

ON THE ROAD AGAIN: ACTS 18.18-19.29



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

On the Road Again: Acts 18.18-19.29
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Introduction to Acts 18.18-19.29

Paul returns to Antioch for a brief stay before heading off on his third missionary journey. Ephesus comes into view as an important center of Paul's ministry. He will stay there for three years, the longest he stayed anywhere.

We've seen the ongoing work of Christ *launched* in various places, from Jerusalem to Corinth. We also see that Paul and Barnabas worked continually to help *establish* the churches they had begun, both by visiting them and training leaders, as well as – in Paul's case – by his epistles.

These *established* churches became centers from which the Gospel of the Kingdom is *dispersed* so that the whole process of the ongoing work of Christ can be *replicated* over and over. The Holy Spirit definitely has traction, and the Kingdom is coming in power.

We're happy to offer a series of brief videos to introduce each portion of this study. You can view each one by [*clicking here*](#).

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Ministering as He Goes

Read and meditate on Acts 18.18-23.

God had called Paul to be a minister of the Gospel, and Paul took that call very seriously. Even as he made his journey back to Antioch – the end of his second missionary journey – Paul ministered to the believers all along the way.

For reflection

1. First stop, Cenchreae, from where he would take his leave by ship to Syria. He took a vow here and shaved his head, doubtless in order to gain entry among the Jewish community there. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 9.19-23. In what ways have we seen Paul applying this principle thus far in Acts?
2. Next stop, Ephesus, and a little seed-sowing in the synagogue before probably finding a new ship to continue his journey. Paul was encouraged by the response at Ephesus, so, since he could not remain himself, he left Priscilla and Aquila to dig the soil, tend the sown seeds, and water any emerging seedlings of faith. How can you see that Paul was not merely in the work of sowing the Gospel, but of making disciples, as the Lord commanded (Matt. 28.18-20)?
3. By leaving his friends there, Paul not only kept the work going in Ephesus, but he strengthened the role of two of his companions – a move that would soon reap benefits for the Kingdom. What principles of leadership development have we seen in Paul thus far?
4. His next stop was Caesarea. From there he made a quick journey to Jerusalem to greet the church there, and probably to give a report on his journey. Then back home to Antioch, continuing his ministry there in his home church. After spending some time there, Paul begins his third missionary journey, heading out overland to visit and strengthen the churches he and Barnabas had birthed on an earlier journey. What can we learn from Paul, and his work in His Personal Mission Field (2 Cor. 10.13-18), to guide us in working our own?
5. We get a glimpse here at the staying power of the Gospel. This was not simply some new religious fad or spiritual movement. It was the work of God, advancing His Kingdom in the lives of men and women, and establishing beachheads of faith throughout the Roman world. Many of these churches continued to be vital and vibrant for years, even centuries, changing whole societies and cultures according to the truth and righteousness of God's Word. What can we learn from the churches Paul started about the role of the local church as sign and outpost for the Kingdom of God?

Summary

Paul was called to minister the Word of God, and ministering the Word of God defined every aspect of his life. Whether he was doing the work of evangelism, doing good to others, making disciples, or developing leaders for the next generation, the ministry of the Word was central. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 11.1. How can you make the ministry of the Word more central to your own life?

Closing Prayer

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!

For praise from the upright is beautiful.
Praise the LORD with the harp;
Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.
Sing to Him a new song;
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.
For the word of the LORD *is* right,
And all His work *is done* in truth.

Psalm 33.1-4

2 God's Timing

Read and meditate on Acts 18.24-28.

How timely that Priscilla and Aquila should have been left in Ephesus. We don't know anything more about Apollos than what we read here. He was steeped in the Old Testament, eloquent, and a believer in Jesus as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. But that's all he knew. Still, he preached this message fervently, believing John's witness concerning Jesus, but not knowing anything beyond that.

For reflection

1. Apollos shows us that we must be zealous to proclaim as much of Jesus as we know, even though there's always room for learning and growth. Why do you think most Christians don't follow his example in this?
2. Apollos was a true man of faith, already preaching Jesus, though he knew only part of the truth of the Good News. Knowing *part* of the truth is not the same as knowing a *half*-truth. But Priscilla and Aquila recognized his faith and stepped up to bring him to a fuller understanding. Are you alert to the opportunities God provides you for encouraging and teaching believers who are younger in the faith?
3. Priscilla and Aquila filled in the gaps of Jesus' life and work, which, for Apollos, only served to cause more of the pieces of the Old Testament puzzle to fall into place in the story of redemption. Apollos seems to have been looking for a place to serve, and when he learned about the Gospel taking root in Corinth and elsewhere, he longed to go to Achaia (southern Greece as we know it today), perhaps because he may have been trained in Greek culture and literature in Alexandria. Apollos was seeking to serve the Lord in a context most favorable to his background, training, and interests. Is there any guidance for you here in thinking about opportunities to serve the Lord in your church?
4. The believers in Ephesus wrote Apollos a letter of recommendation, and Priscilla and Aquila may have gone with him, in order to introduce him to the believers, before continuing on to Rome (Rom. 16.3), which had been their home (Acts 18.2). Apollos appears to have been well received and effective in his ministry among the churches Paul had started in Greece (cf. 1 Cor. 1.12; 3.5-9). The emergence of evangelists and teachers like Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos is further evidence that this is a work of God, and not just some personality cult organized around Peter or Paul or anyone else. What does your church do to encourage the development of leaders for the ongoing work of Christ?
5. Jesus had said He would build His Church (Matt. 16.18), and in the book of Acts we're getting a good look at the ways He carries out this commitment. A strong unity existed among the churches of the Lord during this period, and this made it possible for people like those mentioned in this chapter to be available as the Lord led to serve in various places, if only for limited periods of time. The Spirit of God supervised and energized this work, and not even the gates of hell could prevail against it, much less the Jews or the Romans. Do you have a sense that God is calling you to some specific area of ministry? Are you as prepared for this as you should be? Talk with a pastor or church leader to help you figure out how to get to where God is leading you in His service.

Summary

God continues raising up leaders to keep the ongoing work of Christ *ongoing*. Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, Timothy, Titus – all became effective leaders in their generation, in no small part because of their association with Paul. Leaders don't just happen. They must be made. Ask your pastor or a church leader how you can help in this important work.

Closing Prayer

Give ear, O my people, *to* my law;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
We will not hide *them* from their children,
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.

Psalm 78.1-4

3 Back to Ephesus

Read and meditate on Acts 19.1-7.

Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila departing for Achaia left a vacuum of leadership in Ephesus. Some believers were there, but not many. Perhaps the three determined they'd done all they could for now? But only twelve believers?

For reflection

1. Paul may have had Ephesus in his sights from the beginning of his third missionary journey, for we don't hear much about any stops along the way. When he arrived he found a dozen or so men, true believers, but not well trained. They seem to be stuck about where Apollos was, trusting in John the Baptist's word about Jesus. How would those men have known whether or not they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed?
2. We note that Paul took the time to discern the state of their faith. He gave them credit for true faith but then took them further into the work of Christ and the Spirit. This is what good teachers do, build on foundations, discover and lengthen base lines, cultivate seedlings, check on the state of things, and build from there. In what ways does the disciple-making work of your church reflect this approach?
3. These twelve men became the nucleus of a revival in southeast Asia Minor. Twelve men! From Ephesus the Gospel radiated throughout the region, as the Spirit convicted, converted, filled, equipped, and sent people into all the surrounding area. First Paul, then Priscilla and Aquila, then Apollos, then Paul again: The Kingdom progresses by stages under the skilled hands of master builders (1 Cor. 3.5-10). Patience, persistence, and faith are the keys to the ongoing work of Christ. Is your church's vision for its ministry big enough for all members to find a growing role?
4. The movement of preachers, evangelists, and pastors throughout the book of Acts and the New Testament fascinates me. Over and over we see people arriving to take up or continue a work, going forward to new places, or launching out to begin and help establish some new effort. What is your church's ministry plan for continuing the ongoing work of Christ?
5. God is orchestrating the progress of His Kingdom, using faithful servants and witnesses from all walks of life. Launch, establish, disperse, replicate – this is the pattern of the ongoing work of Christ. This is the way the Spirit flows God's grace through churches into the world. In what specific ways is your church in the flow of God's Kingdom work in our day?

Summary

The organic nature of the Church is becoming increasingly evident, as we see new congregations coming into being, new leaders emerging, and more disciples being added to the churches. Only the Spirit of God can superintend and give continuity and strength to such an effort. How can you know when your church and its leaders are looking to and depending on the Spirit for the ongoing work of Christ?

Closing Prayer

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired *it* for His dwelling place:
“This *is* My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provision;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
I will also clothe her priests with salvation,
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
There I will make the horn of David grow;
I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.
His enemies I will clothe with shame,
But upon Himself His crown shall flourish.”

Psalm 132.13-18

4 Ephesus to All Asia

Read and meditate on Acts 19.8-10.

Paul picked up where he left off, taking the Gospel to the synagogue, speaking boldly, reasoning and persuading people concerning Christ and His Kingdom. For three months in Ephesus he carried on this ministry, but then certain influential people had had enough. It will always be thus in the ongoing work of the Lord.

For reflection

1. Paul considered that he'd done all he could in this synagogue, so when some began to speak evil of the faith, he took his followers to a new venue. Whether Paul rented this hall or it was given to him for his use is not clear. We note the Gospel does not require some "sacred space" in order to flourish and bear fruit. How can you see that, under the influence of the Spirit, Paul used the pressure of unbelieving opposition for the progress of the eternal Kingdom? What can we learn from this?
2. For two years Paul taught the Word of the Lord – as he will remind the Ephesians in chapter 20, "the whole counsel of God" – concerning Christ and His Kingdom. What do you suppose that entailed?
3. He also put the church in order, ordaining elders and probably deacons, and arranging for pastors to shepherd the churches in Ephesus and beyond. We don't read about this, but the fact that elders from these churches came to Paul in Acts 20 suggests strongly that they all knew the apostle. What's involved in preparing shepherds to care for the Lord's flocks? Should local churches have a role in this work?
4. The truth took hold, began to spread, and before long all Asia – the southwest part of what is today Turkey – had heard the Gospel. Paul didn't do all this work himself. Those who heard him understood that they, too, were to be witnesses to Christ, and so they were. The seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are part of the impact of Paul's – and later John's – ministry in Ephesus. The ongoing work *goes on!* How does it appear that your church is contributing to the ongoing work of Christ in your community?
5. Churches require sound teaching in order to flourish. But they also require a certain order, and the New Testament spells that order out clearly. We ignore God's preferred order for His churches to our detriment. How confident are you that your church's order – the way its members are cared for and taught – is what the New Testament recommends?

Summary

Everywhere the Gospel took root, opposition arose. Should we expect this to be any different in our day? How should church leaders prepare their congregations to respond to opposition to the Gospel?

Closing Prayer

Save me, O God, by Your name,

And vindicate me by Your strength.
Hear my prayer, O God;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.
For strangers have risen up against me,
And oppressors have sought after my life;
They have not set God before them. *Selah*
Behold, God *is* my helper;
The Lord *is* with those who uphold my life.
He will repay my enemies for their evil.
Cut them off in Your truth.
I will freely sacrifice to You;
I will praise Your name, O LORD, for *it is* good.
For He has delivered me out of all trouble;
And my eye has seen *its desire* upon my enemies.

Psalm 54

5 Accept No Substitutes

Read and meditate on Acts 19.11-16.

This episode provides a bit of comic relief from the excitement of the fast-spreading Gospel. It also reminds us that the ongoing work of the Lord does not escape the attention of spiritual forces of wickedness in high places. We need to prepare for these, too.

For reflection

1. Like Simon in Acts 8, these sons of Sceva were just looking for some “edge” for themselves, something to bring a little more glitz and bang to their exorcising business. Should we expect to see people like this today, trying to use the Gospel for their own peculiar interests or advantage? Explain.
2. The comic part is not that they get drubbed by the evil spirit for their self-serving attempt to capitalize on the name of Jesus. The comic part is the evil spirit itself, the devil’s representative on earth. What are some ways today we might expect to experience spiritual adversity in the ongoing work of the Lord?
3. Remember: The Gospel has been going forward everywhere, on all fronts, with almost no resistance from the devil, so it seems. The demon in the little girl in Philippi? Toast! Jesus has the devil on a leash (Matt. 12.22-29), and the more Paul and the others preached and made converts, the angrier the devil became. How shall we reconcile the teaching of Matthew 12.22-29 with Peter’s warning in 1 Peter 5.8 and Paul’s comments in Ephesians 6.12?
4. The devil could do nothing to stop the spread of the Gospel. He was beginning to look bad in front of his fellow demons. But when these opportunistic exorcists tried to make some purchase with the name of Jesus, the Lord gave one of the devil’s minions some leash, and he whacked these guys a good one. Is this a victory for the devil, or merely a *pyrrhic victory*? Explain.
5. The ongoing work of Christ continues amid a ferocious spiritual warfare, and Luke doesn’t want us to forget this. He could have reminded us in some more fantastic way – complete with spinning heads, projectile vomiting, and things that go bump in the night. But why lead us to think the devil has any power to terrorize? Why not remind us with a vignette highlighting the haplessness of the devil and his cause? Well done, Luke. Spiritual warfare is serious business, but they who believe in Jesus know how to handle the devil and his ilk. How would you counsel a new believer to prepare both to recognize and fight the good fight in our spiritual warfare?

Summary

Not even the power of the devil can hold back the ongoing work of Christ. Herod couldn’t. The religious leaders and philosophers of the day couldn’t. Angry mobs couldn’t. Nothing can stop the progress of the Kingdom of God (cf. Dan. 2.44, 45; Is. 9.6, 7). So why are we seeking so little progress in the ongoing work of Christ in our day?

Closing Prayer

You have given a banner to those who fear You,

That it may be displayed because of the truth. *Selah*
That Your beloved may be delivered,
Save *with* Your right hand, and hear me.
God has spoken in His holiness:
“I will rejoice;
I will divide Shechem
And measure out the Valley of Succoth.
Gilead *is* Mine, and Manasseh *is* Mine;
Ephraim also *is* the helmet for My head;
Judah *is* My lawgiver.
Moab *is* My washpot;
Over Edom I will cast My shoe;
Philistia, shout in triumph because of Me.”
Who will bring me *to* the strong city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
Is it not You, O God, *who* cast us off?
And You, O God, *who* did not go out with our armies?
Give us help from trouble,
For the help of man *is* useless.
Through God we will do valiantly,
For *it is* He *who* shall tread down our enemies.

Psalm 60.4-12

6 Fear and Praise

Read and meditate on Acts 19.17-22.

Word about the thrashing of the sons of Sceva provoked fear among the people of Ephesus; but the kind of fear that is necessary if worship, obedience, and discipleship are to follow. They feared the name of Jesus, because of the evident power they saw His name could wield.

For reflection

1. But rather than turn *from* Jesus in their fear, they turned *to* Him in worship. Fearing God and loving Him are both essential for full faith. Why?
2. The public expression of this wave of fear and worship took two forms. First, believers were shaken to forsake many practices which they knew to be not consistent with the faith, but which they had heretofore continued and concealed. Is this a good thing? Should we nurture fear of God within the Christian community, to help us along the path of righteousness (Heb. 12.3-11)? Explain.
3. Second, magicians brought the tools of their trade together and burned them, thus dramatically declaring a full and final break from their idolatrous and demonic practices. What does this suggest about the fear of God, the Good News of the Kingdom, and the call to all people everywhere to repent and believe (Acts 17.30)?
4. The effect of these two responses was to bolster and spread the Gospel even further. Seeing the progress of the faith, Paul considered that he could leave the churches of Ephesus and Asia in the hands of their leaders, and he determined to push on to visit the churches in Greece. He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him to begin making preparations, while he stayed on in Asia for a while to finalize details there. As it turned out, that was nearly a fatal decision. Would you describe Paul as a visionary leader? Why or why not? What makes a person a visionary leader?
5. The deeper the Gospel penetrates the souls of people, the more dramatic are its effects. It's pretty clear that many people today who confess faith in Jesus Christ are living a fairly superficial Christian life. If it were not so, would we not expect to see more impact of the Gospel in the social, cultural, and moral arenas of life? We might wonder what it will take to drive the Gospel more deeply into the souls of the faithful – and to rattle those who, to this point, have opposed or denied the faith, preferring instead their own forms of “magic arts.” Whatever it takes, it will be a work of the Spirit, and we should pray for it. Suggest some ways you might pray for the progress of the Gospel in your community.

Summary

The fear of God and love for God are not antithetical affections. They are two sides of the same coin, and, when both are present, the power of the Gospel will be at work. How can you nurture these twin affections in your own walk with and work for the Lord?

Closing Prayer

Will the LORD cast off forever?
And will He be favorable no more?

Has His mercy ceased forever?
Has *His* promise failed forevermore?
Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? *Selah*
And I said, "This *is* my anguish;
But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."
I will remember the works of the LORD;
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
I will also meditate on all Your work,
And talk of Your deeds.
Your way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary;
Who *is* so great a God as *our* God?
You *are* the God who does wonders;
You have declared Your strength among the peoples.

Psalm 77.7-14

7 Tumult

Read and meditate on Acts 19.23-29

As we have seen over and over, positive responses are not the only ones provoked by the Gospel. The Gospel was bringing economic hardship to a certain class of Ephesian citizens. They cared little, if at all, about the waning worship of Artemis. What really angered and emboldened them was the fall-off in sales of their trinkets and idols.

For reflection

1. From Demetrius' speech we can see that Paul was pointing the Gospel directly at the cultural lives of the people of Ephesus, calling them to forsake certain specific practices and ways and to come to Jesus and His Way. So it is today. Or so it should be. In what ways does the Gospel speak to the cultural lives of people in your community?
2. For many today who oppose the Gospel, it's not a matter of truth but of convenience, or moral preference. The Gospel threatens a way of life they have come to enjoy – autonomous, materialistic, self-indulging, and free of unbending moral restraints. Like Demetrius and his cronies, they will find some phony premise, sure to rile the masses, on which to take their stand against the Good News. What evidence do you see that this is happening in our day?
3. But what such people are really seeking to preserve has little to do with truth, and much to do with moral preference. In Ephesus, someone would have to pay for all this upset, and when they couldn't find Paul, they laid hold on two men they recognized as being his companions in ministry. You may not be a Paul, but like him, if you are faithful in your walk with and work for the Lord, you'll be associated with Him. Are you ready to be the object of the anger, resentment, or violence of those who oppose the Gospel? Explain.
4. The world of unbelief will always lash out at the Gospel in one way or another. We should neither be surprised nor dismayed when outrage or oppression come against us. God uses even these responses to further the ongoing work of Christ. We must continue to preach the Kingdom of God against the false worldviews and practices that hold many people in thrall today. Some will be convicted and repent, some will want to think and talk about it more, and some will want to do violence against us. How can we better prepare for such responses?
5. Paul leveled the Gospel and the claims of Christ right at the cultural practices of the Ephesians, just as he had done in every other place. Does your church preach the Good News specifically against any moral, social, or cultural situations in your community? Should it? Merely to condemn those practices, or to show a better way?

Summary

People get comfortable in their chosen way of life. The Gospel wants to jar people out of their sins so that they can find full and abundant life in Christ. Unless we, making room for the Holy Spirit to work, point out the specific sins of people, and the lies in which they have become ensnared, believing in Jesus won't benefit them very much. How can you see that the call to believe in Jesus is incomplete without a specific call to repent?

Closing Prayer

For in You, O LORD, I hope;
You will hear, O Lord my God.
For I said, "*Hear me*, lest they rejoice over me,
Lest, when my foot slips, they exalt *themselves* against me."
For I *am* ready to fall,
And my sorrow *is* continually before me.
For I will declare my iniquity;
I will be in anguish over my sin.
But my enemies *are* vigorous, *and* they are strong;
And those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied.
Those also who render evil for good,
They are my adversaries, because I follow *what is* good.
Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, be not far from me!
Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

Psalm 38.15-22

For reflection or discussion

1. Paul seemed to regard Ephesus as strategic in the ongoing work of Christ. He stopped there briefly, then hurried back to it and spent a long time there. What seems to have been strategic about this city?
2. How can you see that spiritual warfare frequently takes a “human face”? What might that look like in our day?
3. The Gospel speaks *into* cultures, but it also speaks *to* them. Explain.
4. What does an established church look like as it is beginning to mature in the Lord?
5. What’s the most important insight or lesson you’ve learned from Acts 18.18-19.29?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God’s Word to the way we *live for His glory* in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God’s glory in our reading and meditations in this week’s studies? How has He shown Himself to you more clearly? How can this help you live more consistently *for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from Acts 18.18-19.29 to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.