

# Into What Then Were You Baptized?

By Dan & Brenda Cathcart

The video version is available at:

The scripture reading is Acts 19:1-41

Paul had longed to travel to Ephesus for quite some time. Having always gone where the Holy Spirit led him, Paul was prevented from traveling to Ephesus on a previous journey. He did however have a brief stopover there on his way to Jerusalem to complete his obligation to his Nazarite vow.

Acts 18:19-21 NKJV 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there (Aquila and Priscilla); but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21 but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

Paul fully intended to return to Ephesus at a later time. Perhaps Paul realized the great potential to further the kingdom of God in this important city. As it turns out, when he did return, Paul stayed on in Ephesus for more than three years. Many of the epistles that Paul wrote to the other churches were written during his time in Ephesus. Aside from Syrian Antioch, Paul's mission in Ephesus would be one of the most successful in terms of furthering the kingdom of God among both the Jews and the Gentiles.

At the time of the Apostles, the city of Ephesus had been under Roman control for nearly two hundred years. Ephesus was a major seaport on the western coast of what is today Turkey. Boasting a population of over two hundred thousand, Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. Although under Roman authority, Ephesus was never established as a Roman colony and remained a free city-state within the empire.

The port of Ephesus received commerce and passengers from all points in the eastern Mediterranean. Several important land routes intersected at Ephesus as well connecting the city to many remote areas at the ends of the Roman controlled territories. Thus, the city of Ephesus was an important communications center for the Roman Empire and a hub for commerce and cultural exchange.

As we have seen during Paul's travels to other cities of the eastern Mediterranean where many Greek and Roman gods were worshipped, each seemed to have its favored god. It was no different with Ephesus.

In Greek mythology, the City of Ephesus was founded by the Amazon warriors and the goddess Artemis, or Diana. The city center was dominated by the enormous temple of Artemis and a nearby Amphitheater, both of which could be clearly seen as one approached Ephesus by both land and sea.

The ancient Greek poet, Antipater of Sidon wrote about the temple of Artemis in the second century B.C. calling it the greatest of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

"I have set my eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, the colossus of the sun (at Rhodes), and the huge labor of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliance, and I said, "Lo, apart from Olympus, the sun never looked on anything so grand."<sup>i</sup>

Artemis was one of the most widely worship goddesses of the world of that time. She was thought to be the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo. She was granted her wish of perpetual virginity. This was also true of her mythological companions as well as her most devout worshipers who were sworn to celibacy. This seems a bit of a contradiction because the images and numerous statues of Artemis of the Ephesians depict her with multiple rows breasts, and she was viewed as a goddess of fertility as well. But in the ancient world the multiple breasts were viewed as nourishing rather than sexual in nature. The goddess Artemis and the cult surrounding the worship of her would prove to be a problem for Paul and the emerging body of believers.

When Paul returned to Ephesus, he found a small but growing body of disciples.

Acts 19:1-3 NKJV 1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples 2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."

This small body of disciples, like Apollos, had heard and believed the message of repentance and the imminent arrival of the Messiah as taught by John the Baptist, but they did not yet know of Yeshua as the Messiah. They may even have first heard this message from Apollos. Paul told them that John was indeed the forerunner of the Messiah spoken of in the scriptures. Paul may have reminded them of John's teaching about the Messiah.

Matthew 3:11 NKJV 11 "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Paul told them about the one who came after John.

Acts 19:4-7 NKJV 4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. 7 Now the men were about twelve in all.

After Paul's explanation, there were twelve who were then baptized in the name of Yeshua, and through the laying on of hands, received the Holy Spirit. After this Paul turns his attention to the broader Jewish community of Ephesus.

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

Luke records that Paul "reasoned and persuaded" with the Jews of Ephesus. This would be the normal rabbinic method of discourse in the yeshivas and synagogues. This implies deep discussions offering proof texts, points and counter points in a debate format. Paul spent three months engaged in this debate in the synagogue. He would certainly have persuaded many that Yeshua was the Messiah. Later, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul mentions Onesiphorus, one of the many God-fearing Gentile believers from Ephesus. Onesiphorus came to Rome to visit Paul.

2 Timothy 1:16-18 NKJV 16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out

very zealously and found me. 18 The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day--and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.

After a time, while teaching in the synagogue in Ephesus, Paul experienced some serious pushback from some of the Jews, likely in response to his position of Gentile inclusion.

Acts 19:9 NKJV 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Paul had certainly learned from his previous experiences that overstaying his welcome would only result in an increasingly ugly situation. Just as he did in Corinth, Paul left the synagogue, taking the believers with him, and retreated to a friendlier venue. Paul setup in this new location for a period of 2 years.

Acts 19:10 NKJV 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

History tells us that this school of Tyrannus was more akin to a lecture hall available for rental rather than a school as we would understand it today. It is also likely that Paul again plied his trade in the marketplace to support himself, perhaps again with Aquilla. Most of the ancient markets operated from dawn to just before the noon hour, leaving Paul the afternoons to study and teach the new believers.

We know from Paul's later writings, the letter to the Romans in particular, that there were many new believers and several new congregations comprising of a large number of Gentiles that were the result of Paul's extended stay in Ephesus.

According to many historians, in addition to the prominence of the goddess Artemis, the city of Ephesus had many schools of magic and sorcery. Paul later warned the Ephesians about this enemy, admonishing believers to be well trained and equipped to enter battle against them.

Ephesians 6:10-12 NKJV 10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

God met this enemy head on and prepared Paul for the battle. The LORD worked many extraordinary miracles through the hand of Paul while he was in Ephesus.

Acts 19:11-12 NKJV 11 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 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.

A reputation began to build around Paul that he was a holy man, a miracle worker and an exorcist. First Fruits of Zion in their work "The Chronicles of the Apostles" describes what took place.

"As his reputation grew, the people of Ephesus used to steal his personal items of clothing – handkerchiefs, sweat-rags, and aprons that he wore while at work as a tent-maker – and use them to heal the sick and cast out demons."<sup>ii</sup>

It seems that many of the Ephesians may have viewed Paul as just another itinerate sorcerer. It does not seem likely that Paul would have approved of this practice. Some of the Ephesian magicians and sorcerers appear to

have been other Jews who, seeing Paul as a Jew, perhaps thought that they too, could call on the name of Yeshua and draw on the same power of the Holy Spirit to enhance their trade.

Acts 19:13-14 NKJV 13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.

Big mistake! They were about to be taught a big lesson that the Holy Spirit was not to be treated lightly. By invoking the name of Paul along with Yeshua, they thought that they could also tap into the same source. They were about to take a licking.

Acts 19:15-16 NKJV 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

News of this incident, and perhaps others like it, spread quickly throughout the city. Paul's reputation grew and the word of the LORD spread further and faster than before.

Acts 19:17-20 NKJV 17 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 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. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

News of this incident would have shaken the community to its core. People began to confess their involvement in occult practices. It appears that many Jewish and Gentile believers had dabbled in these occultic practices as well. They confessed their sins and brought their secret idols and other items to be destroyed in a fire. The value of these items was fifty thousand pieces of silver, probably a drachma. Translated to modern value, it would be equivalent to millions of dollars. As a result, the gospel of Yeshua spread rapidly in Ephesus and the surrounding area. Apparently, Paul's ministry was so successful that the local idol makers noticed a sharp downward trend in their business.

Acts 19:23-27 NKJV 23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. 25 He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. 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."

Demetrius was no fool! He could clearly see the astonishing number of Gentiles who were embracing The Way. He understood what it meant for his business and the other craftsman in the same idol making trade. If the trend were allowed to continue, he and others could be soon out of business. Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen agreed to act.

Acts 19:28-29 NKJV 28 Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" 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.

The exact identity of Gaius is unknown, most scholars believe that he is not the same Gaius from Corinth but hailed from Derby. He is mentioned later in the next chapter of Acts. Aristarchus was from Thessalonica and later accompanied Paul in his travels from Ephesus all the way to Rome.

The situation was getting serious, and some of Paul's closest friends and associates were being rounded up. Paul wanted to act. The city was in confusion. A state of near riot existed in the streets and many had gathered in the amphitheater. However, the disciples would not allow Paul to go to the amphitheater.

Acts 19:30-32 NKJV 30 And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. 31 Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. 32 Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

It appears that some of the angry craftsmen tried to find Paul, but couldn't. The Jews apparently tried to distance themselves from the believers and put forth Alexander as their spokesman.

Acts 19:33-34 NKJV 33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. 34 But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Some scholars believe that this Alexander, although he was a Jew, was also a craftsman and an idol maker. The crowd obviously didn't care that Alexander was one of their own. He was a Jew and that is all that mattered. The Jews realized that the angry crowd would make no distinction between Paul and the believers of The Way and the rest of the Jewish community, they were all in danger.

Somewhere along the way, Paul may have befriended several high-ranking city officials. The writer of Acts doesn't mention when or how. But here at Ephesus, one in particular came to the disciple's defense.

Acts 19:35-41 NKJV 35 And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? 36 "Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. 37 "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. 38 "Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. 39 "But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. 40 "For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." 41 And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

It is unknown if this city clerk knew Paul or not, but cooler heads eventually prevailed, and the crowd dispersed. The Ephesians left the theater while Gaius and Aristarcus thanked God for their narrow escape; they easily could have been killed in the mob. As usual, all good things must come to an end and it was apparent to Paul that his remaining time in Ephesus was short. It was time to move on to the next mission.

Paul spent more time in Ephesus than any other city he traveled to. In his three and a half years in the city, he left a lasting legacy and had a profound impact on the body of believers there and beyond.

Study Questions:

1. What is the significance of the initial 12 men of Ephesus being baptized by Paul?

2. How does the fact that the assemblies in Ephesus were comprised of a vast majority of Gentiles guide our interpretation of Paul's later letter to the Ephesians?
3. What does it mean to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire?"
4. In Paul's letters to the Corinthians, he often refers to probable events and incidents during his time in Ephesus that are not mentioned in Luke's account in Acts. Paul refers to facing "wild beasts" in 1 Corinthians 15:29-32. And Paul alludes to a death sentence in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:8-10. What is the context of these references? Should they be interpreted as literal events or not?
5. How is the angry mob in Ephesus like modern day anti-Semitic actions and pogroms? Focus on the mechanics of how this incident came about in relation to anti-Semitic incidents today.
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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<sup>i</sup> Antipater, Greek Anthology ix.58

<sup>ii</sup> FFOZ, Chronicles of the Apostles, D.T. Lancaster, Vol 3 p674