

# Anointed Hankies?

[Acts 19:8-20](#)



If you remember from back in [Acts 16](#) Paul tried to go into Asia on his second missionary journey, but the Spirit forbade them. Later in that journey Paul finally came to Ephesus, but because he was intent on reaching Jerusalem for the feast he spent only a short time there. He did, however, leave Priscilla and Aquila behind, and they must have played a significant part in preparation for Paul's lengthy stay as recorded in our text. So Paul is now in Ephesus again.

The city of [Ephesus](#) probably ranked with Corinth as the two most important cities on the road east from Rome. In the eastern division of the Roman Empire, the three main cities would be [Antioch](#), [Alexandria](#) and Ephesus. So it was a big time place. It was a commercial center.

Four main roads crisscrossed right there in Ephesus. It was a port city. It was three miles inland, but the [Caster River](#) flowed into it, and it was navigable even though they had a dredging problem.

Ephesus had a huge religious influence due to the [Temple of Artemis](#) (Greek) or [Diana](#) (Roman). Tourists traveled from all over the Roman Empire to see it. The temple was four hundred and twenty-five feet long, two hundred and twenty feet wide, sixty feet high; it was a 120-year project started by Croesus of Lydia. It was described by Antipater of Sidon, who compiled a list of the Seven Wonders:



*I have set 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, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labour 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 brilliancy, and I said, 'Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught (anything) so grand.'* (Antipater, Greek Anthology [IX.58])



Nothing remains of the original temple, which was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Ephesus was also a great city of pagan superstition, because it was one of those refuge cities. It was a place where sorcery existed and witchcraft

existed and all kinds of perversions and there were magical imposters and exorcists all over the place.

In one of Shakespeare's plays, "The Comedy of Errors," there is a Syracusan by the name of Antipholus, who speaks

concerning Ephesus, and he says, *“They say this town is full of cozenage as nimble jugglers that deceive the eye, dark-working sorcerers that change the mind, soul-killing witches that deform the body, disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks, and many such-like liberties of sin.”* So it was a city of unusual pagan superstition. It was the place where you could buy charms and amulets, the phrase “Ephesian writings” (Ephesia grammata) was common in antiquity for documents containing spells and magical formulae. They were little scraps of paper that had spells and other occult material on them which you could recite if you wanted to control the spirits in some way.

So Paul returned to Ephesus, as he had promised them, and it seems as if he picks up exactly where he left off.

*And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. (Acts 19:8 NASB)*

The singular *“synagogue”* probably signifies, “the sphere of the synagogue”. There would be a number of synagogues in Ephesus and he probably visited many of them.

Paul continued to speak *“Boldly”*—this is the imperfect tense. He continued speaking boldly for three months. *“Three months”* in a synagogue without a riot was something of a record for Paul. *“Reasoning and persuading”*—these same two verbs that keep popping up in Acts. The first one means dialogue, it's a back and forth question answer type thing. And persuading means to convince by argument. This is Paul's customary method. He would take his readers through the history of Israel and point to the fulfillment of the great promises in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke says, Paul preached *“about the kingdom of God”*—The idea of "kingdom" in both Testaments is primarily dynamic rather than spatial. Paul is not preaching about a future physical reign on the earth. It is not so much a kingdom with geographic borders as it is a "kingdominon," or reign. The kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven is, quite simply, the rule and reign of God. The kingdom of God is not a democracy; it's a monarchy. God is in charge, and that's the way it works. Christianity is the kingdom of God. To trust in the Lord Jesus Christ is to be a kingdom citizen:

*For He delivered us (saints - Colossians 1:2) from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, (Colossians 1:13 NASB)*

All believers, and only believers, are kingdom citizens.

*But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. (Acts 19:9 NASB)*

*“Hardened”*—this word when used in the New Testament is always used of Jews. As we saw last in our last study true Israel—“the twelve” disciples of John the Baptist believe the message and embraced Messiah. But those not of true Israel, not of the remnant, rejected the message and became hardened. Their rejection was expressed in a public maligning of Christianity, no doubt including blasphemy against Jesus Christ. It presumably made further teaching in the synagogue impossible.

*“The Way”*—this seems to be the earliest "name" for the Christian movement, it is used five times in Acts. Where did this name come from? Well it may have a connection with Jesus' claim to be “The Way”, it was a Messianic term. So when Jesus said, “I am the Way,” He was saying that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah 35 and 40. The disciples calling themselves “The Way” were saying that Israel was being restored and the promises about “The Way” were made to Israel.

Because of the resistance of the Jews Paul, together with his disciples, Timothy, Erastus, the twelve Jewish disciples, Aquila and Priscilla, and many other new converts walked out of the synagogue. The Jews would see this act as apostasy.

They moved their operation to the *“school of Tyrannus”*—the name Tyrannus means: “tyrant,” and since it is difficult to think of any parent would name his or her child “Tyrant,” this must have been a nickname given by the man's students.

The Western text (i.e., Codex Beza), one of the ancient copies of Acts, added that this was *“from the fifth to the tenth hour”* ([Acts 19:9](#)), which would be from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The Mediterranean "siesta" occurred from the fifth hour (11:00 a.m.) To the tenth hour (4:00p.m.). The working day began at about seven in the morning. The shops closed at eleven and everyone went home until four when the shops reopened and business went on until about nine-thirty at night.

We know from [Acts 20:34](#) that Paul worked at his trade while in Ephesus. So he would have worked at his trade in the morning hours and then taught his students in this school building during the middle of the day, (for five hours; and you think my sermons

are long) and then most likely go back to work in the evening. This gives us a picture of a tireless apostle and an eager audience. Each is willing to give up the normal time of rest in order to speak and hear of the kingdom. If he taught for five hours every day for two years, it adds up to 1,500-1,800 hours of teaching which is a substantial amount!

Can you even begin to imagine the spiritual hunger of these Ephesians? They would give up their nap time to study the Bible for five hours every day.

Some few years later when he called the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus on his trip back to Jerusalem, he said to them:

*... "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,<sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;<sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, (Acts 20:18-20 NASB)*

*"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. (Acts 20:27 NASB)*

By the time Paul left these Ephesians were grounded in the Word.

*This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:10 NASB)*

*"All"*—is all without distinction, not all without exception. What he is saying is that the whole of Asia got evangelized. All seven of the churches in Revelation two and three most likely were founded during these two years. There is no way that Paul, by himself, could reach this region. But he could equip Christians to do the work of the ministry, just as he described in [Ephesians 4:11-12](#). And so those that were listening to Paul evidently went out, proclaiming the things that they were hearing. And since Ephesus was the capital of Asia, and people from all over that Roman province came there from time to time, the gospel through Paul's preaching was not limited to the citizens of Ephesus but spread throughout the entire region.

*God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, (Acts 19:11 NASB)*

God was working through Paul to do *"extraordinary miracles"*—this is the only time this phrase is used in the Bible. Paul had done many miracles, but Luke states that these are extraordinary. We'll see what he means in the next verse.

Those mighty miracles that were done in the history of the early church were the product of the apostolic ministry. It is significant that apart from Stephen and Philip, who worked closely under the apostles, there are no miracles recorded as performed by anyone other than the apostles. The purpose of these apostolic miracles (according to [Heb. 2:3-4](#)), was to confirm the message of salvation that Jesus and the apostles proclaimed. In fact, throughout the entire Bible, miracles are not uniformly sprinkled as everyday occurrences.

In the late 1970's, [John Wimber](#) and the Vineyard churches that he spawned began claiming that miracles should be the ordinary experience of the church. Jesus said that His followers would do greater works than He Himself did ([John 14:12](#)). Wimber asserted that the main reason that we do not see such works of power is our skeptical Western mindset. If we are not doing miracles along with our preaching, we are not preaching the gospel as we should, according to Wimber.

The hope of miraculous healing attracts many people to churches that claim to see such miracles happening, because there are many who are afflicted with serious, incurable illnesses, and these people are desperate.

*so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. (Acts 19:12 NASB)*

This verse has been greatly misused and abused down through the centuries. These "handkerchiefs" that people carried from Paul to the sick were actually sweat-cloths that he tied around his head to keep the sweat from dripping into his eyes as he worked. The artisans, or anybody in the crafts or anybody who did manual labor in those days, carried about these cloths with which they would wipe their brow and sometimes tie around their head. The aprons were his work aprons.

They were hauling off anything which Paul touched, and when the sick came in contact with these items, they were delivered. Can you imagine how hard it would be for Paul to keep a hankie or apron once this word got out. They would be taking all his things.

As I said, these signs and wonders were accomplished to validate and underscore the words which Paul was speaking—the words of the Gospel. The fact that people were healed is explained, I think, purely in terms of the grace of God. These people, with their pagan background, knew of only this way of being healed, and they acted in a very simple faith, and God in His grace, gave them what they sought by faith—deliverance.

How did the handkerchiefs or aprons work? In the same way that the shadow of Peter ([Acts 5:15](#)) or the hem of Jesus' garment ([Matthew 14:36](#)) might heal, the item became a point of contact by which a person expressed their faith in Jesus as healer.

How many of you have heard of an “anointed prayer cloth”? Modern TV preachers send out little squares of cloth that they have “anointed.” They ask their audiences to touch them as a point-of-contact and, of course, to send in their donation.

Ora Parish writes,

*Are prayer hankies scriptural? Payer handkerchiefs are very scriptural and have been used throughout history with exciting supernatural results...Modern day believers are still using anointing cloths, or prayer hankies, to give to those who are in need of a miracle, or an answer to prayer, and it seems that the popularity of prayer hankies are increasing. Pastors, or elders of the church will anoint the cloth with oil, usually olive oil, and then pray over the cloth asking God to meet the need of the one it is intended for. Most of the time the person is given the cloth to keep, however, sometimes the cloth is anointed for someone who is unaware that they are being prayed for. In these circumstances the cloth or handkerchief is usually placed in a home, under a mattress, or in a vehicle. This is usually done when you are praying for someone who is in spiritual bondage, and would not be willing to receive prayer for themselves, or even be willing to receive a prayer cloth, or prayer hankie...There are many anointed men and women of God who use prayer hankies on a regular basis, and have been blessed to see exceptional answers to prayers, by an exceptional prayer answering God. If you are interested in purchasing a prayer handkerchief for yourself or someone you love, visit <http://hankie blessings.com>.*

This is a bunch of hocus-pocus, and makes Christianity sound like voodoo. Luke tells us that what happened with Paul's clothing was “**extraordinary**”. Not something to be used for all time.

***But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." (Acts 19:13 NASB)***

There's only one use of the word exorcist in the New Testament and that's in this passage. Exorcism is the process of expelling demons. There were in Ephesus, as in Israel (see [Luke 11:19](#)), Jewish exorcists, who sought to cast out demons through the use of the name of one who had great power. This was a kind of spiritual “name dropping,” whereby the power of the one named was believed to be able to exorcise demons. Such “ministry” was hardly to be performed without a fee, and so it appears to be a business, not altogether unlike that business of Acts 16, the business of fortune-telling.

The early church had to deal with a great deal of the exorcism in their day. The exorcists and the necromancers of the East were often influenced by Jewish individuals, probably, because since they were the recipients of the revelation of God it would be natural that they would have a better understanding of divine things.

Interestingly a papyrus that has been discovered mentions the use of the name of Jesus in exorcisms in the form “***I adjure you by Jesus, the God of the Hebrews***”, while the rabbinic prohibition of using the name of Jesus in exorcisms indicates that it certainly occurred.

We know from history that there were many Jewish people among the exorcists. We see an example of Jewish exorcism in the apocryphal Book of Tobit.

***And as they went on their journey, they came in the evening to the river Tigris, and they lodged there. And when the young man went down to wash himself, a fish leaped out of the river, and would have devoured him. Then the angel said unto him, Take the fish. And the young man laid hold of the fish, and drew it to land. To whom the angel said, Open the fish, and take the heart and the liver and the gall, and put them up safely. So the young man did as the angel commanded him; and when they had roasted the fish, they did***

*eat it: then they both went on their way, till they drew near to Ecbatane. Then the young man said to the angel, Brother Azarias, to what use is the heart and the liver and the gal of the fish? And he said unto him, Touching the heart and the liver, if a devil or an evil spirit trouble any, we must make a smoke thereof before the man or the woman, and the party shall be no more vexed. (Tobit 6:1-7 KJVA)*

The resulting smell and smoke of the burning heart and liver are supposed to drive away the demons.

Josephus, who was a very intelligent person, a noted Jewish historian, told of a cure in which a demon was drawn through the nostrils of a demoniac by the use of magic root supposedly prescribed by Solomon. And there are other rabbinical writers who reflect the same fanciful magic superstitions.

Historically for example the Roman Catholic Church has been involved in rites of exorcism and they've got all the secret formulas for it. A Newsweek article stated, *"Among Pentecostal Christians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, exorcism has become as common as speaking in tongues."*

Methods of exorcism have been used for centuries by witch doctors and by sophisticated people today. There are people today who claim to have some authority over unclean spirits and claim to know a great deal about demons. I heard about some landlord in some apartment who paid people \$3,500.00 to get rid of some demons. It's always been big business.

This is the testimony of a Doctor Loughton Smith, MD. In Miami, Florida. *"What happened thereafter was an amazing thing. Jerry commanded in the name of the Lord Jesus that the demon should name himself. I heard a voice speak out of my own lyrics, with an entirely different tone and inflection than my own voice and say, fingernail biting."*

*"I had bitten my nails since I was a small child and never gotten the victory over this in my Christian life. The Rutkins then prayed in tongues and commanded the demon to come out in the name of the Lord Jesus. I felt the pulling sensation in my fingers and began gagging and coughing. As soon as this stopped I felt a tremendous relief and I had the witness of the Holy Spirit that the demon had gone."*

Do you bite your nails? You may have a demon. You might be thinking, I'm a Christian, and a Christian can't have a demon. Well according to the website [www.demonbuster.com](http://www.demonbuster.com) a Christian can have a demon. The website states:

*HOW YOU CAN, AND DO, HAVE DEMONS - EVERYONE HAS DEMONS, NO EXCEPTIONS (so this includes all Christians). For those of you who demand to see a Scripture before you can believe something, there are NO Scriptures that say YOU do NOT have demons. That should settle it!*

*When you are Born Again as a Christian/Believer/True Worshipper, JESUS/Holy Spirit comes to abide in your SPIRIT. Demons CANNOT get INTO your Spirit. You are a triune being - BODY, SOUL and SPIRIT. Your SOUL is your MIND, WILL and EMOTIONS. BODY - Christians can have a sickness/disease just like the unSaved. That's caused by demons (if not caused by other factors). SOUL - Do you have a bad temper? That's a demon. Is there mental illness in your family background? That is a demon. Do you have trouble serving God? That's a demon. Do you have problems with bad thoughts? That is a demon(s) in your mind, will or emotions.*

So what ever you do that is bad is caused by a demon. This is a belief that is held by many today who call themselves Christians. The web site goes on to say:

*BOYCE and BOICE are two demons that interfere with any electronic equipment, i.e., phone, computer, printer, automobile. If something malfunctions, command these two demons to leave your equipment, in the name of Jesus. We get many emails saying this worked.*

If this isn't absolute nonsense I don't know what is. The Bible says:

*the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8 NASB)*

Jesus Christ was not a failure in his mission. He destroyed the devil and his demons. For more on the subject of the defeat of the devil and his demons see "[Paul Exorcizes the Python](#)".

Alright let's get back to our text:

***But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." (Acts 19:13 NASB)***

***"I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches"***—In the Greek text, there is an article there. “By the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” These Jewish exorcists thought if Paul could accomplish what he did through the name of Jesus, so could they.

The following incident throws more light on the spiritual darkness that enveloped Ephesus as well as the power of Jesus Christ and the gospel to dispel it.

***Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. (Acts 19:14 NASB)***

The “***seven sons***”, the divinely perfect number, would be seen as signifying that working together they had “sevenfold” effectiveness. Since there is no record of any Jewish chief priest by that name, either he was a member of a high priestly family, or, more likely, he took the title for himself to impress his clientele.

They would try to gain power over the evil spirits by invoking the name of a more powerful spirit being. So when they heard about Paul's success using the name of Jesus, they added it to their repertoire. But they found out that the name of Jesus was not to be used lightly.

***And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15 NASB)***

The reply is significant to Luke. The realm of evil was very much aware of Jesus and Paul. Notice what Mark records for us:

***Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, <sup>24</sup> saying, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:23-24 NASB)***

They know Jesus. "***Jesus I recognize,***" he said. In other words, if it was Jesus casting them out, they'd move. And then I like this: "I know about Paul" They didn't know Paul nearly as well as they knew Jesus.

***And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. (Acts 19:16 NASB)***

By superhuman strength, the demon-possessed man pounces on them and overpowers them. We can compare this possessed man with the Gadarene demoniac who also revealed his possession by violence ([Luke 8:26-39](#)).

They so called exorcists receive such a beating that they barely escape with their lives. If these Jewish exorcists were attempting to copy the ministry of Paul, they ended up being a very clear contrast to it. And in his rebellion against authority, this demon served the cause of Christ by testifying to the power of the Gospel in contrast to the counterfeit ministry of the sons of Sceva, and others like them.

***This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. (Acts 19:17 NASB)***

News of this incident spread abroad, serving to contrast the power of God at work through Paul with the counterfeit power of the exorcists. Even the unsaved began to recognize something stupendous about the Name of Jesus.

Many in Ephesus whose usual cry had been “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (verses 28 & 34), now instead cried “Great is the Name of the LORD Jesus”. People no longer feared demons but they feared the Lord, whose name was being “magnified.” Another result was that the church was purified:

***Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. (Acts 19:18)***

**NASB)**

And for Christians who have believed for a while, (the perfect tense of *pisteuo* indicates), it is now time for a final break with their past. They make the break by coming and openly confessing (literally, "*confessing and announcing*") their evil deeds, their magic practices, possibly revealing the spells themselves.

How does this verse fit with the concept of Lordship-Salvation? These are believers who were still practicing sorcery.

Some people in ancient times believed that the power of sorcerers' rites and incantations lay in their secrecy. Magical secrets supposedly lost their power when they were made public. The fact that the converted Ephesian magicians disclosed these shows the genuineness of their repentance.

*And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. (Acts 19:19 NASB)*

Although they had come to trust in Jesus as their Savior, they did not see the evil of their magical practices, and they had not yet renounced this as both worthless and evil. As a result of the shaming of the sons of Sceva, a great conviction of sin fell upon the saints in Ephesus, causing them to renounce their magical practices and to destroy the magical books which they possessed.

If these were drachmas, the value was 50,000 days worth of wages. That would amount to several million dollars worth of wages in present earning power.

*So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. (Acts 19:20 NASB)*

The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed, and this in contrast to the word of Satan which was doomed to the fire. There was a revival in Ephesus!

Today we don't need the confirming signs because we have the Word of God. And through a study of the Bible we can know who and what is of God.

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