

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: January 28, 2018
Lesson Title: "Incomplete Picture"
Lesson Passage: Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-7

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson is based on two episodes, closely related, in the early growth of the Christian movement. One was the appearance of Apollos, a talented Jew from Alexandria, whose partial understanding of the Christian faith was corrected and augmented by Priscilla and Aquila after they heard him in the synagogue in Ephesus. In the other episode, Paul found in Ephesus followers of Jesus' teachings who had experienced only John's baptism; but he corrected this deficit by baptizing them in the name of the Lord Jesus.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Briefly describe Apollos, as he is presented in Acts 18:24-28.
- (2) Explain the difference in John's baptism and Christian baptism.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin with this comment: This lesson reminds us that Christianity didn't come on the scene as a pre-packaged religion, neatly laid out in an instruction book. Even the original disciples were slow to grasp the true nature of Jesus' messiahship (Acts 1:6). It took time to free the earliest Christians from the idea that believers must practice circumcision (Acts 11:1-3). And this week's Bible passage tells us that, as late as his second missionary journey, Paul encountered disciples who were following the teachings of Jesus, but who remained ignorant of "the baptism of the Spirit" at Pentecost and had undergone baptism only at the hands of John the Baptist. But, after Paul instructed them in the faith, they readily submitted to Christian baptism.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Comment on the description of Apollos and his encounter with Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26):* (1) Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, one of the greatest centers of learning in the ancient world. (2) He was very eloquent (i.e., he was a philosopher noted for his wisdom; Barclay says, "a man of culture.") And, as a loyal Jew, he devoted his learning and eloquence to the exposition of scripture (Acts 18:24). (3) Apollos had been well-educated in the "way of the Lord," but his understanding of the Christian faith differed in one important way from the gospel which grew out of the Jerusalem church--the only baptism he knew was the baptism of John the Baptist (2:25), a baptism of repentance, not baptism in the name of Jesus, which had been proclaimed by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). (4) Priscilla and Aquila heard him in the synagogue interpreting the story of Jesus in the context of

Old Testament prophecies, and were impressed by the zeal with which he presented the gospel. But, noting the deficiencies in his proclamation of the gospel, they invited Apollos into their home in Ephesus, where they helped him understand "the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). COMMENT: They are to be commended for helping him understand in private, rather than challenging him in public.

2. *Refer to the continuation of the story in Acts 18:27-28:* (1) After some time Apollos wished to cross the Aegean and visit Greece; so, armed with a letter of recommendation from Christians in Ephesus, he went to Corinth, where he proved to be a source of encouragement and inspiration to the church there, both by his teaching within the church and his preaching to outsiders. (2) Like Paul, he effectively refuted the Jews of Corinth by going into the synagogue and showing how Jesus of Nazareth had demonstrated his messiahship by fulfilling the scriptures (18:28).

3. *Proceed to the second portion of the lesson passage (ACTS 19:1-7):* (1) After visiting the churches in South Galatia, Paul made his way back to Ephesus. And, shortly after his arrival, he came across twelve men who professed to be disciples (19:1-2). (2) "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (v. 2) implies that he regarded these disciples as true believers in Christ; but when he inquired about their reception of the Holy Spirit, they purportedly answered, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." NOTE: Some reliable texts have, "We have not heard whether people are receiving the Holy Spirit". This seems more likely, for if they had been baptized "Into John's baptism" (Acts 19:3), they would have known that John had spoken of a coming baptism with the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 3:11); so it is unlikely that they said, "we have never heard that there is a Holy Spirit." But, having been absent from the striking demonstration of the presence of the Spirit at Pentecost, they did not know that this expected baptism of the Spirit was now an accomplished fact.

4. *Comment on Acts 19:5-7:* This is the only account of re-baptism in the New Testament. The apostles themselves, who undoubtedly had been baptized with John's baptism, apparently were not re-baptized. But, unlike these twelve disciples at Ephesus, they had experienced the blessing of the Spirit at Pentecost.

CLOSING THE LESSON

A FINAL EXPLANATION: The laying on of hands in Acts 19:6 preceded the coming of the Holy Spirit. But in the home of Cornelius the Spirit had come upon the God-fearing Gentiles while Peter was still speaking (Acts 10:44), and the laying on of hands is not mentioned. Also, on that occasion, baptism followed the coming of the Spirit. So, apparently, neither baptism nor the laying on of hands was necessary for the coming of the Spirit. (So, probably, Acts 19:6 does not refer to the actual coming of the Spirit, but to their recognition that the Spirit had come.)