

REASONING DAILY IN EPHESUS

Acts 18:23–19:20

Key Verse: 19:10

“This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”

How do you spend your time? Most of us have a limited amount. If we're in school, we have classes and studies. If not, we have a job, daily chores, and family responsibilities. Our time gets eaten up really fast. In our free time, we may want to relax, watch tv shows, movies or sports, play video games, or just scroll mindlessly a bit on our smart phone. Because everyone lives this way, it seems normal. But is it? In Acts, Jesus' words at the start are the major theme: “You will be my witnesses” (1:8). These words weren't just for his first followers; whoever we are, wherever we are, being filled with the Holy Spirit and living as Jesus' witness is God's hope for every Christian today. But how do we actually do that? Today's passage shows it requires an investment of our time. Paul spends time in one place daily, for two whole years, telling people about Jesus. This passage has other dramatic details that seem more exciting and interesting. But Paul's focused, consistent, daily reasoning in one place is how the word of the Lord spreads. How could Paul be so focused? What inspired him to spend his time, day in and day out, for two years, reasoning with people? How can we apply this to our lives now? May God speak to each of us.

In Acts there are two main witnesses of Jesus: Peter (chpts.1–12), and Paul (chpts.13–28). Peter focused on Jews, and Paul, on Gentiles (Gal.2:8). Both men were filled with the Holy Spirit.¹ Both proclaimed the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and our need to repent, believe in Jesus and receive the Spirit.² Their Spirit-filled messages and lifestyle are the best example for every Christian today. Every Christian needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit and be telling people the good news of Jesus.

Since Acts 13, we've seen Paul witnessing, not in the land of Israel, but on journeys to places far away. He's been in lands that today are in the nations of

¹ 4:8; 9:17; 13:9.

² 2:23–24,38; 13:28,30,38; 17:30; 19:2.

Turkey, Macedonia and Greece (map of 2nd journey). Now, on his third journey, his main focus is the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor (Turkey). In the details, we see how needed Paul is. Some people are now using the name of Jesus. Others use magic even while claiming to be Christians. Apostle Paul is the authentic witness of Jesus.

But before getting into it, we should ask, “Why Ephesus?” Ephesus was an ancient city on the Aegean Sea (view of Ephesus). It was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. It was famous for the Temple of Artemis (view of temple), one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Since the Roman Empire took over Asia Minor, it built an extensive system of roads that connected Ephesus with the other major cities there (map of Asia Minor). Ephesus was so influential. On his second missionary journey Paul really wanted to go to Asia Minor, but the Holy Spirit instead led him to Macedonia (16:6). When he finished his ministry in Corinth, he dropped off his coworkers Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus on his way home (18:18–19). Now, God finally allows Paul to go to Ephesus. He believes Ephesus is the best place to reach not just a big city, but the other major cities nearby. As the gospel touches our hearts today, we too get really interested in spreading the good news of Jesus to as many people as possible.

Paul has just been to the church in Jerusalem, then to his home church in Antioch (18:22). Look at 18:23. Odd place to start, but it’s where Paul begins his third journey. He travels back to places he’s already been on his first and second journeys (map of 2nd journey again). He wants to strengthen all the disciples there. Paul is passionate both about building people up who already believe, and about reaching new people. His third journey has some colorful people.

First, a smart guy who’s a little off (18:24–28). Before getting into Paul’s work in Ephesus, we first see the story of Apollos. Apollos is a Jew from the city of Alexandria in Egypt (view of Alexandria). Next to Rome, it’s the second largest city of the Roman Empire, twice the size of Ephesus. Alexandria is famous for education, with the largest library in the world and the biggest Jewish population outside of Judea, almost 200,000 people. Coming from this place, Apollos is “eloquent” and “competent” or “powerful” in the Scriptures, meaning he’s highly educated. He comes to Ephesus before Paul does. It says he’s been instructed “in the way of the Lord,” meaning the way of Jesus, though it’s not shown how. It also says he speaks and teaches “accurately the things concerning Jesus.” He

has the right information about him. But it adds, “though he knew only the baptism of John.” This means Apollos is emphasizing the baptism of repentance.

Despite his great learning and training, Apollos needs to really know Jesus, with a little help from some lay Christians. But they don’t publicly correct and embarrass him; instead, it says they take him “aside.” Read verse 26. Priscilla and Aquila have lived and worked closely with Paul in Corinth for 18 months, so they have a strong grasp of “the way of God.” What is “the way of God”? It’s the way of a personal encounter with Jesus. It’s the way of receiving the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of the kingdom of God from Jesus. The way of God also means following Jesus as Lord in the way of the cross. This “way of God” is called the full gospel. Priscilla and Aquila really like the boiling, fiery spirit of Apollos. They just want him to have the full gospel message. They want him to be telling the people “all the words of this Life” (5:20). It’s been said that it’s Priscilla who helps Apollos, because she can explain things on his level due to her own aristocratic upbringing. Amazingly, Apollos is humble enough to accept the instruction. What happens? Read verses 27–28. God uses Apollos greatly in Corinth of Achaia (map of 2nd journey again), where Greeks are impressed by knowledge.

Why is this story here? It highlights how the early church needs Apostle Paul. Paul doesn’t just know *about* Jesus; he knows Jesus *personally*. He knows his *grace* deeply. In that world of so many religions, philosophies, and ideas, Apostle Paul, with great learning of his own, his familiarity with the philosophies of East and West, as well as his own authentic conversion experience, can explain the gospel clearly and fully. And he can equip even laypeople like Priscilla and Aquila to share it effectively, who, in turn, now help others.

Second, repentant people, but without the Spirit (19:1–7). Look at 19:1. Here “inland” is literally “highland” country (map of 2nd journey again). Paul makes this hard trip up in the mountains, where there are no known roads, for hundreds of miles, through some of the roughest terrain in Asia Minor. Why? He’s been caring for disciples in Galatia and Phrygia. Now he’s eager to get to Ephesus to start a new work, as he’s been hoping for. With this in his heart, it’s no problem to endure a hard journey. There, he first finds some “disciples.” It seems great. But these disciples are different from the ones he’s just been helping. Look at verse 2. They may be called disciples, but not knowing there is a Holy Spirit means

they're not yet even Christians. Only knowing John's baptism, they may have been helped by Apollos earlier. They're serious about repenting of sin, but without the Spirit they have no love, no joy, no inner peace. How does Paul help them? Read verses 3–7. He simply gives them the name of Jesus by faith and puts his hands on them. It takes no great learning, intellect or speaking skill—just genuine faith. It's similar to when Peter and John went into Samaria and helped people receive the Holy Spirit by faith (8:14–17). Regardless of people's location, education, culture, or ethnicity, we all need the universal gospel of Jesus. And it spreads only through personal faith in Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit, and authentic servants of Jesus. When these men receive the Spirit, speak in tongues and prophesy, it's like when the Holy Spirit first came on the believers (2:4,17), or when he came on non-Jewish people in Cornelius' home (10:45–46). Now, here in Ephesus, God is bringing another new era in gospel history.

Third, Paul reasoning in Ephesus (19:8–10). After helping these men, what does Paul do? Read verse 8. As usual, in a new place Paul begins in a Jewish synagogue and shares the gospel first with the Jews and others there.³ In Acts, wherever he goes, he's "reasoning" with people.⁴ "Reasoning" means "speaking back and forth between people, with intelligence." Paul is giving people deep questions to ponder, and time to think about their answers. He's not manipulating their emotions; he's persuading them with truth. He's not giving a one-sided lecture; he's engaging them. He's not out just to impress or win an argument; he's speaking to their hearts, to help them truly believe. It reminds us of the passionate teaching ministry of our Lord Jesus (Mark 6:34). Paul is reasoning with these Jews out of real compassion for them.⁵ It also says he's "persuading them." It's working. In Acts the word "persuade" is used often.⁶ It means convincing people that something is true, and helping them commit to it. Ultimately, Paul is convincing people of who Jesus is and helping them follow him to the kingdom of God. He's doing it out of his compassion, faith, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. And in Ephesus, with its impressive temple, buildings and streets, he's emphasizing the eternal kingdom of God.⁷

³ 13:5; 14:1; 17:1–2; 18:4; 19:8; 28:17.

⁴ 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8–9; 24:25.

⁵ Rom.9:1–5; 10:1–4.

⁶ 17:4; 18:4,13; 19:8,26; 26:26,28.

⁷ See also 14:22; 20:5; 28:23,31.

What happens? Read verse 9. When some Jews begin to publicly speak evil of his message, Paul moves on to Gentiles who are open and willing to listen.⁸ It again mentions “the Way”⁹—the way of repentance and faith in Jesus, the way of receiving the Holy Spirit, the way of forgiveness of sins and living hope, the way of following our Lord Jesus, sharing in his suffering. Speaking evil of this Way is speaking evil of God’s way. If we encounter such people, Jesus told us to shake the dust off our feet and leave.¹⁰

But some people’s rejection of the gospel doesn’t make Paul stop; he perseveres. Verse 9b says, “...he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.” Paul finds a good place, in probably the busiest part of town (view of downtown Ephesus). In his daily ministry he’s both reasoning with new people and helping these disciples observe. By observing him, he’s helping them to both deepen their faith and learn how to share the gospel themselves. The footnote adds, “from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M.” It’s likely the hottest time of day, when many laborers would take a break in a place like this school hall (view of Hall of Tyrannus), Paul uses this time to dedicate himself to Spirit-filled, Christ-centered Bible study with anyone willing to listen. Thankfully, no one bothers him here. Because Paul is pouring out his heart to explain who Jesus is and what good news he brings, people start coming. As the capital city of the region, many from the province of Asia come here for shopping, business, or legal matters. Because Paul is always right there in the heart of it all, in the middle of the day, it’s God’s opportune time for him to sow gospel seeds.

How do people respond? Read verse 10. This is written in understatement. Daily reasoning is going on, not for one or two weeks, or one or two months, but *for two years*. It’s the longest time to date anywhere that Paul engages in gospel ministry undisturbed. Through his two-year ministry in Ephesus, disciples are being raised. And the word of the Lord reaches all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks. Probably it’s when believing communities are born in Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, the seven churches in Revelation (Rev.2–3; map of Asia Minor again). At the beginning of Acts, Peter gave two sermons, and suddenly thousands of people joined the church. But here, Paul patiently reasons with people daily, for two years, and the word of the

⁸ 13:46; 18:6; 28:28.

⁹ 9:2; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14,22.

¹⁰ Matt.10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5.

gospel spreads to an entire region. We probably prefer the quicker, easier results. Sowing gospel seeds in new people is hard, and intense. But most often, God works not quickly, but through patient, tearful sowing.¹¹

Fourth, phony exorcists (11–17). Look at verses 11–12. God confirms Paul as an authentic apostle of Jesus by the miracles he does through him. They are the same kind of miracles our Lord Jesus did, the same ones Apostle Peter did. Look at verses 13–14. Some phony Jewish exorcists try to use the name of Jesus for a spiritual power encounter, to gain people’s respect. What happens? Read verses 15–16. Ministry is never clever manipulation; it’s spiritual warfare against real forces of evil. Read verse 17. For both Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, Paul is not being honored, and exorcists are not distracting people; the name of Jesus is being extolled, with holy fear. We need this kind of faith in the name of Jesus.

Fifth, the word of the Lord prevails mightily (18–20). Read verses 18–19. This is another powerful work of the Holy Spirit: leading believers to deeper practical repentance. Ephesus is a center for magic arts from the East. But believers begin publicly burning their valuable magic scrolls to show that only Jesus is Lord, only Jesus can protect us. Read verse 20. This tells us that we can’t just talk about or write about God’s word; we need to let it lead us to deep and honest repentance.

So how do you use your time? The American author Thoreau famously coined the phrase: “As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.”¹² What we do with our time matters more than we realize. Paul’s reasoning with people daily for two years shows how clear he is to obey God’s call. It shows how real his love for Jesus is and how much he wants people to know Jesus. It shows how much he believes the power of God’s word, that “the sacred writings” of the Bible are “able to make [people] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim.3:15b). It shows how determined he is to make the best use of his time. Jesus said, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4). Later, Paul writes, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”¹³ What is “the best use of the time”? It starts with spending personal time in Bible study. We should do it whenever we have the

¹¹ Cf. 20:18–20,31; Ps.126:6.

¹² Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: Tickner and Fields, 1854), 123.

¹³ Eph.5:15–16; cf. Col.4:5.

chance—if possible, daily. If we really *want* something, we *make* time for it. Why do this? Apostle Peter wrote, “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...” (2 Pet.1:19). Paying careful attention to God’s word like this *takes time*. But as the light of Jesus begins to shine in our hearts, we find it’s time well spent.

After that, we should be using our spare time in helping others know Jesus through the word. Often we don’t feel like it. We’d rather spend time on trivial pursuits, or maybe working on our appearance. The people we want to help have so many distractions, so many other interests, so many of their own ideas and agendas. But Paul told his spiritual son Timothy, “...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim.4:2). It’s what Paul himself was doing in Ephesus daily for two years. He wasn’t just imparting Bible information or knowledge. He was helping people come to know the truth that is in Jesus (Eph.4:21–24). It’s the most valuable use of time any person can have.

How we use our time impacts the people and world around us, even for eternity (Gal.6:7–8). Read 19:10 again. May God help us focus our time on meditating on his word and patiently sharing it with others, so that God can use us to spread the good news of Jesus in this dark world.