

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 18:24 – 19:41

The gospel vs. false religions

*Who was Apollos? What did he teach about?

*Do we have to be baptized again if the first time was for the wrong reason?

*Why was the whole city of Ephesus in an uproar?

Introduction

Continue to read each text in your Bible before you read the paragraph written here. You will begin to notice helpful things are your own that aren't mentioned here. Last time we read in Acts, Paul had finished his second preaching trip, and is just starting his third one (Acts 18:23). The next section (18:24-28) starts off with some background information.

Acts 18:24-28 Apollos in Ephesus

When Paul first came to the great city of Ephesus, he could not afford to stay long (Acts 18:19-21). But he did leave his husband and wife friends, Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila and Priscilla, during their stay, came in contact with a very talented man named Apollos. Apollos was an educated and eloquent orator who taught from the Bible with great charisma. However, he didn't quite have the whole story; he only knew up to the baptism of John, and knew nothing about the person of Jesus. It was as if someone only read up to Mark 1:8 and didn't read any farther about Jesus! But Aquila and Priscilla talked with him privately and explained the things he needed to know. Apollos accepted the instruction and went on to visit the churches in Achaia (Greece), where he publicly proved that Jesus was the Messiah that the Old Testament prophesied.

Note: Knowing the way of God more accurately

Before he even met Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos was doing a fantastic job preaching about God's way. However, he didn't have a full knowledge. He needed to humbly accept instruction about Jesus from this Christian couple. Fortunately, he had prepared himself well to learn the whole truth, because he was "mighty in the Scriptures" and had a deep respect for the word of God.

It is the same case today with us. No matter how great and eloquent we think we are, sometimes we do not know the way as fully as we think we do. How will we be able to learn "the way of God more accurately"? The same way as Apollos: humility and a deep respect for the Scriptures. We must believe what the Bible says no matter what we have been previously taught.

Acts 19:1-6 Paul in Ephesus

Now the story goes back to Paul, who had just finished encouraging the churches in Galatia and other regions. He comes to Ephesus after Apollos had already left. There he finds a dozen men that were like Apollos; they had followed God's path up until John the Baptist, but did not know anything beyond that. When Paul discovered this, he taught them about Jesus, and baptized them in His name. He also felt that they needed to have the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, so he laid his hands on them (the only way Christians could receive the gifts; remember Acts 8:14-18) and they began to prophesy and speak in foreign languages.

Note: Baptism for the right reason

The baptism of Jesus Christ is for the forgiveness of our sins (Mark 16:16; Acts

2:38). Many denominations do not practice this. They baptize babies, who have no sin; they baptize people to give them church membership; they baptize people as a “sign that they are already saved.” Some people, when they see the truth about the purpose of baptism, think that their previous baptism in their old denomination will be just fine, even though it was for the wrong reason. This Scripture shows us that we need to be baptized for the proper reason — “in the name of the Lord Jesus” — even if we had been previously baptized, like these disciples had been baptized into John’s baptism.

Acts 19:8-20 All Asia hears the word

Paul decided to stay in Ephesus, preaching about Jesus. However, after three months of reasoning in the Jewish synagogue, the Jews’ stubbornness forced him to move to a different site: the school of Tyrannus. Paul had his headquarters there for two years, and the gospel spread all around Asia (not the continent of Asia, but the region that we now know as the country of Turkey). Many of the churches that we read about later in the New Testament in nearby cities were probably formed at this time.

God was supporting the message with great miracles. Perhaps the power of the gospel is best shown in contrast to the false religions all around at that time. There are three stories in this chapter of the gospel versus false religions, and we find two of them here. In verses 13-17, some Jews were trying to cast out demons. They had seen the power of the name of Jesus because they saw the miracles of Paul, so they thought they could use the name to draw out the demon. But the demon talked right back to them! While the demon had to listen to Jesus and to Paul, it knew it didn’t have to listen to these sons of Sceva. So the man with the evil spirit beat up on all seven men until they had to run out of the house without clothes. The news of this event helped people to understand that only the gospel had true power.

The other story is of those who formerly practiced magic. When they decided to give up on this false religion, they burned their old magic books, even though they were worth a large amount of money. They realized Christ was far more valuable!

Acts 19:21-41 “No small disturbance concerning the way”

The third story is on the biggest scale. Just as we saw in chapter 16 with the owners of fortune-telling slave girl (16:16-21), the success of the gospel entailed a decline for Paganism. This fact meant trouble for Paul.

The city of Ephesus housed a magnificent temple to the Greek goddess Artemis (or Diana, to the Romans). This temple is considered today to be one of the “seven wonders of the ancient world,” and at the time attracted many visitors. This idolatry was especially profitable for craftsmen that made small silver shrines of the goddess. But when people began converting to Christianity, they stopped buying these images. It brought economic hardship for the craftsmen, and they finally got so upset that they started a riot. The riot reached such proportions that the whole city was involved and the people had to rush to the theater, a facility that held well over 20,000 people. Imagine so many people shouting together “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians”! But even at that moment, Paul would have entered the theater to make his defense if his friends had not stopped him. The shouting lasted for two hours, even though the crowd didn’t know for certain exactly why they were there. The confusion only ended when an official stood up and calmed the people down. He said that instead of rioting, the proper procedure was to put Paul on trial. What disorder — all because people were more concerned about their money than the truth!

Choose the right answer:

- ___ 1. Who was the eloquent speaker in Ephesus who spoke about John’s baptism? a) Aquila, b) Silas, c) Demetrius, or d) Apollos.
- ___ 2. How many men were in the group that Paul found in Ephesus that had not been baptized in Jesus’ name? a) 3,000, b) 2 or 3, c) 12, or d) 144,000.
- ___ 3. Where did Paul teach for two years in Ephesus? a) the synagogue, b) the school

of Tyrannus, c) Jason's house, or d) the Catholic cathedral.

___ 4. What did the new Christians do with their magic books? a) they sold them and gave the money to the poor, b) they burned them, c) they kept them, or d) they rewrote them with magical incantations that Paul used.

___ 5. What was the occupation of those who started the riot against the gospel in Ephesus? a) craftsmen, b) sorcerers, c) tent makers, or d) insurance salesman.

True or False:

___ 1. Apollos was teaching the truth when Aquila and Priscilla heard him; he just didn't know the whole story.

___ 2. After his conversion, Apollos used the Scriptures to show that Jesus was the Christ.

___ 3. God will accept our baptism, no matter what reason we did it for.

___ 4. The Jewish exorcists tried to cast out demons using Jesus' name, but instead, the man with the evil spirit beat them up.

___ 5. Most of the people in the huge crowd that was shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" didn't even know why they had come together.

After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.

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