

Lesson 27: Acts 19:1-20 The Holy Spirit and the Name of Jesus

Introduction

Ephesus is the seat of administration for the Roman province of Asia. On a map, that's the lower left-hand chunk of Asia-Minor. It is the most populous city of all Asia Minor. Ephesus did great trades, situated on a main trade route to Rome and it was granted the status of a free Greek city-state. So, Ephesus fits well into Paul's strategy to establish Christian fellowships in influential urban centers from which the Gospel can then spread into the surrounding area. Paul will stay almost three years in Ephesus. And he will see the success of his strategy. Luke reports in 19:10, "And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in [the province of] Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." To get an idea of what that means, we can consider the churches listed in Revelation 2 and 3, all located in this province: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Paul had thought to go to Ephesus on his second missionary journey. And we see that his reasoning to create a base in Ephesus that would reach out into the surrounding area was very sound strategy. It is just that the timing was not right. God led him instead to the European provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. Now, Paul has reset his strategy and on this third missionary journey he tries the same route, starting off strengthening the churches through Galatia and Phrygia and then continuing on to Ephesus, this time arriving successfully. The text tells us he "passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus," I assume this is the more direct east-west route following the Roman road directly west from Pisidian Antioch. The other option would have been to turn southward and follow the coast along to Ephesus.

This is not Paul's first visit to Ephesus. We read in our previous lesson, when he departed Corinth, he stopped over on his way back to Jerusalem. He made a brief appearance at that time in the synagogue and promised to return if God wills. And we know God wills.

The conversation about Jesus at the Ephesian synagogue did not end when Paul left. Priscilla and Aquila stayed. Apollos arrived, lending his voice to the case for Christ. But now Apollos has left and Paul has returned.

The pattern of Paul's stay in Ephesus follows the same pattern we encountered in the other three movements of Acts Part V. Luke starts with a two-part introduction and then he gives us a problem, resolution, and follow-up.

The introduction tells the story of Paul's interaction with 12 disciples and then gives an overview of his first two years in Ephesus. These two accounts are recorded in Acts 19:1-10.

Paul's Stay in Ephesus – Introduction (Acts 19:1-10)

¹ It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. ² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they *said* to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were in all about twelve men.

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from

them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.¹⁰ This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

12 Disciples (1-7)

Paul meets twelve disciples. “Disciples” is Luke’s preferable term for, “Christ-follower.” If Luke wanted us to understand that these were disciples of John the Baptist, rather than disciples of Jesus, it seems most likely he would have told us they were disciples of John. The word, disciple, appears 28 times in Acts and always in reference to people who have believed in Jesus. It has the same basic meaning as, Christian, or believer; terms Luke also uses but only a handful of times each.

These disciples were fairly deficient in their knowledge of Jesus. Unlike Priscilla and Aquila’s assessment of Apollos, Paul finds their understanding quite inadequate. I am asking myself how is it that these men did not meet Apollos or get to know Priscilla and Aquila? Why is not until now when Paul comes that we find out that their faith in Jesus is deficient? They are members of the Jewish community, but apparently, they have little or no connection to the other Christ-followers in that community.

The text says that Paul found them, so it seems to me they were not known to Priscilla and Aquila. Where were they hiding? Well, Ephesus had a population of over 200,000 at the time. And the Jewish community may have exceeded 10,000.¹ That’s a large church; large enough that there might be numerous sub-groups that do not regularly come into contact with one another. You can imagine showing up at synagogue and if there are this many people, we’ve got services all day long, and it’s quite possible that you never get to know this other sub-group of people who are talking about Jesus.

For whatever reason, these twelve did not receive sufficient instruction until Paul himself, coming to Ephesus, met someone who knew someone who introduced him to someone who connected him to this group of men. Or maybe he just ran into them on the street, you know, just a Holy Spirit appointment. We don’t know how they came to meet each other.

We do not know the full extent of their conversation. They profess belief in Jesus Christ. Paul does not dispute the reality of their faith. But he does ask them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” He accepts they may have believed, but something in their experience of Jesus or something in their understanding of Jesus suggests to Paul that they have not been born again by the Spirit.

There is not a modern experience that exactly parallels the experience of these men, because they were living through the transition between Old Covenant and New Covenant. They may have seen Jesus, or the people who discipled them may have seen Jesus. Though we can’t think of exact parallels, we can think of Christian experiences that bear some similarities. I believe there are multitudes of believers in Jesus Christ in churches today who have an insufficient understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some, for example, are in churches where forgiveness in the name of Jesus is preached, but the Holy Spirit is rarely mentioned. They have never been taught what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Others are in churches where the emotion of being in the Spirit is emphasized in such a way that it distorts what it truly means to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is lost in the emotionalism, or in the emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit. That was an error in 1 Corinthians. Both errors, ignoring the Holy Spirit or speaking about relationship with the Holy Spirit as fundamentally an emotional experience, can lead to a pursuit of the Christian life through the effort of human flesh rather than through the power that comes from dependence on the Holy Spirit. To abide in Christ, to walk in the Spirit, to be filled with the Holy Spirit -these ideas all point to a day-by-day dependence on Jesus Christ to produce spiritual fruit in us and through us. And

¹Mikael Tellbe. *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective*. (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 75.

ever since Pentecost, the message of the Apostles and the message of Paul links together faith in Jesus Christ with the spiritual reality of the indwelling Spirit.

These twelve men lacked instruction about the Holy Spirit. They had believed in Jesus to some point, but then their knowledge of Jesus seems to end. They have not come to understand certain truths about Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. They do not understand how it was that Jesus leaving physically was then able to send the Spirit to indwell and empower those who believe in Him. Let's think a little bit how this might come to be, how might they have this kind of faith in Jesus that's inadequate as it is.

The primary stream of Christian teaching coming out of Jerusalem flows from the preaching of the Apostles initiated on the day of Pentecost and rapidly expanding during the early days of the Jerusalem Awakening. We might expect to meet Jews with a strong understanding of Jesus who had received instruction from the Apostles or others in this movement. Churches, like the church in Rome, were started by Jewish believers returning home after Pentecost.

Another major stream of Christian faith comes from the missionary work of Paul. His teaching is in agreement with the Apostles. We would not be surprised if Paul met some Jews in Ephesus that he had never met before, who had a strong understanding of faith in Jesus through their interaction with Priscilla and Aquila who, in turn, had been mentored by Paul.

Those are the two streams of Christian proclamation we have been following through Acts: the stream that's coming from the Apostles out of Jerusalem, and the stream that's coming from Paul and his missionary labors.

A third stream of belief about Jesus began in Israel through the ministry of John the Baptist. That stream seems to have forked into two different streams. One stream coming from John the Baptist flowed into and became equivalent to the stream of belief associated with the Apostles. Disciples of John shifted over to the movement that surrounded Jesus. They moved over sometime during the course of Jesus' public ministry.

Another fork of that stream from John the Baptist never met up with the further teaching that came from Jesus and the Apostles. Apollos, who we met in chapter 18, seems to have received his teaching from this stream that came from John the Baptist but that did not link back in with the Apostles. John called for a baptism of repentance as preparation for the coming of Messiah. And then, when Jesus began His public ministry, John proclaimed Him as "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Reading from the third chapter of the Gospel of John, we can see that John's ministry did not end when Jesus began His ministry. Some of his disciples went over to join the movement around Jesus. Others stayed even when John began to point people to Jesus.

Those disciples who stayed with John the Baptist would not have personally heard all the later teaching that Jesus gave to His disciples. I'm thinking of the night of instruction that Jesus gave the Twelve before His arrest: all that material that we have recorded in the Gospel of John, chapters 13-17. Twice in those chapters Jesus teaches, "I am going to send you a Helper, it's the Holy Spirit. And He is going to indwell in you to help you to love God and obey His commandments. And He is going to be the one who witnesses to the world." And in the center of that - that was in John 14 and John 16 and John 15 - we have Jesus urging His disciples to abide in Him as branches in the vine, so that they might produce spiritual fruit. Jesus later met with His disciples after His resurrection, and He continued His teaching. You know, He is talking about Himself, and He is showing how the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, how they speak of Him. But then He is also telling them, "Stay in Jerusalem and wait until the Holy Spirit comes on you with power."

None of this teaching would be available to a stream of believers who accepted John's proclamation that Jesus is the Lamb of God, but who, for some reason, were not able to connect into the later movement of Christian teaching. We can imagine that they left Jerusalem while Jesus was still alive. You know, or maybe even right after Jesus' death to go to do what Paul is doing, and to go back into

Jewish synagogues and other places, and tell them about what's going on, about the Messiah. We can imagine someone going into Alexandria in Egypt and into that community and there's this communication that the Lamb of God has come. But Pentecost hasn't happened, or they weren't there when Pentecost happened. So, they don't know about that. And maybe it's from this witness that Apollos came to believe in Jesus, but without the instruction that must have come from Pentecost. Somehow, his instruction is more adequate than these twelve. We imagine similarly how Jews influenced by the teaching of John came to Ephesus and they began to meet in a small group, and their understanding maybe that wasn't that far along but they believed what John said, that Jesus was the Messiah, and they gathered together this small group of people who came to believe in Jesus, but without the later stream that came from the life of Jesus and the later instructions of Apostles that came after His death and resurrection. They haven't heard any of that.

So, in this transitional period between the Old and New Covenant, we can imagine this third stream of Christian faith identified with the earlier ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus but being cut off from the later ministry of Jesus and so producing disciples who proclaim faith in Jesus as Messiah but lack knowledge about very significant aspects of Christian truth.

Paul recognizes this lack and he connects it to a deficiency of spiritual knowledge and experience.

² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they *said* to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were in all about twelve men.

Practically, I do not think we need to know whether these men had saving faith in Jesus before meeting Paul or after meeting Paul. And this is the way of evangelism. It is not unusual to meet people who identify as Christians but seem to have rather fuzzy thinking about the Gospel, or who cannot point to any specific moment when they yielded their life to Christ. In a sense, it's not that important. Not in that evangelistic moment. What is important is how they respond to the Gospel message being shared with them. If they have truly believed in Jesus, then they will accept clarification of grace as the truth. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice." If they are already His sheep, they are going to respond to the voice of Jesus.

And so, it is not really relevant whether these men had truly believed before they met Paul or whether this is their moment of saving faith. What is relevant is that they have now affirmed their faith and having been born again through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they can now begin to experience the abundant life that Jesus offers to His followers as they walk in Him.

They are hearing the Holy Spirit speak through Paul. They hear and they respond. And they receive immediate confirmation of what they believed to be true, that Paul's Gospel is the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is telling them the truth. That immediate confirmation to them is manifested through tongues and prophesying.

Now, the nature that does raise questions for us. We know that belief in Jesus Christ is followed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul recognizes through his conversation with these men that they lacked the indwelling of the Spirit. They were caught in the transition between Old Covenant and New, where it was possible to have believed in Jesus through John before Pentecost, and to have not received the Holy Spirit. But then, their faith is affirmed through the very visible signs of speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Okay. So, we also believe that true faith is followed by the indwelling of the Spirit. Should we expect the new birth to be confirmed in a very visible way as it is here, through speaking in tongues? We have to ask that question of Biblical narrative that we have been asking through Acts, "What here is

norm to the Christian experience (what about these twelve men is normal at all times through the Church age), and what here is special to the specific circumstances?”

I already addressed this question in regard to speaking in tongues back in lesson 16, which covered the first half of chapter 11. At that point we had already discussed the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the Apostles at Pentecost, the Samaritans when Peter and John laid hands on them, and Cornelius’ household after hearing the Gospel from Peter. So, we have those three accounts. So, I addressed it then. I also referred to this account back in lesson 16 so that we could cover all four accounts in Acts where we are told that people received the Holy Spirit.

I addressed the context of each passage, and the context of the whole book, and then the broader context of the Apostles’ teaching in the New Testament epistles, so if you want to refresh yourself on the comparison between those four passages, you can look back at lesson 16.

My conclusion back in lesson 16 was that in these four accounts, the coming of the Holy Spirit on people after they had placed their faith in Christ like some, with a time lapse, and the speaking in tongues when receiving the Holy Spirit, that neither one of those things is a norm for the Church. That’s not the normal way that these things happen. The normal experience, what we get taught in the later epistles, is that people place their faith in Jesus Christ and are immediately born again through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And that speaking in tongues may happen when someone comes to faith in Christ. It’s a special gift, not attached to the new birth experience in the epistles, and it’s not even encouraged as a sign of new birth. So, what we are seeing in Acts with this delay of the Holy Spirit and the speaking in tongues are special occurrences under special circumstances at the beginning of the New Covenant community.

When we examine the epistles, we do not see a call to a second experience of the Spirit. We see the teaching that believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at the moment of new birth. We see a call to be filled with the Spirit. We also see Jesus teaching about our need to abide in Him, that spiritual fruit comes through this moment-by-moment abiding. And then we get Paul’s exhortation to walk in the Spirit in Galatians 5. The “baptism in the Spirit”, whenever we encounter it in the Gospel and in the epistles, it is equivalent to the new birth that comes through faith in Jesus. So then, the phrases “abide in Christ”, “be filled with the Spirit”, and “walk in the Spirit” they are all speaking of the act of living our Christian faith in dependence on the Spirit of Christ who has indwelt us at the moment of our true belief.

Interestingly, it is in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians that he gives the command to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). And though he does take time in that letter to present the Gospel message and to call the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel, he never calls them to a second experience in the Holy Spirit. And he does not even mention tongues in the gift list of Ephesians 4:11. He does pray for the Ephesians, and it’s interesting what he prays. He prays in chapter 3:16-19,

¹⁶ that [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Paul affirms this need for the Spirit of Christ to be working in the believer. To truly know Christ, you need His Spirit to be revealing to you the extent of His love for you. The norm that is communicated in our present story, what should be true of all believers in Jesus Christ through the Church age, is an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in us and through us. It doesn’t have to be evidenced by speaking in tongues but there is something lacking in our Christian experience if we don’t have an experience of being filled with the Spirit, or of the Spirit working in us and through us, empowering us, guiding us, developing fruit in our lives.

I do have another question about the pattern. I can understand the special role that speaking in tongues played for the first three instances of receiving the Holy Spirit. Those events matched Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8 that his disciples would,

⁸ ... receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon (them); and (that they would) be... witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, remotest parts of the Earth. So, Jews spoke in tongues in Jerusalem, that was our first story. Then Samaritans in Samaria, that was our second story. Then Gentiles in Cornelius' house, that was our third story. So as the Gospel moves out culturally, the miracle of speaking in tongues affirms to the Jewish leadership of the New Covenant community that all peoples are received into the promise through faith in Jesus and that they are fully accepted. The miracle of speaking in tongues shows that, just like the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles have received promise of the Holy Spirit. So, we know that. They are not less spiritual than the Jews and so God gives this outward confirmation so that the Jewish leadership will see, "We don't have to make them Jewish in order to attain a deeper spiritual status. They have been fully granted the promise through faith in Jesus Christ." So, that explains the first three accounts; why we have these three special moments of the Holy Spirit coming after belief and people speaking in tongues at that moment.

But why this fourth instance of speaking in tongues after receiving the Holy Spirit? So, there is the immediate reason: the experience would have served to affirm Paul's message to these men themselves. So that's good for them but we don't see that as a norm through... I did not speak in tongues when I believed in Christ and the Holy Spirit indwelt me. So, this is not a norm for the Church age. But is there another big picture reason that God would have these men speak in tongues and prophesy after Paul lays hands on them?

I think there is. This experience here with these Ephesian believers has the effect of affirming the ministry of Paul through comparison to the ministry of Peter. Luke has been concerned throughout Acts to establish the credibility of Paul.

And in this particular movement here in chapter 19, Luke recognizes and communicates several details that parallel God's work through Paul with Peter. Just as Peter laid hands on the Samaritans who then spoke in tongues, so too, Paul lays his hands on these men who are then empowered to speak in tongues.

And note also the short sentence in verse 7. "There were about twelve men in all." That sounds like there were not twelve men. You don't say, "There were about twelve men" when there are not twelve men. If there were exactly twelve men, he would have said, "And there were twelve men," not, "about twelve men." "About twelve" men would be ten men, or eleven, or thirteen men. So, why not say, "about ten men?" That's a normal, round number. So, if you've got eleven men, why say, "about twelve men" instead of just saying, "Eh, there were about ten"? Luke could have said, "about ten," but he doesn't. He says, "about twelve." And here we are in a story about a group of Jewish men who are baptized in the name of Jesus and then begin speaking in tongues and prophesying, and Luke makes a point to tell us there about twelve of them. So, what is he trying to get us to think of? He is pointing back to Pentecost. This is a parallel he has recognized, and he is showing us so that we'll see that Paul really is equally an Apostle of the Gospel along with Peter. Later I'll point out their other parallels in this text. Maybe you'll see them before we get there but I will point them out at the end. Okay, the summary.

Summary (8-10)

The story of the twelve emphasizes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through faith in the name of Jesus. So, the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus. In that story we're going to come back to that. The second account in this introductory section provides an overview of Paul's first two years in Ephesus with an emphasis on the fruitfulness of that ministry. We have already read this. I'll read it again,

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

This sounds very similar to Corinth. Paul is continuing his strategy of entering the synagogue to proclaim the Gospel. There is something that's different. Usually, Luke describes Paul as proclaiming Jesus Christ. Here he says Paul seeks to persuade in regard to the Kingdom of God. This is not a shift in message. This is a different phrase for summing up the same message. To be Christ is to be King. Arguing that Jesus is the Christ is an argument about the Kingdom of God. Paul has been talking about Christ, he has been talking about Kingdom of God all along. And just as the language of Christ is not a political message in direct opposition to the Roman emperor (we recognized that in Thessalonica), so also the language of Kingdom is not in direct opposition to the Roman Empire. You can live fully committed to this Kingdom, the Kingdom of Christ, and then still be a good citizen of the Roman Empire. You know, until that Empire pushes you to reject God. Jesus had told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this realm (John 19:36)." Christians are not setting up a political Christian kingdom like there was a political theocracy, Israel. During the Church age, the Kingdom of God is primarily a spiritual reality that works in and through us who have faith in Jesus. And being primarily spiritual doesn't mean that it doesn't have a real effect and impact in this world. It better have! If we are truly living for Jesus, then we make a difference in society.

Luke only refers to the Kingdom of God seven times in the book of Acts, which is an interesting number. At the beginning of the book the Apostles had asked, "Is now the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?" And Jesus says, "It is not for you to know." And then gave them a different set of marching orders that reveals the agenda of the Kingdom for the Church. We establish Kingdom through witness. That is the agenda Jesus gave the Twelve. When the Spirit comes on you, you will be my witnesses starting in Jerusalem and moving out to the ends of the earth. When people yield in faith to the Jesus as King over their lives, the Kingdom of God is expanded. And this Kingdom of God is opposed to the demonic kingdom of darkness, which is why I think Luke is using this language here because it's setting us up for the story to come, that the establishment of the Kingdom of God is going to have a major impact in Ephesus.

As in Corinth, the opposition against Jesus became irreconcilable after three months of reasoning in the synagogue. So Paul leaves the synagogue and he goes again to a Gentile location from which he can continue to teach disciples and proclaim the Gospel. In Corinth he went to the home of Titius Justus located just beside the synagogue. Here Paul moves to the school of Tyrannus. The word, "school," means, "lecture hall." Maybe it says that in your translation. Tyrannus may be the teacher who taught at this lecture hall, maybe he was a lecturer; or he may have been the owner of the lecture hall. We don't know. There is an insertion in some later manuscripts that says Paul taught from 11 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. And we do not know if that is accurate. It certainly seems to come later and not original to the text, but it does have the ring of truth.

In Mediterranean cultures of Paul's time, the workday started quite early, so we are talking about 4 in the morning, to avoid the heat of the day. So, it is quite possible that the main lectures, if Tyrannus was a lecturer, that he was done by 11. Paul likely got up early to work as a tentmaker. And then he may have gone to the lecture hall to teach from 11-4, skipping the normal rest that takes place during the heat of the day, and instead choosing to teach through the heat because the lecture hall at that time was empty. It was available for his use.

So, it may not have been ideal, but God certainly produced fruit through it. So that Luke can end this introduction with the conclusion, "This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

Now Luke turns our attention to the problem, resolution, and follow-up he has chosen to record from Paul's stay in Ephesus for this movement. There is actually going to be another big problem in

Ephesus, but we are keeping the pattern of Acts part V. The text is not long, so I will read the whole and then we will break it down. Acts 19:11-20.

Paul's Stay in Ephesus – Problem, Resolution and Follow-up (Acts 19:11-20)

¹¹ God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 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. ¹³ But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

¹⁷ This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. ¹⁸ Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. ¹⁹ And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

Problem and Resolution

Something truly special is going on here. The Kingdom of God shines through God's servant Paul in an extraordinary way. God's reigns over the laws of the physical universe. People are healed by Paul's touch, even by handkerchiefs carried from Paul to the sick. God also reigns in His Kingdom power over the spiritual forces of darkness. So, people are delivered from demonic possession.

Luke has mostly kept us focused on the message of Paul rather than the miracles of Paul. Here, he reminds us that the proclamation of Paul was accompanied by unmistakable power. And it was attractive to others who would use that power to their own end. The Jewish exorcists here remind me of Simon the magician in Samaria who offered money to Peter. He saw Peter laying hands on people, and they began to speak in tongues, and he wanted to be able to have that power by laying on of his hands.

These exorcists made a similar mistake of understanding spiritual reality - the power that they were seeing - from a worldly point of view. They believed that spiritual power was something a person could tap into through the right formula. The Holy Spirit can be manipulated through the name of Jesus. That's what they saw happening. When Paul proclaims the name of Jesus, people are freed from the demonic. So, they are like, "We want to get some of that! How do we learn this magic spell? How do we learn to manipulate the name of Jesus so that we also can do this?" That's the problem that Luke records here for us. If these Jews succeed in using the name of Jesus as a source of spiritual power, then they will succeed in compromising the Gospel message. The message of Paul will be syncretized together with a bit of Judaism and a bit of pagan spiritism and a bit of magic. Jesus will not stand out as distinctly different from pagan practice of the gods in magic. He will be just another source of power, just another god to add in.

The account of the twelve men at the beginning of the chapter gave us a picture of what the Christians relationship with the Holy Spirit really ought to look like. First, we believe in Jesus. Then, through our relationship with Him, we are empowered and led by His Spirit. For them, to be baptized into the name of Jesus, that wasn't a simple baptism formula. Baptized into the name of Jesus meant that they were receiving the revelation of who Jesus was; Jesus' own self-revelation communicated through Paul. This is Jesus who Jesus says He is. Do you truly believe in His name? Do you believe that is who He is? And when they submit to who Jesus truly is, then they are empowered with the Holy Spirit.

What these Jewish exorcists attempt is something very different, though maybe not so different from the way that many Christians attempt to relate to the Holy Spirit. I think we all to some, maybe to a lesser degree, have the temptation of falling into this idea, “If I just pray with the right words or the right amount of faith, or if I’m good enough through the day, if I get the right formula, then I can get God to do what I want God to do.” The name of Jesus Christ does not represent to them the Lord to whom they should personally submit. It’s not relational. The name of Jesus Christ is not bringing about does faith. To them, then name of Jesus is a magical formula they can use in prayer to exert power over the spiritual world. Okay, we know that’s wrong, and yet we have to be careful because sometimes we pray, and we end our prayer “in the name of Jesus.” What are we doing when we do that? Am I tagging that on because that’s the right way you pray to get what you want? Or is that a statement of my, “I am giving this prayer up to Jesus. I am trying to pray in line with who I know Jesus to be. I am praying out of my relationship with Jesus in the name of Jesus.” You know, what are we saying?

These exorcists are breaking the third commandment, “You shall not take the name of your Lord God in vain.” That commandment is specifically directed against a spiritual or a magical use of the name of God to obtain your own ends. Prayer that attempts to use God as a way to gain power or control over life is magic. It is the attempt to manipulate God.

True believers pray like Jesus. “Take this cup from me if it is your will, o, God. My trust is in you.” We pray to God as our Father in Heaven who loves us, and desires our good, and who is completely sovereign, and who is free to answer our prayers according to His own will and wisdom. Prayer, for the believer, is a relational conversation. When we ask for things, we always ask as a request to the One who has right authority over our lives. It’s asking anything of your dad or asking somebody who has authority over you. You have the right to ask. And you hope they will answer, but He is Father, He is King, He is God. Our right relationship is to love, to serve, to obey. And He welcomes our requests. But we also recognize He has the right to deny any request. We are not trying to manipulate Him through the intensity of our emotion, or through a magical pattern, or repetition of words, or through life obedience. That is pagan thinking. We cannot force God to act. We can pour out our emotion. We can let Him know how important this is to us but in the end, if He doesn’t act, that’s “amen.” He is God. He is the One with all wisdom, and all power, and all knowledge. He knows whether or not to answer this prayer that I have submitted to Him. And am I disappointed? Yes. But, God, help me to have faith not to be disappointed. Help me to believe that Your not answering my prayer is out of Your goodness and out of Your wisdom. Help me to truly submit myself to who You are: to the name of Jesus, that You are King, and You are good, and You are sovereign, and I want to trust You with my prayer.

So, we can ask anything out of love for Him. And He will answer out of love for us. That is what it means to pray in the name of Jesus. We are praying out of this growing recognition of who Jesus really is and who our Father really is. And we pray to relate to Him, to see Him. We also pray to see ourselves and our circumstances through His eyes.

I am always a little surprised when people say, “Why should we pray if God is just going to do what he wants to do anyway.” And it makes me wonder, “Is that why you pray? You pray to get God to do what you want God to do. Is that what you think prayer is? A way to get stuff from God? Is God a source of power and you just have to learn the right formula for manipulating Him, so that you can get what you have asked for? And if He can’t be manipulated, then why even talk to Him? Why would I talk to somebody I can’t manipulate?” Well, you talk to Him because you love Him. Because you trust Him. You believe that He is good. He is your Father. You’re entering into relationship with Him and when He doesn’t answer your prayers, that’s an opportunity for you to see things the way that God sees them.

That’s not what these exorcists believed. They believed that God can be manipulated, that the name of Jesus is a formula for unleashing spiritual power. And they tried to use the name of Jesus without

any relationship with Jesus. That's what the evil spirit is going to tell them, "I have no idea who you guys are."

The resolution to this misuse of the name of Jesus comes through the response of the evil spirit.

¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

The approach of these Jewish exorcists is shown to be false in a really dramatic way. They did not submit in faith to Jesus as the twelve Jewish men did at the beginning of our chapter. They sought to use the name of Jesus for their own ends. God did not protect them from the fire they played with. God did not allow them to continue on with the false belief that Jesus is just another god that you can include into your religious system to make your life better. By declining to protect these men, God sends the message, "Do not play with the name of Jesus. Do not take His name in vain."

Follow-up

The follow-up to this story is revival in Ephesus. The shocking, brutal effect of the misuse of Jesus' name opened people's eyes to the power of the Kingdom of God, and it led to a widespread rejection of occult practice throughout the city. The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified and people turned to Him.

The revival extended to prominent practitioners of the magical arts, who renounce magical texts worth fifty thousand pieces of silver. That's a huge amount when you consider that one drachma was equivalent to a day's wage. I don't particularly fancy the burning of books. In this case, however, the books in questions were not simply repositories of information. The books were how-to manuals. The reason you have these books is to use them. And you use them to get control over the spiritual world. The use of the manual was an invitation to the spirits to be active in the practitioner's life. The use of these manuals is an invitation to the spirits to be active in your life. That's creating an open door for the demonic. The destruction of the books showed a commitment - it was a sacrifice, it's a lot of money - it's a commitment to turn away from the occult, to not play with the fire of the demonic, but to instead come under the kingship of Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we have entered into spiritual union with Jesus Christ. The magical use of the name "Jesus" is no protection to us. But relationship and dependence on the person of Jesus, on that name, that is our protection. When we pray for God's protection in the name of Jesus, we are not using a magical formula. We are acknowledging our faith in the person of Jesus, in who He declares Himself to be. He is God, and his Spirit indwells us. We do not have to be afraid of the demonic when we fix our eyes on Jesus and trust in the power of his Lordship.

Parallel to Peter

I said that at the end I would come back to the parallelism Luke recognizes here between the ministry of Peter and Paul. The two are both called by God. They preach the same message of salvation through Jesus Christ and empowerment for life in the Holy Spirit.

The parallelism began in the introduction, taking us back to the beginning of Acts. We have twelve Jewish men affirming their belief in the name of Jesus who are filled with the Spirit and then speak in tongues and prophesy as a result. That reminds us of Pentecost. Paul also lays his hands on the men, just as Peter laid hands on the Samaritans before they spoke in tongues.

Then we have the report extraordinary miracles where even a handkerchief of Paul heals the sick. And that reminds me of Acts 5:12, where the Apostles are performing many signs and wonders to the degree that people laid out their sick on the street in the hope that Peter's shadow might fall on them. We just have these two reports of this kind of extraordinary, over-the-top miracles, and one is of Peter and one is of Paul. Those miracles back in Acts 5 were preceded by the story of hypocrisy that went very bad for Ananias and Sapphira in a way similar of the Jewish exorcists here wrongly using the name of Jesus, and then it goes very bad for

them. In both stories, here in chapter 19 and back in chapter 5, the people of the city begin to fear Yahweh and place their faith in Jesus. The expansion of the Church that began in Israel through God's chosen apostle Peter is continuing among Gentiles through God's chosen Apostle Paul.

All right! This movement ends Acts Part V. In each of our four movements, from Philippi, to Athens, to Corinth, to Ephesus Luke has developed the theology of the Gospel against a backdrop of Gentile politics, philosophy, and religion. This story in Ephesus reminds us that, though the advance of the Gospel certainly requires reason and persuasion from the Word like Paul has been doing in the synagogue and in the school of Tyrannus, the spread of the Gospel is not purely a battle for the mind. The proclamation of the Gospel is a spiritual battle for the souls of men and women that can only be won through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. As Paul would later remind these Ephesians in his letter, Ephesians 6:11-12,

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Luke wraps up Acts Part V with this final summary statement. Acts 19:20, "So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."

Reflection questions

1. Read Acts 19:1-20. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. Who do you understand the disciples in Acts 19:1-7 to be? What details are suggested in the text? Do you see any connection with Apollos in 18:23-28?
3. How do you understand the connection with baptism and speaking in tongues and prophesying? How does this incident relate to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost in chapter 2, the coming of the Spirit on Samaritans in chapter 8 and the coming of the Spirit on Gentiles in chapter 10? Is this a fairly unique occurrence connected to the spread of the gospel through Paul's ministry or is the indicative of a normal spiritual experience that baptized Christians should expect? Or would you offer another explanation?
4. What details in 19:8-10 summarize Paul's ministry in Ephesus? How does this summary parallel the experience Paul has had in other cities like Pisidian Antioch, Thessalonica and Corinth?
5. How do the story of the 12 men in 19:1-7 and the story of the seven men in 19:11-19 relate to one another? Are there similarities in the stories? What are some differences?
6. Comparing both stories, what do you learn about the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit?
7. Think back over the problem and resolution of each section in Acts Part IV (in Philippi, in Athens, in Corinth, and in Ephesus). What do you think about the summary statement of 19:20? If you added to that summary statement, what would you add?