

Monday - Acts 18:18-28

Priscilla and Aquila round out Apollos' education

Insight

- Verse 18 *"He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow."* We have no more information about the vow Paul had taken. However, from the fact that he cut off his hair to fulfill the vow, Paul may have taken the vow of the Nazarite. Those who took this vow were not permitted to cut their hair for the period of the vow. When the time of the vow was over, they had to cut off all their hair. Paul's vow came to an end when he was at Cenchrea, a port city of Corinth, about to set sail for Jerusalem. This demonstrates that Paul was not against Moses' laws but observed many of them as one of his options in serving God.
- Verse 23 *"After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there."* After a brief rest from his travels, Paul began his third missionary journey.
- Verse 25 *"[Apollos] knew only the baptism of John."* John's baptism was powerful. It resulted in the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). Apollos was not rebaptized, but he had to be instructed in Jesus' baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. How did Paul show his understanding of the principle expressed in James 4:13-15?
2. What special gifts did Apollos have?
3. When Apollos went to the province of Achaia, he worked in the chief city of that province, Corinth. Read Acts 18:27 and 1 Corinthians 3:5,6. What was Apollos' primary work in Corinth, as compared to that of Paul?

Apply

4. Apollos was a very gifted speaker and knew his Scriptures well. However, Priscilla and Aquila discovered that his teaching was in error on some points. Describe how they handled Apollos' mistake. Discuss the wisdom of their approach. How might we be tempted to handle such incidents in a sinful way? How can we handle them in a godly manner?

Summary - Paul finished his second journey and began his third. Apollos grew in knowledge.

Answers

- 1) Paul knew that he wanted to see the Ephesians again. However, he did not know if the Lord wanted him to return there. As a result, he promised them, "I will come back if it is God's will."
- 2) He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. He spoke with great enthusiasm and used the Scriptures to refute false teaching vigorously.
- 3) The Lord used Paul to plant the seed. The Lord used Apollos to water it. "He was a great help to those who by grace had believed."
- 4) Priscilla and Aquila embraced Apollos as a friend and gently shared the truth privately. Instead of publicly rebuking and embarrassing him, they dealt with his weaknesses behind closed doors. We are tempted to respond impatiently to error, desiring more to prove we are right than gently to correct. When we sense that something false has been taught in weakness, private conversation remains a great place to begin. We can note areas of agreement, then gently share Bible verses that reveal the error and state the truth.

Tuesday - Acts 19:1-22

The name of Jesus was held in high honor

Insight

Verse 19 *“Fifty thousand drachmas”*—A silver drachma was equal to a day’s wage. Figuring six days of work per week, a day laborer could have earned this amount by working 160 years!

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. As the gospel spread outward from Jerusalem, the Lord made it clear that each new people to whom the gospel came was welcome into the church—first Jerusalem, then Samaria, then Cornelius, who represented the Gentiles as a whole. How did the Lord continue this pattern in Ephesus?
2. As usual, Paul was ejected from the Jewish synagogue. How did God bring good from this evil?
3. Some Jews saw what God was doing through Paul and thought that they could use God’s name for their benefit too. Describe what happened to them.

Apply

4. What effect did this incident have on the Ephesian believers? Discuss the proper role of fear in the life of a Christian.

Summary - Paul conducted a long and fruitful ministry in Ephesus. Miracles played an important role in testifying to God’s grace and his power.

Answers

- 1) There were a number of men in Ephesus who believed in Jesus, but they knew only of John’s baptism and his work of preparing the way for Jesus. While most people who received John’s baptism were not required to be rebaptized into Jesus, Paul rebaptized these men. At this point, the Lord demonstrated that he had received these Ephesians into his church, which set the pace for Paul’s long stay in the city of Ephesus.
- 2) Paul moved his work to a school, where he worked daily for two years. There, so many heard and spread the Word that everyone in the province of Asia heard about the Lord.
- 3) The Lord would not let his name be used for profit or prestige. One day, he allowed a demon to make it clear that the Lord’s name was not to be used for personal gain. The demon spoke, acknowledging the Lord and Paul, but refusing to acknowledge these men. The demon, who does not seem to have had the power to do this before, beat up these men and showed how powerless they were.
- 4) The Lord’s name was held in high honor. It appears that some believed but were secretly still practicing magic arts. The incident with the demons impressed on them the extent of God’s power. They realized God could not be fooled nor would he allow sorcery to go unpunished. The incident preached the law to them in a most powerful way. They confessed sins they had been hiding, rejoiced in Jesus’ forgiving love, and gladly produced fruits of faith in keeping with repentance. Sometimes the Lord allows events to come into Christians’ lives to jolt them out of complacency or secret sins. The Lord does this to create a healthy fear of his wrath and judgment, so Christians will take this to heart, repent, and produce the fruits of repentance and faith.

Wednesday - Acts 19:23-41

Once again, the desire for profit leads to persecution

Insight

Verse 27 *“The temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited.”* This temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was over 300 feet long and 150 feet wide. Its columns towered more than 50 feet into the sky. While Demetrius worked hard to preserve its honor, about 70 years later, in A.D. 125, a Germanic tribe invaded Ephesus and leveled the structure.

Verse 33 *“[Alexander] motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people.”* This defense was not intended to help Gaius and Aristarchus, Christian recipients of Ephesian wrath. Jews pushed Alexander to the front hoping to make clear that the Jewish community in general ought not suffer because of this. They too hated Christians. Unfortunately for them, the plan backfired. When the crowd discovered that he was a Jew, voices shouting different things in confusion (verse 32) became a single voice shouting one thing in unison (verse 34).

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. What is the connection between Acts 19:10 and the concern Demetrius and his coworkers had?
2. How did Paul react when he heard about the riot? What advice did his friends give him?
3. What reasoning did the city clerk use to disperse the crowd?

Apply

4. Compare the concerns Demetrius expressed about his goddess (verse 27) to Psalm 115:3-9. What is the difference between a false god and the true God? At times we may think that our God is getting beaten. We may see that morality is eroding and especially that the gospel is being watered down or denied. Since we know God, who is described in Psalm 115, why can we remain calm and unafraid?

Summary - The truth of Jesus pained the pocketbook of Demetrius. The Ephesians rioted, then dispersed.

Answers

- 1) God's powerful Word had spread over the entire province of Asia. This Word changed hearts, reducing substantially the number of Romans interested in buying silver Artemis shrines.
- 2) Paul wanted to appear before the crowd. His friends begged him to stay away.
- 3) First, he falsely assured them that the facts of Artemis' divinity were undeniable, meaning she didn't need their riot to prove anything. He noted that Gaius and Aristarchus had committed no crimes. He reminded them that there were legal avenues should Demetrius have a valid grievance. He warned them that their actions were illegal and the Romans could accuse the city of starting a riot.
- 4) False gods cannot defend themselves. They need people to support them. The true God does what he pleases. No one can overcome him. If we believed in a god of stone or wood, we would feel helpless when trouble comes into our lives. When frustrated, we would fall into despair. But we who believe in the divine Lord and Maker of all can be calm because no problem can prove that God is out of control. God does whatever pleases him, so we can trust him.

Thursday - Acts 20:1-12

Paul travels through Greece and begins his trip to Jerusalem

Insight

From Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, we discover that Luke chose to omit many details of this trip. We learn that Paul was in a crises situation with the church in Corinth. We also learn that he was gathering a collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Paul spent three months in Macedonia and Greece, encouraging the churches he had started there on his second missionary journey. He finally arrived in Corinth. From Corinth, he planned to sail for Syria and then travel to Jerusalem. He changed his plans and retraced his steps back to the north through Philippi. A number of men accompanied him. These men were representatives of the church in Asia Minor and Greece, who were carrying the offering to Jerusalem to guard Paul from any accusations that he had taken some of the money for himself. (On the offering, see Romans 15:25,26.)

Verse 4 *"He was accompanied by . . ."* Certain congregations had elected representatives to accompany Paul and carry the offering to Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:18-24). The list of companions and where they were from reminds us of stops on Paul's third missionary trip: Derbe, Lystra (Timothy's hometown), Thessalonica, Berea, and Ephesus (in the province of Asia).

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. A riot in the city of Ephesus led to Paul's decision to leave the city. Though Paul left Ephesus, how did the Lord use his departure as a blessing for others?
2. How did the Lord strengthen the faith of the church at Troas?

Apply

3. After the riot in Ephesus, Paul decided to leave. Later, when Paul heard of a Jewish plot to attack him on the voyage to Syria, he decided to walk instead. Evaluate: When Paul chose to leave Ephesus and when he avoided the Jewish plot, he showed that he did not trust in the Lord. (See Psalm 118:6 and Luke 4:12.) How do we determine what risks to run as we wish to share the good news of Jesus?

Summary - Paul traveled through Macedonia and Greece, strengthening the churches there. From Corinth, he began his journey to Jerusalem, accompanied by representatives of the churches who would help him deliver an offering to the poor in Jerusalem.

Answers

- 1) The Lord used this event to bring Paul's time in Ephesus to an end. Paul continued preaching the gospel, revisiting congregations in Macedonia and Greece.
- 2) First, he led Paul to visit there on his way to Jerusalem. Second, he raised from the dead a young man named Eutychus.
- 3) Paul suffered beatings, stonings, and imprisonment. He recognized that God's children have nothing to fear from evil men. He also recognized that a Christian doesn't look for trouble. Good sense founded on pure motives led him to move on from Ephesus and to walk instead of sail. Like Paul, we want to be unafraid of any physical danger. We need not fear embarrassment or ridicule. Never will we sin to avoid persecution. At the same time, we realize that persecution must fit in with God's plans for us. At times trouble will overtake us and we will rejoice in our sufferings. At times the Lord will give us the opportunity to avoid persecution so that we can continue in the path of service he has laid out for us.

Friday - Acts 20:13-38

I commit you to God and to the Word of his grace

Insight

- Verse 17 *“Miletus”*—Miletus was the port city for Ephesus. Paul did not want to walk the several miles up to the city of Ephesus. Paul was now on board a ship. He and his traveling companions were working their way down the Asia Minor coast on their way to Jerusalem.
- Verse 28 *“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”* God has blood! God is a spirit, but in Jesus Christ, God became a man. As the perfect God-man, Jesus shed blood, God’s blood. When Jesus died, God died. What a precious sacrifice for our salvation!

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Paul’s sermon to the elders at Ephesus is also a warm, encouraging message to church leaders in the New Testament.
 - Verses 18-21 How had Paul lived among the Ephesians? Why do you think he reminds them of this? *Paul was tested by the plots of the Jews, yet he never gave way to anger, nor did he ever stop praying for their conversion. He faithfully preached everything they needed to hear, and he centered their teaching on repentance and faith in Christ. This provided an example for the Ephesian elders.*
 - Verses 22-24 What was Paul’s goal in life? *Paul knew persecution would follow him. But his life meant nothing if only he would finish the course God had laid out for him, of testifying to the gospel.*
 - Verses 25-28 What vital task had the elders been called to do? *Paul had taught the Ephesians the whole counsel of God. He encouraged the elders to do the same, reminding them that they were caring for the church that Christ had bought with his own blood.*
 - Verses 29-35 Of what did Paul warn the Corinthians? What resource did Paul leave with them? *Paul warned them about the false teachers who would infiltrate the congregation. Paul committed them to the power of God’s Word. He encouraged them to follow his example of showing love to others for the sake of their faith.*
2. What made the Ephesians so sad?

Apply

3. What would the consequences have been had Paul not proclaimed the whole will of God? What makes us hesitant to announce certain teachings of the Bible? Why is this dangerous?

Summary - Paul encouraged the Ephesian elders to care for the church Christ had redeemed by his blood.

Answers

- 1) See above
- 2) Paul said they would no longer see him. This proved not to be true, however. After Paul was released from his Roman imprisonment, he visited them again. (See 1 Timothy 1:3.)
- 3) Had Paul failed to proclaim what God had commanded him to proclaim, his listeners would have suffered for it and he would have been responsible. We hesitate to speak truths we suspect are unpopular. We allow the fear of persecution or ridicule to muzzle our witness. Such silence not only brings spiritual harm to us, it also reveals a lack of confidence in God’s truth.

Saturday - Acts 21:1-26

I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus

Insight

Verse 4 *“Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.”* In Acts 20:22 Paul said, “Now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem.” The Holy Spirit does not give mixed messages. But both messages were true. Paul, through the Spirit, knew what he had to do. The believers, also through the Spirit, knew what would happen to Paul and didn’t want to lose him, so they urged him not to go. Both Paul and the believers were informed and led by the Spirit.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Trace Paul’s journey from Ephesus to Jerusalem.
2. Paul landed at Tyre. The disciples there warned Paul about what awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul received the same warning in Caesarea. What did the prophet Agabus predict would happen to Paul? Describe the reaction of Paul’s friends, and explain why their attitude eventually changed.
3. The leaders in Jerusalem praised God for what he had done through Paul. But the Jewish Christians had heard a false report about Paul, and they thought he had rejected any use of Moses’ laws. What did Paul teach? What plan did the Jerusalem leaders devise to correct the Jews’ misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching?

Apply

4. When Paul met with the Christian leaders in Jerusalem, both he and they shared exciting information. What blessings did Paul and the Jerusalem leaders describe? How might we put into practice Paul’s example?

Summary - Paul arrived in Jerusalem. He proved that he himself—in freedom—followed Moses’ laws.

Answers

- 1) You may wish to have a map handy. There are many places mentioned in these verses. Tracing Paul’s route beforehand (or as Paul goes to each city) will give you a framework for covering this section.
- 2) Agabus announced that the Jews in Jerusalem would arrest Paul. Initially Paul’s friends were overcome with grief, feeling the only proper path was for Paul to stay away from Jerusalem. Paul reminded them that physical hardship is nothing to fear and that he looked forward to proclaiming the name of Jesus. While still pained by the thought of losing him, they now confessed confidently, “Let the will of the Lord be done.”
- 3) Paul taught that obedience to Old Testament ceremonial regulations was no longer required but could be followed if one wished. This had been twisted to make Paul say that a person must not observe these laws at all. The Jewish leaders encouraged Paul to take part in a purification ceremony to prove that he still followed Jewish laws and customs. (Note the similarity of this rite with the one he himself had observed only a few years before, Acts 18:18.)
- 4) Paul described in detail the great things God had done among the Gentiles. The Jerusalem leaders praised God, then noted the thousands of Jews in Jerusalem who had believed. Taking note of blessings worked by God through his Word gives us the opportunity to glorify God. We might do this at home, in Bible study, or in worship services.

Sunday - Acts 21:27-36

Paul is falsely accused by the Jews and arrested

Insight

Verse 27

“When the seven days were nearly over”—Paul had agreed to assist four men in ceremonial purification rights to demonstrate that observance of Jewish ceremonial laws, while no longer required, was not forbidden by God. These men would shave their heads on the seventh day, indicating that their vow had been fulfilled.

“Some Jews from the province of Asia”—Jews in the province of Asia had given Paul problems for a long time. For example, when Paul visited church leaders from Ephesus, the key city in the province of Asia, he reminded them, “I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19). The same could be said about Paul’s experiences in Antioch, Iconium, and in other cities of Asia Minor.

Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. What accusations did the Asian Jews use to rile up the Jerusalem crowd?
2. The saints in Tyre and Caesarea had warned Paul against going to Jerusalem. What almost happened to Paul there?
3. Why did the Roman commander decide to bring Paul into the military barracks?

Apply

4. When Jews from Asia saw Trophimus, they concluded the worst, assuming that Paul had violated Jewish laws by bringing this Greek into a restricted temple area. Why was it so easy for them to assume the worst about Paul? When are we most likely to assume the worst about individuals? Read 1 Corinthians 13:5-7 and Galatians 6:1,2. How should we respond when we think someone has done something wrong?

Summary - Asian Jews initiated mob violence against Paul. Paul was saved by the Roman authorities.

Answers

- 1) They accused Paul of speaking against the Jewish people, against the law, and against the temple. They also claimed that he had brought a Greek into the restricted temple area. (They recognized Trophimus because he also was from Asia, from the city of Ephesus. Trophimus had accompanied Paul on his third journey, Acts 20:4, and perhaps was bringing along a gift from Ephesus for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. See Romans 15:25-27 and 2 Corinthians 8:18-21.)
- 2) The mob almost succeeded in killing him. If the Lord had not let the Roman commander hear of the disturbance, Paul’s life might have ended then and there.
- 3) He would accomplish nothing by reasoning with the mob. Some accusers shouted one thing, and others, something else. The general unrest convinced him to remove Paul from the scene.
- 4) These Asian Jews were angry at Paul and were looking for opportunities to hurt him. We also are tempted to assume the worst, especially when we feel hurt by another and our flesh is looking for revenge. However, if we are uncertain about the facts, we should assume the best. Love works to protect reputations, wanting to put everything in the best possible light. Sometimes the worst is proven true, and if so, we deal with the person’s sin gently. We first acknowledge to the Lord our own sins; then we work humbly to point out sin and direct a frightened heart to the Savior.