

Paul's Missionary Journeys
Journey Three
Handout Two

Paul's ministry at Ephesus has been impactful, but in this next passage we'll see some even more extraordinary results. In fact, we might be stunned by the power of God that is demonstrated when we think about the next two verses. Interestingly the Concordia Self-Study Bible only comments on the use of the handkerchiefs and aprons that are mentioned but doesn't offer any further explanation on the healing and other miracles that occurred. Likewise, Barclay mentions that these items were probably a part of Paul's attire used in his trade. He does offer a bit more on the healing work that was done, but let's read the verses first.

Acts 19:11-12 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

Regarding the way that the simple touch of the objects that had been worn by Paul was used by God, Barclay writes: "Yet there is an intensely significant touch here. The narrative does not say that Paul did these extraordinary deeds; it says that God did them through Paul's hands. God, said someone, is everywhere looking for hands to use. We may not work miracles with our hands but very certainly we can give them to God that He may work through them."

What are your first reactions to the idea that things that had been worn by Paul could be effective in healing the sick and even casting out evil spirits?

What thoughts do you have regarding what Barclay wrote about God looking for hands to use?

In the next passage we'll get another story of extraordinary events that took place.

Acts 19:13-20 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims."¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸ Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Here's what Barclay writes about this event: "This is a vivid bit of local colour from the Ephesian scene. In those days everyone believed that illness and disease, and especially mental illness, were due to evil spirits who came and settled in a man. Exorcism was a regular trade. If the exorcist knew the name of a more powerful spirit than the spirit which had taken up residence in the afflicted person, by speaking that name he could overpower the evil spirit and make him come out. There is no reason at all to disbelieve that these things happened. The sufferers were genuinely convinced that they were possessed; not all the exorcists were frauds; some of them were genuinely convinced of their own

powers. The human mind is a strange thing and even misguided and superstitious faith has its results in the mercy of God. When some charlatans tried to use the name of Jesus the most alarming things happened. The result was that many of the quacks, and many of those in earnest too, saw the error of their ways. Nothing can more definitely show the reality of the change than that in superstition-ridden Ephesus they were willing to burn the books and the charms which were so profitable to them. They are an example to many of us. In the most literal way they burned their boats; they made the cleanest of clean cuts; they never even asked how they were going to live if they abandoned the things that were their livelihood; they made the sharp and abrupt break. It is all too true that too many of us hate our sins but cannot leave them. Even when we do seek to leave them there is the lingering and the backward look. There are times in life when treatment must be surgical, when only the clean and final break will suffice."

Verse 20 says that "the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily". **While that sounds like a very positive thing, might there be some downsides given what's just been happening? What might those be?**

If you look back at the first handout with the map of this third journey, you may notice that Jerusalem is one of the last cities Paul visited and yet in this next passage Luke records that Paul was intending to go there while he was still in Ephesus. His time in the other cities would include gathering a collection for the church in Jerusalem which needed financial help.

Acts 19:21-22 Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." ²² And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

Even at this early point, Paul also has ambitions to go to Rome. In the next passage we see something happening that still takes place today. When the message of Christianity runs into the ability for people to make money, there's almost always going to be a negative reaction. Barclay says, "This story, in itself a thrilling story, sheds light on the motives and minds of nearly all the characters in it." Let's read the story and see what motives we can uncover.

Acts 19:23-41 About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴ For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ 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, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

²⁸ When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. ³⁰ But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. ³¹ And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. ³² Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most

of them did not know why they had come together. ³³ Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. ³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

³⁵ And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? ³⁶ Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. ³⁷ For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸ If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. ³⁹ But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. ⁴⁰ For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." ⁴¹ And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

Barclay writes, "When pilgrims came to Ephesus they liked to take a souvenir home. These silversmiths were makers of little model shrines which were bought and sold as such souvenirs. Here is a clear case of what happened and still happens when Christianity comes against a vested interest." So, we see the motive of Demetrius being financial profit, even though he makes a veiled attempt at defending the reputation of the temple of Artemis. Ultimately, if the temple lost favor, he was going to lose business.

The Concordia Self-Study Bible records that Alexander was "pushed forward by the Jews either to make clear the disassociation of the Jews from the Christians and/or to accuse the Christians further of an offense against the Greeks. The crowd recognized that the Jews were not worshippers of Artemis any more than the Christians."

What do you learn about the crowd from verse 32, that might be familiar today?

From the Self-Study Bible concerning the town clerk, "The secretary of the city who published the decisions of the civic assembly. He was the most important local official and the chief executive officer of the assembly, acting as a go-between for Ephesus and the Roman authorities." Barclay adds, "He kept the public records; he introduced business in the assembly; correspondence to Ephesus was addressed to him. He was worried at the possibility of a riot. Rome was kindly, but the one thing Rome would not stand was civil disorder. If there were riots in any town Rome would know the reason why and the magistrates responsible would lose their positions."

While the motive for the town clerk may in fact have been to preserve his job, what good did he accomplish?

Do you have any personal examples of someone standing up for you or for a Christian cause, even though perhaps not for the same motive as you or I would have?

Have you seen Christians cave into the pressure of success of money rather than maintain their integrity and morals?

What about an organization?

Have you any examples when a person or organization stood their ground even though it cost a lot?