

Spiritual Warfare in Ephesus (Acts 19)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

I. Background and Introduction

- a. In the prior lesson, we saw Paul return to Antioch at the end of his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:22**) and then embark on his third missionary journey (**Acts 18:23**).
- b. Paul is now on his third missionary journey. He starts by going the inland route through Asia Minor (modern Turkey), going from Syria through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia (in the inland center of Turkey), traveling westward and ending up at Ephesus, on the western coast.
- c. Before Paul arrives at Ephesus on his third missionary journey, his friends Priscilla and Aquilla (whom Paul had met in Corinth, **Acts 18:2**), were in Ephesus and encountered Apollos.
 - i. Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, described as being “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures” (**Acts 18:24**).
 - ii. It says that Apollos taught accurately about Jesus, but for some reason was not familiar with Christian baptism (in the name of Jesus or of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). He only knew about the baptism of John the Baptist.
 - iii. Aquilla and Priscilla take Apollos aside and “explain to him the way of God more accurately”, filling in what he did not previously understand.
 1. Apollos had the humility to learn from others who had a better understanding of the faith.
- d. We will see that there are other believers in Jesus in the area of Ephesus who also, like Apollos, only knew about the baptism of John the Baptist.

II. Paul in Ephesus Again – An Issue Regarding Baptism

- a. Read **Acts 19:1-7**
 - i. Storyline:
 1. Recall that Paul had spent a brief time in Ephesus before this, on his second missionary journey, at which time he had told

the Ephesians, "I will return again to you, God willing." (**Acts 18:19-21**)

2. Recall that when Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos in Ephesus, he was preaching about Jesus, but knew only the baptism of John the Baptist.
 - a. "This man [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." (**Acts 18:25-26**, NKJV)
3. Upon returning to Ephesus, Paul finds about a dozen men disciples, and asks them if they had "received the Holy Spirit" when they believed.
 - a. The men respond that they are not aware of there being a "Holy Spirit".
 - b. Paul then asks them what baptism they had received.
 - i. The baptism established by Jesus was closely associated with the Holy Spirit.
 1. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son *and of the Holy Spirit*," (**Matthew 28:19**, NKJV)
 2. "Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water *and the Spirit*, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (**John 3:5**, NKJV)
 3. "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift *of the Holy Spirit*." (**Acts 2:38**, NKJV)
 - a. Peter then explains that this promise (including receiving the Holy Spirit) applies to all people, whomever the Lord will call,

everywhere (**Acts 2:39**).

Therefore, all Christians should receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism.

4. The men explain that they have received (only) the baptism of John the Baptist. Paul explains to them the purpose of John's baptism. Then the men are baptized into the name of Jesus.
 5. Paul then lays hands on the men, and they receive the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit (they then speak in tongues and prophesy).
 - a. This reminds me of the passage we read in **Acts 8:14-19**. There, Peter laid hands on the disciples in Samaria, who already had believed and been baptized following the preaching of Philip.
 - b. When Simon the Sorcerer saw the powerful manifestation of the Spirit following the laying on of Peter's hands, he wanted to purchase that ability and fell into serious sin.
- ii. Early Christian writer Tertullian commented on the significance of this passage in his work, *On Baptism*.
1. Tertullian starts his discussion on baptism by mentioning several Old Testament foreshadowings of Christian baptism, including:
 - a. **Genesis 1:1-2**, where the Spirit is described as "hovering over the waters".
 - b. **Genesis 6-8**, the Flood of Noah, which Peter also said foreshadowed baptism (**1 Peter 3:19-21**).
 - i. Tertullian wrote: "Over the waters of baptism, recognizing as it were His primeval seat, He reposes: (He who) glided down on the Lord 'in the shape of a dove,' (**Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:22**) in order that the nature of the Holy Spirit might be declared by means of the creature (the emblem) of simplicity and innocence, because even in her bodily structure the dove is without literal gall. And accordingly, He says, 'Be simple as doves.' (**Matthew 10:16**)

- ii. “Even this is not without the supporting evidence of a preceding figure. For just as, after the waters of the deluge, by which the old iniquity was purged—after the baptism, so to say, of the world—a dove was the herald which announced to the earth the assuagement of celestial wrath, when she had been sent her way out of the ark, and had returned with the olive-branch, a sign which even among the nations is the fore-token of peace; so by the self-same law of heavenly effect, to earth—that is, to our flesh—as it emerges from the font, after its old sins, flies the dove of the Holy Spirit, bringing us the peace of God, sent out from the heavens, where is the Church, the typified ark.”
 - 1. (Source: Tertullian, *On Baptism*, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 673)
- c. **Exodus 14**, the Red Sea crossing, which Paul said foreshadowed baptism in **1 Corinthians 10:1-2**.
 - i. “How many, therefore, are the pleas of nature, how many the privileges of grace, how many the solemnities of discipline, the figures, the preparations, the prayers, which have ordained the sanctity of water? First, indeed, when the people, set unconditionally free, escaped the violence of the Egyptian king by crossing over through water, it was water that extinguished the king himself, with his entire forces. What figure more manifestly fulfilled in the sacrament of baptism? The nations are set free from the world by means of water, to wit: and the devil, their old tyrant, they leave quite behind, overwhelmed in the water.”
 - 1. (Source: Tertullian, *On Baptism*, chapter 9; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 673)
 - 2. Note that Tertullian here points to something not discussed by Paul, namely, that the water of the Red Sea destroyed the forces of the wicked king, Pharaoh,

and the forces with him. Tertullian makes the point that this is similar to how in Christian baptism, Satan and those with him are defeated.

- a. A similar point was developed by Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395 AD). See *Gregory of Nyssa - The Life of Moses*, translated by E. Ferguson and A. Malherbe, Paulist Press, pp. 82-85.

2. In *On Baptism*, Tertullian then explains how significant water was in the ministry of Jesus, from beginning to end. [*Even as a water engineer by profession, it did not occur to me how many significant references to water there are in the life of Jesus! -CP*]
 - a. “How mighty is the grace of water, in the sight of God and His Christ, for the confirmation of baptism! Never is Christ without water: if, that is, He is Himself baptized in water; inaugurates in water the first rudimentary displays of His power, when invited to the nuptials (**John 2:1-11**); invites the thirsty, when He makes a discourse, to His own sempiternal water (**John 7:37-38**); approves, when teaching concerning love, among works of charity, the cup of water offered to a poor (child) (**Matthew 10:42**); recruits His strength at a well (**John 4**); walks over the water (**Matthew 14:25**); willingly crosses the sea (**Mark 4:36**); ministers water to His disciples (**John 13**). Onward even to the passion does the witness of baptism last: while He is being surrendered to the cross, water intervenes; witness Pilate’s hands (**Matthew 27:24**): when He is wounded, forth from His side bursts water; witness the soldier’s lance (**John 19:34**)!”
 - i. (Source: Tertullian, *On Baptism*, chapter 9; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 673)
3. Tertullian closes his short work on baptism by addressing some “minor questions” regarding baptism, including the issue of the baptism of John the Baptist (and what that was for).
 - a. Read **Mark 1:1-8**.

- i. John the Baptist came to “prepare the way for the Lord”.
 - ii. John preached “a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”.
 - iii. People confessed their sins and came to him to be baptized.
 - iv. He pointed to One who would come after him, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.
- b. Read **Mark 11:27-33**.
- i. Jesus challenged the Jewish leaders: “Was John’s baptism from heaven or from men?”
 - ii. They answer, “We don’t know.”
- c. Read **John 3:23-36**.
- i. Here, the contrast is between “he who comes from the earth and speaks of the earth” (John the Baptist) versus “he who comes from above” (Jesus, the Christ), *who will provide eternal life*.
- d. From Tertullian in *On Baptism*:
- i. “We have spoken, so far as our moderate ability permitted, of the *generals* which form the groundwork of the sanctity of baptism. I will now, equally to the best of my power, proceed to the rest of its character, touching certain minor questions.
 - ii. “The baptism announced by John formed the subject, even at that time, of a question, proposed by the Lord Himself indeed to the Pharisees, whether that baptism was heavenly, or truly earthly: about which they were unable to give a consistent answer, inasmuch as they did not understand, because they did not believe.
 - iii. But *we*, with but as poor a measure of understanding as of faith, *are* able to determine that that baptism was *divine* indeed, (yet in respect of the command, not in respect of efficacy too, in that we read that John was *sent by*

the Lord to perform this duty,) but *human* in its nature: for it conveyed nothing celestial, but it fore-ministered to things celestial; being, to wit, appointed over *repentance*, which is in man's power.

- iv. "In fact, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees, who were unwilling to 'believe,' did not 'repent' either. But if repentance is a thing human, its baptism must necessarily be of the same nature: else, if it had been celestial, it would have given both the Holy Spirit and remission of sins.
- v. "But none either pardons sins or freely grants the Spirit save God only. Even the Lord Himself said that the Spirit would not descend on any other condition, but that He should first ascend to the Father (**John 16:6-7**). What the Lord was not yet conferring, of course the servant could not furnish.
- vi. "Accordingly, in the **Acts of the Apostles**, we find that men who had "John's baptism" had not received the Holy Spirit, whom they knew not even by hearing. (**Acts 19:1-7**)
- vii. "...And so 'the baptism of repentance' was dealt with as if it were a candidate for the remission and sanctification shortly about to follow in Christ: for in that John used to preach 'baptism *for* the remission of sins,' the declaration was made with reference to *future remission*; if it be true, (as it is,) that repentance is antecedent [= *coming before*], remission subsequent; and this is 'preparing the way.'
- viii. "But he who 'prepares' does not himself 'perfect,' [= *make complete*] but procures for another to perfect. John himself professes that the celestial [= *heavenly*] things are not his, but Christ's, by saying, 'He who is from the earth speaks concerning the earth; He who comes from the *realms* above is above all;' (**John 3:30-31**) and again, by saying that he 'baptized in repentance only, but that One would shortly come who would baptize in the Spirit and fire;'—of course

because true and stable faith is baptized with *water*, unto salvation; pretended and weak faith is baptized with *fire*, unto judgment.” (**Matthew 3:11**)

1. (Source: Tertullian, *On Baptism*, chapter 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 673-674)

4. Points made by Tertullian here include:

- a. John the Baptist was calling people to repent (something that was in their power to do). He was from the earth, yet was doing something that God had told him to do.
- b. Therefore, in one sense, John’s baptism was heavenly (in that it was following a command of God. Yet, in another sense, it was earthly (in that it did not impart remission of sins nor receipt of the Holy Spirit, which only the baptism from heaven would do). John called people to repent, and his baptism was to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus.
 - i. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance in expectation of **a future remission of sins** that would become available through Jesus.
- c. The Holy Spirit could not be given, based on what Jesus said, until after He died, was resurrected and ascended to heaven.
 - i. “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you *and will be in you.*” (**John 14:15–17**, NKJV)
 - ii. “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” (**John 15:26**, NKJV)
 - iii. “But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But

because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” (**John 16:5-7**, NKJV)

b. Read **Acts 19:8-10**.

- i. Paul preaches for three months in the synagogue.
- ii. After some “were hardened” and do not believe, he moves on to the school of Tyrannus and continues there for two years.
 1. “All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles”.
- iii. **Question:** What was the message that Paul was preaching in Ephesus?
 1. “And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and *persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.*” (**Acts 19:8**, NKJV)
 - a. As Jesus Himself had said: “And *this gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (**Matthew 24:14**, NKJV)
 2. While many Protestants tend to view Paul’s gospel through the prism of **Ephesians 2:8-9** (taken out of context), this passage from **Acts 19** summarizes the message Paul personally preached to the Ephesians.
 3. **Challenge:** Let us, therefore, preach the same message that Jesus said we should preach, the same message Paul preached in Ephesus: the message of *the kingdom of God!*

c. Read **Acts 19:11-22**.

- i. Miraculous signs and conquest of evil spirits help spread the faith.
 1. “God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul”, which included articles of Paul’s clothing being brought to the sick and diseases and evil spirits being cast out!
 2. This fulfilled what Jesus had said at the end of the **Gospel According to Mark:**

- a. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: *In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*” (Mark 16:15–18, NKJV)
3. Those involved in the occult turn themselves in. They burn their own occult books in public, with a value of 50,000 pieces of silver.
 - a. Some translations say 50,000 drachmas, with a drachma being a silver coin that corresponded to about a day’s wage for a workman.
 - b. If you assume 300 working days/year in the ancient world, that comes out to *over 160 years worth of wages!*
 - c. Based on an average wage (U.S.) of \$50k, that would correspond to over \$8M in today’s wages.
 4. This is one of the greatest examples of radical repentance in all of the New Testament.
 - a. Books in the ancient world were copied by hand and valuable. These books especially so.
 - b. Think about it. If they just sold the scrolls, they and their families would be set for life, for generations!
 - c. No excuses were made. They burned these books publicly, forswearing any connection with the occult that they had been involved in!
 - i. **Question:** Have you ever done anything that radical in terms of repenting? Have you ever seen anyone do that?
 - ii. What kind of faith in God would it take, and being cut to the heart about your sin? They did not even want to profit by selling to others!

- iii. This reminds me of the kind of fruit produced by true godly sorrow for one's sins, as Paul described in **2 Corinthians**.
 - 1. Read **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1** and **7:8-11**.
 - 2. True godly sorrow produces a radical, 180-degree change in the life of a sinner! No excuses, no compromise with the devil.
 - 3. **Challenges:** Is there any sin in your life today that you have been holding on to, which you need to repent of? Do you have this kind of radically repentant attitude?
 - ii. Erastus is mentioned here as a helper to Paul, who he sent on to Macedonia at this time. He also is mentioned in a few other places in Scripture, in Paul's letters.
 - 1. "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. *Erastus, the treasurer of the city*, greets you, and Quartus, a brother." (**Romans 16:23**, NKJV)
 - a. He is described in other translations as the "steward" or "public works director" of the city (referring to Corinth).
 - 2. "Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. *Erastus stayed in Corinth*, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick." (**2 Timothy 4:19-20**, NKJV)
 - 3. I have visited ancient Corinth and seen the following well-known inscription (from the middle of the first century) in a paved area: "Erastus, in return for his aedileship laid this at his own expense".
 - a. In the Roman empire, an *aedile* was an elected official responsible for managing public works.
- d. Read **Acts 19:23-41**.
 - i. A great riot breaks out in the city, and a large agitated mob gathers in the theater area.
 - ii. The Christian faith is spreading to the point where it is having a threatening impact on the idolatrous silversmith trade.
 - iii. A few things about ancient Ephesus:

1. Ephesus was famous as a center for worshipping the goddess Artemis (Diana). The Temple of Diana was known as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
 - a. (Others include the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, the statue of the Colossus in Rhodes, and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.)
2. This port city included a large temple complex, as well as a great commercial center.
- iv. This goddess was associated with fertility. She also was known as the 'queen bee' and was served by castrated priests, who were her 'drones'.
- v. Ephesus was destroyed in the 200s and never rebuilt. For that reason, some of the best-preserved ruins of an ancient city in Asia Minor are those of ancient Ephesus.
 1. From that, we know that the theater in Ephesus could hold about 25,000 people.