

THE WAY, SESSION 12

I Have Many People in This City

The Acts of the Apostles 18:1-19:41, Corinth, Ephesus, and the God Who Works Through Matter

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants meet the Church's working ecosystem in the two great pagan metropolises: a tentmaking apostle sustained by a night vision, a married couple who catechize an eloquent preacher over dinner, and believers who had only John's baptism completed with Christian baptism and apostolic hands. In Ephesus they discover the God who is unembarrassed to work through matter, handkerchiefs from Paul's skin, and trace that scandalous generosity back through Peter's shadow, the hem of Christ's garment, and the bones of Elisha, into the Church's teaching on sacramentals and relics.

Catholic Touchstone. Sacramentals, relics, and the sacramental principle. "God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them" (19:11-12). Luke reports it without embarrassment, because Scripture has never been embarrassed by grace through matter: a dead man revived at the touch of Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:21), the woman healed touching Christ's garment (Mark 5:27-30), the sick laid where Peter's shadow might pass (5:15). The Church's sacramentals and her veneration of relics stand in exactly this line (CCC 1667-1670, 1674), and the sons of Sceva, in this same chapter, mark the counterfeit the Church herself condemns: holy things used as magic (CCC 2111). The chapter contains both the doctrine and its abuse, labeled.

What You Need to Know

Corinth first: a boomtown of commerce and vice, the last city a strategist would pick for a church. Paul arrives alone, afraid by his own admission (1 Corinthians 2:3), and God gives him three anchors: work, companions, and a word. The work is tentmaking with Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple expelled from Rome under Claudius; the apostle to the nations pays his own way at a workbench, and the Church has honored the dignity of labor ever since. The word comes by night: "Do not be afraid... for I am with you... for I have many people in this city" (18:9-10). Sit with that sentence and its Old Testament twin, which the group will discover: Elijah, despairing in hostile territory, told by God of seven thousand hidden faithful he could not see (1 Kings 19:18). God counts people who have not yet believed as already His; Paul stays eighteen months on the strength of the census heaven had already taken. Note also Crispus, the synagogue ruler, who believed "together with all his household" (18:8), tonight's quiet echo of last session's touchstone, and Gallio the proconsul, whose refusal to hear the case (18:12-17) gives the Way a favorable ruling and years of shelter in Corinth, and whose name, carved on a stone at Delphi, fixes his proconsulship to about AD 51-52 and gives Paul's Corinthian ministry, and with it the chronology of his letters and journeys, its single most important approximate anchor in the calendar.

Then Apollos (18:24-28), one of the most instructive minor characters in Scripture: eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, accurate as far as he goes, and incomplete, knowing only the baptism of John. Watch what the Church's ecosystem does with him: Priscilla and Aquila, a lay married couple, tentmakers, hear him, take him aside privately, "and expounded to him the way of God more accurately" (18:26). Note Luke's phrase: *the way of God*. The eloquent man lets himself be catechized over what was probably dinner, by a woman and her husband, and emerges a champion who "powerfully confuted the Jews in public." Humble teachability plus private, charitable correction: the Church's quality control, working exactly as designed.

Ephesus opens with a scene that consolidates two earlier touchstones (19:1-7): Paul finds about twelve disciples who, like Apollos, know only John's baptism, and have not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul's diagnosis distinguishes precisely: John's baptism was repentance *in preparation*; Christian baptism is into the Lord Jesus. They are baptized, Paul lays his hands on them, and the Spirit comes. Preparation is not possession, sincerity is not sacrament, and the Session 6 pattern, water and apostolic hands, holds. The Church has never treated the sacraments as interchangeable with good intentions, because Acts does not.

Then the Ephesian crescendo: two years of daily teaching in the hall of Tyrannus until "all the residents of Asia heard the word" (19:10); the extraordinary miracles through cloth from Paul's body; the sons of Sceva, freelance exorcists wielding the name of Jesus "whom Paul preaches" as an incantation, overpowered by the demoniac with the most darkly comic line in Acts: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" (19:15); the great bonfire of magic books, fifty thousand pieces of silver, tens of thousands of days' wages, burned by their own owners as the cost of a clean break (19:19); and Luke's scoreboard: "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (19:20). Finally the riot: Demetrius the silversmith, who sees the Gospel threatening his shrine trade, packages his profit motive as piety, and two hours of "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" fill the theater. For the second time in our study, the Gospel's collision with a business model produces a mob; grace is bad for the bondage economy. Note the Way's two sightings in this chapter for the Thread Watch, and prepare the steelman on relics with special care: it is the touchstone, and the sons of Sceva are your gift, because the chapter itself supplies the distinction between sacrament and sorcery.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

2 Kings 13:20-21. A burial interrupted by raiders; the corpse thrown hastily into Elisha's grave; "and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood on his feet." The Old Testament's own relic miracle: God's power still working through the body of His holy one, even in death. The handkerchiefs of Ephesus have a pedigree, and the group should find it themselves.

2 Kings 2:8, 13-14. Elisha strikes the Jordan with Elijah's fallen mantle and the waters part: the master's cloak carrying the master's grace into the successor's hand. Cloth, in the economy of the prophets, was never just cloth.

1 Kings 19:14-18. Elijah at Horeb, certain he alone is left, answered by God's hidden census: "I will leave seven thousand in Israel... that have not bowed to Baal." The Lord's night word to Paul in Corinth, "I have many people in this city," is the same divine arithmetic: God's people in a place are more numerous than His prophet's despair can count, and some of them have not yet believed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Jerome, *Against Vigilantius* (written AD 406)

When Vigilantius sneered at the honor paid to the martyrs' remains, St. Jerome answered for the whole Church: we do not worship relics, we do not adore the sun or moon or angels or the bones of any man; we honor the relics of the martyrs in order to adore Him whose martyrs they are, honoring the servants so that the honor may flow to the Lord. The distinction Vigilantius could not see, between veneration and worship, the Church has never lost.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, Book 22 (5th century)

St. Augustine devotes pages of his greatest work to cataloguing miracles he could verify in his own diocese, many wrought at the shrine of the relics of St. Stephen, the martyr of our fifth session, healings of the blind, the dying, the dead raised, documented with names and witnesses. The God who healed through handkerchiefs from Paul, Augustine testifies, was still healing through the bones of Stephen in Africa, and the Church kept records.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom, Homily on the words, Salute Priscilla and Aquila (4th century)

Chrysostom preached an entire homily on this couple, marveling that tentmakers instructed the eloquent Apollos, and that Paul names Priscilla first. Their workshop was a church, he says, and their marriage a school of virtue; let no one plead ordinary life as an excuse, for the catechists of this chapter held needles, not offices.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1667-1670. Sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church which prepare us to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify different circumstances of life; they work not as magic but through the Church's intercession and the disposition of faith.

CCC 1674. The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, among which the Catechism names the veneration of relics.

CCC 2111. Superstition is the deviation of religious feeling: to attribute the efficacy of prayers or sacramental signs to their mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions they demand, is to fall into superstition. The sons of Sceva are its patron cautionary tale.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

Thread 1, The Name: three sightings tonight. Priscilla and Aquila expound to Apollos "the way of God more accurately" (18:26); at Ephesus some "spoke evil of the Way before the congregation" (19:9); and the riot is "no little stir concerning the Way" (19:23). Have the group mark each aloud as they appear; the name is now how Luke refers to the whole movement under pressure. Three sightings remain: one next session, two in the finale, where the thread gives up its last secret.

Thread 2, The Map. Corinth and Ephesus: the commercial and religious capitals of the Aegean world, held for eighteen months and over two years respectively. The Gospel is no longer visiting the Gentile world; it is moving in.

Thread 4, The Breaking of the Bread. Resolution next session. Absolute silence tonight.

Callback registered: Crispus's household (18:8) quietly seconds last session's touchstone, and Gallio's dismissal builds the legal shelter Paul's citizenship began constructing in Philippi.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover the Elijah-at-Horeb pattern behind the Lord's night word in Corinth and can articulate its hope for evangelizing hard places.
2. Participants can describe the Apollos pattern of humble teachability and private, charitable correction.
3. Participants can explain the distinction between John's baptism and Christian baptism, and why sincerity does not substitute for sacrament.
4. Participants discover Elisha's bones behind the Ephesian handkerchiefs and can present the Catholic teaching on sacramentals and relics, answering the superstition charge with the chapter's own sons-of-Sceva distinction.
5. Participants each commit to praying for their city with God's census in mind, and to one rightly ordered use of a sacramental at home.

Time Note

Planned for 90 minutes: Win 15, Build 55, Send 15, prayer and memory verse 5. If running long, cut in this order: (1) the second Win question, (2) the Dig Deeper on Gallio's stone, (3) compress question 7 (the book burning and riot) into a vivid two minute retelling. Do not cut the Corinth night word, the Apollos scene, or the relics steelman.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord of the city, you had many people in Corinth before Corinth knew it, and you have many in our city tonight. Give us your census-taker's hope. Make our homes workshops of catechesis like Priscilla's, our corrections private and kind, our devotions clean of all superstition, and our grip on everything that competes with you loose enough to burn. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Who gave you the most valuable correction of your life, and what made you able to receive it?
2. Is there a physical object connected to your faith or your family, a rosary, a Bible, a grandmother's crucifix, that genuinely matters to you? Why do objects carry so much?

Build (55 minutes)

1. Read Acts 18:1-11. Assemble Paul's situation in Corinth: his trade, his companions, his fears (Paul himself admits them in 1 Corinthians 2:3), and the night vision. Then, live discovery: read 1 Kings 19:14-18, Elijah at Horeb. What is the Lord's answer to both discouraged servants, and what staggering claim hides in "I have many people in this city"?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Paul arrives alone in a boomtown of commerce and vice, works leather with Aquila and Priscilla, refugees from Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome, and by his own later admission was there "in weakness and in much fear and trembling." The Lord's night word gives him three anchors: do not be afraid, I am with you, and the astonishing third: "I have many people in this city." Elijah at Horeb, certain he alone was left, received the same correction: God had seven thousand hidden faithful the prophet could not see. And notice the tense in Corinth: God speaks of people in Corinth as *His* before Paul has met them, a promise most readers hear as heaven counting those who will yet believe. Paul stays eighteen months on the strength of heaven's census. Every discouraged evangelist, every parent praying for a child, every catechist in a hard parish should carry this sentence: God's people in your city outnumber your despair, and some of them have not believed yet.

2. Read Acts 18:8 and 18:12-17. Two quick observations: how does Crispus believe, echoing last session, and what does the proconsul Gallio's ruling accomplish for the young Church, whether Gallio cares or not?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed "together with all his household," the third household of our study, quietly seconding last session's touchstone. And Gallio, brother of the philosopher Seneca, throws the case out: if this were crime he would hear it, but questions about words and names and Jewish law are not Rome's business. His bored dismissal means that here, at least, Rome treats the Way as an internal matter of Judaism, no crime to try, and Paul preaches on for many months under that shade. God can use a proconsul's indifference as effectively as an angel; providence does not require its instruments to be devout.

3. Read Acts 18:24-28, the education of Apollos. Build his resume, name precisely what he lacked, and then watch the correction: who does it, how, where, and what does Apollos become? Catch the phrase Luke uses for what they taught him.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Apollos of Alexandria: eloquent, well versed in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, and knowing only the baptism of John, a brilliant man with a gap. The correction is a miniature of the Church working perfectly: Priscilla and Aquila, lay tentmakers, a married couple, hear him, take him aside privately, no public humiliation, no letter-writing campaign, "and expounded to him the way of God more accurately." Mark Luke's phrase: the *way* of God, our thread brushing past. And mark the order of the names: Priscilla first, a detail many readers take as a sign of her prominence in the couple's shared teaching of the most eloquent preacher of the age. Apollos receives it humbly and emerges a champion, powerfully confuting opponents in public, "showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus." Two lessons, both rare: the greatness of correcting privately and charitably, and the greater greatness of being correctable. The Church's quality control has always run on both.

4. Read Acts 19:1-7. What do the twelve Ephesian disciples lack, how does Paul diagnose it, and what two actions complete them? Distinguish precisely between John's baptism and Christian baptism, and connect the scene to Session 6.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Disciples, sincere ones, who have not so much as heard that there is a Holy Spirit, because they received only John's baptism. Paul's diagnosis distinguishes exactly: John's was a baptism of repentance, preparation, pointing forward to the one coming after; Christian baptism is *into the Lord Jesus* and confers what John's only promised. So they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and Paul lays his hands upon them, and the Holy Spirit comes: water and apostolic hands, the Session 6 pattern intact at the other end of the map. The standing lesson: sincerity is not sacrament, and preparation is not possession. Devout intentions, even devout rites, do not substitute for the actual means Christ instituted, which is why the Church has never treated "I mean well" and "I am baptized and confirmed" as interchangeable sentences.

5. Read Acts 19:8-12. Describe Paul's Ephesian operation and then the extraordinary miracles of verses 11-12, exactly as Luke reports them. Now, live discovery: read 2 Kings 13:20-21, and recall Peter's shadow (5:15) and the touch of Christ's garment (Mark 5:27-30). What pattern runs through all four scenes, and what does it reveal about how God likes to work?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Two years of daily dialogues in the hall of Tyrannus until all Asia hears the word, and alongside the preaching: "God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them." Now the pedigree: a corpse flung into Elisha's grave revived the instant it touched the prophet's bones; a hemorrhaging woman was healed touching Jesus' garment, and He perceived that power had gone out of Him (Mark 5:30); the sick of Jerusalem were laid where Peter's shadow might fall. Four scenes, one pattern: the God who became flesh is unembarrassed to work through matter, and God freely chooses to keep working through the bodies and even the belongings of His holy ones. Note Luke's careful grammar: *God* did the miracles, by the hands of Paul; the cloth conveys, it does not contain. This is the sacramental principle in its boldest form, and it is the entire logic of the Church's sacramentals and her veneration of relics (CCC 1667-1670, 1674): grace, sovereign and free, delighting to travel through the physical, because the Word became physical.

Build the steelman. The Protestant objection here is old, serious, and partly aimed at real abuses: the handkerchief miracles were unique apostolic signs authenticating the first preaching, not a warrant for a

permanent religion of objects. Venerating bones, touching cloths to tombs, wearing medals, this is the pagan instinct in Christian dress, treating created things as batteries of divine power, exactly the magic mindset Scripture condemns. Dead men's bones defile (Numbers 19:11, 16); honor paid before relics slides, in practice, into worship; and church history's relic trade, forgeries, and superstitions prove where the road leads. Did not this very chapter show freelancers treating the holy name itself as an incantation, and being thrashed for it? Let the objection stand at full strength, because the answer is standing in the same chapter.

6. Press the steelman using the chapter's own contrast case. Read Acts 19:13-17, the sons of Sceva. What exactly are they doing with the name of Jesus, how does it differ from what God was doing through Paul's handkerchiefs, and what does the difference teach? Then make the honest concessions the objection has earned.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The sons of Sceva wield the holy name as a technique: "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches," a formula borrowed secondhand, without faith, without communion with Christ or His Church, power sought apart from the Person. And the demon's reply is the whole theology of the scene: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Hell recognizes relationship and mocks recitation. There is the exact line the Church herself draws: the handkerchiefs healed because *God* chose to work miracles through the body of His servant; the incantation failed because it grasped at holiness as a technique, without faith or communion. What the objector calls the Catholic position, attributing efficacy to external performance apart from interior disposition, the Catechism condemns by name as superstition (CCC 2111); the Church codified the objection into her own law. Now the honest concessions, owed and paid: relic abuses, forgeries, and trafficking really happened, and the Council of Trent legislated against them while retaining the principle, reform of abuse rather than amputation of truth, the Church's constant surgical rule. And the deepest answer is the Incarnation itself: a religion whose God took a body, healed by touch and spittle and hem, and left His Church bread that is His Body, cannot be a religion embarrassed by matter. St. Jerome said it for all time: we honor the servants so that the honor flows to the Lord. The bones of the martyrs are not batteries. They are trophies, and the power is His.

7. Read Acts 19:18-20 and 19:23-29, 32. Two economic scenes: what do the new believers burn, at what cost, and who starts the riot, for what stated and actual reasons? What does this chapter teach about conversion and cost?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The believers who had practiced magic bring their own books and burn them publicly: fifty thousand pieces of silver, tens of thousands of days' wages, torched by their owners, no one demanded it; repentance did. And Luke's scoreboard follows immediately: "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily." Then Demetrius the silversmith, who sees the Gospel threatening his Artemis-shrine trade, convenes his trade and performs the oldest rhetorical trick on record: he opens with the profit motive, "from this business we have our wealth," and closes wrapped in piety, the temple of the great goddess may be counted as nothing. Two hours of "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" fill the theater, and Luke adds the driest line in Acts: most of them did not know why they had come together. For the second time in our study, Philippi's slave girl being the first, the Gospel's collision with a business model produces a mob. Real conversion has a price tag, sometimes fifty thousand silver pieces of your own past, and real evangelization will eventually inconvenience someone's revenue. A Gospel that costs nothing and threatens no one's idols is not the one that prevailed mightily in Ephesus.

DIG DEEPER: THE STONE THAT DATES THE NEW TESTAMENT

Gallio's year as proconsul of Achaia is fixed by an inscription found at Delphi quoting the emperor Claudius,

commonly dated to AD 51-52. Since Paul stood before Gallio's judgment seat in Corinth, that stone gives this chapter, and with it Paul's letters and journeys, their most important approximate anchor in the calendar. Luke's narrative touches verifiable history at dozens of such points, names, titles, harbors, magistracies, and archaeology has repeatedly vindicated his precision. The faith of the Way rests on things that happened, in cities that can be excavated, before officials whose terms can be dated.

DIG DEEPER: PRISCILLA FIRST

Of the six times the couple is named in the New Testament, Priscilla is named before her husband in four, including the catechesis of Apollos, an arrangement counter-cultural enough that many scholars take it to reflect her real prominence as a teacher. The Church's first recorded adult-formation instructor of a future Christian leader was a laywoman with a needle trade, working alongside her husband, in their home. Chrysostom preached a whole homily in their honor. Every couple that has ever hosted a Bible study, this table included, works in their line.

Send (15 minutes)

1. "I have many people in this city." Do you actually believe that about your city, your workplace, your extended family? What would change in how you speak and pray if you assumed God's census is larger than your evidence?
2. The Ephesian converts burned what competed with Christ, at enormous cost, by their own hands. What in your life belongs on that fire, and what has kept the match unstruck?

Live It This Week

Three small assignments, one for each city of the heart. For Corinth: pray for your own city daily this week using the Lord's own sentence, "You have many people in this city," naming your parish, your street, your workplace, and asking to be led to one of His uncounted ones. For Ephesus: choose one sacramental in your home, holy water at the door, a blessed crucifix, a rosary, and use it once this week *rightly*: with a deliberate prayer, as the Church intends, grace through the sign and never the sign as machinery. For the workshop of Priscilla: if a correction has been sitting undelivered in your heart for someone you love, deliver it this week her way: privately, charitably, and over food if you can manage it.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, known by name in heaven and hell alike, keep our religion clean: no superstition, no magic, no performance, only faith in you who love to work through water and oil and bread and the bodies of your saints. Give us Corinthian courage for hard cities, Apollos's teachable heart, and the Ephesians' arithmetic, that counted fifty thousand pieces of silver a fair price for a clean break. You have many people in our city; introduce us. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you... for I have many people in this city.'" (Acts 18:9-10)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 12, in order of appearance. Flag these before the session.

PRIMARY TEXT

1. Acts 18:1-11 (Corinth; the night vision)
2. Acts 18:8; 18:12-17 (Crispus; Gallio)
3. Acts 18:24-28 (Apollos)
4. Acts 19:1-7 (John's baptism completed)
5. Acts 19:8-12 (Tyrannus; the handkerchiefs)
6. Acts 19:13-20 (the sons of Sceva; the bonfire)
7. Acts 19:23-41 (the riot of the silversmiths)

OLD TESTAMENT DISCOVERY PASSAGES

8. 1 Kings 19:14-18 (the hidden seven thousand)
9. 2 Kings 13:20-21 (Elisha's bones)
10. 2 Kings 2:8, 13-14 (Elijah's mantle)
11. Numbers 19:11, 16 (a dead body, and bones, defile; steelman)

NEW TESTAMENT CROSS REFERENCES

12. 1 Corinthians 2:3 (fear and trembling in Corinth)
13. Acts 5:15 (Peter's shadow); Mark 5:27-30 (the garment)
14. Acts 18:26; 19:9; 19:23 (the Way, three sightings)

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

15. CCC 1667-1670; CCC 1674; CCC 2111