

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 17 OF 104

Counted and Carried

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Numbers 1-4
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 20
Gospels	Matthew 17:14-18:20
General New Testament	Acts 18-19:10

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to convince a class of ordinary people that God deals with them personally. Numbers counts them by name. Proverbs says His lamp searches the inward parts. Jesus warns the church not to despise a single little one and goes after the one sheep that wandered off. Paul and a tentmaking couple stop everything to get one preacher and twelve obscure disciples squared away. God works one person at a time, and He expects His people to do the same.

Doctrinally, Acts 19:1-5 is the center of gravity. It gives you the opportunity, perhaps the best one all quarter, to teach that baptism is into Christ, for the remission of sins, and that what a person understood and was baptized into matters. The laying on of the apostles' hands in 19:6 lets you explain how miraculous gifts were given and why they are not given now. Matthew 18:3 lets you affirm that children are safe and that guilt is personal. And Matthew 17:20 will need careful handling so that nobody leaves believing that enough faith guarantees a miracle.

Formationally, the thread is attention: God's toward us, and ours toward each other. Every reading involves somebody stopping for one person. Put this question to your class before they leave: name one person in this congregation who has drifted, been forgotten, or been carrying something alone, and say what day this week you are going to go find them.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Acts 18-19:10, and plan to spend at least half the hour on Apollos and the twelve men at Ephesus. This is your best opportunity of the quarter to teach what baptism is and what it is for. Leave time for questions and be available afterward.

Second session: Take up Matthew 17:14-18:20, built around Matthew 18. Give real time to the child in the middle, to the one lost sheep, and to the four steps of verses 15 through 17. A class that learns to go to a brother privately will change a congregation.

The other two readings: Numbers 1-4 and Proverbs 20 are for home reading. Tell the class before they leave that Numbers 2 is worth sketching on paper with the tabernacle in the center, and that Proverbs 20:9 asks the question the whole Bible exists to answer. Encourage them not to skip the census; God counted them one at a time on purpose.

Every Man in His Place

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Numbers gets its English name from the two censuses that frame it, but its Hebrew title comes from its fifth word, “in the wilderness,” which is really what the book is about. These opening chapters find Israel still camped at Sinai in the second year, organized and ready, with everything the Lord commanded now built and consecrated. What follows in chapter 1 is not bureaucracy. It is a nation being mustered for a march that should have taken weeks.

Chapter 2 is worth drawing on a board. Three tribes on the east, three on the south, three on the west, three on the north, each under its own standard, with the Levites camped in the inner ring and the tabernacle at the exact center. Wherever an Israelite stood, he faced the tent where God had put His name. The layout was a daily sermon about who was at the middle of the nation and who was not.

Chapters 3 and 4 then narrow to the Levites, and the detail is striking. God takes them in place of the firstborn He had claimed at the Passover, counts the difference, and collects redemption money for the extra 273. Then He assigns duties by family and by age, down to which family carries the pillars and which carries the pins and cords. The Kohathites, who bore the ark and the table and the lampstand, could not begin until Aaron and his sons had covered every holy object. Privilege and peril arrived in the same wagon.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The setting is the wilderness of Sinai, the first day of the second month of the second year after the exodus (1:1), about a month after the tabernacle was raised (Exodus 40:17).
- The men counted are those twenty years old and upward who could go to war. The total in 1:46 is 603,550, not counting Levites, women, or children.
- The Levites replace the firstborn sons whom God spared and claimed at the Passover (Exodus 13:1–2). They are not priests; only Aaron’s line serves at the altar. The rest serve the tabernacle.
- Marching order and camping order mattered because the tabernacle had to be dismantled, carried, and reassembled at every stop, sometimes after a single night.
- The Levitical system is fulfilled and set aside in Christ, our great High Priest (Hebrews 7:11–14; 8:13). Christians are themselves a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5, 9).
- Numbers is written for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11), which is how Paul uses its wilderness material.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Numbers 1 counts the men one at a time, by name, by family, by their fathers’ houses, in a book most of us skim. Talk about what that much attention to individual names tells you about how God looks at a crowd of six hundred thousand.*

Say it plainly: God counted them because He knew them. The same God who numbers the stars and calls them by name (Psalm 147:4) had His servant walk through a camp and write down households. Jesus said the hairs of your head are numbered and not a sparrow falls without the Father (Matthew 10:29–31). Scripture never treats a multitude as a mass. It treats it as a very large number of individuals.

The pastoral use is immediate. Most of your class has felt like a number somewhere this month: at work, at the doctor’s office, in traffic, maybe even at church. Ask them how it changes a Monday to know that God has never once lost track of them. Then turn it around and ask who in the congregation is currently being treated as a number, because the God who counts expects His people to count too.

Question 2. *Numbers 4 hands each Levite family a specific load: one takes the holy furniture, one the curtains, one the boards and sockets. Nobody chose his own assignment. How should a Christian think about a job in the Lord's work that he did not pick and does not particularly enjoy?*

Begin with the obvious: in Numbers nobody volunteers and nobody negotiates. The Gershonites did not apply for curtains. Yet there is nothing demeaning in it, because every load served the same tent. Paul makes the identical argument in 1 Corinthians 12:14–25, where the parts that seem less honorable are given greater honor and the body is arranged by God as He pleased.

Press the application gently, because some in the room are tired. A Christian may certainly grow out of a task, and no congregation should let one family carry everything for twenty years. But the attitude Scripture keeps commending is the one that asks what needs carrying rather than what would be gratifying. Ask the class what they would be willing to do for a year if no one ever knew they did it.

Question 3. *The Kohathites carried the holiest objects and were warned they would die if they touched them or looked at them uncovered (4:15, 20). Why would God attach that much danger to the highest privilege, and where does the same principle operate now?*

The danger guarded the holiness. If the ark could be handled casually, then Israel would soon conclude that God could be handled casually, and the whole point of the tabernacle would be lost. Notice how the danger was answered: not by keeping the Kohathites away, but by Aaron covering everything first so they could carry it safely. God protects His people from His holiness by providing a covering, which is the shape of the entire gospel.

Where does the same principle work now? Not in furniture; there is nothing holy about a communion tray or a pulpit. It works in the handling of God's word and in leading His people. James 3:1 says teachers receive a stricter judgment. Hebrews 13:17 says leaders watch out for souls as those who must give account. Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6 is the cautionary tale. The privilege of handling holy things is real, and so is the responsibility.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Sketch the camp from Numbers 2. Put the tabernacle in the center and set each tribe where God placed it, then note who stands between the tent and the people.*

The tabernacle sits in the center. Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun camp east; Reuben, Simeon, and Gad south; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin west; Dan, Asher, and Naphtali north. Between the tribes and the tent are the Levites: Moses, Aaron, and the priests on the east, Kohath south, Gershon west, Merari north. The Levites function as a protective ring so that no unauthorized Israelite blunders into the holy place and dies (1:53).

2. *Numbers 3:12–13 says God took the Levites instead of all the firstborn of Israel. Read Exodus 13:1–2 with Exodus 12:29–30 and explain why the firstborn belonged to Him to begin with.*

At the Passover God struck every firstborn in Egypt and spared Israel's firstborn under the blood of the lamb. In Exodus 13:1–2 He therefore claimed them: every firstborn, of man and of beast, is Mine. The Levites are accepted as a substitute for that claim, which is why the numbers are compared and the surplus redeemed at five shekels each. The principle is redemption by substitution, and Scripture will keep using it until Christ.

3. *List the three Levite families and exactly what each was responsible to carry (Numbers 4:4–33). Mark which family had the heaviest work and which had the most dangerous.*

Kohath carried the ark, table, lampstand, altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary, on their shoulders, after the priests had covered them. Gershon carried the curtains, coverings, screens, and hangings of the court. Merari carried the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, pegs, and cords, the heavy structural timber and metal, and they were given wagons and oxen for it (Numbers 7:8). Merari had the heaviest labor; Kohath had the most dangerous.

4. *The Levites served from thirty years old to fifty (4:3, 23, 30). Set that beside 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, and describe what God consistently looks for in people who handle holy things.*

Both the Levitical age limits and the New Testament qualifications look for maturity proven over time. Elders must not be novices, must be blameless, must manage their own households well, must hold fast the faithful word, and must have a good testimony from outsiders. God is not chiefly looking for talent or eagerness; He is looking for

tested character. Note also that the Levites at fifty moved from carrying to assisting (8:25–26), which is a dignified picture of older servants still serving.

5. Somebody had to carry the sockets. Name the least visible job in your congregation, find out who actually does it, and this week either thank that person by name or take a turn doing it.

Answers will vary. Expect answers like the person who unlocks the building, counts the contribution, runs the sound, prepares the Lord's Supper, mows, cleans, keeps the nursery, or drives the van. The action is what matters: a name spoken, a note written, or an hour taken over. If nobody in the class knows who does these jobs, that is worth a sober moment.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not spend the hour on the census totals. The large numbers have prompted much discussion; take the text as it stands, note that God ordered the count, and keep the class moving toward what the arrangement teaches.
- Do not build a clergy and laity division out of the Levites. Under the new covenant every Christian is a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9), and the Levitical order has been changed along with the law (Hebrews 7:11–14).
- Do not use the Kohathites to create superstition about buildings, furniture, or communion ware. Nothing in a modern meeting place is holy in that sense. The reverence God still requires is for His word, His name, and His people.
- Resist allegorizing every detail of the camp. Draw the plain lessons about order, individual worth, and reverence, and leave the speculative diagrams alone.

Honest Weights and Clean Hearts

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Proverbs 20 keeps returning to what is underneath appearances. The wine looks like friendship and is a mocker. The sluggard has a reason and the reason is weather. The man who announces his own goodness is common; the actually faithful man is rare. The buyer says it is worthless and then boasts. The child seems too young to read, and yet even a child is known by his deeds. Solomon is teaching a class to look past the surface of people, including themselves.

Verse 9 is the hinge of the chapter and one of the great questions of the Old Testament. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? The expected answer is nobody, which is exactly where Paul lands in Romans 3:23. Notice the verb: made my heart clean. The question is not whether anyone is sinless but whether anyone can clean himself, and the whole Bible answers with a cross.

Then the chapter keeps circling back to the Lord's involvement in ordinary commerce and ordinary steps. He hates the crooked scale. He made the hearing ear and the seeing eye. A man's steps are of the Lord. His lamp searches the inward parts. Teach this chapter as the assurance and the warning that it is: there is no private life, and there is no unimportant transaction.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is part of Solomon's collection of individual sayings (10:1 to 22:16), each generally complete in two lines.
- Ancient commerce ran on stone weights and measured containers, so a merchant with two sets of weights could rob every customer quietly. Scripture condemns this repeatedly (Leviticus 19:35–36; Deuteronomy 25:13–16; Amos 8:5; Micah 6:11).
- The word translated “abomination” marks what God finds detestable; using it of business fraud puts dishonest trade in the same category as idolatry.
- Verse 9 belongs to a strand running through the Old Testament that exposes the need for a cleansing no one can perform for himself (Psalm 51:2, 10; Jeremiah 17:9; Job 14:4).
- Remember the genre. These are reliable general principles about how life runs under God's order, not guarantees for individual cases.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 20:1 says wine is a mocker and strong drink a brawler. Beyond the obvious, describe what that verse says alcohol does to a person's judgment, and talk about how a Christian should think about it in light of Ephesians 5:18 and 1 Peter 4:3.*

The verse says the drink itself does the mocking and the brawling, which is a striking way to put it. What alcohol removes first is judgment, and judgment is the very faculty a person would need in order to decide he has had enough. That is why “whoever is led astray by it is not wise” is the second half of the verse, and why Proverbs 23:29–35 later gives the most vivid description of a hangover in ancient literature.

Take the New Testament line honestly and without either sneering or winking. Drunkenness is plainly condemned (Galatians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 6:10). Ephesians 5:18 contrasts being filled with wine and being filled with the Spirit. 1 Peter 4:3 lists drinking parties among the things the Gentiles do and Christians have left behind. Add the question of influence (Romans 14:21) and the simple fact that nobody who ever wrecked a family with alcohol intended to. Ask your class what wisdom would counsel for a person who cannot be sure which drink is the one that changes everything.

Question 2. *Verse 9 asks a question no one can answer: who can say, “I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin”? If you answer honestly, how should that change the way you treat the people who annoy you most?*

The honest answer is that nobody can say it. Every person in the room has sinned, and no one has cleaned his own heart. Romans 3:23 states it flatly, and 1 John 1:8 says that claiming otherwise is self-deception. Be careful to teach this as universal personal sin, not as inherited guilt. We are guilty because we have sinned (Ezekiel 18:20), not because Adam did.

The change it works in us is toward mercy. The person who has taken verse 9 seriously cannot maintain contempt for long. Jesus told a parable about exactly this in Matthew 18:23–35, where a forgiven man throttles a fellow servant over pocket change. Ask the class to name, silently, the person whose faults they recite most often, and then to say verse 9 slowly with that person in mind.

Question 3. *Twice in this chapter (20:10, 23) God calls unequal weights and measures an abomination. Where do modern versions of the crooked scale turn up in ordinary work, business, and family life?*

Start where they can see it: the invoice padded, the hours reported but not worked, the expense report stretched, the repair not actually performed, the item sold with a known defect unmentioned, the tax return that leaves something out. Then push it past business into family life, where the scales are also uneven: the grace we extend to ourselves and withhold from a spouse, the standard we apply to our children and exempt ourselves from, the version of the argument we tell our friends.

The reason this belongs in a Bible class rather than an ethics seminar is verse 23: the Lord detests it. Not merely dislikes, not merely disapproves. Christian integrity is not primarily a reputation strategy; it is worship. Ask the class for one place this week where an honest weight will cost them money, time, or standing, and let them name it out loud if they are willing.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Collect the verses in this chapter about laziness and diligence, beginning with 20:4 and 20:13. Write out what the sluggard’s reasoning actually sounds like when he says it out loud.*

Verse 4 says the lazy man will not plow because of winter, so he begs in harvest and has nothing. Verse 13 warns against loving sleep. Verse 21 notes an inheritance gained hastily. The sluggard’s reasoning always sounds reasonable in the moment: the conditions are not right, I am tired, I will start when things settle down, I work better under pressure. Proverbs never mocks rest; it mocks the endless postponement that dresses itself up as prudence.

2. *Proverbs 20:27 calls the spirit of a man the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths. Add 1 Corinthians 2:11 and Hebrews 4:12–13, and describe what God sees that no one else ever will.*

1 Corinthians 2:11 says no one knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him, and Hebrews 4:12–13 says the word pierces to the dividing of soul and spirit and that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. God sees motive: why you gave, why you volunteered, why you forgave, why you told that story about someone. The lamp is not hostile surveillance; it is the thoroughness of a God who intends to make us clean.

3. *Verse 6 says most men proclaim their own goodness, but a faithful man who can find. Name three people you know to have been faithful over a long stretch of years, and write down what they have in common.*

Answers will vary. What faithful people usually have in common is unremarkable: they show up, they finish what they start, they keep their word when it costs, they are the same in private, and they have done it for a long time. Encourage the class to notice that none of those qualities require talent. Faithfulness is available to everyone, which is why God asks for it (1 Corinthians 4:2).

4. *Verse 14 pictures a buyer running the price down and then boasting about his bargain as he leaves. Read Leviticus 19:35–36 and 1 Thessalonians 4:6, and decide where the line falls between shrewdness and defrauding.*

Leviticus 19:35–36 requires honest weights and measures, and 1 Thessalonians 4:6 forbids taking advantage of a brother in any matter. Negotiating a price is not sin; misrepresenting the value of something to gain an advantage is.

The test in verse 14 is the boast afterward, which reveals that the buyer knew all along what the item was worth. Answers should land on truthfulness rather than on shrewdness.

5. Verse 22 says do not say “I will recompense evil,” but wait on the Lord. Name the person you are keeping a private score against, and do something specific and good for that person this week.

Answers will vary. Expect resistance; most people would rather forgive in the abstract. Romans 12:17–21 says the same thing Solomon does and adds the method: overcome evil with good. The specific act is the point. A meal, a note, a favor, a public word of respect. Look for whether anyone reports back next week.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verse 7, that the children of a just man are blessed after him, is a general principle, not a promise. Faithful parents in your class have wayward children, and this verse must never be used to accuse them.
- Handle the alcohol discussion from Scripture rather than from culture or family tradition, and keep it from becoming an argument about one glass of wine. Teach the plain condemnations, the principle of influence, and the wisdom of verse 1.
- Verse 9 teaches universal personal sin, not inherited guilt or total depravity. Each person becomes guilty when he himself sins (Ezekiel 18:20), and children are safe (Matthew 18:3; 19:14). Say so, because someone will hear the verse the other way.
- Verse 24, that a man’s steps are of the Lord, speaks of God’s providence over life, not of God determining each person’s choices or eternal destiny. Keep free will and accountability firmly in place.

Little Ones and Lost Sheep

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The section begins at the bottom of the mountain, and the contrast is deliberate. Above, the glory and the voice; below, a desperate father, a suffering boy, and nine disciples who could do nothing. Jesus heals the child and then answers the disciples' private question bluntly. Their failure was unbelief. Faith like a mustard seed, He says, would move a mountain, meaning that the size of real faith matters less than its presence and its object.

The temple tax scene is easy to skip and worth ten minutes. Jesus establishes that as the Son He is exempt, and then pays anyway, lest we offend them. The Son of God, who owns the temple, hands over the coin. That posture sets up everything that follows, because the very next thing the disciples do is argue about which of them is greatest.

Matthew 18 is often called the chapter on greatness and on little ones, and it hangs together tightly. Become like a child or you will not enter. Receive one such child and you receive Christ. Cause one of these little ones to stumble and it would be better to be drowned. Do not despise one of them. The shepherd goes after the one that wandered. And then, with all that established, here is how you go after a brother who has sinned: privately, then with witnesses, then with the church, and always for the purpose of gaining him.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This immediately follows the transfiguration, and the healing takes place as Jesus comes down to the waiting crowd.
- The tax in 17:24 is the half-shekel temple tax of Exodus 30:13–16, not a Roman tax. The question put to Peter concerns whether his Teacher supports the temple.
- In Jewish teaching of the day, children had little social standing. Setting one in the middle of a dispute about rank was a deliberate shock.
- “Little ones” in Matthew 18 includes children but widens to the humble and vulnerable disciple, as verse 6 makes clear by saying “these little ones who believe in Me.”
- Matthew 18:15–17 is the New Testament’s clearest procedure for congregational discipline, and it is echoed in 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15, Galatians 6:1, and Titus 3:10.
- Binding and loosing here, as in 16:19, means acting on earth in accordance with what heaven has already determined.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The disciples ask privately why they could not cast the demon out, and Jesus answers, “because of your unbelief” (17:19–20). How does faith the size of a mustard seed move a mountain, and what is this passage not promising?*

Faith that moves a mountain is not a quantity of feeling; it is confidence resting on what God has actually said. A mustard seed is tiny, but it is alive, and that is the contrast Jesus draws with the disciples, who had been given authority in chapter 10 and had stopped expecting God to use it. Note that the object matters more than the intensity: faith in a promise God never made is not small faith but misplaced faith.

Say clearly what the passage does not promise. It is not a formula by which a modern Christian can command miracles, move literal mountains, or guarantee a healing. The apostles had a confirmed, miraculous commission (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4), and those confirming gifts served their purpose and ceased when revelation was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8–10). Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Teach the passage as a rebuke of practical

unbelief in prayer and in expectation, which is a real and widespread problem, and do not turn it into a promise God did not make.

Question 2. *Asked who is greatest in the kingdom, Jesus sets a child in the middle of the room. Which quality of a child is He holding up in 18:3–4, and which qualities of children is He plainly not commending?*

He is holding up humility and dependence. Verse 4 says it outright: whoever humbles himself as this little child is greatest. A child in that culture had no rank to protect, no résumé, no leverage. He receives. He is not embarrassed to need help. Jesus is not commending childishness, immaturity, gullibility, or the tantrums any parent in the room could describe.

There is a second truth here worth stating, because Matthew 18:3 and 19:14 carry it: children are safe. Jesus says we must become like them to enter, which would be nonsense if they were born guilty. Scripture teaches that each person becomes guilty when he himself sins (Ezekiel 18:20). Say it kindly and plainly, because a parent in your class has lost a child or is worried about one.

Question 3. *Matthew 18:15–17 lays out four steps for dealing with a brother who has sinned. Walk through them in order, then be honest about which step congregations most often skip, and why.*

Step one: go and tell him his fault between you and him alone, and if he hears you, you have gained your brother, which is the stated goal of the entire process. Step two: take one or two more, so that every word is established. Step three: tell it to the church. Step four: if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector, which is withdrawal, not hatred (2 Thessalonians 3:14–15).

The skipped step is almost always the first one, and the reason is that it is the hardest and least satisfying. It is easier to tell someone else, easier to write the whole matter off, easier to wait for the elders to handle it. But going alone protects the brother's reputation and gives him the best chance to repent with the fewest people knowing. Ask the class honestly how many conversations in the last year went to a third party before they went to the person. Then note Galatians 6:1 on the spirit required: gentleness, and watching yourself.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the temple tax episode in 17:24–27. Note the argument Jesus makes about kings, sons, and strangers, and then note the reason He gives for paying it anyway.*

Jesus asks Peter whether kings collect taxes from their own sons or from strangers, and when Peter answers strangers, Jesus says, "Then the sons are free." As the Son of the God whose temple it was, He owed nothing. Yet He says, "Nevertheless, lest we offend them," and sends Peter to find a coin in a fish's mouth, enough for them both. Christ surrenders a right rather than put a needless obstacle in someone's way, which is exactly what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 8 and 9.

2. *Read Matthew 18:6–9 slowly, then set 1 Corinthians 8:9–13 beside it. What does Scripture say about the weight of causing another person to stumble, and what does it ask you to give up?*

Matthew 18:6–9 says it would be better to be drowned with a millstone than to cause one of these little ones to sin, and it uses deliberately extreme language about cutting off a hand or foot to make the seriousness unmistakable. 1 Corinthians 8:9–13 applies it to liberty: Paul says he would never eat meat again rather than cause a brother to stumble. Scripture asks you to give up permitted things for the sake of someone weaker. The hand and foot are hyperbole for decisive removal, not literal maiming.

3. *Jesus says the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to look for the one (18:12–14). Compare Luke 15:3–7 and identify who the one is in Matthew's setting, and how that changes who the parable is aimed at.*

In Luke 15 the parable answers Pharisees complaining that Jesus received sinners, so the one is an outsider being sought. In Matthew 18 it stands among warnings about little ones who believe in Christ, so the one is a disciple who has wandered, and the parable is aimed at the other ninety-nine, the church. Matthew's version is about our responsibility toward straying brethren, and it sets up the process of verses 15 through 17.

4. *Matthew 18:19–20 is usually quoted about small prayer meetings. Read verses 15 through 20 as one unbroken paragraph, and say what the two or three are actually doing when Christ promises to be among them.*

They are dealing with the brother who has sinned. Verse 18 concerns binding and loosing, verse 19 concerns two of them agreeing about the matter, and verse 20 assures them that Christ is present with the two or three who are carrying out this painful work. The promise is not that God hears small prayer groups better than individuals, though He certainly hears small groups. Read in context, it is an assurance that a church acting in Christ's name in discipline is not acting alone.

5. *There is a person who has drifted from the Lord whose name came to mind while you read the parable of the lost sheep. Write the name down, and go see that person this week.*

Answers will vary. This is the question most likely to produce real fruit all week. Encourage a visit rather than a message, and a question rather than a lecture. James 5:19–20 says turning a sinner from the error of his way saves a soul from death. If someone hesitates because they fear a bad reception, remind them that the shepherd in the parable went looking anyway.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Matthew 17:20 is used to promise present-day miracles and to blame the sick for insufficient faith. Teach what faith is and what it rests on, note that the confirming gifts served their purpose and ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8–10), and protect the suffering people in your class from a cruel misreading.
- Matthew 18:10 mentions the angels of these little ones. Scripture affirms that angels are ministering spirits sent for those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14) and says no more than that. Resist speculation about guardian angels.
- Matthew 18:20 is regularly lifted out of its paragraph. Teach it in context as an assurance to a church acting in discipline, while affirming that Christ is with His people always (Matthew 28:20).
- Church discipline is painful and is often either neglected entirely or carried out harshly. Teach both the procedure and its purpose, which Jesus states in verse 15: that you may gain your brother.

Taught the Way More Accurately

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Corinth was a sailor's town, a commercial crossroads with a reputation so bad that its name had become a verb in the Greek language. Paul arrives alone, discouraged, and by his own account in weakness, fear, and much trembling (1 Corinthians 2:3). He meets a displaced Jewish couple who share his trade, works with his hands, and preaches every Sabbath. When the synagogue turns on him he shakes out his garments, says their blood is on their own heads, and moves next door, where the ruler of the synagogue is converted.

Then comes one of the great encouragements in Acts. The Lord tells Paul in a vision not to be afraid, to keep speaking, and gives the reason: I have many people in this city. Not had. Have. God knew who in Corinth would hear the gospel before any of them had heard it, and He kept Paul there eighteen months to preach to them. Gallio's refusal to prosecute religious disputes then gave the church a measure of legal cover for years.

The last section belongs to the Ephesian material and it is doctrinally rich. Apollos, brilliant and sincere, knew only the baptism of John, and a tentmaking couple took him aside privately and explained the way of God more accurately. Twelve men at Ephesus were in the same condition and had not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. Paul asks two diagnostic questions, explains John's baptism, and when they hear, they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Luke includes this precisely because baptism is not a formality; it matters what a person was baptized into.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is the end of the second preaching tour and the beginning of the third, roughly A.D. 51 to 54.
- Aquila and Priscilla were in Corinth because Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome, an event Roman historians also record. The couple appears repeatedly in the New Testament, always together and always serving (Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).
- Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, and an inscription at Delphi dates his term, which makes Acts 18:12 one of the anchor points for New Testament chronology.
- The vow at Cenchrea (18:18) was a personal Jewish vow, likely Nazirite in character. It was voluntary and cultural, not a return to the law as a means of justification.
- John's baptism was a baptism of repentance preparing Israel for the Christ. It was valid until Christ died and the new covenant came into force, and after Pentecost it was no longer the baptism Christ commanded.
- Miraculous gifts in Acts come either directly from God or through the laying on of an apostle's hands (8:14–18; 19:6; Romans 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:6). That is a key observation for understanding why such gifts did not continue.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Apollos was eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, and teaching accurately the things of the Lord, and he still needed correcting (18:24–26). Look at how Priscilla and Aquila did it, and talk about what it would take for someone to do that for you.*

Notice the manner. They heard him in the synagogue, they took him aside, and they explained the way of God more accurately. Privately, not publicly. Instructively, not combatively. And Apollos, who had every reason to be defensive, received it, went on to Achaia, and helped the believers greatly, powerfully refuting the Jews from the Scriptures. Everyone in this story behaves well, which is rarer than it should be.

Turn the question on the class. Who is permitted to tell you that you are wrong about something in the Bible?

What would a person have to do so that you would actually listen rather than argue? Proverbs 9:8–9 says rebuke a

wise man and he will love you. The willingness to be taught more accurately is the difference between a man like Apollos and a man who spends forty years defending his first opinion.

Question 2. *In Acts 19:1–5 twelve men who had already been baptized were baptized again. Work carefully through Paul's questions and their answers, and discuss why the first baptism was not sufficient.*

Follow the text carefully. Paul asks whether they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, and they say they have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. He asks into what then they were baptized, and they say into John's baptism. Paul explains that John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe on the One coming after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The first baptism was not sufficient because the covenant had changed. John's baptism prepared Israel for a Messiah who had not yet died; the baptism Christ commanded is into His death, for the remission of sins, into His body (Romans 6:3–4; Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27). These men were sincere, they were wet, and they were not baptized into Christ. Ephesians 4:5 says there is now one baptism. Handle this with great care, because somebody in your class was immersed as a teenager for reasons they could not now defend, and this passage is their invitation, not their condemnation.

Question 3. *The Lord told Paul, "I have many people in this city," and Paul stayed eighteen months in Corinth, a place with a reputation across the empire (18:9–11). How should that promise change the way you look at the community you live in?*

The promise reframes a city. Corinth had idolatry, prostitution attached to the temple, litigation, drunkenness, and the whole catalog Paul later recites in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 before adding, "And such were some of you." God looked at that city and said He had many people in it. He was not describing who was righteous; He was describing who would respond when they heard. That is why Paul stayed.

Ask the class to name their own Corinth: the neighborhood, the plant, the school, the town nobody expects anything from spiritually. Then ask what they have concluded about the people in it. Most of us quietly decide a place is hard and adjust our effort accordingly. God's assessment was that many people there were His before a single one of them believed. The pastoral point is perseverance: keep speaking, do not be afraid, and stay long enough to find them.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Acts 18:1–11 tells you about how Paul supported himself, who worked with him, and how he divided his time.*

Paul came to Corinth from Athens, found Aquila and Priscilla, stayed and worked with them because they were tentmakers by trade, and reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, persuading Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia he was compelled by the word, testifying that Jesus is the Christ. After the opposition he moved to the house of Justus next door to the synagogue and continued a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. He worked with his hands and preached; the two were not in competition (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 11:7–9).

2. *Acts 18:8 says Crispus believed with all his household and that many Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Read Paul's own comment in 1 Corinthians 1:14–17, and explain why he personally baptized so few and what that does not mean.*

Paul says he thanks God he baptized none of them except Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas, lest anyone should say he baptized in his own name, and that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the gospel. He was avoiding the personality cults already forming in Corinth. This does not mean baptism is unimportant; Paul is the one who wrote Romans 6:3–4 and Galatians 3:27, and Acts 18:8 says the Corinthians who believed were baptized. He simply left the baptizing to others.

3. Compare the baptism of John (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:4) with the baptism Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38). List every difference you can find, and note what Ephesians 4:5 says about how many baptisms there are now.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, preparing Israel for the coming Messiah, administered before the cross and only to Jews. Christ's baptism is into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into His death and resurrection, for the remission of sins, adding the saved to His body, and it is for all nations. Ephesians 4:5 says there is now one baptism, which is why these twelve men were baptized again and why no one today needs to repeat John's.

4. Acts 19:6 says the Holy Spirit came upon these men when Paul laid his hands on them. Set that beside Acts 8:14–18 and Romans 1:11, and identify who was able to impart such gifts and what follows for us.

In Acts 8 Philip preached and baptized in Samaria, but the apostles Peter and John had to come down before the Samaritans received such gifts, because they came through the laying on of the apostles' hands. Paul tells the Romans he longs to see them that he may impart some spiritual gift. What follows is plain: once the apostles died and those on whom they had laid hands died, the means of imparting such gifts was gone. That is consistent with 1 Corinthians 13:8–10, where the partial passes away when the complete revelation comes.

5. Priscilla and Aquila took a preacher home and taught him. Name one person you could sit down with in that same spirit this month, and set the date before you close this book.

Answers will vary. The model is worth stating: private, humble, unhurried, in a home, with the Scriptures open. This is how most people are actually taught. Encourage the class to think of someone who is already interested and already sincere, perhaps someone who is teaching or serving on incomplete information, and to invite them to supper rather than to a debate.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Acts 19:1–5 is one of the clearest passages on the necessity of scriptural baptism, and it is also one of the most personally unsettling. Teach it plainly, and be prepared to sit down privately afterward with anyone who begins to question what their own baptism was for.
- Do not use this passage to teach that everyone baptized in another group must automatically be immersed again without inquiry. Ask what these men were asked: what was your baptism for, and into what were you baptized (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4)? Let Scripture set the questions.
- The laying on of Paul's hands in 19:6 is the occasion for teaching how miraculous gifts were given and why they ceased (Acts 8:14–18; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). Be firm on the text and gentle with people who have been taught otherwise.
- Priscilla is named with Aquila in teaching Apollos, and the setting is private instruction by a husband and wife in their own home. This is a fine example of a Christian woman teaching, and it is not a warrant for women teaching or leading in the assembly, which the New Testament addresses separately (1 Corinthians 14:34–35; 1 Timothy 2:11–12). Say both parts, and say them warmly.
- Paul's vow at Cenchrea (18:18) sometimes troubles readers. It was a voluntary personal vow among Jewish brethren, not an attempt to be justified by law, which Paul had already ruled out in Galatians.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Numbers 5–9 · Proverbs 21 · Matthew 18:21–19:30 · Acts 19:11–20:16

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