Jesus, the form of baptism that John proclaimed is no longer in use. The one whom John announced has come, and the baptism with the Holy Spirit that John promised has been given on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:4-5; 2:16-17, 33). When they understand this they are baptized in water as disciples of Jesus Christ, and receive the Holy Spirit as the original disciples had at Pentecost (Acts 19:1-7).

After Paul has preached for three months in the synagogue, the Jews force him out, so he goes and teaches in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. He carries on his teaching work there for the next two years, during which the disciples take the message into the surrounding countryside (Acts 19:8-10).

In the three years at Ephesus, many people become Christians. Ephesus is considered to be the home of the goddess Artemis (or Diana), and the citizens of Ephesus were the honoured guardians of the magnificent temple of Artemis in their city. With so many people turning from the worship of Artemis, the temple was losing its popularity. Furthermore, local silversmiths who made small images and household shrines of the goddess were going out of business (Acts 19:23-27).

Angry at their loss of income, the silversmiths stir up the people against Paul and his fellow missionaries, and a riot breaks out. Since any who did not worship Artemis are in danger, the Jews try to protect themselves by pointing out that they are not associated with the Christians. But the mob refuses to listen (Acts 19:28-34).

In calming the riotous crowd, the city's chief official defends Paul and his party. At the same time he warns the people not to take the law into their own hands again, because Rome will not tolerate such disorder (Acts 19:35-41).

Luke wants to share with his readers the marvellous ministry God gave to Paul and about those people which affected Ephesian society and religion in that strategic city which was so steeped in idolatry and the occult. Paul's three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31) - the longest he stayed in any city - were certainly exciting and fruitful.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 18: 23 – 19:41

Things to learn: 1) Incomplete Message and Inconsistent Witness 2) Inadequate Power 3) Indignant Citizen Mob

Read the introduction to this study and Acts 18:23 – 19:41

Questions:

Q1. What vital lessons can the Church today learn from the message and witness of Apollos and the twelve professing "Christian" men whom Paul met at Ephesus (Acts 18:23 – 19:10)?

Q2 Why did the seven Jewish men failed in using God's name to exorcise the demon possessed man in Acts 19:11-20

Q3 Paul faced an indignant mob while ministering at Ephesus. How should Christians continue their practice under similar circumstances as in Acts 19:21-41?