**Introduction – Paul’s Third Missionary Journey, Part 1 – 18:18–19:10**

* **General Overview:** This section closes out Paul’s second missionary journey and quickly launches into the third (map on pg 14). In journey three, the geographical emphasis centers on the city of Ephesus. But fascinatingly, the social emphasis centers on the Jewish people—not the Gentiles. Over and over again, Luke records the missionary team engaging with Jews. And by comparison, Gentile engagements are mentioned with less emphasis, and they’re portrayed more like consequences of previous engagements with Jews. For that reason, journey three underscores the fact that Paul’s Jewish loyalties remain strong—despite him venturing deep into the Gentile world, and despite all the Jewish resistance he faces. So, you can take the Paul out of Israel, but you cannot take the Israel out of Paul. He’s a Jew to the core, and he wants to see his people get saved (Rom 10:1). This thread ties all of his missionary journeys together (Rom 11:13–15), and it becomes more important as we see Paul stepping into hotter and hotter water with his unbelieving countrymen. *Paul’s* the true Jew.
  1. **Day 1:** In Luke’s closing scene for the second missionary journey, he hints at the possibility of a third journey involving a return specifically to Ephesus. The reason? There are *Jews* *there* who are asking for the word of God. Paul cares for them.
  2. **Days 2–3:** After Paul starts the third journey, but before he gets to Ephesus, we see that his fellow *Jews*, Priscilla and Aquila, are engaging in fruitful *Jewish* ministry there. Luke describes how they provide further instruction an already-well-versed *Jewish* believer named Apollos so that he could better address the arguments of unbelieving *Jews* in the region. Here, we see that it is the *believing* *Jews* who have a proper grasp of God’s word.
  3. **Day 4**: Once Paul finally sets foot back in Ephesus, he meets several *Jewish* believers who, like Apollos, need to be caught up to speed on Jesus. Whereas Apollos needed knowledge, this engagement is slightly different. Paul bestowed not only further knowledge about Jesus but also the baptism of Jesus/the Holy Spirit that enables them to prophesy and speak in tongues and better testify to the community. This, then, proves that it is the *believing Jews* who get the baptism of the Spirit. God clearly sides with *them*.
  4. **Day 5:** The scene ends with Paul reasoning with *the* *Jews* of Ephesus for quite some time. On the one hand, he has success in persuading some, but, on the other hand, as has so often been the case, other Jews become hardened toward the gospel. For that reason, Paul moves his witnessing efforts over to a Gentile schoolhouse. From there, he teaches for two years with the effect that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (19:10).

**18:18–22 – The Setup for a Future Ministry in Ephesus**

* **Overview:** This section concludes the second missionary journey and lays the groundwork for the third. Here, Luke shows how Jewish blood still courses through Paul’s veins and his heart still beats for his fellow countrymen. For that reason, when the Jews in Ephesus ask for further gospel witness, and his desire for *their* salvation is what launches journey three.

**The Emphasis on Ephesus:**

* It’s important to keep in mind that vv. 18–22 are a single unit designed to prepare the reader for a future ministry in Ephesus.
* To prove how the story is turning toward Ephesus, Luke places Paul’s departures from Corinth and Ephesus side by side to highlight his move *away from* Corinth and *toward* Ephesus. Paul leaves both places, yes, but he leaves them differently. See below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The Departure from Corinth** | **The Departure from Ephesus** |
| Paul remained “many days longer” (v. 18) | The Jews asked Paul to stay for “a longer time” (v. 20) |
| Paul “took leave” (Gk. *apotassō*)of the brethren (v. 18) | Paul “took leave” (Gk. *apotassō*)of the Jews (v. 21) |
| Paul left Corinth but took some Corinthians “with him” (“Priscilla and Aquila”) (v. 18) | Paul left the Ephesians but turned back and promised, “I will return to you again if God wills” (v. 21) |
| “Put out to sea for Syria” – with the emphasis on looking *forward* to a new place (Syria, v. 18) | “Set sail from Ephesus” – with the emphasis on looking *backward* to the old place (Ephesus, v. 21) |
| Paul went to “Cenchreae” where he had “his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow” (v. 18) | Paul landed in “Caesarea” before he “went up and greeted the church [in Jerusalem]” (v. 22) |
| “They came to Ephesus” – intermediate stop on the way to Syria. | “They went down to Antioch” – a potential intermediate stop on the way back to Ephesus |

**Note:** Not only does this table show Luke’s slant toward Ephesus, but the text also includes his reason for it. Looking at verses 19–20, we find that “the Jews” of Ephesus were, at this point, favorable to Paul—a stark contrast from how “the Jews” of Corinth “resisted and blasphemed” God—hence why Paul left them to minister to Corinthian Gentiles (18:6). In Ephesus, however, there’s still an open door to help the Jews, so Paul wishes to return there.

**Another Note:** Focusing on what Luke *does say* helps us steer away from trying to find meaning in what Luke *does* *not say*. For example, many commentators point out how Ephesus was a major city-center in that part of the world, and therefore Paul’s decision to minister there would’ve been a tremendously strategic move. But while this is true, we should remember that if this was Luke’s point, he would’ve said so. Luke knows how to applaud a city—he’s done so already for Philippi (16:12)—but for some reason, he doesn’t describe the “strategic value” of Ephesus. Instead, the only thing he says is that *the Jews* in Ephesus were asking for the gospel. So, we take this as his main focus and Paul’s main reason for his return.

* **Aside (and by that, we mean “really far over to the side, behind that other stuff”):** “A commercial and religious center, Ephesus was situated in a fertile plain in the Roman province of Asia, near the mouth of the Cayster River…In Paul’s day Ephesus was one of the greatest cities of the Roman world, boasting a population of nearly 500,000…Its economic importance derived from the fact that the city was situated on the great north-south road of western Asia Minor and was in position to control trade flowing into the interior of Asia Minor…Religiously, Ephesus was the center for the worship of Artemis (Diana)…The temple of Artemis in Ephesus, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was 180 feet wide and 377 feet long. The roof was supported by 117 sixty-foot columns, each of which was six feet in diameter. The temple stood on a platform 239 feet wide, 418 feet long…In addition to its cultic use, it served as a refuge for fugitives from justice and as a bank for treasures.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* **V. 18** – Luke begins with a brief mention of how Paul was able remain “many days longer” in Corinth after the dust up with Gallio. We see he was not chased out like he had been from so many other cities. Rather, it is from a position of relative security that he “took leave of the brothers and put out to sea for Syria,” (his missionary headquarters in Antioch). And as the story moves on, Luke adds two important details that clarify the picture:
  1. Luke says that “with him were Priscilla and Aquila.” This couple has been introduced in 18:1–2, and the fact that they’re leaving to go with Paul demonstrates that they’re going to become key characters in the narrative and some place that’s *not* Corinth.
  2. Luke also mentions how “in Cenchreae [i.e. a city of Corinth] he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.” This statement has seemed out of place to many commentators, and it’s caused a lot of speculation that pushes beyond or behind the text. For example, there are debates on exactly what kind of vow it was,[[2]](#footnote-2) and whether he was starting a vow or concluding one,[[3]](#footnote-3) but if we just look at (A) the grammar of the verse and (B) Luke’s structure of the passage (shown in the table above), it becomes clear why Luke is emphasizing the simple fact that Paul got a haircut.
     1. From the grammar, this phrase modifies how Paul “set sail” from Corinth. In writing it that way, Luke evidently wants Theophilus to see that Paul left them after having cut his hair due to a vow. For that reason, the mention of a vow serves his purpose of drawing Paul *away* from Corinth due to a more fundamental commitment. The nature of this commitment is then implied from a look at the context.
     2. Looking at the context as a whole, Paul’s haircut and vow function in parallel to his return to the church in Jerusalem. As such, both points expressed Paul’s enduring allegiance to Jewish culture (which was notinherently sinful).
* So, as Paul continued to press ever deeper into the Gentile world, Luke wants to make sure we get reminders that Paul is still doing all this as someone whose heart is fundamentally loyal to the nation of Israel. Paul doesn’t shed his Jewish identity as he ventures into the nations. As Paul himself wrote in Romans 11:13–15, “Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry [to the Gentiles], if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them, for if their rejection the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” So, the main point here in mentioning the vow is Paul’s enduring allegiance to Jewish culture and the people of Israel. For this reason, Luke doesn’t give more detail for Theophilus (a Gentile) about Paul’s vow (what kind it was, why he was taking it at that time and in that place, etc.). Luke could’ve easily done so—he also could’ve added the word “Nazirite”—but he didn’t, which tells us those details are not important for his point. Rather, his point is for Theophilus to keep Paul’s enduring dedication *to Israel* in mind as he sees Paul roaming around the Gentile world. (Furthermore, the theme of vows and shaved heads reemerges in chapter 21, and there the point is the same—the enduring Jewishness of Paul and his Jewish companions).
* **V. 19** – Luke’s already told Theophilus that Paul’s final destination was Syria, but rather than fast-forward to when Paul stepped back onto Syrian shores, Luke instead tells Theophilus about an important pitstop Paul made in Ephesus. From the way Luke shaped this scene, we can see that he lays the groundwork for Paul’s future ministry in Ephesus. Note two points:
  + 1. Paul “left [Priscilla and Aquila] there” as ministry delegates. (He does this same kind of thing later with Timothy and Erastus in 19:22).
    2. Paul himself “entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.” So, this was more than a simple pitstop. He had ministry ambitions.
* **Vv. 20–21** – These verses continue to explain how the door is open for future ministry in Ephesus. Though Paul had to leave (for unspecified reasons), readers can see a remarkable difference in the response of these Jews in Ephesus compared to those in Corinth.
  1. The Jews in Ephesus *ask Paul* “to stay for a longer time,” unlike the Jews in Corinth who essentially hated his guts. And in Ephesus Paul “did not consent” to stay, which is also unlike how Luke says Paul “was staying” (18:3) in Corinth and ministering for “a year and six months” (18:11). So, Corinth got a lot more of Paul than Ephesus.
  2. It is perhaps for these reasons that, when leaving Ephesus, Paul turned around to say, “I will return to you again if God wills.” Here, Theophilus would see that (A) The door is open for future ministry; (B) Paul could only walk through it *if God willed it*.
* **V. 22 –** Having set sail from Ephesus (v. 21), Paul then “landed in Caesarea,” which is not in Syria but in *Israel* (9:30). This proves that, in the midst of his missionary travels all over the world, Paul maintains his Jewish roots. He went out of his way to return to his homeland.
  1. This point is clearer in view of the parallels on the table above along with the language Luke uses of how Paul “went up and greeted the church.” The language of going *up* has consistently been used for going up to Jerusalem (Luke 2:4, 42; 18:10; 19:28; Acts 3:1; 11:2; 15:2), so this again illustrates Paul’s enduring concern for his countrymen *and* Luke’s enduring concern to make that point clear for Theophilus. Although Paul serves in the foreign reaches of the world, his heart is for Israel to be saved and prosper. His ministry to places like Corinth and Ephesus falls under that overarching desire for Israel.
  2. Having made his point, Luke shows how Paul completed his journey and “went down to Antioch” in Syria.

**Day 1 – Questions**

1. Why would Paul want to return to Ephesus?
2. What could Theophilus learn from Paul saying his return to Ephesus depends upon God’s will? How clear should our own dependence on God’s will be in our lives (Eph 1:11; James 4:13–17)?
3. Why would Luke want Theophilus to see that Paul’s deepest loyalties lie with the nation of Israel? What happens when *they* get saved (Rom 11:13ff)?

**Day 2 – The Engagement with Apollos (18:23–28) – Part 1**

* **Overview:** After Paul embarks on his third journey, but before he gets to Ephesus, we get a scene of Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus interacting with another Jewish believer named Apollos. The elements of this scene are all critical for the point Luke is making. Though Apollos knows a great deal of the Bible and already believes in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, he illustrates for us what it means to be, in modern language, “a completed Jew.” Luke says that Apollos was “acquainted only with the baptism of John” but even with that limited knowledge, he still believed in Jesus. From that we know that other Jews who heard John preach *should have* come to believe in Jesus as well. After all, John “preached the gospel to them” (Luke 3:18). But beyond that, Apollos also illustrates the fact that, no matter what any unbelieving Jew might say, the more accurately a Jew handles the word of God, the more powerful a witness he or she will become *for Jesus*. So, Paul’s Jewish opponents might claim to have Scripture on their side, but we see here that they are really just Jews who rejected John’s gospel and frankly don’t know their Bibles very well. True Jews believe in Jesus (Rom 9:6), and Apollos is a tremendous example of that. This is why the story ends with Priscilla and Aquila letting Apollos loose on the unbelieving Jews in the region: He can powerfully shut down their arguments because Scripture is on his side.
* **V. 23** – The third missionary journey begins with much less of a bang than the first. There’s almost no time dedicated to the launch process because, as the journeys continue, Luke’s emphasis moves away from the launching process to the ongoing work being done in Gentile lands. At this point, “the emphasis is Ephesus.” So, once Paul’s back in Antioch, Luke simply says that he “spent some time” in the city before “he left [again] and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phyrgia, strengthening all the disciples.” Off he goes. Taking another lap around the world.
* **V. 24 –** Knowing Paul started another lap but didn’t arrive yet at Ephesus, Luke cuts over to what was going on in Ephesus before Paul got there. As he does so, we get an illustration of how Paul’s Jewish companions (Priscilla and Aquila) are helping to better explain the way of God to a fellow believing Jew.
  1. **Enter: Apollos**. Luke gives a glowing recommendation of a man who seemingly came out of nowhere. He starts with 5 points that describe the man generally, and then he gets into five more points that describe him specifically, in regard to his faith.
     1. He was “a Jew” – This is Luke’s leading emphasis (even the first word in Greek), which means Luke’s description following this serves to reinforce the importance of his identity as a Jew. He’s basically the epitome of a faithful Jewish Christian, and in seeing him, Theophilus would be reminded that God is on the side of Jews who embrace Jesus.
     2. He was “named Apollos” – likely derived from the Greek word for “destroyer” (Rev 9:11), and perhaps, beneath that, “extraordinary.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Both of these ideas accurately describe this man who soon proves to be an “extraordinary destroyer” of the “Jewish” arguments against Jesus. His competence is further reinforced below.
     3. He was “an Alexandrian by birth” – This draws attention to the kind of education he was privy to in his early years. From it, we know Apollos was anything but stupid. Alexandria was a tremendously significant education hub in Egypt.
        + “*Alexandria* was the second largest city in the Roman Empire and was ‘the leading intellectual and cultural center of the Hellenistic world (as Athens had been of the classical world), built around a massive museum and 400,000-volume library’. It was in Alexandria that Jewish scholars had produced the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures called the Septuagint (LXX).”[[5]](#footnote-5)
     4. He was “an eloquent man” – more literally a “a man characterized by word,” alluding to not only his speaking ability but also his education (TDNT, 4:136–37). In other words, Apollos eats books for breakfast and he’s an excellent speaker. As we will see, this capacity enables him to be incredibly effective in handling and communicating *the* book, the word of God.
     5. He was “mighty in the Scriptures” – The mention of “power” (Gk *dunatos*), ties this man to Luke’s earlier description of Moses, who was “powerful in word and deed” (7:22). So, Apollos is not a mousy, mumbly little man with a stuttering problem. When stood up to speak, he was a powerful presence, and his power came straight from the words of God that have shaped him. The phrase used here is literally that he “came to Ephesus, being powerful in the Scriptures.” And by tying this description to his arrival at Ephesus—his entrance into the narrative—this description shows he’s come ready to do some work. It is as though all the other elements of his pedigree—his heritage, his education, his eloquence—have now been employed in the service of Scripture. So when Apollos shows up, the unbelieving Jews should sit down.
* **Vv. 25–26a –** The five previous descriptions are then followed up by five more descriptions that emphasize how he was putting his current education to work for the glory of Jesus. The emphasis is on how Apollos knew enough from the Old Testament to embrace Jesus, but his knowledge could become “that much better” if he knew more of what had been revealed about Jesus since the preaching of John. In that sense, when he acquired more “New Testament knowledge,” it only further strengthened his case for Christ.
  + 1. Luke begins by emphasizing Apollos’ existing education: “This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord.”
       - The word comes from the Greek word “*katecheō*” from which we get the English word “catechism.” In Greek, it literally describes an education in which truths of the lesson are “resounding” back and forth from teacher to student (MGLNT). In modern language, we would say that Apollos had God’s word drilled into him. As such, he’s on the right path (knowing “the way of the Lord,” referring to the way God wants us to live, cf. 2:28; 13:10; 14:16; 16:17).
       - The phrase “the way of the Lord” also ties him to the teaching of John the Baptist, who called for the people to “make ready the way of the Lord” (Luke 3:4), referring to their repentance (Luke 3:3). Again, Apollos knows what the Bible calls Israel to.
    2. Luke then moves to showcase the zeal of Apollos, saying he was “fervent in spirit.” In other words, he knows the truth, and he’s fired up about it. It’s the same language used in Romans 12:11 describing how Christians ought not be “lagging behind in diligence” but instead be “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”
       - **Which S/spirit? –** People debate whether this is simply referring to his own spiritual enthusiasm or if this describes how the Holy Spirit was evoking this enthusiasm. In both cases, the theology is the same, and in both cases the enthusiasm is the same, but in the end, it’s a matter of what Luke wants Theophilus to think about here.
       - Most translations stick fairly close to the grammar and take the conservative route, concluding this is a simple reference to his own spirit. This does not deny that the Holy Spirit was changing his spirit, but only denies that Luke is pointing that out. One key reason in favor of this is that virtually every other time in Acts that the Spirit of God is mentioned, there’s an obvious indicator (e.g. “Holy Spirit” or “Spirit of God” or some other point in the context).[[6]](#footnote-6) Here, the language is just “the spirit.” The article (the) is important, but could still be interpreted either way.
       - On the other hand, it might be better to take this as a reference to the Holy Spirit when the structure of the passage is considered. Noting how Luke has already embedded trinitarian emphases in the book (cf. 16:6–10: “The Holy Spirit…the Spirit of Jesus…God [the Father]”), it’s possible the same thing is being done here. The end result would be to understand that Apollos was instructed in the way of “The Lord” (taken as Yahweh, which seems appropriate given that it’s later described as “the way of God” v. 26), he’s fervent in “the Spirit,” and he’s teaching concerning “Jesus.”
       - Peterson adds, “There is a good deal of attention in Acts to manifestations of the Spirit through speech (1:16; 2:4, 17–18; 4:8, 25, 31; 6:10; 10:44–46; 13:9–10; 19:6; 21:4, 11). The parallel with 6:10 (…‘the Spirit by which he spoke’) is particularly suggestive.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Even Acts 19:21 has the same grammar and translations give a footnote that it could go either way (S/s). But for some reason, it’s not footnoted here.
       - However, knowing Luke’s pattern of writing thus far, it seems better to take this as a reference to the Holy Spirit, and, more accurately, as a reference to how the Triune God is supporting the message of Jesus from the Old Testament Scriptures.
    3. The main thrust of the text—given the emphasis on Apollos as a powerful orator—is that he was “speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus.” From this, we see the main work that Apollos was engaged in—teaching about Jesus of Nazareth. All his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures enabled him to commend *Jesus* to others.
    4. Luke then describes how Apollos didn’t yet have a complete picture of Jesus, for he was “acquainted only with the baptism of John.” Notably, his grasp of John’s baptism was enough that he understood who Jesus was (read 19:4). And so, Apollos was a man who knew Jesus truly, but who did not know Jesus as fully as he could at that point in time. Thankfully, his deficiency was such that other Jews like Priscilla and Aquila were in perfect positions to help.
    5. Luke’s closing description is that Apollos “began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.” The Greek is emphatic, “This one began…” just like at the beginning of this list of 5 traits. And what readers walk away with is an understanding of a powerful man who, though not knowing Jesus as well as he could, still spoke openly about what he *did* know of Jesus. And he did so among those of the synagogue, the place where Jews were open to Paul’s message before. So, Apollos is proving himself to be an asset on this team, but one who could get even more effective with some help.

**Day 2 – Questions**

1. What do you admire most about Apollos?
2. How would this description of Apollos encourage Theophilus to know that the gospel was truly from God?
3. Why would it be important for Luke to show that the Trinity is on Apollos’ side?

**Day 3 – The Engagement with Apollos (18:23–28) – Part 2**

* **V. 26b –** The latter part of this verse describes the helpful way in which Priscilla and Aquila respond to the rising phenomenon called Apollos. They heard him teach and noticed some gaps in what he said, which, if filled, could make him even more effective. For that reason, being better acquainted with the knowledge of Jesus than he was, they “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”
  1. The key word here is “more accurately,” since Apollos was already teaching “accurately” (same word, v. 25). He was *not* in error; he was merely incomplete in his understanding:
     1. For that reason, this was not exactly a “confrontation” in the way we think of Paul combatting Peter’s *error* in Galatians 2:11 (which he was happy to do publicly for the good of everyone being drawn away by it). Instead, this was a “Hey-we-have-more-ammo-for-you” kind of conversation.
     2. It’s also important to see how they sought to strengthen him with a gracious tact:
        + Their instruction was **biblical** in that it lined up with God’s word (they explained “the way of God” to him).
        + Their instruction was **proactive** in that they “took him aside” themselves, rather than waiting for him to ask.
        + Their instruction was **private** in that they took him “aside” to bring him further along, rather than effectively one-upping him in public.
        + In other words, “They do not silently stew over his deficiency, attempt to undercut his ministry, or publicly rebuke him to embarrass him. Instead, they communicate their concerns privately to him. To his credit, he willingly accepts their instruction and mentoring. Since he knows the Scripture well, he must conclude that what they teach tallies with Scripture.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
* **Vv. 27–28 –** The main thrust of these closing verses is that Apollos, having been better equipped by Priscilla and Aquila, “wanted to cross over into Achaia,” and, when he got there, “greatly helped those who had believed through grace.” These phrases are the main grammatical points of this closing section. From these ideas, we see the primary motion is on the expanding witness of the gospel beyond Ephesus to Achaia (home of Corinth, Athens, etc.). Yet, at the same time, Luke adds several other phrases onto these points that describe *how* this was done.
  1. For example, Luke first says that Apollos ventured to Achaia as someone supported by the existing body of believers. Luke says that, having encouraged Apollos, the brothers “wrote to the disciples” (in Achaia) instructing them “to welcome him.” There’s apparently a wordplay here. Theophilus would’ve seen that Apollos not only had the Scriptures (Gk. *graphon*) at his back (v. 28), but he also had the writings (Gk. *graph*ō) of the church at his back. He is both well-spoken and well-spoken *of*.
* As an aside, it is helpful to see that the group urging him on does not involve Paul. For that reason, this episode becomes an illustration of how the church body abroad is doing the work of strengthening and encouraging its members. The movement is growing.

1. Beyond just being supported by existing believers, Luke wants Theophilus to understand what kind of work this “man of the word” did for the Lord in Achaia. In one single act, he both helped the church and harmed the arguments of its enemies. He inflicted serious “damage” to the defenses of the unbelieving Jewish community.
   * + 1. **Positive:** Notice how the main point was how Apollos “greatly helped those who had believed through grace,” so the emphasis is on how the church prospered.
       2. **Negative:** However, with the word “for,” Luke reveals that Apollos helped the church *by virtue of the fact that* “he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.” Evidently, the church needed help in combatting the apparently “biblical” arguments of the Jews. And in the absence of Paul, Apollos was God’s man to help ground them in the word. Notice several points about his refutations:
     + They were **biblical**: Apollos was able to demonstrate “by the Scriptures” that the Messiah (Christ) was, in fact, Jesus. Thus, he had a clear enough biblical grid that he could set it over Jesus’ life and prove that He was a perfect match for the long-awaited Messiah, no matter what other Jews wanted to say, and no matter what Bible passages they pointed to.
     + They were **powerful:** The term for “powerfully” here is the same word used to describe how “vehemently” the chief priests and scribes came after Jesus to accuse and kill Him (Luke 23:10). In a similar vein, Apollos takes no prisoners. He’s vicious for the glory of Jesus.
     + They were **public:** He moved to refute his enemies “in public” (v. 27) so that others would understand who really had the truth on their side. In this way, he, like Stephen, exposed the folly of those who oppose God in order that true believers would understand what’s going on.

**Day 3 – Questions**

1. How does the example of Priscilla and Aquila help you think about helping other believers with gaps in their theology?
2. In refuting the Jews, Apollos shows that “the best defense is a good offense.” How equipped do you feel in the area of biblical apologetics?
3. What encouragement can you draw from the fact that Scripture is on the side of Jesus?

**Day 4 – Paul’s Engagement with the Disciples of John the Baptist (19:1–7)**

1. **Overview:** Paul returns to Ephesus and further instructs other disciples who, like Apollos, did not have a fully up-to-date grasp of redemptive history as it had been revealed in Jesus. They were true believers, but they were only baptized into John’s baptism. So, whereas Apollos needed more doctrine, which he could get from “everyday Christians,” this episode involves the apostle Paul, who bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit (Spirit Baptism). This episode therefore serves to illustrate that it is the Jewish believers who receive the authenticating witness of Spirit baptism. When an apostle comes to town, *those* Jews get the Spirit. And unfortunately, there are not many of those kind of Jews around anymore.

* **V. 1** – Verse 1 of chapter 19 resumes the story for Paul by clarifying that “while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper regions and came to Ephesus and found some disciples.”
  + The statement that he “passed through the upper regions” is remarkable, since the “the foot journey from Antioch to Ephesus”[[9]](#footnote-9) was something in the ballpark of 800 to over 1000 miles, perhaps “requiring nine weeks of walking.”[[10]](#footnote-10)
* **Vv. 2–3 –** Luke’s emphasis is on the nature of the back-and-forth conversation between Paul and these disciples, showing how, like Priscilla and Aquila, Paul had something that legitimate believers in other regions didn’t yet have. For Apollos it was a depth of doctrinal understanding. For these disciples, it was the authenticating power of the Holy Spirit (which came only through apostles, so this is not to suggest that Apollos had that Spirit baptism).
  + After finding these disciples, Paul said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” This question is commonly misunderstood, and some translations don’t do us any favors because the response of the people is often translated, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (NASB, ESV)—as if to suggest that these disciples of John the Baptist didn’t understand that the Spirit of God was real. But John certainly would’ve understood the Holy Spirit’s existence…from the second verse of the Bible (Gen 1:2). For that reason, it’s not correct to think that they didn’t know that the Holy Spirit *existed*. And to get more specific, this idea misses the point of exactly what Paul was asking. Paul was asking specifically if they “received” the Holy Spirit after they believed. For that reason, the better sense of the translation is brought out in the LSB, which reads, “No, we have not even heard if the Holy Spirit is *being received*.” Three arguments support this further:
    1. **These disciples are already saved:** Because these disciples had already “believed” (which is language Luke consistently uses for converted Christians), we must understand that the “reception of the Holy Spirit” in Acts refers to something distinct from salvation.
    2. **The language of “reception” is used for Spirit baptism:** From the beginning of the book, we see that Luke uses the language of “receiving the Holy Spirit” to refer not to salvation but to the outpouring of miraculous power that came when the Holy Spirit baptized believers (cf. Acts 1:5, 8). This is why Jesus speaks of how the reception of the Holy Spirit marks a new era in redemptive history: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now…you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (1:5, 8). From that point on, the language of “receiving” the Holy Spirit is used exclusively of this reception of the Holy Spirit’s miraculous power (2:33, 38; 8:15, 17, 19; 10:47). And so, the proper way to read Paul’s question here “Did you receive the Holy Spirit…?” is to understand that he is asking “Did you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit”? (i.e. spiritual empowerment)
    3. **The context indicates that these believers had not yet crossed over from the baptism of John to the baptism of Jesus/the Holy Spirit**. This is why Paul’s follow-up question makes sense: “Into what then were you baptized?” and they said, “Into John’s baptism.” This means that these disciples hadn’t received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, though they truly believed in Messiah. Their situation was entirely unique to them as they lived on the hinge of history between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus.
* **V. 4 –** Paul then clarified that John’s baptism was not ultimate, saying: “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” In other words, John’s baptism was preparatory for the era of Jesus, and now Paul is saying that the era of Jesus has come, which leads to verse 5.
* **Vv. 5–6 –** “When they [the disciples] heard” that John’s baptism was preparatory for the baptism of another—namely, Jesus—Luke says that “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” And not only that, but “Paul laid his hands upon them” and “the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.” These signs and wonders of speaking with tongues and prophesying make it clear that these men have not only outwardly identified now with Jesus now in baptism, but, through Paul, they’ve been blessed with the Spirit baptism that empowers them with miraculous abilities to help advance the witness of Jesus in this part of the world. God has recognized *these Jews* as true Jews.
* **V. 7** – Luke ends by saying, “Now there were in all about twelve men.” Luke is clearly wanting us to know how many disciples there were, but when it comes to the significance of the number twelve, commentators commonly say “nothing to see here,” especially since there were only “about” twelve men and not *exactly* twelve men. But if that were the case, there would’ve also been a reason not to say, “about eleven” or “about fifteen.” So, what can be made of it? For starters, this should not be compared to the earlier summary statements of conversions (3000, 5000) because this is not a conversion story. This is a Spirit baptism story. For that reason, it should be compared to earlier accounts of Spirit baptism. And when that comparison is made, we find that this statement “about twelve men [~12]” is likely illustrating how Spirit baptism is falling upon *far* *less* *Jews* than was the case earlier in the book, when the Spirit fell upon “about one hundred and twenty persons [~120]” (1:15)—10 times as many. That seems to be what Luke is driving at. God’s purposes for Israel remain amidst growing resistance.

**Day 4 – Questions**

1. What do you learn about Paul from his tenacity to travel so far to get to Ephesus?
2. Why should Paul’s question be understood to refer to Spirit baptism, not conversion?
3. As the book continues to unfold, how does it strike you to see the Spirit falling on 10 times *less Jews* than before? Doesn’t God still love His people (Rom 11:25–27)?

**Day 5 – The Ongoing Engagements of Paul (19:8–10)**

**Overview:** The scene ends with Paul himself reasoning with the Jews of Ephesus for quite some time—and having success. However, along with the positive response, we also see a negative response by other Jews, and that allows us to see Paul’s strategy in moving his witness from the synagogue to a Gentile schoolhouse. From that new facility, over the course of two years, “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (19:10). So we see again that the Jewish opposition to the gospel serves only to magnify the message among Gentiles.

* **V. 8 –** This verse describes how Paul entered his familiar target site in “the synagogue” and “continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God.” With this, Luke finally gets Paul back into the synagogue where he earlier found people asking for further gospel witness (18:20). Now he’s getting the time he desired with these people.
  + Luke’s language is important. The fact that Paul did this “for three months” shows that a significant amount of time was spent here. So he wasn’t rejected immediately.
  + The language of “reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God” indicates that Paul not only had arguments (“reasoning”) but that his arguments were effective (“persuading”; cf. 19:26).
  + Fascinatingly, his topic is “the kingdom of God,” which, in Acts, refers to the kingdom God will restore *to Israel and the Jewish people in Israel*—for the good of the whole world (Acts 1:3, 6–8). This topic would therefore be a strategic choice for Paul when speaking to Jews, and Theophilus would see that Paul’s heart continues to beat for the wellbeing of his fellow countrymen.
* **V. 9** – Verse 9 shows that the response to Paul was not 100% positive. Over time, “some [of the Jews] were becoming hardened and disobedient.” The language of “hardening” reveals that their hearts were growing resistant to the gospel, and the language of “disobedience” tells us they were acting upon it. What they did becomes clear in the next phrase: “speaking evil of the Way before the people.” And so now that Paul’s primary audience was going and giving God bad press, we see his strategy in that “he withdrew from [addressing] them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” So, rather than speak to people who are hardened to the gospel, Paul’s response was to circumvent them by gathering up the faithful members of the community and moving his teachings to a new, Gentile platform known as the school of Tyrannus, where people would likely be more open-minded.
* **V. 10** – This verse then shows how, once again the Jews’ rejection to the gospel blows back in their face. Rejecting the gospel didn’t stop Paul but only expanded the gospel witness to the entire region. Luke says that “This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”
  + Readers should note that the mention of “two years” is significantly longer than the three-month witness made directly to the Jews. So, the Gentiles get more Paul than the Jews.
  + The point that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord” demonstrates that the Jews’ rejection only amplified the scope of Paul’s ministry to “both Jews and Greeks.” Luke’s main focus is not numbers (“every last one”) but ethnicity (“Jews and Greeks”).
  + “Paul moves to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, where he teaches a predominantly non-Jewish audience for two years, during which time he could cover in depth Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection and the interpretation of Scripture. Since Ephesus was a commercial center, people flooded into the city from all over, and the result is that everyone in the province of Asia heard the gospel (cf. 19:26;…). The synagogue’s obstinacy has the effect of broadening the reach of the gospel to gentiles far beyond the city (cf. Rom. 11:11).”[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Day 5 – Questions**

1. Why is the topic of “the kingdom of God” especially relevant to the Jews in the Ephesian synagogue?
2. When you bring God’s word to people, do you try to “persuade” them like Paul did (cf. 19:8, 18:4)? How does 2 Corinthians 5:11 help you understand that “persuasion” is an appropriate goal for a Christian to have when engaging unbelievers?
3. Do you think Paul’s move from synagogue to school gives us any pattern for how we should engage the world?

A map of the ancient world

Description automatically generated

1. Vaughan, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/fsgc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac19.1-41&off=238&ctx=nd+came+to+Ephesus.%0a~A+commercial+and+rel), 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac18.18&off=1559&ctx=War+15.1).+However%2c+~Bruce+describes+the+), 520, notes how Bruce makes a case *against* this being a Nazirite vow. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac18.18&off=250&ctx=+without+hindrance.+~Just+why+Paul+decide), 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Apollos.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac18.24-25&off=284&ctx=he+came+to+Ephesus.+~Alexandria+was+the+s), 525. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The only possible exception is Acts 21:4, in which several translations have a footnote to indicate that, at least from a translational standpoint, it could be read either way. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac18.24-25&off=1461&ctx=ively+human+spirit.+~There+is+a+good+deal), 525. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac18.26-28&off=292&ctx=Apollos%E2%80%99s+teaching.+~They+do+not+silently), 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac18.23&off=971&ctx=the+churches+there.+~A+journey+to+Ephesus), 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac18.23&off=1774&ctx=e+province+of+Asia%2c+~on+this+route+was+a+), 783. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac19.8-10&off=468&ctx=th+them.+He+leaves.%0a~Paul+moves+to+the+le), 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)