

Learn to Read Acts Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 10

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Session 10 - Paul in Ephesus and Greece

Acts 19 and 20

Introduction

In this session we will learn of the success of Paul's preaching at Ephesus and the turbulent reaction that followed. We then see Paul returning to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) before starting on his return journey to Jerusalem.

You will find it useful to read Acts 19 and 20 before you look at the notes.

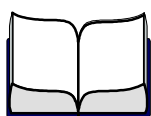
Summary

The church spreads through the Roman Empire

Paul's third missionary journey

Paul's preaching at Ephesus	19 v 1 to 10
Miracles and conversions at Ephesus	19 v 11 to 22
Riot at Ephesus	19 v 23 to 41
Paul's journeys in Greece	20 v 1 to 6
Troas to Miletus	20 v 7 to 16
Message to the Ephesian elders	20 v 17 to 38

Acts 19 v 1 to 10 - Paul's preaching at Ephesus



Read Acts 19 v 1 to 10

In verses 1 to 10 Paul encountered about twelve believers who had only known baptism as taught by John the Baptist. Possibly they were converted by Apollos before he met Aquila and Priscilla. We saw in Acts 18 v 25 that Apollos originally only knew about John's baptism. Like Apollos himself, they needed to be taught about the full significance of the work of Jesus to have a full understanding of God's plan. God showed His approval by giving them the gift of tongues and of prophecy.

Acts 19 v 8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

As in Corinth, Paul started by going to the synagogue, where in fact there would be both Jews and Gentiles who knew the Old Testament. As we have seen several times, he only needed to convince these people that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Paul spent three months “reasoning and persuading” - another familiar aspect of Paul’s work.

Verses 9 and 10 again show echoes of Paul’s work in Corinth. When the Jews opposed his work, he sought another venue to continue his “reasoning and persuading”. It is interesting to look at what we are told about the way Paul went about his preaching. The following echoes teach us a lot:

**Echoes -
Paul’s
preaching**

Acts 13 v 5; 17 v 2; 18 v 11; 19 v 10; 28 v 23, 30 and 31.

Paul:

- Preached the Word of God
- Reasoned from the Scriptures
- Taught the Word of God for eighteen months (in Corinth)
- Reasoned daily for two years (in Ephesus)
- Persuaded concerning Jesus from the law of Moses and the prophets
- Preached the kingdom of God and things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ for two years (in Rome)



For a total time of almost six years, Paul used the law of Moses and the prophets in his reasoning, persuading and teaching people about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 19 v 11 to 22 - Miracles and conversions at Ephesus



Read Acts 19 v 11 to 22

Acts 19 v 11 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul

We have looked at several instances where miracles were performed. It may be interesting at this point to ask the question:



What was the purpose of the miracles and signs?

Some of the cross-references from this verse help us:

X-Refs-
Acts 19
v 11

Acts 14 v 3; Romans 15 v 18 and 19; Hebrews 2 v 3 and 4.

- The signs were a witness that Christ was approving the preaching
- The signs were to encourage the Gentiles to be obedient to God's message
- The signs were a witness to the message of salvation

There are many echoes from this idea:

Echoes -
Miracles as
a witness to
the message

Mark 16 v 20; John 2 v 11 and 23; 3 v 2; 6 v 2 and 14; Acts 2 v 22.

- The signs confirmed the words of the apostles
- The disciples believed after seeing Jesus turn water into wine
- Many believed in Jesus when they saw the signs he provided
- Nicodemus acknowledged that signs were an evidence of God's approval
- Many followed Jesus as a result of his miracles
- The feeding of the 5,000 convinced those involved that Jesus is "the Prophet who is to come"
- Peter said that the miracles of Jesus were proof that God was working through him

Acts 19 v 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

This verse shows the extent of the support that God gave to Paul to help his preaching work. Paul was the main preacher to the Gentiles. His teaching and writings now form part of the authority for what we should believe. So maybe this is the reason God gave him the special powers that we see in this verse.

Verses 13 to 16 form a warning to us. They tell of some Jews who tried to use the name of Jesus to copy the signs God gave through Paul. These exorcists were those who claimed to heal people by various mystical means. They possibly held the respect from the common people that doctors and surgeons do today. So probably they were trying to imitate Paul in order to enhance their own status and esteem in the eyes of others.

Verse 16 tells us that the exorcists were attacked by the man they were trying to heal.

Verses 17 to 20 tell us that the result of this incident was that Jesus' name was magnified and the influence of the word of the Lord grew.

*Acts 19 v 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.
19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.*

The scale of impact of these events is shown in verse 19, where the value of books destroyed is given. **Ellicott's Commentary* tells us that one piece of silver was equivalent to a day's wages. This means that the value of books was well over 100 years' wages.

There are echoes in other parts of Scripture that warn us that we should be on our guard for people who try to deceive us with so-called signs from God:

**Echoes -
False
signs**

Matthew 24 v 24; 2 Peter 2 v 1 to 3; 3 v 15 to 17.

- Jesus warns us of false Christs and false prophets who will be able to do convincing signs

**Ellicott's New Testament Commentary, Vol II, Cassell & Co. 1897*

- Peter warns of false teachers who will bring false teaching into the church. The motive of these false teachers will be “covetousness”, or desire for gain, whether of money or of power
- Peter also warns that people will twist Scripture, and that his hearers should be careful about being led astray by error



From these passages we conclude that we must be on our guard against people who claim to do signs in God’s name yet twist Scripture, whose real motive is desire for power or money.

Acts 19 v 21 When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

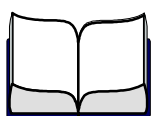
In this verse we see Paul’s plans:

- Go through Macedonia and Achaia
- Then to Jerusalem
- Finally to Rome

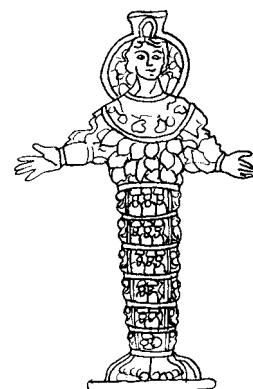
If you look at Map 6 on page 3 of the *Additional Notes* booklet you will see that this is no small journey - well over 1,000 miles!

In verse 22 we read that Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia as an “advance party”, but meanwhile he stayed on in Ephesus.

Acts 19 v 23 to 41 - Riot at Ephesus



Read Acts 19 v 23 to 41



*Figure of
Diana of the Ephesians*

Ephesus was a prosperous city dominated by worship of the goddess Diana. The temple of Diana ranked as one of the wonders of the world. Silver coins bearing the inscription “Diana Ephesia” have been found in many countries, showing that the worship of Diana was widespread. Demetrius, who profited from this situation by making silver shrines of Diana, called together his fellow workers to consider the effects of Paul’s preaching.

Acts 19 v 26 "Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.

27 "So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

The cross-references from verse 26 show that Paul's message that "they are not gods which are made with hands" is a common Bible theme:

X-Refs-
Acts 19
v 26

Psalm 115 v 4 to 8; Isaiah 44 v 10 to 20; Jeremiah 10 v 3 to 5;
1 Corinthians 8 v 4.

All these references show that gods made by men have no power at all to help us.



Do we put *our* trust in things that cannot really help us?

Verse 27 tells us that Demetrius was concerned that the effect of Paul's message would be to discourage people from buying the silver shrines of Diana that the silversmiths made. The threat of loss of income and employment is always a very emotive issue. Demetrius achieved his object of stirring up anger among his fellow workers, which resulted in a riot.

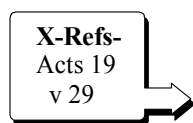
Acts 19 v 29 So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.



Ruins of the Theatre at Ephesus

This would have been a frightening experience for Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's companions. We are not told why Paul was not seized as well. Possibly the mob knew where Gaius and Aristarchus were and Paul was not with them at that time. The ruins of the theatre where this riot occurred still exist today. Together with the gymnasium, the theatre was the centre of cultural activities and was used for all official assemblies, so it was natural that the mob went there.

Look at the cross-references and you will discover more about Aristarchus:



Acts 20 v 4; Colossians 4 v 10; Philemon 24.

- Aristarchus came from Thessalonica and was with Paul on his journey to Asia
- Paul was in prison with Aristarchus
- Paul regarded Aristarchus as his fellow labourer

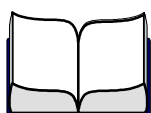
This was a man committed to the work of helping Paul and he suffered similar hardships.

Verses 30 and 31 show that Paul wanted to take any opportunity to spread the gospel message. However, his companions and the officials probably knew that the crowd were in no mood to listen to anything, so they pleaded with Paul to keep away.

Verse 32 reveals that a large proportion of this mob were confused and did not understand what the trouble was all about.

Verses 34 to 41 tell us about the mob shouting for two hours, and how the city clerk eventually managed to quieten the crowd and get them to leave the theatre, pointing out that there were legal means of settling their dispute.

Acts 20 v 1 to 6 - Paul's journeys in Greece



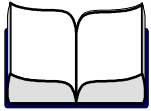
Read Acts 20 v 1 to 6

In verse 1, Paul was probably convinced that the city of Ephesus was no longer in the mood to receive his message following the riot, so he decided to move on to Macedonia and revisit the believers there and encourage them. This would include visits to Philippi and Thessalonica.

Verses 2 and 3 tell us that Paul then spent three months in Greece, which would possibly include visits to Corinth and Athens. He then decided to sail to Syria, probably the easiest way physically to Jerusalem. But a plot by the Jews made him change his plans and return through Macedonia. Among his travel companions was Aristarchus, who had been involved in the riot at Ephesus. At this stage they didn't actually travel with Paul, but "went ahead".

Verses 4 to 6 record the details of Paul's journey and his eventual arrival at Troas, where he stayed seven days. It is interesting to note that Luke joined Paul in verse 5, indicated by the change of pronoun from "him" to "us". He and Paul sailed from Philippi and caught up with the rest of the party at Troas.

Acts 20 v 7 to 16 - Troas to Miletus



Read Acts 20 v 7 to 16

We see the enthusiasm and stamina of Paul when he spoke until midnight at a breaking of bread service, and then stayed talking until daybreak.

This incident involving Eutychus in verses 7 to 12 contains some comforting thoughts for us to consider:

- We can all be guilty of failing to hear God's message - Eutychus, probably suffering from heat and tiredness, not only stopped listening, he fell asleep!
- Paul showed no sign of irritation that Eutychus had fallen asleep while listening to Paul giving God's message
- Paul showed that his message was with power by raising Eutychus from the dead

The cross-references from verse 10 remind us of those times when Jesus showed that his message had real power behind it by raising people from the dead:

X-Refs-
Acts 20
v 10

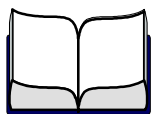
Matthew 9 v 24 and 25; Luke 7 v 13 to 15; John 11 v 11, 40 to 44.

Jesus raised:

- The ruler's daughter
- The son of the widow of Nain
- Lazarus

Verses 13 to 16 record Paul's journey to Miletus.

Acts 20 v 17 to 38 - Message to the Ephesian elders



Read Acts 20 v 17 to 38 again

Having sailed past Ephesus (verse 16) Paul sent for the elders of the Ephesian church. He was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem but wanted to give a message via the elders without going to Ephesus himself. Paul began by reminding them of what he had gone through and how he had behaved.

This is a useful reminder to us of how we should live, as we see from the cross-references from verse 19:

X-Refs-
Acts 20
v 19

John 12 v 26; Romans 12 v 11; Ephesians 6 v 5 to 7; James 1 v 2 and 3.

- If we wish to serve Jesus, we must follow him. We will then be honoured by God
- We should serve the Lord enthusiastically
- We should serve our employers as though we were working for Jesus
- We should regard problems and trials as tests of our faith in God

In verses 22 and 23, Paul made it clear that he knew that he was going to have problems when he reached Jerusalem.

The references from verse 22 show that Paul's experience was like that of Jesus, in that he knew that he was about to suffer:

X-Refs-
Acts 20
v 22

Luke 18 v 31 to 33; John 18 v 4.

In verse 25 Paul was obviously concerned that his work in Ephesus was coming to an end, because he told the Ephesian elders that he would not see them again, and in verse 28 he encouraged them to look after the believers in their care.

Acts 20 v 29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."

Paul gave a solemn warning that problems would arise in the community of believers. False teaching would enter the church.

The cross-references show that this warning was common all through the New Testament:

Have a look at these references and see what you can learn about the problem of false teachers among the believers.
Compare your findings with those on page 12.

X-Refs-
Acts 20
v 29 and 30

2 Timothy 4 v 3 and 4; 2 Peter 2 v 1; 1 John 2 v 18 and 19; 2 John 7 to 11;
Jude 4.

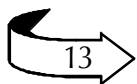


These verses clearly warn that the true gospel message taught by the apostles would be threatened by false ideas arising from among the believers.

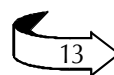
The rest of Acts 20 records Paul's continuing encouragement to the elders to keep to correct doctrines from God's Word and give practical help to those who needed it. The elders then went with Paul to the ship, feeling very sorry, however, because of his warning that they would not see him again.

The letter to the Ephesians

The letter to the Ephesians does not deal with specific problems. It encourages its readers to appreciate the responsibilities and privileges of being part of God's plan. Have a look at the *Additional Notes* for more information on the letter.



In the next session we will travel with Paul to Jerusalem and see the problems he encountered there.

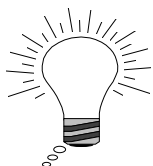


Summary of Session 10

We have seen how Paul preached, and have looked at some warnings:

- In his preaching at Ephesus, Paul used the law of Moses and the prophets in his reasoning, persuading and teaching people about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ
- We have seen that miracles were:
 - * A witness that the Lord was approving the preaching
 - * An encouragement to the Gentiles to be obedient to God's message
 - * A witness to the message of salvation
- We must be on our guard against people who claim to do signs in God's name yet twist Scripture, and whose real motive is desire for power or money
- We have been reminded not to trust in things which cannot really help us
- Paul predicted a time in the church when people would believe what they wanted rather than hold correct beliefs
- John predicted that false teachers whom he called "antichrists" would come
- There were many "antichrists" in his own day
- These people came from within the church and would show that they were not really part of it

We have been challenged:



- Are our beliefs about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ based on the law of Moses and the prophets?
- Are we aware of the threat that false ideas pose to the teachings we have from the first-century apostles?
- Do we hold any beliefs that were not clearly taught by the first-century apostles?

Questions

1. How did the miracles help in the work of preaching?
2. What lessons are there for us in Paul's message to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20 v 17 to 38)?

Self-study notes

Problems with false teachers (page 10)

- There would be people in the community of believers who would bring in false teachers who would teach them the false ideas which they wanted to hear (2 Timothy 4 v 3 and 4)
- Peter predicted a time in the church when false teachers would bring in false teaching regarding the saving work of Jesus (2 Peter 2 v 1)
- John predicted that false teachers whom he called “antichrists” would arise. There were many “antichrists” in his own day. These people came from within the church and had shown that they were not really part of it (1 John 2 v 18 and 19)
- John also urged his readers to keep to the doctrines of Jesus, because “antichrists” would try to persuade people to believe false ideas (2 John 7 to 11)
- Jude also warned of ungodly people among the believers who would deny correct teaching about God and Jesus (Jude 4)