

Lesson 7 Acts 18-19-20

18:1. After this he left Athens. After leaving Athens Paul arrives at Corinth, the capital city and a commercial center of southern Greece. There he meets a Jew named Aquila from Pontus, a Roman province in northwest Asia Minor. Aquila and his wife Priscilla had lived in Italy but were forced to relocate by the expulsion of all the Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius. The ancient historian Suetonius, who mentions this event, writes that the expulsion was occasioned by inter-Jewish strife over a certain “Chrestus,” which is probably a misspelling of the Latin name for Christ, *Christus*.¹ Corinth was a very commercial cosmopolitan city. Low moral standards, concentration on money-making and voluptuous worship of Aphrodite meant that Corinth did not seem the best ground for sowing the word of God.² (**See the Handout – The City of Corinth**)

18:3. St Paul earns his living and manages to combine this with all his preaching of the Gospel. “This teaching of Christ on work,” John Paul II writes, “based on the example of his life during his years in Nazareth, finds a particularly lively echo in the teaching of the apostle Paul. Paul boasts of working at his trade and thanks to that work he was able even as an apostle to earn his own bread” (*Laborem exercens*, 26).

During this stay of a year and a half in Corinth, St Paul wrote some rather severe letters to the Thessalonians, pointing out to them the need to work: “If any one will not work, let him not eat. [...] We command and exhort [idlers] in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living” (2 Thess 3:10, 12).

18:6. And when they opposed. These Jewish listeners contradict and insult Paul. In response he shakes out his garments, in accord with Jesus’ instructions in Luke 10:10-11. Paul and Barnabas had performed a similar

¹ Kurz, W. S. (2013). [*Acts of the Apostles*](#) (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.; p. 279). Baker Academic.

² *The Acts of the Apostles*. Navarre (2005). (pp. 142–163). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

gesture after being rejected in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:51). Paul accompanies this gesture with a declaration similar to that of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 3:17–21; 33:7–9): “Your blood be on your heads! I am clear of responsibility.” He is telling his listeners that he isn’t responsible for their failure to respond to God’s word, he has done all he could to deliver it to them. They, not Paul, are responsible for the judgment they will incur on account of rejecting the gospel. As on previous occasions (see Acts 13:46), Paul now turns his attention to the Gentiles. (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 281)

18:9–10. And the Lord said. Paul receives a guiding vision at night, possibly in a dream, like his vision in Troas (Acts 16:9). In this case, the Lord Jesus himself reassures Paul, “Do not be afraid.” Having experienced repeated rejection by his own people, Paul might well have needed encouragement to continue his witness. The Lord gave similar reassurances to Isaac (Gen 26:2–4), Moses (Num 21:34; Deut 3:2), and Joshua (Josh 8:1) in times of adversity. Jesus exhorts Paul to continue the mission he has begun: “Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you.” “I am with you” is often God’s response to the fear and trepidation of those to whom he has given a humanly impossible mission (see Exod 3:12; Judg 6:16; Luke 1:28). (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 282)

18:18. He cut his hair. Luke does not make clear what kind of vow this is, but it is probably a Nazirite vow, a form of consecration to God for Israelite laypeople. It was a voluntary commitment that Israelites could make to show special devotion to the Lord or to give thanks for a favor received. On completing the terms of the vow, a Nazirite would offer sacrifices in the temple and shave his head; verse 22 implies that after arriving in Caesarea, Paul did in fact go to the temple in Jerusalem. (Also see Acts 21:24.) The mention of this detail shows that Paul is still an observant Jew. This will be further underlined by James’s request that Paul join four men taking a vow and pay their expenses so as to silence those who accuse Paul of breaking the Mosaic law (Acts 21:23–24). (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 285) (**See Handout – Nazarite**)

18:26. When Priscilla and Aquilla heard him. They discreetly take Apollos aside and fill in the gaps, namely, that the Lord proclaimed by John is the

crucified and risen Lord Jesus and that “the Way of the Lord” is the path of discipleship that one enters through baptism into Christ. It is noteworthy that Priscilla’s name appears before Aquila’s, suggesting that she has the more active role in instructing Apollos. Four out of the six times Priscilla is mentioned in the New Testament, her name appears first. Although both she and her husband, Aquila, were valued coworkers of Paul, Priscilla was more prominent, indicating that, despite the generally inferior position of women in the first century and limitations on their public teaching (1 Cor 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:12–15), the early Church was able to appreciate the insight and abilities of gifted women. (*Ibid.* Kurz pp. 288-289)

19:1–7. Paul passed through the upper country. This presence in Ephesus of a group of disciples who had received only John’s baptism is open to various interpretations. The text seems to imply that they were not, properly speaking, Christians but people who followed the Baptist’s teaching and whom Paul regarded as (beginning) Christians, to the point of calling them disciples. We say this because in the New Testament being a Christian is always connected with receiving Baptism and having the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Gal 3:2; Acts 11:16; etc.).

19:2. Did you receive the Holy Spirit. Leaving aside questions as to the origin and composition of this group of disciples, their simple statement about knowing nothing about the Holy Spirit and his part in fulfilling the messianic promises points to the need to preach Christian doctrine in a systematic, gradual and complete way.

Christian catechesis, John Paul II reminds us, “must be systematic, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal; it must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis; it must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the *kerygma* (that is the teaching of Gospel truths); it must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life” (*Catechesi tradendae*, 21).

19:5. In the name of the Lord Jesus. The view of most commentators is that this does not mean that the Trinitarian formula, found in MT. 28:19 “in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” was not used. The particular phrasing here may simply be a way of distinguishing Christian Baptism from other baptismal rites which were features of Judaism in apostolic times—particularly John the Baptist’s rite. Christian Baptism was administered on Jesus Christ’s instructions in union with him and using his power: Jesus’ redemptive action is initiated by the Father and expresses itself in the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (**Ibid.** Navarre)

19:6-7. The Holy Spirit came upon them. This fulfills Jesus’ promise: “John baptized with water, but ... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5; 11:16). The outward signs of the Spirit’s coming on these disciples are the same as occurred at the upper room at Pentecost: they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Another hint that the Pentecost event is being repeated is the detail that there were about twelve men, recalling the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. Remember, in Scripture the number twelve often symbolizes the people of God (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 292)

19:11–16. And God did extraordinary miracles. Here we have another reference to miracles worked by Paul (cf. 13:11; 14:10)—the signs which he himself tells us accompanied his preaching (cf. 2 Cor 12:12; Rom 15:19). St Luke here contrasts the spiritual vitality and the divine character of Paul’s message with the falsity and uselessness of magic. Genuine Christian preaching is on a completely different plane from that of opponents or imitators of the Gospel. In religions of ancient times there were lots of exorcists like the sons of Sceva. This man, probably a member of an important priestly family, gave himself the title of high priest to help promote and gain credibility for the magic-making his family went in for. Many magicians, fortune-tellers and exorcists were ready to invoke any and every God. For example, there were pagans who used the different names of Yahweh, and we have evidence in the form of a magician’s papyrus which reads, “I abjure you by Jesus, the God of the Jews.” In the case of the sons of Sceva, the evil spirit turns on the seven brothers, showing that “the Name does nothing unless it be spoken with faith” (St John Chrysostom, *Hom. on Acts*, 41).

19:23-27. There arose no little stir.The cause of the commotion is a **silversmith named Demetrius**, who makes **miniature silver shrines** of the goddess **Artemis**, the patroness of Ephesus. Artemis, known in Latin as Diana, was a huntress in Greco-Roman mythology.⁴ The city boasted a large and famous temple dedicated to her, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The motive for Demetrius’s objection to the gospel was more economic than religious. (*Ibid.* Kurz p. 298)

19:32.The mob scene that follows again contains a touch of humor: some people are **shouting one thing, others something else**. Not only is the assembly **in chaos** but **most of the people have no idea why they had come together**. (*Ibid.* Kurz p. 300)

Paul’s struggles in Ephesus illustrate how easily Christian preaching and teaching can provoke fierce reactions. Both then and now, speaking the truth expressed in God’s word sometimes has political or economic repercussions that lead to persecution. Looking behind such conflicts, Paul explains that “our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Eph 6:12). The strategy he recommends is to “draw your strength from the Lord,” to “put on the armor of God,” and to “pray at every opportunity in the Spirit” (Eph 6:10, 13, 18) (*Ibid.* Kurz).

20:2–3. After the uproar ceased. On his trip through Macedonia, Paul continues to provide **many words of encouragement** to the churches he founded in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Beroea. Moving southward into Greece, Paul stays there for **three months**, presumably bolstering the churches of Athens and Corinth. It was probably during this period, from Corinth, that Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans, in which he shared his hopes to visit Rome soon on his way to preach the gospel in Spain (Rom 15:23–24, 29).

Intending to head toward Jerusalem, Paul is **about to set sail for Syria**, where his journey began, but discovers that some **Jews** have organized a

⁴ See F. W. Beare, “Artemis,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:241–42; and Hubert M. Martin Jr., “Artemis,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:464–65.

conspiracy against him. To evade their **plot**, Paul changes his plans and decides to travel overland **by way of Macedonia**, rather than going more directly by sea (see map, p. 51/241). Paul’s travel decisions stem not only from the Holy Spirit (see Acts 13:2–4; 16:6–7) but also from a prudential weighing of his circumstances. (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 304).

20:7. On the first day of the week. This is the first mention of a Christian liturgy on Sunday, the first day of the week, which Christians celebrate as the Lord’s Day (see Rev 1:10) because it was the day Jesus was raised from the dead.⁵ They gather **to break bread**, an expression the early Christians often used for the Eucharist. According to the biblical pattern established already in the Old Testament (Exod 24:3–11; Neh 8:8–10) and by the example of the risen Jesus at Emmaus (Luke 24:25–32), the Church celebrates the liturgy of the Word before the liturgy of the Eucharist—first hearing the word of the Lord and then enjoying Eucharistic communion with him. So Paul first gives a prolonged homily, **speaking until midnight**, in view of the fact he is **going to leave on the next day**.

Going Deeper

The Lord’s Day, the Day of Worship

The people of Israel celebrate the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, as the day of rest and worship in communion with the Lord, a practice based on the Genesis account of six days of creation followed by God’s day of rest (Gen 2:1–3; Exod 20:8–11). Christian tradition transferred the celebration of the Lord’s Day to the first day of the week, Sunday, because of the Lord Jesus’ resurrection on that day—the beginning of the new creation. According to the Catechism (1166),

“By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s Resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery every seventh day, which day is appropriately called the Lord’s Day or Sunday” (SC 106). The day of

⁵ See Matt 28:1. Along with Rev 1:10 and 1 Cor 16:2, here Acts 20:7 is one of three New Testament texts that mention the Christian day of worship.

Christ's Resurrection is both the first day of the week, the memorial of the first day of creation, and the "eighth day," on which Christ after his "rest" on the great sabbath inaugurates the "day that the Lord has made," the "day that knows no evening." The Lord's Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet. (*Ibid.* Kurz pp. 305–306)

20:8–9. He sank into a deep sleep. Luke relates the account of **Eutychus** with a little humor, even though his falling to his death must have been quite alarming. The text stresses the **many lamps in the upstairs room**: these oil-burning vessels generated both heat and smoke, which can make people drowsy. **Eutychus** was a **young man**—the Greek can refer to an older boy or young unmarried man—and his name means "Lucky." As a youth might do, he was **sitting on the window sill**, and **as Paul talked on and on he was sinking into a deep sleep**. Finally, he was **overcome by sleep and fell down from the third story**. The not-surprising result was that **when he was picked up, he was dead**.

20:10. Do not be alarmed. Paul's reaction recalls the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who each raised a boy from the dead by lying on his dead body (1 Kings 17:21–23; 2 Kings 4:32–36). Paul **threw himself upon** the dead youth and **embraced him**, telling the group not to be **alarmed** because **there is life in him**. Whether the boy was really dead or only seemed to be dead is not clear from this statement alone. However, because it is very similar to what Jesus said about Jairus's dead daughter in Luke 8:52, Luke probably expects readers to realize that the boy really died and was restored to life when Paul embraced him.

Without explicitly saying so, Luke implies that Paul's actions included praying to God to revive the boy. This differs from Jesus' raising of the widow's son at Nain, in which Jesus acted directly on his own authority. (*Ibid.* Kurz pp 306-307).

20:17-24. And he said to them. Paul's farewell speech fulfills an important sociological and cultural function, providing the transition from a venerable figure (in this case, Paul) to a younger generation that will follow in his steps (the Ephesian presbyters/elders). They enable the leader to

express his love for his followers, ensure a smooth transition to new leadership, and summarize his most important lessons.

The speech is within a biblical tradition of solemn farewell addresses, such as those of Moses (Deut 31–34), Joshua (Josh 23–24), Samuel (1 Sam 12), David (1 Chron 28–29), and Mattathias (1 Macc 2:49–70). In the New Testament, Jesus’ farewell to his disciples before his passion is recounted in John 13–17...these farewell speeches demonstrate God’s care for his people in providing them with leadership in every generation. Leaders are entrusted with the solemn task of faithfully shepherding God’s people and handing on what they themselves have been taught. (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 311)

20:33–34. I coveted no one’s silver. Now Paul echoes the solemn declaration of the prophet Samuel that while he was in authority over the people, he never cheated them or enriched himself at their expense (1 Sam 12:3–5) by taking advantage of his position. Instead, he provided for himself and his **companions** with his own **hands**—probably referring to his tent making trade (see Acts 18:3).

20:35. By so toiling (by hard work). Consistent with his Jewish heritage, Paul emphasizes the dignity and importance of work. The biblical teaching on work differs radically from many Greek philosophers, who tended to look down on manual labor as befitting only slaves. To reinforce the precept of using one’s labor to benefit those less fortunate, Paul appeals to **words of the Lord Jesus himself**, a saying not recorded in the Gospels, which Paul must have learned from oral tradition: **“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”** (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 315)

20:36–38. he knelt down and prayed with them all. For Christians every situation is suitable for prayer: “The Christian prays everywhere”, Clement of Alexandria writes, “and in every situation, whether it be when taking a walk or in the company of friends, or while he is resting, or at the start of some spiritual work. And when he reflects in the interior of his soul and invokes the Father with unspeakable groanings” (*Stromata*, 7, 7). (**Ibid.** Navarre p. 163)