

The Book of Acts

Lesson 24: Corinth and Ephesus -- Acts 18:1–19:41

Paul comes to Corinth weary and alone, a great pagan city notorious for its immorality, and at first the work is hard. He meets a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers and fellow believers, and they take him in. When opposition rises in the synagogue and Paul is discouraged, the Lord speaks to him in the night: do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and I have many in this city who are my people. Strengthened by that promise, Paul stays a year and a half, and a church is born in the heart of Corinth.

Along the way we meet a gifted preacher named Apollos, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, who teaches accurately about Jesus, but he knows only the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla hear him, take him aside, and explain the way of God more accurately. Here is a beautiful picture of humble teaching and humble learning, an ordinary couple sharpening a brilliant preacher, and a brilliant preacher willing to be corrected. Apollos goes on to greatly help the believers.

When Paul reaches Ephesus, he finds about a dozen disciples who, like Apollos, have known only John's baptism. They have never even heard that the Holy Spirit has been given. Paul explains that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, pointing forward to the One who was to come, Jesus. And when they hear this, they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Proper, scriptural baptism matters, and Paul will not leave them with a deficient one.

In Ephesus the gospel collides with the powers of darkness and the idols of the age. God works extraordinary miracles through Paul; would-be exorcists who try to use the name of Jesus as a magic formula are overpowered and humiliated; and new believers haul out their costly books of magic and burn them publicly. The word of the Lord grows mightily and prevails. But when the gospel begins to empty the temple of Artemis and threaten the silversmiths' profits, a riot erupts, with the crowd chanting for two hours, great is Artemis of the Ephesians. The gospel is turning the world upside down again, and the world is fighting back.

Group Discussion: The Lord encouraged Paul not to be afraid because I have many in this city who are my people (vv. 18:9-10). How does knowing that God is already at work in a place, drawing people to Himself, change the way we think about evangelism and our own fears?

Personal Reflection: The Ephesian believers burned their valuable books of magic when they came to Christ, making a clean and costly break with their old life (v. 19:19). Is there something in your life God is calling you to make a clean break from? What is holding you back?

Read Acts 18:1–19:41

Study Questions

1. When Paul was discouraged and facing opposition, the Lord told him, do not be afraid, for I am with you, and I have many in this city who are my people (vv. 18:9-10). What does this encouragement reveal about God's presence and His prior work in evangelism?
2. God's promise that He had many people in Corinth gave Paul courage to keep speaking (vv. 18:9-11). Where does fear hold you back from witnessing or serving? How would it change things to truly believe that God is with you and already at work in the people around you?
3. Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to Paul, worked alongside him, and took Apollos aside to explain the way of God more accurately (vv. 18:2-3, 24-26). What does this couple teach us about the vital role of ordinary believers as fellow workers in the gospel?
4. Aquila and Priscilla served through hospitality, partnership, and the patient mentoring of others (vv. 18:2-3, 26). What is your part as a fellow worker in the gospel? Where might God be calling you to greater hospitality, encouragement, or helping others grow?
5. In Ephesus, would-be exorcists were overpowered when they tried to use Jesus' name as a magic formula, and new believers burned their costly books of magic (vv. 19:13-20). What do these events teach about the supremacy of Christ over the occult and about making a clean break with such practices?
6. The Ephesian believers made a clean, costly break with their old practices by burning their magic books (v. 19:19). Is there something in your life, a habit, a relationship, a practice, that God is calling you to make a clean break from? What is holding you back, and what would a decisive break look like?
7. When the gospel began to threaten the worship of Artemis and the silversmiths' profits, Demetrius stirred up a riot to defend their idol and their income (vv. 19:23-41). What does this teach about how the gospel confronts idolatry and vested interests, and why the truth often provokes opposition?
8. The Ephesians resisted the gospel because it threatened their religion and their livelihood (vv. 19:23-27). Where do the claims of the gospel conflict with your own interests, comfort, or way of life? Are you willing to follow Christ even when it costs you something you value?
9. Paul found disciples in Ephesus who had received only John's baptism, and after explaining the difference, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (vv. 19:1-7). What is the difference between John's baptism and baptism into Christ, and what does this teach about the importance of proper, scriptural baptism?
10. Looking back over this whole passage, God's encouragement, faithful fellow workers, the clean break with the occult, and the importance of proper baptism, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to respond, in bold witness, faithful service, decisive repentance, or being well-grounded in the faith, and what is one step you will take this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Mark 1:1-8, John's baptism of repentance pointing forward to Christ; Acts 2:38, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; Romans 6:3-7, baptism into Christ's death and resurrection; Galatians 3:26-27, baptized into Christ and clothed with Him; Matthew 28:18-20, the command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit