

Study 28: Acts 18:23-19:7

Introduction

The third missionary Journey commences, and Paul revisits many of the same churches again that he had previously established. He then came to Ephesus, where some interesting events unfolded.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

Content: *What are the major events?*

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Body of the Study

Why does Luke give only a brief description of Paul's travels?

What do we know about Apollos?

How did Aquilla and Priscilla react to what Apollos taught?

What does Paul find when he comes to Ephesus?

What does Paul do about this situation?

What connection did Paul make between belief in Christ and baptism?

Why did Paul lay his hands on these disciples?

Homework:

Read the notes as a review of the study.

- *What were the character traits that we observe in Apollos and the twelve disciples in Ephesus? How should we exhibit the same traits in our lives?*
- *How did Aquila and Priscilla deal with an “issue” that arose in the church?*

Read the rest of chapter 19 in preparation for next week

Notes for study 28: Acts chapter 18:23-19:7

Introduction

The third missionary Journey commences, and Paul made what seems like a fast trip to Ephesus. He did not stay very long in Antioch (possibly a month, maybe two) and then began to retrace his steps of the second journey – overland to Tarsus, through the Cilician Gates to Derbe, then Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch.

Timing: When did these events occur?

The second missionary journey concluded with Paul arriving back in Antioch (and going to Jerusalem) in early AD 54.

Content: What are the major events?

Paul leaves Antioch, then revisits the churches of southern Galatia, Apollos in Ephesus, Paul comes to Ephesus, correction of faulty understanding of twelve disciples.

Cast: Who are the major players?

Paul, Aquila & Priscilla, Apollos, the 12 disciples.

Body of the Study

Why does Luke give only a brief description of Paul's travels?

As previously noted, Luke's purpose is to give us "glimpses" or "windows" into what was happening in the church, rather than a detailed description. After "some time" in Antioch Paul "...departed and went over all the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples..." (18:23 NKJV). Luke covers in less than a full verse, quite a bit of Paul's travels that must have taken several months. He made an overland trip (walking) that took a month in the opposite direction by ship. Paul had stopped along the way – revisiting the churches that he had previously established. His purpose must have been like that of the second journey: "...Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing..." (15:36 NIV).

The journey covered 800 to 1000 km, and involved Paul in missionary activities along the way. In some cases, this was the fourth time that Paul had visited these cities and churches.

However, Luke's primary purpose is to bring the readers back to Ephesus. Before describing Paul's arrival, he gives a brief description of the interluding events at Ephesus.

What do we know about Apollos?

Apollos was born in the city of Alexandria on the North of Egypt near the mouth of the Nile River. This city was famous for two things – the lighthouse that was one of the 8 wonders of the world, and the great library. Alexandria had a large Jewish population, was a great centre of learning, and was named after Alexander the Great, who founded it in 332 BC.

The population of Alexandria in New Testament times was estimated at 250,000 people. The Old Testament was translated into Greek in 285 BC for the great library at Alexandria, which is known as the Septuagint. It is abbreviated as *LXX* after the seventy scholars who translated it, and it was the version usually used by the Hellenistic Jews. One of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament is the Codex Alexandrenicus, which is housed in the British Museum.

Apollos was "...an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures..." (18:24 NKJV). He was skilled in the use of words, and also skilled in his thinking. This contrasts somewhat with Paul, who said: "...When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God..." (1 Cor 2:1 NIV). We need to remember that Apollos did not have the advantage of modern knowledge systems – such as computers – and printed books that were freely available. By modern standards, the available books would

have been few, on hand written scrolls, regarded as precious, and hence not available for general use. However Apollos came from Alexandria, which had the greatest library in the world at that time. The library of Celsus in Ephesus was to become the third greatest library in the world. The building was begun in 110 AD and completed about 20 years later. [The second greatest library was at Pergamos]. Apollos must have memorised a great portion of the Old Testament to have such a grasp of it.

Apollos “*...had been instructed in the way of the Lord...*” (18:25 NKJV). John the Baptist had come to “*...prepare the way of the Lord...*” (Lk 3:4) and it is interesting that Luke uses the same language here. It might seem likely that he had been taught by some of John’s disciples, because “*...he was only acquainted with John’s baptism...*” (18:25).

Not only was Apollos eloquent and well versed in the scriptures, but he was “*...fervent in spirit...*” (18:25) – in this case his own spirit not the Holy Spirit.

He “*...taught accurately the things of the Lord...*” (18:25 NKJV). He knew the facts that the Messiah was to come – which suggests he was taught by one of John’s disciples – and the Old Testament scriptures that he knew so well provided the evidence of the coming messiahship.

However, Apollos’ knowledge was incomplete. He was obviously not acquainted with the great commission, and with the gift of the Holy Spirit. He must have had little or no knowledge of the events of Pentecost. If he had heard of Jesus, he might not have been acquainted with His death and resurrection. Perhaps he had only known of Jesus earthly life, and was fully convinced of who Jesus was by the evidence of the miracles (c/f Jn 3:2).

Apollos “*...spoke boldly in the Synagogue...*” (18:26). His eloquence and knowledge were welded together in such a way, that the power, veracity, and truth of what he proclaimed was undeniable. Later (in Corinth, after he had been “*...instructed more perfectly...*” (18:26), he was able to “*...publicly show from the scriptures, that Jesus is the very Christ...*” (18:28).

How did Aquilla and Priscilla react to what Apollos taught?

Aquila and Priscilla continued to attend the Synagogue services after Paul had left, for it must have been there that they heard Apollos teach. We need to remember that Paul had received a very positive reception at the Synagogue in Ephesus, and “*...they asked him to stay a longer time with them...*” (18:20 NKJV). It would appear that Apollos had come into town not knowing about Aquilla and Priscilla, and the church in Ephesus. How could he? If he was not fully aware of the events of Pentecost, then he would not be aware of the change of covenant, and the establishment of the church!

Aquila and Priscilla would (probably) not have known of Apollos until he arrived in the synagogue preaching Jesus. They must have had a delightful reaction to find someone else who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. But yet they heard from Apollos’ own lips that his knowledge of Jesus was incomplete, for he knew only of John’s baptism.

They took Apollos aside and taught him privately (most likely in their own home) “*...and explained to him the way of God more accurately...*” (18:26 NKJV). They would have explained the last events of Jesus ministry, of His death, burial and resurrection, of the coming of the Holy Spirit, of the establishment of Jesus’ church, and of baptism into Jesus Christ as being symbolic of His death, burial and resurrection.

Luke does not say that Apollos was then baptised into Christ. Some have suggested that being baptised would have been an obvious action, however we need to remember that there is no evidence of any of the apostles being baptised again after Pentecost (since they were baptised under John’s baptism at the start of Jesus’ ministry). The simple reason is that at the time they were baptised, John’s baptism was valid. After Pentecost, christian baptism was the valid baptism. The change at Pentecost did not require those who had shown repentance and obedience in submitting to John’s baptism to be baptised again. At the time that Apollos submitted to God, showed the fruits of repentance, was obedient by being baptised, and believed in the Messiah who was to come, (ie before the cross, and the death of Jesus) – John’s baptism was the valid method – and hence he did not need to be baptised again.

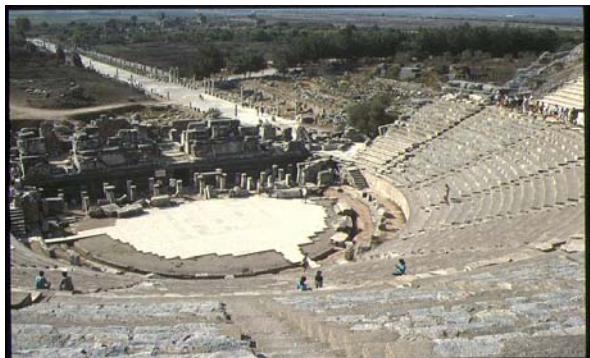
Apollos departed to Achaia and Corinth, but left behind some disciples in Ephesus, having taught them to be baptised after John's baptism. The brethren in Ephesus wrote a letter of commendation to the brethren in Corinth – the first mention of such in the New Testament.

What does Paul find when he comes to Ephesus?

Paul had promised that – Lord willing – he would return to Ephesus. It was probably at least six months and perhaps getting close to a year since he had been there on the return of the second journey. Ephesus was one of the major cities in the world at the time, and the Temple of Artemis one of the eight wonders of the world.¹ Luke has, no doubt, inserted the story of Apollos so that we might have the knowledge of how things at Ephesus came to be this way.



The marble lined street in Ephesus shows how beautiful the city was.



The theatre at Ephesus held 50,000 people. "...so the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theatre..." (19:29).

Ephesus was in the region called "Asia minor". Other cities in the area in New Testament times are those addressed as "The seven churches of Asia" in Revelation chapters 2 and 3: Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. It was the major centre of the region for trade, culture, commerce, politics and religion. It was famous for two things: The huge theatre with a seating capacity of 50,000 and the Temple of Diana (or Artemis) which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. [Some of the others were the Egyptian pyramids, The hanging gardens of Babylon, The lighthouse at Alexandria, The Collosus of Rhodes.]

The ancient theatre is still very much like it would have been when the city revolted against Paul's teaching as recorded later in Acts 19. The area is not far from the narrow straits between the Aegean and Black seas known as the Dardenelles – major theatres of war during the first and second world wars, near which was the famed Gallipoli peninsular.

In the time of Paul, a harbour existed near the city, but it has since silted up and is now 3 miles (5 km) away. Great wide paved roads such as the Arcadian way went through the city linking the centres of trade of the harbour and the Agora (marketplace). Today, the ruins of Ephesus are one of the greatest places to visit to understand what life would have been like in ancient times.

In New Testament times, the population of Ephesus could have been around 50 to 100 thousand (perhaps even 200 thousand) – a big city for the time, and no small town even by today's standards. It was the fourth largest city in the world at the time.



The library of Celsus was one of the great libraries of the ancient world.

¹ Further discussion on the culture of Ephesus can be found in my notes on the Ephesian letter.

The culture was geared around the Roman governance of the area as a pro-consulate, and the Greek culture that had inhabited the site for hundreds of years and was centred on the worship of the God Artemis, (also called Diana). Whole industries had grown around supporting the temple of Diana, and making silver “charms” with Diana engraved on them. The practice of “magical arts” was also a major industry in the city.

Apollos must have departed the city shortly before Paul arrived. Whilst Aquilla and Priscilla had corrected Apollos’ mis-understanding of christianity, they had not yet corrected that same mis-understanding in the brethren he had taught. It is possible that Aquilla and Priscilla had left for Rome before Paul arrived (Rom 16:3-4, which was written from Ephesus towards the end of Paul’s visit at this time). On the other hand, the fact that Paul left them in Ephesus on his second journey expecting to come back to build on the work suggests that the church in its infancy would not have been left without leadership.

Luke describes the people that Paul found there as *disciples*. They may have had an incomplete understanding of even some of the fundamentals of the faith, yet they are still recognised as *learners* (which is what *disciple* means) who know God and want to grow in His ways.

Because the church is in its infancy, the miraculous spiritual gifts were necessary in order to know and confirm God’s revelation. They were given through the laying on of the hands of the apostles (8:18), and so when Paul came to Ephesus one of the first questions that he asks is “...*do you have the spiritual gifts?...*” (19:2). [Whilst Paul’s words, and the “literal” question that he asks is different than I have stated here, I believe that this expresses the essence of the question.]

The answer to Paul’s question led to a surprising revelation. Not only had they not received the spiritual gifts, ***they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit!*** That was when things got interesting! The logic behind Paul’s question came from two areas – first, that when people became christians, they were baptised into Christ, and with that came the promise of the (indwelling) Holy Spirit (2:38). Secondly, many of them would have eventually come across an apostle who could lay his hands on them, and give them one of the special miraculous gifts (8:17-18), with whatever gift they received being according to God’s own choice (1 Cor 12:11). It is the second position that Paul is addressing when he asks the first question “...*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?...*” (19:2 NIV). However their answer “...*No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit...*” (19:2 NIV) caused him to have concerns about their salvation.

A hard line interpretation of their answer would suggest that they were not familiar with the Old Testament scriptures that teach about the Holy Spirit, nor the teachings of Jesus, nor the teachings of John regarding the Holy Spirit. However it is more logical to think they were answering in relation to the *personal relationship* of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked **them** if **they** had received the Holy Spirit. Their answer was “*well, we know about the Holy Spirit, but what do you mean about us getting it?*”

This response immediately prompted Paul to question their conversion. For if they had been baptised into Christ, then they could not have understood the promise of Acts 2:38. And how could they be baptised in the name of (by the authority of) the Father, the Son, ***and the Holy Spirit?*** Paul immediately questioned their conversion “...*into what then were you baptised?...*” (19:3 NKJV).

Their response was that they were baptised “...*into John’s baptism...*” (19:3 NKJV). The link to Apollos is now established, and we are led to suppose that he had taught these people, with Apollos himself having been taught by John the baptist or his disciples. “...*Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."*...” (19:4 NIV). John taught that people needed to believe on Jesus the Messiah who was to come, they were to repent of their sins, and to be immersed (baptised) to show their belief. The problem was, that the baptism of these disciples in Ephesus happened after Pentecost, when John’s baptism was replaced by baptism “...*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*” (Mt 28:19).

What does Paul do about this situation?

Paul obviously taught them about Jesus, and (like Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos), acquainted them with the facts of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. He took them back to the events of Pentecost – and just as Peter preached the first sermon on the work of Jesus in fulfilling prophecy and proving His position as Messiah by His resurrection – so Paul also concluded by telling them that what they needed to do about it was to be baptised into Christ.

This raises another interesting question: Why is it that these people were baptised again, and yet Apollos was not as discussed previously?

The key is that these people were converted “recently” (by Apollos). At the time of their conversion, John’s baptism was no longer valid, as it had been replaced by baptism *into* Jesus Christ (Gal 3:27; Rom 6:3) at Pentecost. On the other hand, Apollos was baptised with John’s baptism whilst it was still valid, and had no need to be baptised again. As conclusive proof of this, we need to observe that none of the apostles were baptised again after Pentecost, as their baptism with John’s baptism was valid at the time that they submitted to it.

What connection did Paul make between belief in Christ and baptism?

In asking the two questions, Paul had made a strong, positive, and definitive link between belief in Christ, and baptism. His connection between the Holy Spirit and baptism is obvious, and is the reason for the second question. It is also obvious in the light of 2:38.

Paul also clearly understood that baptism occurred *at the time of belief* in Christ. “...Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?...” (19:2). He could not comprehend of someone who *believed in Christ*, but had not been baptised into Him. In the case of the Ephesians under consideration who had inadvertently found themselves in such a situation, it was to be corrected immediately “...When they heard this they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (19:5 NKJV).

Why did Paul lay his hands on these disciples?

The spiritual gifts were given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (as we have already observed in this study). Paul completed the work that he had intended from the beginning “...And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied...” (19:6 NKJV). As in the previously observed cases, the result of the Holy Spirit coming upon them was a miraculous manifestation – since they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

We should note that Paul thought it absolutely perfectly normal that these were faithful brethren *without* the spiritual gifts – that is – the gifts were not there to confirm their salvation, but rather to assist in their growth and knowledge at the time of the absence of the New Covenant scriptures.

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