

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 19A_Third Missionary Journey - Ephesus)

Paul at Ephesus (19:1)

Luke's account of Paul's 3rd missionary journey is essentially an account of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. On his brief visit in Ephesus at the end of his 2nd missionary journey, there seemed to be quite a bit of positive response to the Gospel. Overall, Paul's ministry in Ephesus lasted about three years (from A.D. 53 thru 56).

The City of Ephesus

The city of Ephesus had an interesting history by the time that Paul arrived on the scene. It had been founded around the 12th or 11th Century B.C. by colonists from Athens who used it as a gateway to the resources of Asia. During this period, Ephesus was a secondary port to Miletus, a more prominent port about 30 miles to the south of Ephesus and located at the mouth of the Meander River. However, in time, Ephesus became the more prominent port when the harbor at Miletus became clogged with silt and Miletus was destroyed by the Persians.

In 334 B.C. Alexander the Great captured Ephesus and from his death to 133 B.C. it was ruled by the kings of Pergamum, the most dynamic and powerful of the lesser rulers of Alexander's divided empire.¹ Attalus III, the last of the kings of Pergamum, willed the city to Rome at his death, and Ephesus was made the capital of the newly formed Roman province of Asia. However, by Paul's day, Ephesus, had passed its zenith due largely to the ravages of nature and was in a state of decline economically. (The situation is much like modern-day New Orleans with the exception that the Ephesians did not have the modern technology available today to delay the effect of geological and climatologically driven forces).

Ephesus relied upon two important assets for its wealth and vitality. The first was its position as a center of trade, linking the Greco-Roman world with the rich hinterland of western Asia Minor. But because of excessive lumbering, charcoal burning, and overgrazing the land, topsoils slipped into streams, streams were turned into marshes, and storm waters raced to the sea laden with silt that choked the river's mouth. The Pergamum kings promoted the maintenance of the harbor facilities at Ephesus, and Rome followed suit. But it was a losing battle against the unchecked erosion of the hinterland. In Paul's day, the zenith of Ephesus's commercial power was long since past. Deepening economic decline

¹ Pergamum or Pergamos was the capital city of the province of Asia mentioned in Revelation as one of the seven churches of Asia. Pergamum for a while paid the Gauls tribute in the third century BC, but she retained her general independence. Attalus I defeated the Gauls in two decisive victories and refused her tribute. She remained free for almost a century after that and was perhaps the most highly civilized state in the world. Pergamum shone with the great altar and costly buildings raised by the Attalid kings out of a treasury fattened by the labor of slaves in state forests, fields, mines, and factories. Under the auspices of the Pergamum princes, Greek art flourished. Pergamum remained the capital until the last of the Pergamenian kings, Attalus III, acquiescing to his sense of unavoidable destiny, made the Roman Republic the heir to his kingdom in 133 BC. Pergamum then became the Roman province of Asia. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pergamon>

had cast a shadow over the city. Efforts were repeatedly made to improve the harbor (in A.D. 65 a large-scale attempt was undertaken), but they either failed or provided only temporary relief. Domitian at the end of the first century A.D. was the last ruler to attempt to repair the harbor's facilities and enlarge its dwindling capacities. Today the mouth of the Cayster River is so choked with silt that the ancient harbor works of Ephesus sit back behind a swamp, some seven miles from the sea.²

In spite of its decline as an economic and commercial center, Ephesus remained a popular destination for other reasons. It continued to draw revelers and "worshipers" to the temple Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Roman). The temple was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and was about four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. One is also reminded of modern day New Orleans with its Mardis Gras festival that has provided tourism revenue to offset an economy that is otherwise in decline.

King Croesus of nearby Lydia (reigned 564-546 B.C.) built the first temple to Artemis one and a half miles northeast of Ephesus. It was rebuilt on the same site in the fourth century B.C. after having been set on fire in 356 B.C. This temple was almost four times the size of the Parthenon at Athens and stood till the Goths sacked Ephesus in A.D. 263. With the decline of its commerce, the prosperity of Ephesus became more and more dependent on the tourist and pilgrim trade associated with the temple and cult of Artemis. At the time of Paul's arrival, the people of Ephesus, while surrounded by signs of past wealth and still enjoying many of its fruits, were becoming conscious of the precariousness of their position as a commercial and political center of Asia and were turning more toward the temple of Artemis in support of their economy.³

It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. There were 127 pillars, each of them the gift of a king. They were all of glittering Parian marble and 36 of them were marvelously gilt and inlaid. The great altar had been carved by Praxiteles, the greatest of all Greek sculptors. The image of Artemis was not beautiful. It was a black, squat, many breasted figure, to signify fertility; it was so old that no one knew where it had come from or even of what material it was made. The story was that it had fallen from heaven. The greatest glory of Ephesus was that she was the guardian of the most famous pagan temple in the world.⁴

Paul Arrives at Ephesus (19:1-7)

When Paul arrived at Ephesus, he encountered twelve disciples of John the Baptizer. Luke does not provide us with a detailed description or account. Nevertheless, we can reconstruct certain things based upon what we do know.

- The men had "believed," although Luke doesn't say what they had "believed" (v. 2). (However, as we shall see, it is fairly easy to re-construct what they had believed in verse 4).

² Frank E. Gaebelin, gen editor, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), electronic edition.

³ Ibid.

⁴ William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles, Daily Bible Study Series*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1962), 153 cited in Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts," www.soniclight.com

- They knew nothing of the baptism with the Holy Spirit (the receipt of the Holy Spirit) that had been experienced by other believers who had accepted Jesus as the long-promised Messiah (v. 2)
- The men had only been baptized into John's baptism (v. 3)
- The men were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus when Paul explained the difference between: 1) John's baptism and John's Gospel message vs. 2) the Gospel message Paul preached (v. 4-5).
- According to Luke's narrative, Paul laid hands on them when they believed and they subsequently: 1) received the Holy Spirit; 2) they spoke with tongues; and 3) they prophesied (v. 6)

Luke's narrative in this passage needs some explanation and interpretation, otherwise the believer today can easily reach incorrect conclusions and applications to his or her life. Here are some things that are essential in order to obtain a proper understanding of this passage:

- Water baptism was a ritual that was practiced within Judaism and it pictured cleansing and purification.
- Gentiles who became proselytes to Judaism would submit themselves to water baptism.
- Before they entered the Temple, Jews would dip themselves in ritual bathing pools to symbolize purification
- The baptism that was practiced by John was associated with a call to repentance as opposed to a ritual cleansing as in the case of the bathing pools of the Temple
- John's invitation was a call to people to identify themselves as having accepted the kingdom Gospel message (Matt 3:1-12)
- John's message included a prediction of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16 cf. Jn 1:32-33).
- The response of the 12 men to Paul's question probably indicates that they did not know that God had given the Holy Spirit as Paul had predicted.
- When these men heard Paul's explanation of the Gospel and understood that the Messiah had come and that He was Jesus, they immediately submitted to water baptism.
- As was the case in Samaria, the Ephesian disciples received the Holy Spirit when an apostle, Peter and John, laid hands on them (cf. 8:17).
- Samaria was the first instance of God giving the Holy Spirit in a non-Jewish context.
- The act of the laying on of hands connected or identified these men with Paul's message.
- Important: As subsequent events in this chapter demonstrate, this identification with Paul's message was especially important since Ephesus was saturated with religious activity of a demonic sort (vv. 13-19) and observers needed to be able to quickly distinguish the source of the power behind the miraculous.

There are a number of other doctrinal questions that surround this passage. How one answers them will of necessity be the result of the hermeneutical paradigm one has adopted since Luke's account is so brief. We must remember that Luke's purpose was to provide a historical narrative not a doctrinal treatise. I will briefly address some of the questions that frequently surface around this passage and others like it. In a future session, I will address the subject of tongues – their purpose and issues surrounding this temporary spiritual gift at a later date.

Questions & Answers:

- *Question:* By this point in Paul's ministry and by this point in the 1st Century, if the new dispensation of the Body of Christ (a.k.a. Church Age) had already begun (as I have previously indicated in this series), then did these men receive the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation or later when Paul laid his hands on them?
 - *Short answer:* During the transition period, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to believers for certain events that are documented in the book of Acts. As noted, Luke's purpose was to write a historical narrative, not a doctrinal treatise. Paul is much more explicit in his

epistles and that is where we should turn for doctrinal instruction relating to the present age. Paul teaches that the believer of the Age of the Body of Christ is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In addition, Paul teaches that we are to be filled with the character of God by means of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).⁵

- *Other relevant elaboration and points of interest:*
 - In previous sessions, we have discussed the fact that by A.D. 49, Paul wrote his first epistle, Galatians. This epistle contains concepts and references to doctrines peculiar to the Church Age.
 - Important grammatical point: In verse 2, Paul asks the twelve disciples of John the question “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”
 - “The first aorist active participle of *pisteusantes* [πιστευσαντες - believed] is simultaneous with the second aorist active indicative *elabete* [ελαβετε - receive] and refers to the same event.”⁶
 - Many of the later translations after the KJV have corrected the translation “since you believed” to read “when you believed” to reflect the relationship between the two words.
 - This grammatical point is important as it establishes a direct chronological connection between faith or belief and the receipt of the Holy Spirit and traditionally, dispensationalists have interpreted this to be a reference to the spiritual phenomenon of the baptism of the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ that results in the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit – a phenomenon associated with the Church Age believer in Paul’s epistles.
 - However, this is an interpretive position that is not totally conclusive. Paul could have been simply referring to a group of related past actions in the whole since we see a series of successive events related to belief displayed in verses 5-7. This series of events include the receipt of the Holy Spirit.
 - During the transition period between the Age of Israel and the fully intercalated Age of the Body of Christ or Church Age, those who had been believers of the kingdom gospel received the Holy Spirit once they believed the gospel that Paul and others preached that equated Jesus with the Messiah.
 - Remember that the kingdom gospel focused upon the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom whereas the gospel of Paul and others equated Jesus with the Messiah/Redeemer and the all-sufficiency of His work.

⁵ This is the “type 2” filling of the Holy Spirit and is the only instance in Scripture where we see the Greek construction pattern of *pleroo* + *pneuma* (*dative case*) used as opposed to the *genitive case* as we see in all of Luke’s writings. This is very significant and highlights a difference in content and agency. The content of the filling in Luke’s two books – the Holy Spirit Himself. I’ve referred to the filling that Luke references as a “type 1” filling. The content in Paul’s epistle – the character of God by means of the Holy Spirit. For more information, please see previous teaching on the subject of the “filling” of the Holy Spirit as taught in a prior series on the Spiritual Life of the Believer.

⁶ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume III, The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1930), 311. See similar comments in Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 119.

- What is not entirely clear from the book of Acts is the nature of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and those who made the transition in faith from acceptance of the kingdom Gospel to the grace gospel that equated Jesus with the promised Messiah.
 - It seems to me that whenever we see the Holy Spirit involved with believers who are making the transition from belief in the Gospel of the kingdom to the Gospel that specifically identified Jesus as the Messiah Who had been rejected by Israel, we generally see a miraculous display of the Holy Spirit with a type 1 filling involved.
 - On the other hand, by the later portions of Paul's ministry where his epistles are very Gentile in focus, Paul's teaching on the nature of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to believers is more definitive – i.e. the Holy Spirit permanently indwells the Church Age believer through the baptism of the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, an unseen phenomenon that is not accompanied by the miraculous.
 - There are enough exceptions to the above general comments during the Transition period that the issue can easily become confusing unless those exceptions are examined closely on a one-by-one basis.
- *Question:* Was the “laying on of hands” an essential component or a pre-requisite of the receipt of the Holy Spirit by these men?
 - *Short answer:* No. The “laying on of hands” was a symbolic act – an act of identification or approval and has nothing more to do with the receipt of the Holy Spirit than does circumcision or water baptism with the salvation of an individual.
 - *Other relevant elaboration and points of interest:*
 - When Cornelius believed, Peter did not have to lay his hands on Cornelius in order for Cornelius to receive the Holy Spirit (10:44).
 - When the disciples in Samaria first believed, Peter laid hands on them in conjunction with their receipt of the Holy Spirit (cf. 8:17)
 - Note that when the laying on of hands and receipt of the Holy Spirit occurred, it was at the hands of an Apostle and it was not always practiced.
 - The “laying on of hands” was an act of approval and was only practiced in certain situations for the effect it had as a testimony.
 - Note the similarity between the experience of these believers of the new dispensation of the Church Age and Jesus' promise that He would send the Holy Spirit to be in and with believers (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26). (Jesus' ministry focused upon kingdom truth and there is much similarity between kingdom truth and “mystery age” doctrine in regard to the relationship of the believer to the Holy Spirit).
 - Instruction regarding the Church Age believer in the New Testament does not recognize the possibility of being a Christian apart from possession of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:2; Tit. 3:5-6).
 - The very nature of Paul's question in this passage indicates that Paul saw the act of belief and the receipt of the Holy Spirit as coterminous – “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Paul did not view the act of “laying on of hands” as a pre-requisite to the receipt of the Holy Spirit any more than he would have viewed circumcision as a requirement for salvation.

It should be noted that the reception of the Holy Spirit [by Christians] in Acts does not follow any set pattern. He came into believers before [water] baptism (Acts 10:44), at the time of or after [water] baptism (8:12-16; 19:6), and by the laying on of apostolic hands (8:17; 19:6). Yet Paul declared (Rom. 8:9) that anyone

without the Holy Spirit is not a Christian. Quite obviously the transitional Book of Acts is not to be used as a doctrinal source on how to receive the Holy Spirit.⁷

- *Question:* Where would these men have gone if they had died during the period between their acceptance of John's gospel and their acceptance of Paul's gospel?
 - *Short Answer:* The question of the eternal destiny of the twelve disciples of John should they have died prior to this point is a theoretical question and there are no examples provided to us in Scripture of anyone having died who had accepted John's gospel and who had not yet heard Paul's gospel.
- *Question:* Why did it take so long (approximately 20 years) between Jesus' death and resurrection and the receipt by these men of the gospel that is associated with the present dispensation?
 - *Short answer:* John had baptized thousands of people who accepted his gospel of the coming Messiah and who had repented (changed their thinking) concerning his message. These twelve men could have been disciples of John who departed from Judea prior to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry or they could have been disciples of Apollos. Either way, it is very possible for them to have been traveling as disciples of John without having heard of the events that transpired with Jesus in Jerusalem.
- *Question:* Why did Paul include "when you believed" in his inquiry? Does this phrase indicate that Paul thought they were in fact "believers?" Or, does Paul's question indicate that Paul thought something was not quite correct so he needed to inquire further as to the nature of their belief?
 - *Short answer:* I believe that Paul was using a straw man – if they were true believers in this new dispensation, then they would have received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Paul might have been prompted to ask the question due to their expressions of admiration of John the Baptizer without any mention of Jesus (cf. John 1:19-34 and 2:22-36). Paul's logic – if they had not received the Holy Spirit, then they would have not been believers in Jesus as the Messiah. So, Paul simply allowed them to continue to assume for a moment that they were believers (the straw man), then he challenged their assumption with his question about the Holy Spirit.
- *Question:* Were these disciples of John really ignorant of the existence of the Holy Spirit when they stated – "we have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit?"
 - *Short Answer:* A more literal and perhaps better translation of this passage is "No, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was."⁸ These disciples could not have been ignorant of the existence of the Holy Spirit since the Holy Spirit was a prominent part of the focus of the message of John the Baptizer – "I indeed have baptized you with water, but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mk 1:8). What they did not know was that the Holy Spirit had been given in fulfillment of John's prophecy.
- *Question:* Was this manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the miraculous act of speaking in tongues evidence of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is given to every believer of the Age of the Church? Or, was it similar to the empowering work of the Holy Spirit that was experienced by believers at Pentecost (2:4) and by Cornelius and his household (10:44-46)?

⁷ Stanley Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books: 1983), 409 quoted in Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts" at www.soniclight.com

⁸ Robertson, *Word Pictures, Volume III, Acts*, 311.

- *Short Answer:* The occasions prior to our passage in the book of Acts where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was manifested by the miraculous (i.e. Pentecost – 2:4; Philip, Peter and John’s preaching in Samaria – 8:12-17; and Cornelius and his household – 10:44-47) seem to be very similar to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our passage (19:1-8). As stated in answer to a previous question, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to believers for certain events that are documented in the book of Acts. As noted, Luke’s purpose was to write a historical narrative, not a doctrinal treatise.
- *Additional elaboration and points of interest:*
 - There is no direct evidence in our passage that would indicate this receipt of the Holy Spirit to be equivalent to the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is true of the believer of the present age and will be true of the believer of the Kingdom.
 - However, there is no contradiction between the type 1 filling with the Holy Spirit that we see evidenced in each of these passages and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is common to both the kingdom age believer and the mystery age believer.
 - The outpouring of the Spirit (probably a type 1 filling) that occurred in Acts 19:6 was intended to evidence the change in the content of belief on the part of these men – from a more general gospel of the kingdom to a more specific gospel that identified Jesus with the promised Messiah/Redeemer.
 - So, the answer to the above questions is that the receipt of the Holy Spirit here in Acts 19:6 could have been both a permanent indwelling as well as the type 1 filling manifested on earlier occasions in Acts.

After these men believed and were baptized in water, they received the Holy Spirit – the receipt of which was manifested by speaking in tongues. This is the last reference to speaking in tongues that we find in Acts (cf. 2:4; 10:46; 1 Cor 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14).⁹ Paul’s teaching and instruction concerning this gift is not only authoritative, but helpful.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES IN ACTS				
Reference	Speakers	Audience	Time	Purpose
2:1-4	The Twelve and possibly others	Unsaved Jews	After salvation	To validate for Jews the coming of the Spirit
10:44-47	Gentiles	Saved Jews	Same time as salvation	To validate for Jews God's acceptance of Gentiles
19:1-7	Disciples of John the Baptist	Jews and Gentiles	Same time as salvation	To validate for Jews Paul's message

⁹ Table obtained from Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Acts,” www.soniclight.com

- Paul taught that the gift of tongues would pass away and he uses the middle voice in 1 Corinthians 13:8 to indicate that they would cease of themselves. In other words their purpose would find fulfillment in themselves.
 - The implication in Paul's teaching is that tongues would cease before prophecy would end (1 Cor 13:8). (John wrote the book of Revelation circa A.D. 96).
 - There is no specific verse that indicates a date when tongues would cease
 - Paul teaches that not all believers spoke with tongues (1 Cor 12:30)
 - Some passages imply that they either would or did cease (1 Cor 13:8).