

Text: Ac 18.24-28

Proposition: The brief portrait of Apollos in Acts gives us a portrait of a developing Christian disciple.

With this message, we will close out Acts 18. We close with an interesting figure, one mentioned just in this section of Acts and verse one of chapter 19. Paul mentions him seven times in 1 Corinthians and once in Titus.

Thus, though he is a well-known figure in some ways, he is also, in terms of Bible references, an obscure figure.

What does he represent in the narrative of the missionary journey's?

Well, consider how Acts 18 opens. Paul arrives in Corinth and meets up with Aquila and Priscilla. At the end of the chapter, he carries them with him as far as Ephesus, and leaves them there. While they labour in their business and the work of the Lord, Apollos arrives on the scene and they have an influence on him.

Thus, in one chapter, we have three generations of ministry:

Paul

Aquila and Priscilla

Apollos

The church is a vessel for the nurturing of the saints, but also for the perpetuation of the Lord's work. Every generation needs preachers. Every generation needs disciple makers. Every generation needs to bring on a new generation to fill the roles again.

And so, we have Apollos

Read Ac 18.24-28

What can we make of this account?

- It speaks to characteristics that a minister of the gospel must have
- It shows one generation passing on training to a new generation
- It shows us how new believers can join in and make an impact for God right away.

Proposition: The brief portrait of Apollos in Acts gives us a portrait of a developing Christian disciple.

I. The raw Apollos (24-25)

A. Biographical details

1. He is a Jew
2. His birthplace was Alexandria (Egypt)
 - a. Another of the larger cities in the Empire
 - b. The Roman capitol of Egypt
 - c. Large Jewish contingent (approx. 20-25% of the city)
 - 1) Founded by Alexander the Great
 - 2) Brought Jews in as part of the founding of the city
 - 3) Jews flourished, contributing to the learning and culture of the city
 - 4) Home of a prominent Jewish philosopher, Philo, whose writings influence Bible study

(Philo most likely had just recently died in the timeline of our passage)

3. He is “an eloquent man”
 - a. The word is related to λόγος, word, it is λόγιος
 - b. λόγιος = ‘wordy’ or ‘learned, cultured’ or ‘skilled with words, eloquent’ (NAU and KJV agree on latter)
 - c. Bare minimum: a man who took advantage of his opportunities, learned well
 - d. Likely, his learning informed his speaking, so ‘eloquent’

I don't wish to overblow this point, his eloquence isn't what makes him a great servant or disciple.

4. Later in our passage we will see him go to Corinth
 - a. His ministry was successful, but the fickle Corinthians elected him to membership in the “best preacher” club
 - b. Some Corinthians preferred Apollos over Peter or Paul (and vice versa)

- c. Evidently, they got into conflict about it
- d. Ultimately, Paul settled that conflict in 1 Cor, noting that Apollos [back in Ephesus] really didn't want to come see them at that time

1 Cor 16.12 ¶ But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all *his* desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.

The point, though, of this biography is the usefulness of Apollos in the ministry. Though we know only a little about him, we know he made an impression on the early church.

B. Key distinguishing spiritual qualities

1. Mighty in the Scriptures

- a. We will find out that his knowledge was deficient, but...
- b. His skill with the Scriptures was impressive
 - 1) This presumes long hours of study
 - 2) It also presumes conscious effort to retain what he learned

2. Fervent in Spirit

- a. Is this “spirit” or “Spirit”
 - 1) The translations tend to go with “spirit” — *i.e.* human spirit
 - 2) Some commentators opt for “Spirit” — *i.e.* the Holy Spirit
- b. This is part and parcel of a question, was Apollos a saved man?
 - 1) He knew a great deal about the Lord and what he knew was accurate
 - 2) Yet his knowledge was incomplete
 - 3) And he only knew the baptism of John

These factors tend to make us think that Apollos might not be a Christian at this point

Yet many commentators resist that suggestion: there is a great deal of discussion and comparison with OT saints and so on.

c. The other word in the description, “fervent” is an important detail

- 1) “The description of someone as fervent means that the person is enthusiastic, excited, or ‘on fire’ (BAGD 337; BDAG 426; ‘talked ... with great enthusiasm,’ NLT). The term literally means ‘boiling’ or ‘seething’ (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.12.6 §345).”¹
- 2) “**bubble, boil**, of one lively/sparkling in spirit”²

So, what is the picture we have of Apollos?

- A learned, cultured man from Alexandria, a notable city
- A zealous, enthusiastic Bible student, one who speaks well and is ready to speak

Now, I am holding him up as an example. In some ways he is *exceptional*, so you might think “That can’t be me.”

However, let’s continue and see how God worked in his life.

II. The improved Apollos (26)

A. Version 1: some limitations

1. His speaking about the Lord Jesus was accurate, as far as it went (25)
2. He was bold to speak about Jesus in the Synagogue (26)

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 591.

² F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), BibleWorks. v.8.

3. But his message was incomplete, he was “acquainted only with the baptism of John” (25)
 - a. Perhaps he was at some point in Palestine during John’s ministry, or else he received training from someone who had
 - b. His information was:
 - 1) This is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world
 - 2) John called men to respond to the message by baptism for repentance
 - 3) Perhaps Apollos didn’t know about the death, burial, and resurrection yet; or about the baptism representing regeneration

We aren’t told the specific deficiency

B. Version 2: updated understanding

1. Aquila and Priscilla take him aside and instruct him
 - a. This speaks to their wisdom, they don’t attempt to correct him in public
 - b. This also speaks to his humility, he is willing to learn from disciples with more knowledge than himself
2. The deficiencies corrected, “more accurately” —he is now ready to take on more and greater ministry

The life of the church involves a good deal of instructing one another.

No one can know it all, and those who are new should willingly learn from others of more experience.

One should particularly credit the knowledge and experience of those with a consistent godly testimony (such as Aquila and Priscilla).

[There are some who know a lot of facts, but their life doesn’t show a close walk with the Lord.]

My big point here, however, is that Apollos grew in his understanding, and came away a better servant because of it.

III. The multiplied Apollos (27-28)

A. Approved of the church

1. Somehow, Apollos decided to go to Corinth to help the work there
 - a. Reasons aren't given
 - b. Also note, very much a summary, so the big point is his desire to go
2. Apollos received commendations from "the brethren," *i.e.* the Church of Ephesus
 - a. We commented on this earlier – the church in Ephesus constituted before Paul's arrival
 - b. And note: the church (the brethren) respected Apollos' work and commended him to the brethren in Corinth

B. Effective in the ministry

1. A blessing to the church (27)

he greatly helped those who had believed through grace

2. A challenge to the synagogue (28)

he powerfully refuted the Jews in public

3. The power in his message (28)

demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ

Conclusion:

Proposition: The brief portrait of Apollos in Acts gives us a portrait of a developing Christian disciple.

You are not a learned, cultured, Alexandrian Jew.

But you are a Christian, whose spirit is filled with The Spirit, and you can grow in your fervor for the Lord: bubble up, boil over.

Perhaps your role will not be as big as that of Apollos, most of us aren't.

Yet you have a place to play in God's kingdom and God can use you.