

## The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

### Chapter 19

#### 19:1-7

Paul continued on his third missionary journey across Asia Minor to the west coast and the city of Ephesus. There he met some disciples, but it is incorrect to assume that they were disciples of Yeshua, because in that day it was common for rabbis or Jewish leaders to have *talmidim* (disciples). So Paul sought to ascertain who they followed, and he learned that they were disciples of John the Baptist. That meant these men believed in the things that John had preached:

- Repentance of sin.
- The coming of the Messiah (v. 4 – “the one who was coming after” John).
- The kingdom of God.
- Water immersion as a sign of repentance.

Likewise they would not have known about:

- The Messiah had come.
- Baptism in the name of Yeshua.
- The indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In that way, they would be like the faithful people of the Old Testament, looking forward to the redemption of humanity. And while that redemption had already actually taken place, they were not aware of that fact and had been living in ignorance, which was not difficult to do in that day when communication was limited. Apparently Ephesus was one of those places, because in the previous chapter, Apollos was described as having the same beliefs as these particular disciples, and he, too was living in Ephesus. So just as Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos the rest of the story regarding Yeshua and the Holy Spirit, Paul gave these disciples the enlightenment they needed.

Having a clear understanding of the situation described in this chapter is important for a couple of reasons:

1. Some people use it as a basis for claiming that the Spirit indwells people subsequent to their salvation—a “second blessing.” But these disciples were not believers in Yeshua. It is only when they accepted Paul’s witness and believed in Yeshua at the moment recounted here in Acts 19, that the Spirit came on them (v.. 4-7). This chapter, then, is not normative nor does it serve as a pattern for all people. It relates to a specific time when people were looking forward to the coming of the One heralded by John the Baptist, and not realizing that He had already come.
2. Some people say that being good and religious is sufficient in God’s eyes. But here we see apparently godly people not enjoying the full blessings that come with believing in Yeshua—namely entering into the New Covenant and being indwelled by the Holy Spirit.

#### 19:8-12

v. 8 – Paul maintained his practice of taking the message of Yeshua into the local synagogue in Ephesus. In this case he invested three months of his time doing so, which means the Jewish people there were initially open to what he had to say. His message centered around the

kingdom of God. Thus it would likely these points:

- Yeshua is the Messianic king of the kingdom.
  - Because the *Tanakh* depicts the Messiah as both the Suffering Servant and the exalted King, He would have to come twice. And the first time would not bring about the finality of the kingdom marked by the Messiah judging with righteousness and the wolf dwelling with the lamb (Isa 11:4,6).
  - The kingdom is not just a physical institution, but an inner spiritual state (Mat 5:19; 7:21).
- v. 9 – The word translated as “hardened” conveys the sense of an initial softness or receptivity becoming impenetrable or unreceptive. That tells us that some people will be curious about what we have to say but never end up believing it and will eventually become hostile toward our testimony. That is consistent with Yeshua’s parable of the sower in Matthew 12, where seeds fall on rocky soil and germinate, but then they withered away when the sun came out. So, Paul used wisdom by withdrawing from those people. He applied in a practical sense Proverbs 9:7-8 –

“He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you.”

A scoffer (KJV – scorner) is someone who mimics another person. The word picture for this term is a person who uses his mouth to act like he is speaking a foreign language without actually knowing it. It is making light of reality and showing disdain for truth.

Notice also that they were being critical of The Way, which means the believing community continued to identify themselves at that time by that term, not as Christians like the non-believers were calling them (Acts 11:26).

- v. 9-10 – Paul then left the synagogue but continued speaking publicly in a school that belonged to an Ephesian man named Tyrannus. We do not know if this man was a Jew or a Gentile, but for two years both groups came there to hear him speak. As a result, between Paul’s travels and teaching in this school, Luke concludes that everyone in Asia heard the message of the Gospel.

The remainder of this chapter deals with conflicts between the true power of The Way and that of pagan religions.

### 19:11-41

- v. 11-12 – As a confirmation of Paul’s status as an Apostle, he was able to perform “extraordinary miracles.” This is an important consideration for anyone who claims to be an Apostle today, and is consistent with Yeshua’s proclamation that the Apostles He called and sent face-to-face had unique authority to do the miraculous (Mat 10:1).
- v. 13-16 – Jewish exorcists attempted to utilize the power of the name of Yeshua for their own purposes. This encounter indicates that there is genuine power in the name, but only if it is used by believers in Yeshua as Messiah, Savior, Lord, God. The exorcists had been successful in conjuring up results in the spiritual realm, and they just thought that Yeshua was another power source. And that indicates there are other spiritual power sources, namely demonic ones.
- v. 17-20 – A wave of fear swept across the community. That does not mean everyone became believers. But verse 18 indicates that confession took place. And in verse 19, the

burning of their expensive books on magic and sorcery was an act of repentance. That is consistent with the biblical principle of not just confessing our sins, but taking steps to turn away from them.

- v. 21 – Paul indicated his plans to go to the most influential cities in that part of the world— Jerusalem (the capital of Judaism) and Rome (the capital of pagan religion). In both cases, his intent presumably was to preach the Good News.
- v. 23 – But before he could depart, he was caught up in another controversy.
- v. 25 – Because the people gave up their pagan practices, illustrated by their surrender of magic books that were worth 50,000 pieces of silver (equivalent to 50,000 days of wages), Paul was perceived to be a threat to the financial welfare of Ephesus and its patron deity Artemis.

Artemis was the Greek equivalent of the Roman fertility goddess Diana. The temple in Ephesus erected in her honor was the largest structure in the entire Greek world, standing 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, 60 feet tall and with 127 columns on its perimeter. It was not just one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the man who was the compiler of that list, Antipater of Sidon, wrote that it was more brilliant than the other six (Antipater, *Greek Anthology* IX.58). It also served as a bank where kings, entire cities and wealthy merchants would deposit their gold and silver because Artemis was said to watch over its safety. Moreover, a secondary economic system developed around it, with people profiting from sales of artifacts and other related businesses.

In this narrative, a silversmith named Demetrius provoked the profiteering trade groups to rise up against Paul because their prosperity was at risk.

- v. 26 –For good measure, he warned that Paul would harm their manner of worship all over Asia.
- v. 27 – And he declared that it would be a threat against the worship of Artemis.
- v. 28-31 – This mob of protesters headed to the theater of the city, which was a typical Greek theater, although in this case a very large one. They dragged along with them two of Paul’s traveling companions. And Paul wanted to go there, too, no doubt to defend their position, but his disciples would not let him go.
- v. 32 – So it became a typical episode of confusion and unrest. But, finally, the town clerk, whose responsibility was managing the temple assets, urged the mob to ignore the situation. His warning in v. 40, “we are in danger of being accused of a riot” is understandable since Ephesus was under the control of Rome, and disorder and disrespect for the law could lead to the loss of their privileged status as a “free city.” In the end, the crowd accepted his pragmatic approach.
- v. 35 – In the center of the temple was some kind of image of Artemis. It is described in the Greek as being *diopetes*, which literally means “fell down from Jupiter.” Jupiter is the Roman word for the Greek word Zeus, who was the supreme deity of Greek mythology. But, because Artemis was worshiped in Ephesus, she was considered to have supplanted Zeus, and was called the “mother of all gods and men.” This is a significant point that cannot be overlooked. The religious culture that influenced every other aspect of Ephesian society was based on the exaltation of women over men, which made it unique in the Greek and Roman world. That is further supported by the fact that it was a cult in which women were the priests.

What can we learn from this episode regarding the conduct of Paul and the believers? They did not initiate the situation. Paul did not attempt to overthrow the rule of Rome, in spite of it being a pagan system. He simply preached the Good News without condemning the Ephesian way of life and worship. He carried out miraculous acts for the benefit of others without denying the right of people with different beliefs to live them out. It was the inner conviction of the people of the city that led them to repent of their ways. So, this episode serves as an important example of godly conduct in an ungodly world.