

ACTSFACTS

C@G Supplementary Study Notes for ACTS

Message #44

“MIRACLES & SUPERSTITIONS”

(Acts 19:1-22)

Towards the end of Paul's Second Missionary Journey, when he had arrived in Ephesus from Corinth, some of the local Jews were receptive to his message and implored him to stay longer in Ephesus. However, Paul did not believe that it was the right time, or God's will, for him to stay longer at that time. But he did promise them that, the Lord willing, he would return at some stage (Acts 18:20-21).

Now a couple of years later, Paul has spent time back in Jerusalem and Antioch and has embarked on his Third Missionary Journey. He has been travelling throughout the province of Asia (modern Turkey) encouraging the believers and churches he established on his previous journeys. And, now, he makes good on his promise to return to Ephesus.



EPHESUS

This thriving city was a major business and commercial centre. It was also a major religious centre, focused on the goddess Artemis (the Roman goddess Diana), who was worshipped as a “fertility goddess”. (One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was a massive temple dedicated to Artemis/Diana just near Ephesus.) And Ephesus was also a centre of occultic practice... a place dark with the mystical and magical.

Paul arrives in Ephesus and almost immediately he is met with some confusion (Acts 19:1-7). He encounters twelve “disciples”. Now Luke is rather ambiguous in his use of the term “disciple” here. By definition, a disciple is someone who is a learner, or follower. The term does not define who/what is being followed, although we often (and sometimes mistakenly) think the term is solely used of Christians, followers/learners of Jesus Christ.

Paul, wanting to determine the spiritual status of these men, asks them if they have received the Holy Spirit when they believed. As it turns out, they haven't even heard of the Holy Spirit and they are, in fact, disciples of the repentance teachings of John the Baptist. In other words, they are “Old Testament seekers”.



Celsus Library, Ephesus.

So Paul explains to them the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. They believe and are baptised and then, at the laying on of Paul's hands, they receive the Holy Spirit in a very special way, followed by speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Now, the confusion of the 12 disciples in this encounter is cleared up, but these verses have provided great confusion and controversy for biblical students and believers for many centuries.

Some would see these verses as a “proof text” for the receiving of the Holy Spirit as a “second blessing”, a subsequent to salvation event.

Others would see this as one of only three such experiences (after Pentecost) of such an event and, therefore, not to be taken as the norm.

Let's briefly look at the Person and the Work of the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Third Member of the Divine Trinity – God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit exercises the power of the Father and the Son in creation and redemption.

The Holy Spirit appears in the Gospel of John as the power by whom Christians are brought to faith and helped to understand (and live) their lives with God. (John 3:6; John 6:63).

The Holy Spirit is the *Paraclete*, or *Helper*, whom Jesus promised to the disciples after His ascension. It is through the Helper that Father and Son abide with the disciples (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7).

The Greek word has been translated in different versions as “Comforter”, “Advocate”, “Counsellor”...and all give a further understanding of the many-layered work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

The Holy Spirit guides believers into all truth with what He hears from the Father (John 12:49-50).

During His ministry, Jesus refers to the Spirit of God (Matt.12:28-29; Luke 11:20) as the power by which He casts out demons.

The person and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels is confirmed by His work in the early church. The Holy Spirit is poured out in power in missions and evangelism (Acts 1:5,8; 2:4ff).

The prophecy of Jesus (cf. Joel 2:28-32) begins on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-18). The gift of the Holy Spirit is received in a powerful way, signalling the start of a new era and the initiation of the Christian church.

Paul’s teaching about the Holy Spirit harmonizes with the accounts of the Spirit’s activity in the Gospels and Acts. It is by the Spirit that people are convicted and confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor.12:3).

It is through the Spirit that the body of Christ (the Church) is given gifts to assist with unity and ministry.

The Holy Spirit is the way to Jesus Christ (Romans 8:11). He bears witness to us that we are children of God (Romans 8:16-17) and He helps us with our intercessions (Romans 8:26-27).

The Holy Spirit reveals to Christians the deep things of God (1 Cor.2:10-12 and the mystery of Christ (Eph.3:3-5).

Paul reminds us of how we are to live through the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal.5:22-23) in comparison with the way of the sin-sick world around us.

And receiving the Holy Spirit?

The example of the 12 “disciples” in Ephesus receiving the Holy Spirit in such a dramatic way is one of only three such examples (after Pentecost) in Acts (the Samaritans and Cornelius being the others). If such an experience were to be seen as normative, then Acts would be filled with other such examples.

Indeed, the consistent teaching of Scripture indicates that we receive the Holy Spirit at the point of conversion (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13; 4:4-5; Romans 8:9 etc).

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was God’s way of signalling this new era of His Church being borne out of the **Jewish followers** of Jesus. The **Samaritans** received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-18) and **Cornelius and other Gentiles** received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-47) and, now, the church, having embraced, Jews, Gentiles and Samaritans, now gathered the last group: “**Old Testament saints/believers**”. Now, all the groups are gathered in.

In certain churches/denominations an “over-emphasis” is given to the Holy Spirit...and in others, an “under-emphasis” is given to Him. We must guard against both extremes and understand that it is through the indwelling Holy Spirit that we have power to live the Christian life & to witness for Christ.

As a result of Paul’s lengthy ministry in the strategic centre of Ephesus, the Gospel went out through the province of Asia and “all the Jews and Greeks heard”. Paul took advantage of every opportunity to tell others about Jesus, whether in a synagogue or a lecture hall.

How do you share your faith with others?

In a city and society that were so immersed in magic and superstition, God proved His power and the validity of the message that Paul preached through some dramatic miracles (19:11-16).

When some “exorcists” (the seven sons of Sceva) tried to appropriate the name of Jesus to drive out an evil spirit, the demon rebuffed them by saying: “*Jesus I know, and Paul I know about...BUT WHO ARE YOU?*”

Have you had any personal experience/knowledge of the spiritual realm & the spiritual battle we’re in? (see **Ephesians 6:12**) _____

As a result of Satan being defeated in this episode, many people repented of their occultic allegiances and became Christians...signalling their commitment to their new life by the destruction of a great worth of scrolls and other related magic aids.

How should we separate ourselves from the wrong things in our past? Can the past still have a hold on us? _____

What do the Ephesians converts show us about repentance? Is this what it looks like in your life? _____