

Acts The Gospel on the Move

Study 14

Mission to Ephesus

Acts 18-19

A. John's Baptism and the Holy Spirit

Acts 18:24-19:7 (NIV)

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

1. a) **Comprehension Question. When Paul asked the disciples in Ephesus what baptism they had received, they replied that they were baptized with John's**

baptism. Is John’s baptism sufficient for the disciples of Ephesus to be saved? Why or why not?

No, John’s baptism, which focuses on repentance, is important for helping people to recognize their sins and to turn away from them. However, repentance alone does not lead to salvation without turning to Jesus. Jesus states in John 3:5 that “no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit,” indicating that faith in Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit are essential for salvation. Therefore, it is through turning to Jesus and being reborn in Him that we are saved.

Quick Verse Reference

John 3:5-8 (NIV)

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

b) Discussion Question. Acts 18:24–19:7 is frequently referenced by Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians as scriptural support for two separate baptisms. They argue that new believers are like the disciples in Ephesus who had received only John’s baptism and therefore need a second baptism—the baptism of the Holy Spirit, evidenced by prophecy and speaking in tongues. Is this interpretation correct?

No, the situation of the Ephesian disciples who had received only John’s baptism is distinct from that of new believers today. The Ephesian disciples had repented of their sins and were awaiting the Messiah, unaware that Christ had already come, died, and risen to redeem them. Today, new believers generally repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, which fulfills both the repentance signified by John’s baptism and the rebirth in the Spirit (John 3:5). In this way, they experience the fullness of salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon coming to faith in Christ, without requiring a second baptism.

c) Discussion Question. How is a believer baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus?

Scripture shows that God Himself is the one who fills believers with the Holy Spirit. Passages such as Isaiah 44:2-3 declare that God will pour out His Spirit on Israel's descendants. Similarly, Ezekiel 36:26-27 describes how God will place His Spirit within us, enabling us to walk in obedience, and Joel 2:28 reiterates that God will pour out His Spirit on all people. These verses emphasize that it is God who initiates and completes this work within believers.

d) Discussion Question. What are the key differences between the Jewish high priest (mentioned in verse 14) who invoked the name of Jesus, and the people of Ephesus who practiced sorcery and brought their scrolls to be burned?

The Jewish high priest attempted to invoke the name of Jesus for personal gain, without recognizing his own sin or turning to Jesus in faith. In contrast, the people of Ephesus demonstrated genuine repentance. They not only openly confessed their sins but also burned their valuable scrolls publicly, showing a sincere break from their past practices and a willingness to sacrifice for their new faith.

e) Reflection Question. Have you ever sought the Holy Spirit mainly for supernatural gifts (like how the Jewish exorcists invoked Jesus' name for power) rather than for transformation and a willingness to surrender personal desires, no matter the cost (like the people in Ephesus)?

B. Riot at the temple of Artemis

Acts 19:23-34 (NIV)

About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of

Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”

When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

2. a) Comprehension Question. Why was Demetrius hostile towards the Gospel?

Demetrius opposed the Gospel because Paul’s message against idolatry threatened both the income of those who profited from making silver shrines and the influence of the goddess Artemis.

b) Discussion Question. Does idolatry refer only to the worship of idols, statues, or objects created by man?

Not necessarily. Idolatry extends beyond the worship of physical idols or statues; it encompasses anything that replaces God or takes precedence over Him in our lives. This can include our desires, pleasures, ambitions, relationships, or even our pursuit of happiness. Essentially, anything that occupies the central place in our hearts that rightfully belongs to God can become an idol.

c) Comprehension Question. According to the video lecture, what are the consequences of accepting idolatry in our hearts?

1. Alienation from family
2. Destruction of community
3. Separation from the church
4. Dehumanization

d) Reflection Question. How do we perceive the people around us today? Do we see them through the lens of Christ, recognizing their needs and our role in supporting them, or do we view them through the lens of our idolatry, considering whether they support our desires or pose a threat to them?

e) Reflection Question. What can you do to make yourself genuinely delight in your relationship with God?

Were there moments in life when we lost our sense of joy or delight in God and found ourselves following Him more out of obligation? What practical steps can we take to rediscover genuine joy in your relationship with God, even in difficult seasons?

Takeaway

True Christianity involves not only repentance, where we crucify our passions, desires, and misguided notions of happiness but also a heartfelt pursuit of Christ. We run towards Him not out of obligation, but because we genuinely delight in our relationship with Him.

Case Study

Case 1 – Water baptism

Wade is a friend who attends Third Baptist Church and has recently signed up for an upcoming water baptism ceremony. He has reached out to you, confused about the difference between the church's water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit that he has heard about from his friends. Wade is passionate about following Jesus and is inquiring about how he might skip water baptism altogether to sign up for a baptism of the Holy Spirit. He also mentioned that the water baptism is similar to John's baptism mentioned in Acts 18.

- 1. a) Discussion question. Is Wade correct in his understanding that the church's water baptism is similar to John's baptism as described in Acts 18?**

b) Discussion question. How would you respond to Wade?

c) Discussion question. Is it important for believers to understand the distinctions between John's baptism, the church's water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Case 2 – Idolatry in Worship

In the church's worship team, the worship leader, Melody, has developed a reputation for being very particular about musical excellence. She often favors certain team members who are skilled musicians and singers, treating them with encouragement and praise. In contrast, she is harsh and dismissive towards those who struggle with their musical abilities, despite their willingness to serve. When questioned by the church leaders about her approach, she defends herself by stating, "I want to present the best to God and our congregation. The weaker members should not even serve if they can't present their best to God."

2. a) Discussion Question: Is Melody's desire to serve "the best" to God an idol in itself, or is her desire to present excellence to God acceptable?

b) Discussion Question. How would you respond to Melody if you were the church leader?

c) Discussion Question. Some of the worship team members have approached you about their desire to step down from ministry. How do you respond in this situation?

d) Discussion Question. If you were Melody, what steps would you take to better support and encourage your team members?