



ACTS 19

EPHESUS AWAKENS: BAPTISM, THE SPIRIT, & APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

Acts 19:1-7 records the Apostle Paul's encounter with a group of twelve men in Ephesus. This brief narrative touches on several theological issues that are significant in the life of the early church and in Christian doctrine today: baptism, the reception of the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands, and the manifestations of speaking in tongues and prophecy.

In verse 3, Paul asked, "Into what then were you baptized?" and they responded, "Into John's baptism." John's was a baptism of repentance as the Jews anticipated the arrival of the Messiah (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3). In contrast, believer's baptism was instituted by Christ as a public identification with His death, burial, and resurrection performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The twelve men in Acts 19 had not yet received this baptism so Paul baptized them "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Act 19:5), signifying their acceptance of Christ and their identity as part of the church community.

After their baptism, Paul laid hands on them and "the Holy Spirit came on them" (Acts 19:6). This is consistent with the pattern of the Holy Spirit in confirming the authenticity of faith, the acceptance of Gentiles, and empowering them for ministry. In the book of Acts, God marks the Spirit's coming to signify critical moments in redemptive history (Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 10). In Acts 19, the visible manifestations

likely served to affirm Paul's apostolic ministry and the unity of all believers—Jewish, Samaritan, and Gentile—under the same Holy Spirit. The normative pattern for believers today is to receive the Holy Spirit at the moment a person believes in and professes Jesus Christ as Lord. “...When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13b-14).

The laying on of hands by Paul in this account is in keeping with the demonstration of apostolic authority as seen throughout the book of Acts. Rather than being prescriptive for today, this is descriptive, giving an account of what happened in a unique transitional period in the early church.

When the Holy Spirit came on these men, “they began speaking in tongues and prophesying” (Acts 19:6). This mirrors the pattern seen in Acts 2 and 10, where speaking in tongues or other human languages confirmed the Spirit’s work in Jews and Gentiles respectively.

Speaking in tongues in Acts refers to real human languages primarily known by the hearer. The speaker was divinely enabled to address the hearers in their own language to accomplish God’s purposes, authenticate the apostles, edify the hearers, and establish the early church. Prophesying in this context is a Spirit-empowered declaration of truth. It functioned in this case as a sign that the Holy Spirit was truly at work in these men and possibly served as the edification of the local believers in Ephesus.

Acts 19:1-7 powerfully demonstrates the fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan as the gospel reaches new people and places. What began as a movement among Jewish believers in Jerusalem expanded to Gentiles in Ephesus. For the church today, Acts 19 reminds us of the sufficiency of Christ, the centrality of the gospel, and the power of the Holy Spirit who draws people from every background into one redeemed and Spirit-filled body.

