

Chapter 19: The Third Missionary Journey

Completing What Grace Started



- **Dates:** Approximately AD 53-57
    - Claudius died in October AD 54;
    - Nero's reign begins during Paul's ministry in Ephesus.
- **Companions:** Timothy, Erastus and others
- **Locations:** Galatia, Phrygia, Asia (Ephesus), Macedonia, Greece/Achaia (Corinth), and returning through Troas, Miletus, Tyre, and Caesarea
- **Purpose:** To strengthen, encourage, and stabilize previously established churches in Galatia, Phrygia, Asia Minor, and Greece, alongside carrying out an extensive, three-year teaching ministry centered in Ephesus.
- **Writings:** 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans

Acts 18:23-19:7 — Incomplete faith

Luke opens the story of Paul's third missionary journey with two stories of *incomplete faith*: Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures but knowing only John's baptism, and 12 disciples in Ephesus who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. In both cases God does not discard what is real — He completes it. Then the completed gospel goes out from one lecture hall and prevails over the most magical, most prosperous, most idolatrous city in Asia. "So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily" (19:20).

The issues	Apollos (18:24-28)	The Twelve (19:1-7)
Who	One man, exceptionally gifted and educated	Twelve ordinary men, a group, no gifts mentioned
What they knew	"The things concerning Jesus," taught accurately	Repentance and John's baptism of preparation
What was missing	"The way of God more accurately" — knew only John's baptism	Had not even heard there is a Holy Spirit; needed to believe in the one who was to come after John, that is, Jesus
How they were corrected	Privately, by a lay couple who explained "the way of God more accurately"	By the apostle himself — teaching, then baptism, then laying on of hands
The Spirit	Never questioned — the issue is something in his teaching	The central issue — Paul's first diagnostic question: Acts 19:2 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"
Baptism	No rebaptism recorded — his faith seems already fixed on Christ	Baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus
Visible sign	None needed; went on to greatly help those who through grace had believed	Tongues and prophecy — a Pentecost-pattern validation (2, 10, 19)
What came next	Itinerant apologist in Achaia; a leader of the church in Corinth; "Apollos watered" (1 Corinthians 3:6)	The nucleus of the Ephesian church Paul taught for two years
The lesson	The most gifted can still need finishing — and humility to receive it	Sincerity, morality, and repentance are not enough; the object of faith must be Christ

Acts 19:8-10 — The 'One-room schoolhouse'

- Three months reasoning in the synagogue "about the kingdom of God" (19:8). When some hardened and spoke evil of "the Way," Paul withdrew.
- For two years, Paul taught daily in the hall of Tyrannus so that "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (19:10).
- Ephesus becomes the strategic center of the third journey: a capital city radiating the gospel into an entire province. From this one lecture hall, the cities of Revelation 2-3 (Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, Laodicea, Thyatira, Philadelphia) are evangelized.
- God's method is Word-centered, long, and patient: the same man teaches in one room for two years, and a province is turned upside down — a ministry of depth, not stunts.

Acts 19:11-20 — Extraordinary miracles and a name not to be misused

- Extraordinary miracles through Paul: handkerchiefs and aprons carried to the sick (19:11-12). God is confirming His apostle's word in a city saturated with magic.
- The itinerant Jewish exorcists: seven sons of Sceva, a "chief priest" (title likely self-made; there was no Jewish high priest in Ephesus), try to add Jesus to their toolkit: "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims" (19:13).
- The demon's devastating reply: "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" (19:15). The naked, wounded exorcists flee the house (19:16).
- The result: fear falls on all; they extol the name of the Lord Jesus; believers confess and divulge their magical practices; and they burn the books, fifty thousand pieces of silver (19:17-19).
- Luke's summary: "So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily" (19:20).
- Magic treats God as a tool; worship recognizes Him as Lord.

Ephesus was the capital city of a Roman province in Asia, a significant center of trade, located near a harbor at the mouth of the Cayster River in western Asia Minor. The city lay in a long, fertile valley. Major roads connected Ephesus to all the other significant cities in Asia Minor.

Ephesus was known for its amphitheater, the largest in the world, designed to hold up to 50,000 spectators. Ephesus was also the location of the great temple of Artemis, or Diana, built in 550 BC. This temple, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was "425 ft. long and 220 ft. wide; each of its 127 pillars which supported the roof of its colonnade was 60 ft. high"

(International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).



The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus

FOR WE DO NOT WRESTLE AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES, AGAINST THE COSMIC POWERS OVER THIS PRESENT DARKNESS, AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. —

EPHESIANS 6:12

- **Ephesus as a Center for Magic:** As the empire's third-largest city, Ephesus served as an international center for magical practices and marketing, centered on the cult of Artemis (Diana).
- **Temple of Artemis & Celestial Image:** The splendor of the Temple of Artemis — one of the ancient world's wonders — was enhanced by a local meteorite, which was believed to be an image of Diana sent directly by Zeus.
- **Ephesian Letters (*Ephesia grammata*):** Dating back to the 4th century B.C.E., these small scrolls containing magical spells were used to ward off demons, protect newlyweds, and secure success; the Greek Magical Papyri note they were engraved on images of Artemis.
- **Status of Artemis:** Because of these influences, people widely worshiped Artemis as the "queen of the universe" and goddess of nature spirits and the dead.

Source: **William A. Simmons**, *Peoples of the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide*

Acts 19:21-22 — 'I must see Rome'

- Afterward, Paul felt compelled by the Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before going to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!" (Acts 19:21 NLT)
- Luke's narrative is moving toward the journey that will take the gospel to the heart of the empire, even under arrest.
- Timothy and Erastus go ahead into Macedonia while Paul stays in Asia a while longer.
- The pattern of this whole series holds: closed doors and redirected routes (16:6-7) were never detours. Ephesus was never off the path, and neither is Rome. The Spirit writes the itinerary.

Acts 19:23-41 — A riot in Ephesus: When the gospel hits the pocketbook

- Demetrius the silversmith, making silver shrines of Artemis, calls the trade together: "this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great multitude ... and there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing" (19:26-27).
- Note the order of his concerns: business first, theology second — money dressed up as piety.
- The city erupts: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" for two hours (19:28-34). Gaius and Aristarchus are dragged into the theater; Paul wants to go in, but the disciples forbid him, and even the Asiarchs (leading citizens of Asia, some friendly to Paul) urge him not to risk it.
- Alexander the Jew tries to speak and is shouted down; the crowd wants no Jewish debate, pagan or Christian.
- The town clerk (the city's chief civic officer and liaison to Rome) quiets the mob with a lawyer's argument: the image fell from heaven, so who can deny Artemis? Courts are open, proconsuls are available; charge the men legally if you must. And his closing rebuke: "we are in danger of being charged with rioting ... there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion" (19:40). The assembly is dismissed.
- The gospel does not attack the empire; the empire's idols attack the gospel — and the gospel wins by simply being true. Luke's apologetic thread runs all through Acts: Christianity is orderly, legal, and no threat to Rome (cf. Gallio in 18:14-15).
- The church's enemies in Ephesus were not ultimately people but an economy of desire. When the Word prevails, wallets feel it first, and that is how you know the gospel has actually arrived.

Key takeaways

- **God completes what is real.** Whether you are an Apollos (gifted but unfinished) or one of the 12 (sincere but not yet in Christ), the answer is not to start over in shame, but to receive God's finishing grace.
- **The Word prevails** — not by force, not by spectacle, but by its own inherent power as the Spirit attends it. Our task is the same as Paul's: keep teaching, patiently, publicly, for years.
- **Real repentance costs.** Conversion that never touches the wallet has likely never touched the heart.
- **There is no borrowed Christianity.** The question in the passage on the sons of Sceva asks every one of us: does Jesus know you?

Next

Acts 20: The journey continues through Macedonia and Greece. Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian elders.