

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Ministry in Ephesus

Acts 18:22-19:20

Intro: Having spent 18 months in Corinth, Paul and his missionary team were on their way to Jerusalem. Paul had taken a vow of consecration that needed to be completed there. On the way, they stopped in Ephesus to see if it would be a good place to plant a church. It didn't take long to discover that the harvest was ripe. He went into the synagogue to reason with the Jews and instead of finding resistance he found acceptance and real interest! Paul couldn't stay and preach because he had to fulfill his vow but he was able to leave Priscilla and Aquila behind to carry on the work there. Something good had been started and he wanted that work to continue with his friends.

22-23 - Luke gives us an abbreviated description of the conclusion of Paul's 2nd missionary journey and the start of his 3rd. Paul sails from Ephesus to Caesarea. After Paul lands in Caesarea, Luke says he went "up" and greeted the church. Which church is that? The church in Jerusalem. In the Bible, when someone goes to Jerusalem, they always go up to the city because it's built on top of a mountain. If you leave there for another city, you go down to it.

This is exactly what we see in **vs22**. Paul needs to go to Jerusalem to complete his vow in the temple. While he is there, he pops in for a visit with the apostles and congregation in Jerusalem. It's only after his vow is accomplished that he goes down to his home church in Antioch. What a blessed reunion that had to have been hearing how their prayers and support aided Paul in carrying the gospel to so many different people in so many different places.

Paul spent some time in Antioch but we don't know how much. But Paul wasn't one to sit still for long. One more time, he's off on the road again to minister to those churches he had established years before. This would include churches in Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. Once again, we see Paul's passion for building up disciples. His desire was not just to see people saved but to see disciples become established in the word of God and grow in their relationship with God. Paul knew it wasn't

enough to make a strong beginning with Jesus; we must always be growing in spiritual strength. That only comes from knowing and applying God's Word to our lives.

Spiritual growth is the most important aspect of the Christian life, after salvation. Our growth directly contributes to or detracts from our ministry for the Lord and to others. The more prepared we are, the more effective we will be. Of course, we still can't use our lack of knowledge as an excuse for not sharing the gospel. "I don't know a lot!" that may be true but you know enough and you have the opportunity to learn more. Very few of His servants have any clue what God will have them do. All we can do is be prepared, be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit and trust God to use us as He sees fit. If we're determined to build up strong disciples like Paul did then we must start with ourselves!

Luke spends little time on the transition between Paul's 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys because he seems to want to focus on the work in Ephesus. This was the largest city Paul had visited yet and, like all the other Gentile cities he ministered in, this one was filled with idolatry and moral degradation. Paul would spend 2 full years preaching and teaching here and the end result will be a solid church plant that would last for centuries. Initially though, the ministry in Ephesus comes across 3 different groups of people with 3 different spiritual problems. First, there's a man with an incomplete message. Next, there are 12 men with an inconsistent witness. Last, there are 7 men with inadequate power. Each one of these groups will contribute to the growing church in Ephesus.

24-28 – While Paul was away, things were still happening in Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla stayed behind to continue the witness in the synagogue. Imagine their surprise one Sabbath to hear a visiting Jewish teacher preach many of the truths they believed and taught! The man's name was Apollos and he is an interesting character. Luke says he was from Alexandria (Egypt), the 2nd most important city in the Roman Empire. Alexandria was a center for serious learning, boasting a university and a library containing over 700K volumes. Who is Apollos and why's he important?

From Luke's description, Apollos was exceptional in many ways. **Vs24** says he was an eloquent man (or learned). This means he had acquired the learning of his day. He had gone through the equivalent of university and

graduate school. His credentials were impressive. It also says he was mighty in the Scriptures. This is referring to the OT and Apollo wasn't just familiar with the Scriptures, he knew them well. Vs25 is a little confusing when it says he had been instructed in the way of the Lord. We naturally think of Jesus but the term "the Lord" also often refers to Jehovah, the OT name of the God of Israel. Apollo knew the ways of Jehovah meaning he knew the OT law and tried to follow it.

Luke also tells us he was fervent in spirit. This indicates that Apollo didn't just have a detached academic awareness of the OT. No, the teachings of the OT were important to him. When he spoke about them and taught them, he did so with energy and conviction! No doubt he was classically trained as an orator but this indicates that his success as an OT instructor came from a conviction that was based on something deeply imbedded in his heart. Luke also says he taught accurately the things of the Lord. This was an important thing for him to do. But, although Apollos had this great, important asset, he also had a great liability – he knew only the baptism of John (25). What does this mean?

This could mean that Apollos only knew about a baptism unto repentance, what John the Baptist had preached during his ministry. It could also mean that Apollos knew the unfolding of God's plan up to and including the ministry of John the Baptist. He knew that John announced the coming of the Messiah was coming but what he didn't know was that the Messiah John had announced had already come. Apollos would have a vague understanding of what Jesus was supposed to do; he just didn't know Jesus had already done it. Apollos message was not inaccurate or insincere, it was just incomplete. His limited knowledge meant he had limited resources for a truly effective ministry.

Apollos is preaching in the synagogue and Aquila and Priscilla hear him, are impressed by him and then realize that his message is missing the most important part! Messiah had come, had died on a cross, was buried and rose from the dead. Now, by all accounts, Aquila and Priscilla were just regular blue collar working stiffs; not highly educated or classically trained. And here's Apollos, who is exactly that. This make for an uncomfortable situation. Apollos needs the truth but what if he refuses to listen? If this thought entered their minds, Aquila and Priscilla ignored it and pulled Apollos aside and shared with him the full truth about Jesus Christ. They

were submitted enough to obey the Lord.

The real miracle here is that Apollos accepted their instruction! I'm sure the information they gave him connected a lot of dots for him. The truth about Jesus filled some really big holes in his theology. Even though he was a highly educated and classically trained man with impressive credentials, Apollos was still humble enough to receive the Word of God, believe it and assimilate it into the knowledge he already had, completely transforming his ministry.

He would later travel to Corinth where he would be used by God in a great way (27-28).

19:1-7 – Paul returns to Ephesus, just as he had promised but when he arrives, he finds a group of “disciples” that seem to have a problem. Apparently, there was something about these men and their testimony that prompted Paul to ask this question. As it turns out, they were disciples of John the Baptist. They knew people were to repent of sin and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. But, like Apollos, they hadn't heard that Messiah had come. They only had a basic understanding of the Messiah, what could be gleaned from the teachings of John but they didn't know much about the nature of God as it was revealed to us by Jesus. They had been baptized unto repentance, as John preached but not of faith unto salvation. John's message pointed to Jesus but it didn't take lost sinners there.

Thankfully, their hearts had been completely prepared by the preaching of John the Baptist. When Paul shared with them the truth of Jesus Christ, they not only embraced Jesus fully, accepting Him into their hearts by faith; but they wanted to be baptized in His name. Then Paul laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now, this is not normative in the church today. We know this because it's not repeated. Today, when people accept Jesus into their hearts, they receive the Holy Spirit at the same time. This was a special group of individuals who would make up the foundation of a great church in Ephesus. God used Paul to convey the gift of the Spirit upon them, thus affirming his apostolic authority over that church and uniting it with all the other Christian churches that had been started.

8-10 – Paul eventually wore out his welcome in the synagogue, but not after affecting the spiritual consciousness of many Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. He then moved over to the school of Tyrannus, This was a local

place of learning that Paul had access to during the off hours. Scholars estimate that he had the run of the place from 11AM to 4PM – that's 5 hours a day, every day, for 2 years – If you don't count Sundays, that comes up to between 1500 – 1800 hours of Bible teaching from a guy who wrote most of the NT. That's more teaching that most seminarians get in a 3 year program. It's no wonder the church in Ephesus was so solid and grounded in the truth!

11-12 – We should note first that even Luke describes these as unusual miracles. Miracles themselves are unusual but these were even more so! We don't really know how this worked other than like Peter's shadow in **ch5** or the hem of Jesus' garment in **Mt 14**; the item was a point of contact by which a person released faith in Jesus as healer. It's likely that God allowed these unusual miracles specifically because Ephesus was a center for the occult and Paul was demonstrating God's power right in the middle of Satan's territory.

Now, since the superstitious practice of magic and sorcery was prevalent in Ephesus, I'm sure there were some who took quite a superstitious view of the miracles done through Paul. But, this just goes to prove the longsuffering and grace of God. He is a God who will stoop down and meet us even in the midst of our crude superstitions. Of course, this never means that God is pleased with our superstitions, because, by definition, superstitions tend to deny both the power and presence of God. But, in His mercy, God is willing to overlook them to meet us in our great need. I'm not saying that these types of miracles could never happen again but I would caution you if you get a letter from a TV preacher saying he will send you a sweaty handkerchief for a small donation of \$1000. Don't get your hopes up!

But, wherever God sends people to minister the truth, Satan sends his counterfeits to oppose the work of God. Jesus taught this truth in the Parable of the Tares (**Mt 13:24-43**). Peter experienced this in Samaria with Simon (**8:19**). Paul experienced it at Paphos (**13:4-12**). Satan likes to imitate whatever God's people are doing because he knows that the unbelieving world cannot tell the difference. But, it doesn't always work out well for the counterfeits...

13-16 – We tend to read this passage with a chuckle or two because, let's face it – it is funny. But, Luke didn't write this to add some comic relief to this

story. There are some very sobering realities at play in this account. 1st, there was apparently so much occult dabbling going on in Ephesus that produced so many victims of demon possession that there was enough to keep this band of Jewish exorcists busy! Now, while these men were probably pretty busy, we can assume they weren't very successful. Sadly, they would have practiced their trade with a lot of superstition and religious ceremony. They must have been frustrated by their own lack of success and even more so when they saw how successful the Apostle Paul was at performing miracles, and he wasn't even trying!

So, since Paul seemed to be cutting deep into their market share of the local exorcism business, they decided to do a little reverse engineering of their own and start "imitating" what they thought was Paul's formula for success. The next time they confronted a demon, they would just throw the name of Jesus in their face and make them run! Of course, there were a lot of Jesus' around in those days so they had to specify that this was the Jesus that Paul preached about because, obviously, that's all they knew about this Jesus – other than He had power over evil spirits. But when they applied their new business plan to a real world situation, it didn't turn out quite the way they expected.

In this case, the evil spirit knew exactly who Jesus was and exactly who Paul was but he had no clue who these guys were. Apparently, evil spirits know who their real enemies are (here, Jesus and Paul) and they don't waste any effort familiarizing themselves with those who aren't a threat to them. Clearly, the evil spirit didn't appreciate being accosted by these chuckleheads and he immediately set upon them with displeasure in no uncertain terms.

What was the problem? Why did they fail? These men failed because they had no personal relationship with Jesus. They only knew Jesus as the God of Paul; they didn't know Him as their own personal Savior. These men tried to use the name of Jesus but they didn't have the right to use it because they had no personal connection to Jesus. Don't get me wrong, the name of Jesus is powerful but only for those who have first submitted to the authority of that name. These men had no relationship with Jesus so they had no spiritual power against this evil spirit. Thus, they left this encounter naked and wounded. It was dangerous for them to take the reality of spiritual warfare lightly.

In the same pattern, how many people today – even churchgoers – will perish in hell for an eternity because they also have no personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Oh, they know all about Jesus but they only know Him as the Jesus the pastor preaches about or the Jesus Grandma believed in instead of the Jesus of their own salvation. This is an even greater danger than the 7 sons of Sceva faced. They were merely battered and bruised but they still had a chance to hear the gospel message, repent of their sins and be saved from the wrath of God that is to come. But, those who die under the guilt of sin have other recourse. Jesus said He had power “on earth” to forgive sin. Once you leave this earth, that power – that opportunity – is not lost, it’s just withdrawn. If you won’t accept it here, you won’t get it over there. But, the story doesn’t end there...

17-20 – The incident with the sons of Sceva impressed the people of Ephesus with the reality and danger of the demonic realm (the occult). It made them fear the Lord and the demonic realm in healthy ways. As a result, the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Apparently, before this incident, even many believers didn’t realize they were involved with the demonic world. They probably viewed their dabbling in the occult in a far too innocent light, thinking there wasn’t really anything wrong with it – until they saw the reality of demonic activity and how it opposes the truth.

What happened? Christians were prompted to renounce any and all remaining connections to the demonic occult world. They renounced the demonic by confessing: it’s believed that the power of magic spells is in their secrecy; this power was renounced when they openly confessed their deeds. They also burned all their magic books, with all the spells and incantations, disregarding their value. It’s estimated that the value of these books was upwards of \$5 million. They destroyed them so others couldn’t fall into bondage through them.

What was the result of this action? So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed (**20**). Compare this with **vs10**, which says that as a result of Paul’s teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for 2 years - all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. There’s a difference between those 2 statements. As a result of Paul’s consistent teaching, everybody heard the gospel. But that’s not the same thing as saying that the people who heard believed. But, **vs20** says that when the

Christians really laid it on the line, when they really began to get serious with God, then the Word of the Lord not only spread widely but also prevailed. It was at this point that the people of Asia not only heard the gospel but also believed it and began to follow Christ. What happened in Ephesus should be a challenge for Christians everywhere today. When we get serious with God and seek to walk with Him free of all the satanic influences of the old life, people will not only hear the message of the gospel, they will believe it! The Ephesian believers valued their walk with Jesus more than their satanic magic books! Do we? There may be some literature, computer files, old habits or desires that need to be confessed and burned out of our lives so that we can walk free of hindrances and others can see our victory! 😊