

MANTHE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 19:8-22 | Session 52 | Apostolic Miracles in Ephesus

A.D. 56

Paul is on his third missionary journey. He arrived in Ephesus (19:1) for the second time and found about twelve men (19:7) who had believed in Jesus as Messiah, but had not received the Holy Spirit. This is a difficult passage to interpret and understand, but these men had been baptized into John's baptism which was the *baptism of repentance* (Mark 1:4). At that time in the transition from Law to Grace, the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of hands by the Apostles. Paul laid hands on these 12 and consequently they spoke in tongues and prophesied. During this Apostolic dispensation the receiving of the Holy Ghost was *always* accompanied by a *manifestation* (often called *gifts* today), and the manifestation was *given to every man*. For example, see 1 Corinthians 12:8-11. These manifestations have ceased today during the dispensation of grace (1 Corinthians 13:8). Yet, in our passage today, the manifestations have not ceased as we will see when Paul performs *special miracles*. How or when do we receive the Holy Spirit today in the dispensation of grace? Traditionally we say "The moment we believe we have the Holy Spirit." I tend to believe that statement (maybe I believe it because I have heard it over and over again), but I am not sure I could defend it scripturally. Certainly, Paul says in Ephesians 1:10 that *ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise*, but is being *sealed with the Holy Spirit* the same as receiving the holy Spirit the moment we believe (See also 1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19; 12:27).

Verses 8-10—

Paul is still preaching in the **synagogue** to the Jews in verse 8. What was his message? It was not salvation by grace through faith and not of works. Rather, Paul was **disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God**. The teaching of the kingdom was always *works* based. It required obedience to the Law of Moses and giving up earthly riches to follow the Messiah. A good example of this is found in Luke 18:18-23. Paul taught kingdom gospel often since the promise of Jesus's return was still viable providing the nation as a whole would repent and be baptized for rejecting their Messiah and putting him to death on the cross (we call this the kingdom offer). The offer would be invalid by A.D. 70 when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed and Jews scattered throughout the world. But it will be offered once again, during the Seven Year Tribulation. At that time the Jews will need to believe the kingdom gospel once again in order to be saved. Paul's desire was always that the nation be saved (Romans 10:1).

Nevertheless, the Jews continued to reject the message that Jesus was their Messiah and many (**divers**) of them **were hardened, and believed not**. These Jews, as is often the case when people reject a message that doesn't align with their thinking, **spoke evil of that way before the multitude**. We would have stronger believers today (and the

world in general would be a better place) if people would be open to discussing and arguing a point rather than shutting down the discussion by screaming and yelling.

In light of this opposition, Paul does what he did in Corinth (Acts 18:6); **he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus**.

This **school** would not be like our schoolroom today—it would probably be similar to a lecture hall where many would gather to hear a speaker. The location of this particular school in Ephesus is not known, but according to some early non-biblical writings, Ephesus was a center of *rhetoric* (that is speaking and writing) and public debate would have been the norm. Most likely because it was such a progressive city it drew many speakers and teachers from all over the world and especially **all they that dwelt in Asia** (vs. 10), and now not only the Jews are hearing the gospel, but also **Greeks**. The word **Greeks** is *Hellen* in the Greek language. Sometimes this word is used for Greek speaking Jews (or those Jews who embraced the Greek culture), but I tend to think the **Greeks** here is referring to those of all nations who embraced the language and customs and learning of the Greeks. In other words, Paul has a wide audience.

I am going to go against the flow here and say that all the evidence points to Paul continuing to preach the kingdom gospel, and not the grace gospel at this point in Ephesus. The confirmation of that is found in verses 11-22.

Verses 11,12—

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul. Why did God work miracles through Paul? It wasn't for the sake of the Gentiles. It appears to be for the benefit of the Jews. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:22:

"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom."

How did God manifest himself to the Jews, or the nation of Israel throughout their history? He did it through signs and miracles. For the Jews to believe they would have to know, via a sign from God, that the work was of him. This entire passage is very Jewish.

God gave Paul such Apostolic powers through a **handkerchief or aprons** (this is the only place this word *apron* is used, but it may mean a linen covering). I think the picture is that whatever Paul touched and that item was taken back to the sick their **diseases departed from them**. We saw a similar type of healing in Acts 5:5 at the hands of Peter. In the coming millennial kingdom God will heal all diseases and here through Paul, God is showing his People what the promise of the kingdom will be like; they may have remembered his promise in Psalm 103.

And the evil spirits went out of them. This too is kingdom related. Jesus made it clear in Mark 16:17.

This kingdom thinking is going to be made even more evident in the following verses which we will see next time.