

Introduction

1. After spending some time back at Antioch, Paul set out on his third missionary journey:
 - a. He began in Asia Minor where he revisited some of the churches from his second journey to strengthen the disciples
 - b. At the beginning of Acts 19 he arrived back at Ephesus where he stayed for just over three years:
 - 1) He spent the first three months preaching the Gospel in the synagogue and this is mentioned in 19:8 (READ)
 - 2) After being rejected by the Jews, he took the disciples with him and spent the next 21 months or teaching and preaching at the Greek school of Tyrannus; this is mentioned in 19:9-10 (READ)
 - 3) His final year in Ephesus is covered in 19:21-20:1 which includes Paul's confrontation with the idol-making silversmiths and the ensuing riot
2. As we just read in v. 10, Paul's time in Ephesus was tremendously effective and successful; Luke stated that **"all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."**
 - a. What we have in our passage today, 19:11-20, is a more detailed account of those first two years and give us a picture of how the Lord worked through Paul to spread the Gospel throughout Asia
 - b. The first and last verses of our passage, 11 and 20, actually serve as bookends to frame and explain what takes place—you can almost read them together: **"And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul...so the Word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."**
3. Before we dive into the text, we need to know some important things about Ephesus:
 - a. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and a major center of travel and commerce as it was one of the most important seaports on the Aegean Sea
 - b. It sat at the intersection of three major highways, leading to the northern, southern, and eastern parts of Asia Minor
 - c. It was home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis, who was the Greek goddess of wild animals, the hunt, vegetation, and chastity (called Diana by the Romans); next week we'll see how this comes into play when an angry mob begins to shout "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"
 - d. It was also home to the largest theatre in the world which could hold anywhere from 25,000 to 50,000 spectators depending on the event; we'll also see this next week because it's where the mob that accused Paul gathers and nearly started a riot
 - e. There are two more pieces of information regarding Ephesus that are especially important for our study today:
 - 1) The first is that Ephesus was considered the magic capital of Asia Minor in the first century, and by magic, I mean sorcery; the city was filled with both Greek and Jewish sorcerers
 - 2) The second, and closely related to the first, is that Ephesus was also known for its supernatural or demonic activity (e.g. demon possession, exorcisms, etc.)
 - 3) These two go hand in hand because magic and the supernatural were intertwined

- 4) The goal of the magicians was to determine between good and bad (or healthy and unhealthy) spirits and then use this knowledge to construct things like spells, incantations, formulas, amulets, and even potions, which they would then use to manipulate the gods or spirits into doing what they wanted (e.g. heal, curse, etc.)
4. So, what Luke presents in this passage is an epic battle between God (with a capital G) and gods (with a small g) and between magic and the miraculous; in the words of one commentator, Luke is proving that if the Gospel can succeed in Ephesus, it can succeed anywhere

A. The Lord performs extra-ordinary miracles through Paul (READ 19:11-13)

1. Luke begins by declaring that it wasn't Paul who was performing miracles; but God Himself:
 - a. Paul was simply the avenue through which God was working (e.g. **"by the hands of Paul"**)
 - b. This was important because it was in direct contrast to magic:
 - 1) In magic, the magician manipulated the gods or spirits through their spells, potions, etc.; it was the magician who was in charge and the one who took credit for the healings or exorcisms, etc.
 - 2) But here, Luke declares that God is in charge and He is the one who gets the credit; Paul is an instrument in God's hands, not the other way around
2. Luke also refers to the miracles God was performing through Paul as **"extraordinary"**:
 - a. More literally, Luke refers to them as **"not so common works of power"**
 - b. In other words, these were not your everyday, run-of-the-mill miracles <grin>
 - c. We see what he means in the next verse (12): **"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."**
 - 1) The handkerchiefs Luke refers to here were like bandanas that were worn around the head to keep the sweat out of the eyes
 - 2) The aprons were worn around the waist, possibly used to wipe the hands while working
 - 3) You'll notice that the NASB says that these were **"carried from his body to the sick"** but a more literal translation is found in the ESV: **"so that even facecloths or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick"**
 - 4) So, not only was Paul performing a variety of miracles, by the disciples were taking cloths that had touched his body out to the sick and demon posses to heal them as well
 - 5) It's important to see here that Paul wasn't out there hawking his headbands and aprons for donations like we've seen from some popular TV evangelists

Robert Tilton and his trinkets

3. This is certainly unusual and not normative:
 - a. There are only two other examples, maybe three, of similar healings in this manner in the New Testament
 - 1) The first is from Mark 6:56 where people are healed after touching the fringe of Jesus' cloak
 - 2) The second is the woman with a hemorrhage in Luke 8:44 who is healed after touching the fringe of Jesus's cloak

- 3) A third possible one is from Acts 5:15 which says that people were taking their sick and lining the streets so that Peter's shadow could fall on them, but it doesn't state specifically that they were being healed
- b. The obvious question is why God was using such extraordinary means like Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons to heal people here, but not elsewhere in Acts?
- 1) Unfortunately, Luke doesn't tell us why so we are left to speculation
 - 2) One suggestion offered by scholars is that it might have had something to do with the prevalence of magic in Ephesus; the Greek and Jewish magicians used amulets and other objects when performing their healings and exorcisms so it's something the Ephesians would have been familiar with
 - 3) I'm not sure about that, but there are other explanations that seem just as plausible, maybe more so:
 - a) It served to authenticate Paul as God's messenger and validated his message
 - b) It might have also served as a means to heal more people than Paul could have done himself (e.g. it was likely the disciples that were taking the cloths to the sick to heal them)
 - 4) Regardless of the exact reason, these extraordinary miracles were designed to confront the magic that was so prevalent in Ephesus, and as we'll see they had an incredible impact

B. Some Jewish exorcists try to mimic Paul's miracles but with unexpected and devastating consequences (READ 19:14-16)

1. Jewish exorcists were common in the ANE even though it was something condemned by the Law:
 - a. They were generally charlatans who traveled from city to city, making their living by charging a fee for their services
 - b. While performing their exorcisms, they would invoke the different Jewish divine names depending on the particular circumstance
2. This is what Luke describes in the next few verses:
 - a. Apparently, after seeing Paul's success in casting out demons in Jesus's name, some Jewish exorcists decide they're going to try it (READ 19:13)
 - 1) This is ironic because they had rejected Paul's Gospel (19:9), but are now trying to invoke the name of the very one Paul preached about!
 - 2) Does this sound familiar? Simon the Magician did something similar in Acts 8 when he wanted the power of the Holy Spirit but without repentance and faith in Jesus
 - 3) Much like Simon, these Jewish exorcists see Jesus simply as a means to further their business; they want the power of Jesus without the relationship with Jesus
 - b. One group specifically attempting this was the seven sons of Sceva, a local chief priest, and when they attempt to name the name of Jesus over a demon, he doesn't respond quite as they expect (19:14-16):
 - 1) He first responds with a rebuke (READ 19:15):
 - a) He knew Jesus, as does every demon
 - b) He even recognized Paul

- c) But these guys? His question, “**but who are you?**”, is rhetorical and the demon’s way of declaring that they had zero power or authority over him, unlike Jesus and Paul did; They had just been rebuked by a demon!
- 2) The second thing he does is beat them silly (READ 19:16):
- a) We get a glimpse into Luke’s sense of humor here because it paints a rather humorous picture
 - b) These charlatans arrogantly command the demon to come out of the man in the name of Jesus—someone they clearly don’t know—fully expecting that he will obey; after all, they had probably seen Paul do it time and time again
 - c) Imagine their shock when instead of obeying, the demon verbally and audibly rebukes them, leaps upon them, and as the NET translates it, “**beat them all into submission.**”
 - d) Remember this is one man on seven, and the beat down is so bad that they end up running away naked and wounded

C. Word of the event spreads and multitudes of magicians repent and believe in Jesus (READ 19:17-19)

1. These poor guys; not only had they been beaten and humiliated, but word of what happened to them spread throughout all of Ephesus; it “**had become known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus**”—how would you like to be known for something like this?
2. As a result, two things happened:
 - a. First, “**fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified**”:
 - 1) This could be actual fear, much like what we saw when Jesus cast out Legion and all the townspeople begged Him to leave when the pigs ran off the cliff
 - 2) But, it’s more likely a healthy fear because they “magnified” the name of Jesus which means they praised or extolled it
 - b. Second, multitudes of magicians believed and were led to confession and repentance:
 - 1) The use of the perfect participle (“**those who had believed**”) implies that they had come to believe in Jesus prior to the event with Sceva’s sons, but were now coming forward to confess and disclose their practices
 - 2) This suggests that while they had come to believe in Christ, they may not have completely abandoned their magic practices
 - 3) However, the event with Sceva’s seven sons served as a catalyst to publicly confess and renounce their magic:
 - a) They did this by bringing their books together and burning them; this was a public event
 - b) And, the number of books must have been staggering because Luke says their value was “**fifty thousand pieces of silver**”:
 - One piece of silver (a Roman denarius) was equivalent to one day’s wage for the average worker so 50,000 pieces of silver would equate to 50,000 days of work!
 - Books in the first century were extremely expensive because they had to be made completely by hand, and I’ve seen estimates suggesting an average book could run between one to five day’s wages; if that’s true then we’re looking at between 10,000 and 50,000 books!

- Let's look at this in another way: the median daily wage right now in the U.S. is just under \$200—if we equate that to the denarius, the value of these books would be around \$10,000,000 today
- c) Luke doesn't tell us how many magicians were involved with this mass confession and book burning, but based on the value and estimated number of books, we're probably talking about thousands of individuals

Conclusion

1. As I mentioned in the introduction, verses 11 and 20 operate as book ends ultimately reveal Luke's purpose in including this passage in his historical account of the early church:
 - a. Verse 11 says that God **“was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul”**
 - b. And verse 20 gives us the results: **“So the Word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing”**
2. I see at least three takeaways I'd like to highlight:
 - a. Our faith not only stands in opposition to the popular religious beliefs and practices of the world, but prevails against them:
 - 1) Ephesus was filled not only with Greco-Roman idolatry, but mysticism, magic, and demonic activity
 - 2) However, after just three years, God's Word and the name of Jesus spreads throughout not just Ephesus but all of Asia Minor, leading multitudes to Jesus
 - 3) Paul's ministry had such a major impact in Ephesus that the prosperity of at least two trades were being threatened: magic was being revealed for what it really was and magicians were abandoning their practices, and as we'll see next week idol making tradesmen were freaking out because their business was falling into disrepute
 - 4) That's the way it should be when we preach the Gospel; it stands in opposition to popular culture, beliefs and practices, and ultimately it prevails by changing individual lives, sometimes culture itself (e.g. abortion rates have steadily dropped over the last two decades)
 - b. Some (many?) try to have all the benefits of Jesus, but without knowing Jesus :
 - 1) The Jewish exorcists thought they could wield the power of Jesus to command demons, but without accepting Jesus
 - 2) In the same way, the world we live in thinks that it can have all of the things God promises—morality, hope, peace, safety, prosperity, even eternal life—but they think they can do it without Him
 - 3) They try to mimic these things, but they're all counterfeit
 - c. Jesus Christ is the real source of transformation and redemption:
 - 1) The Jewish magicians and exorcists were running around claiming to heal the sick and cast out demons, and idol-makers were promoting false religion, and it was all just a money-making scam
 - 2) What Paul offered the Ephesians through Christ, however, was genuine transformation and redemption—the sick were really being healed, the demonically oppressed were

being set free, magicians and exorcists were repenting of their false practices, and people were being saved

- 3) We're living in crazy times right now with ever increasing wickedness, violence, hatred, division, immorality and the likes, and many are trying to tell us that the solutions are found in things like more intrusive government, new laws, socialism, critical race theory, teaching sex-ed in schools, and a host of things that are ultimately man made and doomed to failure
- 4) The only thing that offers real hope of transformation and redemption is faith in Jesus