



ACTS: ENDS OF THE EARTH ACTS 19:11-20

STUDY GUIDE
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ACTS 19:11-20 ESV

11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. 13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" 16 And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. 18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

STRUCTURE

- I. An apostles' sweaty rags conquer diseases and demonic powers (11-12)
- II. Apostolic pretenders are conquered by a single demonic power (13-16)
- III. The "word of the Lord" conquers citywide demonic powers (17-20)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

This is a story about the power of Jesus over the demonic sorcery of Ephesus. It's not the first such story in Acts. Through Philip, Peter, and John, Jesus displayed His might over the syncretistic sorcery of Samaria (Acts 8). Through Paul, Jesus blinded Elymas the Sorcerer and false Jewish prophet—a miracle that illustrated the magician's spiritual state (Acts 13). In all three "power encounters" with Satan's sorcerers (including here in Acts 19), magic did not operate as a stand-alone religion; rather, it blended with the supposed worship of Yahweh by Samaritans or Jews. Magic often operates in this manner. You're less likely to find a witch with a pointy hat than you are a Christian dabbling in the occult, often unknowingly. This is why we must understand the fundamental principles of what makes "magic" incompatible with Christianity.

First, God's power is superior to "magical" power. We already observed this in Acts 8, when Simon the sorcerer "amazed the people of Samaria" by his magic (8:9), but the power of the Holy Spirit far surpassed his sorcery to the point that he too was "amazed" (8:13). Now in Acts 19, Luke circles back to the same theme. In contrast to the seven Jewish exorcists who failed miserably to cast out a single demon, a single apostle—actually, a single apostle's sweat rag—dispelled numerous demonic forces all across the magic-obsessed Ephesus.

Second, God's power is accessed through friendship, not formulas. The seven exorcists try to "invoke the name of the Lord Jesus" as though it is a magical spell (19:13). They "adjure" the demon to leave (19:13)—a word never used to depict exorcisms by Christ or His apostles but used commonly of magical approaches in the ancient world. The "name of Jesus" cannot be reduced to a formula or good luck charm. When the Ephesians subsequently burn their spell books (19:18-19), they publicly renounce this "magical" paradigm, which thinks that if we only say the right words in the right order, we will have power. True power derives from our friendship with Jesus. Outside of this friendship, people who speak the name of Jesus are unauthorized claimants. This explains why the exorcism goes so poorly. They try to chase out a single demon and instead get chased out by said demon. This ironic twist highlights how you don't mess with the supernatural unless you are authorized. Just like only nuclear technicians with proper clearance should handle radioactive material, only the friends of Jesus are authorized to expel demons.

Third, God's power does not require our participation. Magic places a strong emphasis on human actions (say the spell, bless the object, recite the incantation, perform the ritual) because it elevates humans to god-like status. In contrast, Paul's handkerchief and apron required no action on his part. People just took cloth from his body and began passing it around, which God used to perform "extraordinary miracles". God loves to bless our participation for the sake of friendship, but He does not need us. Instead of elevating humanity to god-like status, this demonstration of God's power—without human involvement—results in "the name of the Lord Jesus being extolled" (19:17). While magic exalts man, God's power points to the glory of the God-man, Christ Jesus.

Fourth, God's power produces holy fear. Magic traffics in fear, but it is not holy. Those who practice it operate out of fear, not faith, for they aim to manipulate situations for their own blessing as well as to curse others. Saul's visit to the witch of Endor is an example of this (1 Sam. 28). Unfortunately, Saul's attempt to circumvent fear through magic results in the very thing he feared: death. Likewise, the magic of the seven exorcists backfired, causing them to flee like scared puppies (Acts 19:16). Once the rest of the city found out what happened, "fear fell upon them all" (19:17), but it was holy fear—awe at the majesty of God. Throughout Acts, such holy fear is the common outcome of God's power being displayed (Acts 2:43; 5:5; 5:11; 9:31).

Fifth, God's power is exercised through God's Word. The words of seven exorcists fall to the ground due to their disconnection from God and His Word. In contrast, Paul preached daily for two years in Ephesus so that "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (19:10). This statement matches the final verse of the section, forming a bookend: "So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily" (19:20). This phraseology is common to Luke (see comments below), who views God's Word as a divine agent. Spell books have power, but it is not divine, and in the end, their words go up in flames (19:19). In contrast, God created all things by His Word (Gen. 1); He sustains all things by His Word (Heb. 1:3); He saves us by His Word (Jam. 1:21); and He conquers Satan by His Word (Acts 19:20).

In the flow of the narrative, the story of the seven exorcists additionally contrasts with that of the "Ephesian Twelve" in the prior context (19:1-7). These men had not been properly informed of the Word of the Lord until Paul arrived, but their acceptance of God's Word yielded supernatural power: "the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying" (19:6). Insofar as we yield to the Word of the Lord, we experience the power of the Lord. This marriage between God's Word and His power continues in the way Paul proclaims the gospel and demonstrates its truth through signs and wonders in the present passage. In contrast, the seven sons of Sceva resist God's Word and suffer the results in the form of a demon overpowering them. The distinction between those who submit to God's Word and those who resist it could not be clearer: one leads to transformation and power, while the other leads to defeat and shame. True power is found not in human effort or manipulation, but in a humble submission to God's Word.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

—"And": This section continues the thought that began in verse 8 with Paul's preaching that reached "all the residents of Asia." How does it continue the thought? It shows how Paul's preaching reached so many: it combined with miracles.

—"God was doing... by the hands of Paul": Who did the miracles—God or Paul? God was the primary actor, but Paul was His instrument. "hands" implies agency. Paul went out praying for the sick, laying his hands on them, and casting out demons. God acted through him.

—"extraordinary miracles":

- Miracles are necessarily extraordinary, but Luke adds the word "extraordinary" to suggest that these were extra-extraordinary works of power. To whatever degree the Spirit moves in our midst, we should not expect God to *normally* imbue hankies and aprons with supernatural power.
- This verse recollects Peter's ministry: "they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them" (Acts 5:15).

—"even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them":

- Paul did not "anoint" prayer cloths and sell them via his apostolic hotline to heal the sick. Televangelists do this, and it is sorcery. Christians can't sell the supernatural. We don't promise miracles in exchange for cash.
- Paul's role in this is passive. The handkerchiefs and aprons had merely "touched his skin" and were "carried away" by others to heal the sick. The same was true of Peter's shadow. Peter did not actively make his shadow pass over the sick, nor did Paul actively pray over his sweaty work rags. What makes these miracles "extraordinary" is how God worked independently of the apostle's active hand.

- We are reminded of Jesus who healed someone inadvertently when she touched the hem of His robe. He felt power come out of him, but He did not pray for her. He responds, "Your faith has healed you"—not his magical garment but her faith. It is the same with the shadow-chasers of Acts 5 and the apron-bearers of Acts 19. God healed as an act of power in response to faith. He did not heal to establish a formula for future Christians or because these objects held special significance.
- Quite the opposite of "objects holding special significance," Luke's aim in this passage is to critique the magical ways of the Ephesians. Magic places a high emphasis on objects, which can be blessed or prayed over to impart special power. This is why New Age emphasizes crystals. It's why the Ephesians made much of amulets and mystical jewelry. It's why idol-worshippers held special ceremonies to impart the spirit of the gods into their idols. Magic worships creation by looking to created things to manipulate supernatural power for personal benefit.
- Magic manipulates, but God relates. He wants a friendship with us. He has no interest in special objects that we use to manipulate. Why manipulate supernatural power when we can relate to our all-powerful Creator?
- In highlighting the use of Paul's sweat rags in healing and casting out spirits, Luke shows the superiority of God's power over the demonic power of Ephesian gods. God doesn't need your shiny stones and fancy jewelry to perform miracles. A sweat rag will do just fine. That's what "handkerchiefs" were—sweat rags. A modern equivalent might be if people passed around sweaty gym socks to perform a miracle. We respond, "Ew." God says, "That's the point." The sweat that drips from Paul's brow is more powerful, when God touches it, than diseases and demons and all the false gods people worshiped.
- To ensure we understand this, the next episode will display the burning of magic books and objects in a show of public repentance. Luke does not want us to use this story to condone some kind of "Christian magic," like those who bless New Age crystals with prayer for healing in Jesus' name. Sure, God can use objects, but it's not because we bless those objects actively—this is called magic. Instead, God moves through the fringe of Christ's garment and the hankie of an apostle by His own sovereign volition. If it happens, great—praise God. But we must never pursue magic in Jesus's name.
- Magic is real, and the Ephesians no doubt experienced its power. But it is demonic power. The demonic powers they harnessed are cast out without even a command or prayer. The sweat rag of God is more powerful than any demon of hell.
- Bruce calls these "the sweat-rags being used for tying round his head and the aprons for tying round his waist" while he was engaged in his tentmaking."

13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.

—"Then": This word conveys that the next episode with the seven sons of Sceva continues the thought of the previous story about extraordinary miracles. These are not two separate, random, stories. They communicate a single message.

—"itinerant Jewish exorcists": These people traveled around casting spirits out of people, but they did not know the Lord Jesus. Ancient exorcists typically cast spirits out by other more powerful spirits. Given the context of magic, this suggests that the "Jewish" exorcists practiced syncretism: mixing Yahweh's worship with sorcery. This conclusion is corroborated by the word "invoke"—as in, they "undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus." The word "invoke"—reminiscent of magical incantations—does not appear in the Greek text, but translators correctly infer that magical invocation is implied. This especially becomes clear later in the verse when they tell the demons, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims..." Schreiner comments that the word for "adjure" (Gk. *horkizo*) is "a word not employed by Jesus or the disciples in any exorcism story. In fact, *horkizo* is frequently used in magical incantations."

—Keener: "Magical exorcists often invoked the names of higher spirits to cast out lower ones. According to magical theory, exorcists could coerce a deity or spirit to do their will by invoking its name... Some later ancient magical texts invoked the name of Jesus alongside other formulas, recognizing, as do the exorcists in this narrative, its efficacy when employed by Christians to expel demons."

—That these exorcists are "Jewish" reminds us of the magical syncretism among the Samaritans (half-Jews) in Acts 8 and with Elymas the Jewish sorcerer in Acts 13. Why do the most intense "magic stories" in Acts occur among those who claim to worship the God of Israel? The threat of syncretism (mixing religions) is real. Just because you attach the name of Jesus to an activity, that does not make it holy. We cannot redeem the New Age or any pagan practice by using the name of Jesus.

—Modern syncretistic practices include when Christians bless crystals or oils, using them to pray for healing in Jesus's name. Any time someone charges money for supernatural ministries of healing, prophecy, and exorcism, they are trafficking in the demonic despite using Christ's name. Another concern is so-called, "Christian Yoga." The word, "Yoga" means "to unite" or "join"—but with what? Frighteningly, "Yoga" means "to unite yourself to Brahman," which is the infinite, eternal, and ultimate source for everything in the universe according to Hindus. To be one with Brahman is to be liberated from the cycle of death and rebirth (reincarnation). The goal of Hindu meditation is to realize your oneness with Brahman so that one day, you can become a drop in the ocean of Brahman.

—Furthermore, the actions of yoga are not mere stretches. They are intended to worshipfully emulate the stories of the gods. Through these postures, practitioners are not just engaging in physical practice, but also aligning their bodies, minds, and spirits with higher spiritual truths. You cannot "attach" the name of Jesus to Yoga and call it holy any more than these Jewish exorcists tried to attach the name of Jesus to their magical incantations.

—Moses instructs Israel in Deuteronomy how to treat pagan religions:

- "The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction" (Deut. 7:25-26).
- "When the Lord your God has destroyed the nations before you, from before you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? That I also may do the same.' You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods" (12:29-31).
- "When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this" (18:9-14).
- "Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God" (Deut 20:18).
- The proper action to take against pagan objects is to "burn [them] with fire" like in Acts 19:19. The proper heart-response to pagan religions is to "utterly detest and abhor it." The proper way of worshiping God is by avoiding "the abominable practices" of the pagans. Not only must we worship the one true God; we must "not worship the Lord your God in that way"—in the way of the pagans. God alone is worthy of worship, AND we must worship Him in the ways He prescribes, or at least, in the ways He has not forbidden. Yoga is a pagan practice, and we must not worship God in forbidden ways. If you love the physical effects of Yoga, consider Pilates or something else not pagan.

—There is power in the name of Jesus—power to heal the sick and cast out demons—as Acts 19:12 makes clear. But as John Chrysostom said in the fifth century, "The Name does nothing, unless it is spoken by faith."

—Stott: "To be sure, there is power—saving and healing power—in the name of Jesus, as Luke has been at pains to illustrate (e.g. 3:6, 16; 4:10-12). But its effectiveness is not mechanical, nor can people use it second-hand."

—Authority to cast out demons lies not in a formula or technique, but in the authority we already possess in Christ (Matt. 10:1; 28:18-20; Acts 16:18; Eph. 1:19-21 with 2:4-6).

- Justin Martyr (2nd century): "Every demon exorcised in the name of the Son of God, the First-born of all creatures, who was born of a virgin and endured human suffering, who was crucified by your nation under Pontius Pilate, who died and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven—every demon exorcised in this name is mastered and subdued. Whereas if you exorcise in the name of any king or righteous man, or prophet, or patriarch, who has been one of yourselves, no demon will be subject to you. . . . Your exorcists, I have already said, are like the Gentiles in using special arts, employing fumigation and magic incantations."

- Tertullian (3rd century): "For it is not by incantations that Christians seem to prevail (over evil spirits), but by the name of Jesus, accompanied by the announcement of the narratives which relate to Him; for the repetition of these has frequently been the means of driving demons out of men, especially when those who repeated them did so in a sound and genuinely believing spirit."
- "whom Paul proclaims": They can't claim the name of Jesus for themselves. They themselves do not proclaim Jesus. They are only using His name, which they have no right to do. We can't "use" Jesus. We can only partner with Him as friend in a common ministry.
- "Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva":
- These might not be literal "sons" but rather "disciples," much like the "sons of the prophets" in the OT were disciples of Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, etc.
 - It seems likely that Sceva was not a legitimate high priest, but rather a figure associated with a false or non-authorized priesthood. The reference to him as a "high priest" may have been a claim or a title that he used to assert authority or prestige, which was not uncommon in the ancient world, especially among individuals seeking to gain influence or status.
 - We are reminded Judges 17, where Micah set up a private shrine in his home and made an ephod (a sacred garment used by priests) and other idols. He then hired a young Levite, who was traveling, to serve as his personal priest. This story highlights the corruption of Israel's priesthood.
 - Given the inclination of these sons of the high priest to invoke a magical incantation for exorcism, it reinforces that this "priesthood" was fraudulent.
 - This would suggest that both their ecclesial and spiritual authority was compromised. Ecclesial: official religious structure. Spiritual: true divine authority over demons.
 - If someone has sketchy religious credentials, we should naturally distrust their ministry approach. I'm thinking, for instance, of an online "minister" with a massive religious following. Corey Mahler was excommunicated by the Lutheran Missouri Synod for his shameless racism. He insists that Hitler was a role model and that we'll see him in heaven. Just because someone claims to have authority, and just because someone has a following, that doesn't mean we should join their followers!

15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"

—The names "Jesus" and "Paul" were famous in the spiritual world because both conquered darkness through faith and the Holy Spirit. Jesus "disarmed" demonic authorities on the cross (Col. 2:15) and crushed the head of the serpent on the cross (Gen. 3:15). As Christ's representative, Paul continued the serpent-stomping party (Rom. 16:20), casting out spirits in the name of Christ—which is to say, by the authority Christ grants His followers.

—In stark contrast, the evil spirit had no recognition of these so-called "exorcists." Despite their profession of casting out demons, the spirits had no knowledge of who they were. Any success they claimed seemed to be nothing more than an illusion.

—I remember one of my mentors preaching this passage and saying, "Brothers and sisters, is your name known in hell?! Do you pose any threat to the kingdom of darkness?!"

16 And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

—"leaped... mastered... overpowered":

- Demons can exhibit supernatural strength.
 - "They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him" (Mark 5:1-4).
 - "For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert" (Luke 8:29).
 - "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him" (Matt. 17:15).

- Even though the strength derived from the demon, it was “the man in whom was the evil spirit” who actually “leaped... mastered... and overpowered them.” Just like the Spirit of God empowered Samson, evil spirits can empower their followers.
- Satan can empower spiritually in the form of signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9), or he can empower physically in the form of brute strength.

—“fled out of that house naked and wounded”:

- They sought to evict the demon; instead, the demon evicted them!
- This ironic twist highlights how you don’t mess with the supernatural unless you are authorized. Just like only nuclear technicians with proper clearance should handle radioactive material, only the friends of Jesus are authorized to expel demons.
- They left “naked”—the demon put them to shame.
- They left “wounded”—the demon harmed their bodies.
- Demons not only harm people spiritually but also physically (“wounded”) and emotionally (“naked”/shame), not to mention mentally. Saul went raving mad because of a demon (1 Sam. 16:14-23; 18:10), and the Gadarene demoniac lived in the tombs and cut his flesh with stones like a crazy person (Mark 5:5).
- Spiritual warfare is dangerous. When I cast out demons, I always pray afterward that God would protect me from any harm that spirit might seek to inflict on me as a result. I have had times where I didn’t pray afterward and I began experiencing temptations associated with the spirit I cast out, whether it be a spirit of anger or lust or otherwise. When I pray afterwards, however, that never happens.
- Also, when casting out a spirit, I always try to ensure I’m wearing the full armor of God as spelled out in Ephesians 6:10ff. It makes no sense to wage war without proper protection. Prayer is sometimes called “the seventh piece of the armor” (since Paul lists six items followed by an exhortation to pray), but I understand prayer to be the manner in which we put all the armor on our bodies.
- With regard to prayer, Jesus says of one spirit, “This kind only comes out by prayer.” First, the statement implies there are multiple kinds of spirits, and some don’t come out as easily as others. A cross-reference with Matthew 12:45 indicates that some spirits are more evil than others. Second, Jesus does not intend by this statement to say that the disciples who failed to exorcise a spirit somehow forgot to pray in that precise moment. He was talking about a lifestyle of prayer. For example, Luke’s gospel indicates that Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration where he went to pray (Luke 9:28-29)—it was His lifestyle—after which He came down and cast the spirit out (9:37-42). If you want success casting out spirits, you can’t just rely on your inherent authority in Christ’s name; you must also live a lifestyle of prayer that unites you more deeply to the One who has all authority.
- Interestingly, we find zero instances of the disciples successfully praying in the Gospels. They try in the Garden of Gethsemane but fall asleep. Not until after Jesus rises do they really learn their lesson. The rest is history.

—Paul’s handkerchief and apron effectively removed many evil spirits, despite Paul not even saying a word (Acts 19:12). In contrast, the Jewish sons of Sceva could not evict a single evil spirit, despite pronouncing the mighty name of Jesus.

—The anointed sweat rag of God’s servant is mightier than the name of Jesus spoken from an impure heart.

17 And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.

—“known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks”: This ties to 19:10, where “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” Through proclamation and demonstration, Ephesus (and more broadly, Asia) heard God’s Word.

—We need proclamation; we also need demonstration. We need Word and Spirit.

—“fear fell upon them all”:

- “fear” (φόβος, or *phobos*), from which we derive the word, “phobia.” This same word appears throughout Acts, carrying with it the connotation of “awe.” Examples...
 - Acts 2:43: “And **awe** (φόβος) came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”
 - Acts 5:5: “When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great **fear** (φόβος) came upon all who heard of it.”

- Acts 5:11: "And great **fear (φόβος)** came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."
- Acts 9:31: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the **fear (φόβος)** of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."
- Acts 16:29: "And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with **fear (φόβος)** he fell down before Paul and Silas."
- These examples indicate that "fear" or "awe" typically arises in response to signs and wonders, and it leads to the spread of the gospel and "the name of the Lord Jesus" being "extolled" (19:17). This "fear" is balanced by "the comfort of the Holy Spirit" (9:31) so that God's people feel at once both holy terror and divine succor.
- How can we spread the gospel more effectively? We need God to confirm His Word with signs and wonders that spread holy fear among His people and beyond.
- A couple of quotes related to the fear of the Lord stand out to me:
 - Mike Yaconelli: "I would like to suggest that the Church become a place of terror again; a place where God continually has to tell us, 'Fear not'; a place where our relationship with God is not a simple belief or a doctrine or theology, it is God's burning presence in our lives. I am suggesting that the tame God of relevance be replaced by the God whose very presence shatters our egos into dust, burns our sin into ashes, and strips us naked to reveal the real person within. The Church needs to become a gloriously dangerous place where nothing is safe in God's presence except us. Nothing—including our plans, our agendas, our priorities, our politics, our money, our security, our comfort, our possessions, our needs."
 - CS Lewis (refers to the concept of the fear of God as "the Numinous"): "Suppose you were told there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told 'There is a ghost in the next room', and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for no one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fact that it is a ghost. It is 'uncanny' rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous. Now suppose that you were told simply 'There is a mighty spirit in the room', and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking—a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it—an emotion which might be expressed in Shakespeare's words 'Under it my genius is rebuked'. This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which excites it as the Numinous."
- When people felt "fear" after a miracle, it was not primarily the threat of harm they felt. The disciples felt one kind of fear before Jesus calmed the storm (Luke 8:22-24) but an entirely different kind of fear afterwards (8:25). The townspeople felt one kind of fear before Jesus cast out Legion (Mark 5:1-5) but an entirely different kind of fear afterwards (5:15). The fear of God does not primarily concern threats of harm. Rather it is the trembling, awe-filled, breath-taking wonder at the majesty of God.
- In heaven, there is no fear of danger, but there is a fear of God (Rev. 15:4).
- I'm reminded of God's name in Genesis 31:42, 53: "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the **Fear of Isaac**, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night... The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judged between us. So Jacob swore by the **Fear of his father Isaac**."

18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

—Rather than profiting heavily by selling their magic books and spells, they exhibited their repentance by refusing to profit and just burning it all.

—Stott: "That these young believers, instead of realizing the monetary value of their magic spells by selling them, were willing to throw them on a bonfire was clear evidence of the genuineness of their conversion."

—I am reminded of Zacchaeus's repentance: "And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold'" (Luke 19:8).

- Levitical laws required adding one-fifth to the amount stolen (Lev. 16:5; Num. 5:7). In some cases, God required even more: "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep" (Ex. 22:1).
- Zacchaeus went above and beyond, repaying four-fold for his theft AND giving half to the poor. Luke consistently tells these kinds of stories to illustrate repentance.
- When Luke tells this story, he shows that although repentance is an inward work, we must "bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8). The inward work of those who "were now believers" mirrored outwardly in the burning of books and spells.

—There was an online debate about the "Only Fans" model, Olivia Devine, who made millions creating pornography before turning from her sinful career to embrace Christ. Many said that she should give away her millions to the church or the poor or that she should make restitution to the people harmed by her sinful ways. She did not go that far. While it's difficult to "prescribe" what repentance should look like—Zacchaeus and these Ephesians acted spontaneously and under no coercion—I nevertheless would feel more confident about her conversion if she dedicated her sordid gains to a righteous cause.

—This section also clarifies that Paul's "handkerchief" and "apron" miracles were not "Christian magic." Rather, Christians must adhere to the OT principle of burning idolatrous objects and renouncing magical practices. Christians who wish to turn Paul's "extraordinary miracles" into an intentional practice of selling "prayer cloths" have unwittingly practiced sorcery. God can use objects, just as magic uses objects. But God does so by His own prerogative. Christians are forbidden from imbuing physical objects with mystical power.

—This whole story reminds us of the reforms made under King Josiah. In 2 Kgs. 23:12-14, the righteous king breaks down the altars of false worship, casts dust on them, defiles the high places, and he even turns the ash-pits of Molech—where people burned their sons and daughters—into a public restroom! This is how idolatrous worship must be treated. We don't emulate idolaters; we renounce their idolatry in radical ways.

—In the West, conversions are so uncommon that we'll count almost anything as a true conversion—whether saying a heartless "repeat-after-me" prayer, silently raising a hand in response to a preacher, or intellectually assenting to gospel facts. For my part, if someone won't even be baptized, I don't take their "conversion" seriously. We should look for converts not only to "make a decision" but to follow Christ into the water—and out, in the form of a new lifestyle.

—"confessing and divulging their practices": A spell's power lies in its secrecy (Keener). These people openly confessed and divulged their secret powers—not to mention, profits.

—"brought their books": Keener says, "Magical papyri were rolled up in small cylinders or lockets used as amulets around the neck; Luke's term 'books' or 'scrolls' (NIV) probably refers to these magical papyri. These magical incantations were so common in Ephesus that rolls of these formulas are called *Ephesia grammata*, or Ephesian writings, in other Greco-Roman literature."

—"fifty thousand pieces of silver": A piece of silver was a day's wage for a laborer. If an average worker makes \$100-150/day in modern terms, "fifty thousand pieces of silver" equates to roughly \$5-7.5 million.

—Can you imagine a citywide repentance so robust that people across Oklahoma City burned \$5-7.5 million in drugs and drug paraphernalia? Or hard drives containing pornographic content? Or counterfeit goods, stolen items, or illicit software? Or fraudulent business documents and forged financial records? Or weapons used in violent crimes?

—"So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily":

- "So" means that because of what came before—a citywide repentance—more repentance took place. Revival is like wildfire.
- I'm reminded of how the Welsh Revival began. It all started with a young girl named Florrie Evans in a small youth group located in Llanelli, Wales—a town about the size of Shawnee, OK. Deeply convicted by the Spirit, Florrie repented publicly and gave her life to Christ. Her repentance was so heartfelt that it sparked something in the others in her group. One by one, the youth began to follow her example. As they confessed their sins and turned to Christ, a powerful movement of God began to sweep through their community. Before long, the revival spread throughout Wales. Bars closed down, the police had less crime to handle, and churches exploded. It all began with the simple yet profound repentance of one young girl, and it spread like wildfire, much like the citywide repentance we see in Acts 19.

- The passage does not merely say that “the church increased” but that “the word of the Lord continued to increase”. This language resembles other passages in Acts, which collectively tell us something about Luke’s view of the Word.
 - Acts 6:7: “the word of God continued to increase.”
 - Acts 12:24 “But the word of God increased and multiplied.”
 - Acts 13:49: “And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.
 - Acts 19:20: “So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”
 - Acts 20:32: “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
- It’s not just that disciples are increasing in number; it’s that the Word is increasing and multiplying. The Word is spreading. The Word is prevailing. The Word is what builds them up and sanctifies them. The Word is portrayed as a divine actor.
 - Schreiner (quoting Peterson): “The real hero of Acts is the logos, the Word... The ascended Lord Jesus is the central figure in the narrative, and he employs his word and his Spirit to advance his purpose through human agents in the world.”
 - Schreiner: “The centrality of the word in Acts can be seen not only in the explicit emphasis on this theme but also in the form in which Acts was written. About one third of Acts is comprised of speeches or evangelistic preaching.”
 - Schreiner: “In each text, the word multiplies in the midst of opposition. This theme continues throughout Acts as a whole.”
- What is the significance of this, theologically and practically?
 - Theologically:
 - The Word of God inheres with divine power. The amulets and spell books of sorcerers have power, but it is not divine. God created and sustains the universe by His Word, He redeems the world by His Word, and He conquers the devil by His Word.
 - The Word of God is not merely the message; it is the divine agent by which God acts in the world. It has been this way since Genesis 1.
 - Practically:
 - The church’s success relies not on having the fanciest lights and facilities, or the best plan, or a good location. The church’s success hinges on God’s Word—the frequency and fervency and accuracy of its proclamation.
 - Beginning especially in the 80s/90s, churches scaled back the proclamation of God’s Word, focusing on inspiring snippets that attracted seekers, hoping to ease them into the kingdom and disciple them in the Word on the backside. I think Luke would have opposed this. You don’t reach the spiritually lost by placing less emphasis on God’s Word, but rather, more emphasis on His Word.
 - We must talk about Jesus a lot wherever we go. The church thrives when the Word is spoken. Spoken in pulpits. Spoken on the streets. Spoken in house churches. Spoken at dinner tables. Spoken “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut. 6:7). Fascinatingly, the way we love the Lord with all our heart (6:5) is by talking about His Word everyday, every hour, and every where (6:6-9).
 - Not only must we speak the Word frequently; we must speak it fervently, with hearts moved by deep emotion; we must also speak the Word accurately, not watering it down or speaking falsely.