

Acts 18:23-19:20 ~ Teacher's Lesson Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey: Ephesus

Overview:

- 1st Missionary Journey: 2 years, Cyprus and Central Turkey
- 2nd Missionary Journey: 3 years, Greece
- 3rd Missionary Journey: 4 years, Central Turkey (Galatia), Western Turkey (Asia), Greece

Review: At the end of Paul's 2nd missionary journey, he sailed from Corinth (Greece) to back to his starting point, Antioch in what was then called Syria (but now is in Turkey).

Galatia & Phrygia

What did Paul do after spending "some time" in Antioch (18:22-23)? He started out on his 3rd missionary journey, traveling through Galatia and Phrygia (regions he had been to before on previous mission trips). This was in the Spring of A.D. 52.¹

Geography: Galatia and Phrygia ran roughly parallel to each other in the central part of modern Turkey.

1. Based on 18:23, what was Paul's purpose in going back to Galatia and Phrygia? He went back to strengthen the disciples.

Insight: Effective mission work involves both evangelism of the lost and teaching the saved. Jesus said to make disciples, not evangelize (though making disciples starts with evangelism).

Apollos

******Back in Corinth, on his 2nd missionary journey, Paul met a remarkable couple named Aquila and Priscilla (18:1-3). This couple left Corinth (in Achaia/Greece) and moved to Ephesus (in Asia/Western Turkey) evidently for strategic Gospel purposes (18:18-19).² How did God use Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus (18:24-28)?** God used them to complete the education of a gifted evangelist named Apollos. He needed some continuing education.

2. How was God already using Apollos before he met Aquila and Priscilla (18:24-25)? Apollos was already **1)** an eloquent speaker, **2)** competent in the Scriptures, **3)** instructed in the way of the Lord (Jesus), **4)** fervent in spirit, **5)** accurate in the things concerning Jesus.

3. Apollos was from Alexandria (Egypt). How did he already know all this about Jesus (18:24-25)? However it happened, Apollos heard the Gospel and believed it. Luke's history is relatively narrow and mostly concerns how God used Paul. For example, there were twelve other apostles out spreading the Gospel at the same time, about whom Luke said nothing!

¹ *ESV Study Bible*, 2124.

² Ephesus is straight across the Aegean Sea from Corinth.

What was lacking in Apollos' education (18:25b)? He knew only about the baptism of John. Whoever told Apollos about Jesus must have left Jerusalem before Pentecost.

4. What is the baptism of John (18:25)? See Acts 1:4-5, Luke 3:1-22. The religious rite of water baptism was developed by the Jews during the inter-testament period. It was done to symbolize that a person had turned away from his sins and turned to obedience to Jehovah God. John was the last Old Covenant prophet. His ministry was to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah (Jesus). John incorporated the practice of water baptism into his ministry. It was a water baptism that symbolized a person had repented on his sins: "I baptize you with water for repentance"³ (John did not baptize them so they could repent; he baptized them because they had already repented).

5. What, exactly, was it that Apollos did not know (18:25b)? Apollos evidently did not realize that Jesus also wanted people to be baptized to symbolize that they had believed in Him (Mt 28:19-20). John's baptism symbolized that a person had repented of sins. Jesus' baptism symbolizes that a person has repented of his sins *and* put his faith in Jesus as the Christ.

What word did Luke use in 18:26 to describe how Aquila and Priscilla impart the information that Apollos lacked? Luke recorded that they "explained" it to Apollos.

What is the difference between explaining and teaching (18:26)? Though the two are virtually synonymous, any difference would lie in authority or attitude. **Example:** An employee does not teach his boss why he was late for work; rather, he explains why he was late.

ESV 1 Timothy 2:12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man . . .

6. How were Aquila and Priscilla's actions (18:26) not a violation of 1 Timothy 2:12?

- a) Teaching and explaining can be two different things. The word "teach" is not found in Acts 18:26. Instead, the word "explained" is used, from *ektithemi*, "to set forth, to expose." *Ek* means "out of" and *tithemi* means "to place, lay, set".⁴ Also used in Acts 11:4 where Peter explained his actions to the church.
- b) The text does not state anywhere that Priscilla (the wife) did most of the explaining. It simply says that they *both* talked with Apollos. It was a mature Christian couple having a conversation with a less knowledgeable brother.
- c) That women can have the gift of prophesy illustrates that there is nothing wrong with men learning from women. Pilate would have done well to listen to his wife concerning Jesus, and Nabal would have been wise to listen to Abigail's thoughts on David. What Scripture does prohibit is a sister taking on the role of teacher in the church, to the church.
- d) Aquila and Priscilla did not correct Apollos in public. They "took him" aside, probably into their home, and talked privately with him.

³ Matthew 3:11.

⁴ Thayer, #1620.

7. How did Apollos help the believers in Achaia/Greece (18:27-28)? He was able to powerfully refute “the Jews” by using the Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Christ, 18:28.⁵

Evangelism Insight: It is good to be able to present the Gospel to someone else. It is better to also be able to refute the arguments of those who oppose it.

Church Growth Insight: Apollos helped the church by refuting the Jews. A major benefit of apologetics is the strengthening of the church, not so much the conversion of unbelievers. Notice how Luke recorded the Apollos encouraged those “who through grace had believed” (18:27). We are saved by grace, not arguments, but God does sometimes choose to use persuasion and reason in the grace and strengthening process.

Factions: Apollos was so helpful to the church in Corinth that, due to no fault of his own, some immature people developed an unhealthy attachment to his teachings:

ESV **1 Corinthians 1:11-12** . . . it has been reported to me . . . that there is quarreling among you . . . What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

ESV **1 Corinthians 3:5-9** What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed . . . I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one . . . we are God's fellow workers.

Twelve Disciples of John the Baptist

******Paul arrived in Ephesus after Apollos left. What ministry did Paul have similar to what Aquila and Priscilla just had (19:1-7)?** Paul met genuine believers who, like Apollos, were only familiar with John’s baptism. Since John the Baptist preached about the coming of the Holy Spirit, what these men may have meant it that they had not heard of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Like Aquila and Priscilla, Paul told them the rest of the story.

Mystery Man: Perhaps some Jew had been in Jerusalem, heard John the Baptist preach, repented, was baptized by John, then followed Jesus during his three-year ministry, was there for Jesus’ death and resurrection, but left Jerusalem sometime during the 40 days between Jesus’ resurrection and Pentecost. He missed the coming of the Holy Spirit when they all spoke in tongues. Perhaps this mystery man then traveled to Ephesus/Asia (his home?) where he taught all he knew about John the Baptist and Jesus to these twelve Jews.

⁵ Perhaps “the Jews” had counter attacked after Paul left. Apollos was like the cavalry riding over the hill to the rescue!

8. What do you suppose made Paul even think to ask them if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed (19:2)? Aquila and Priscilla had obviously already told Paul about what happened with Apollos.

9. Is it possible today to believe and yet not have received the Holy Spirit (19:2)? See *Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:13*. Acts is a transitional book that records the spread of the Holy Spirit for the first time to various groups of believers, starting with the Jews at Pentecost, then to the Samaritans, then to the Gentiles (Cornelius), and now to these isolated disciples of John. Now that the transition has been completed, every believer already has the Holy Spirit. He may not filled with the Spirit, he may be not walking in the Spirit, but he has been baptized into the Spirit.

ESV **Romans 8:9** Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

ESV **1 Corinthians 12:13** . . . in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

10. Why did God cause these men to speak in tongues and prophecy (19:6)? As previously in Acts, it was a sign they had truly received the Holy Spirit.

Review: This marks the fourth time, and last, the Spirit was dramatically poured out on people: **1)** The Jews at Pentecost, **2)** the Samaritans, **3)** the Gentiles in Caesarea, and now **4)** these disciples of John. Why these disciples of John got special attention is not stated. It clearly was an unusual situation. Perhaps this special manifestation of the Spirit was necessary to convince this group of twelve that they really were now part of the church.⁶

11. Why is speaking in tongues and prophecy not the true sign today that one has received the Holy Spirit (19:6)? See *1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:11, 12:29-30, 14:5*. We must be careful when drawing theology from historical narrative. To conclude from this incident that everyone who has the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues is too ambitious. To conclude from this that the Holy Spirit only comes through the laying on of hands is too ambitious. Tongues and prophecy are both spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit, but not everyone has the same gifts. Paul's wish was that everyone could speak in tongues and prophecy, but he knew that would never happen:

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:5** I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophecy.

ESV **1 Corinthians 7:7** I wish (*thelo*) that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

ESV **1 Corinthians 12:11** All . . . the . . . Spirit . . . apports to each one individually as he wills.

⁶ Marshall, 326.

ESV **1 Corinthians 12:29-30** Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues?

Paul in Ephesus

******What did Paul do for two years in Ephesus (19:8-10)?** He reasoned daily in the hall of Tyrannus, with the result that the word of the Lord spread throughout all of Asia (Western Turkey). It was toward the end of these two years in Ephesus that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

12. What words did Luke use to describe Paul's three month ministry in the synagogue (19:8)? Luke used the words boldly, reasoning, and persuading. This should also describe the way we evangelize.

Recurring Insight: Effective evangelism involves more than merely stating the message of the Gospel.

Ministry Meetings vs. Church Meetings: These synagogue meetings were not church meetings, they were evangelistic ministry meetings. The Ephesian church met separately from Paul's synagogue ministry, in the home of Aquila and Priscilla; writing from here in Ephesus to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote:

ESV **1 Corinthians 16:19** The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

What triggered Paul's strategic withdrawal from the synagogue (19:9)? Paul left when some of them grew stubborn and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation.

13. Why did Luke call Christianity "the Way" (19:9)? See 9:2, 18:26, John 14:6. Earlier Luke wrote of "the way of God" (18:26). Both probably came from what Jesus said about Himself:

ESV **John 14:6** I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Word Study: "Way" (9:1) is from *hodos*, "road" or "highway". This Greek word is the basis for the electronics words electrode (a way for electrons), diode (*di* + *hodos*, two ways), anode (*ana* + *hodos*, another way or a way up) and cathode (*kata* + *hodos*, way down).

14. When Paul reasoned daily for two years in the hall of Tyrannus, was he doing evangelism or was he teaching the church (19:10)? Why? See Matthew 28:19-20. He was probably doing both.

ESV **Matthew 28:19-20** . . . make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

15. How did the two years Paul spent in the lecture hall result in all the residents of Asia hearing the word of the Lord (19:10)? Paul had his headquarters in the city and evidently sent co-workers throughout the surrounding region of Asia to evangelize and plant churches.⁷ It was likely during this time that the seven churches of Revelation were founded. The two years spent here were in fulfillment of the Great Commission:

Apostolic Succession: After Paul's three years in Ephesus ended, he left Timothy behind in his place:

ESV 1 Timothy 1:3 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine . . .

According to early church history, the apostle John later lived there. The center for early Christianity moved from Jerusalem, to Antioch, to Ephesus. John was exiled to the Island of Patmos, just off the coast from Ephesus.

So What?

16. How can we follow the example of Priscilla and Aquila in helping Apollos?

17. How should you change your approach to evangelism based on how Paul evangelized? Paul reasoned and persuaded with the same people over a prolonged period.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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Stephen E. Atkerson
NTRF.org
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⁷ *ESV Study Bible*, 2125.

