

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

two or three poor women spake as if joy did make them speak when they talked how God had visited their souls with His love in the Lord Jesus ; but they did not fail to discourse also of their own wretchedness of heart. And yet the impression

that they made upon an onlooker so shrewd as Bunyan was that they were as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned amongst their neighbours.

## Apollos: A Study in Pre-Pauline Christianity.

BY THE REV. ARTHUR WRIGHT, M.A., TUTOR OF QUEENS' COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

WHEN St. Paul in his third missionary journey settled down at Ephesus, he found that a Christian Church had long been established there. Possibly it dated from the great day of Pentecost, when 'Jews from Asia,' of which province Ephesus was the capital, had been present at the Feast (Acts ii. 9). His old acquaintances, Aquila and Priscilla, were amongst the members. His future helper, Apollos, had but recently departed. There were twelve other brethren, of whom we shall have something to say presently, and doubtless there were a few more of whom nothing is known. That it was a small and struggling community is indicated by the fact that it had never separated from Judaism. Whatever of special love-feasts, eucharists, and other Christian ordinances were kept, must have been celebrated, as they usually were in those earliest days (Acts ii. 46), in the private houses of the brethren. Public services were supplied by the synagogue. St. Paul, on his first visit, joined himself to that synagogue and preached on the Sabbath (Acts xviii. 19). On his second visit he did so again. It was his rule 'to become a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews.' And either experience had taught him how to avoid giving offence, or the Jews of that synagogue were unusually docile. Perhaps, having welcomed the Christians from the first, they had incurred the enmity of other synagogues, and did not like to recede. For in a city like Ephesus there must have been several synagogues. Anyhow, three months elapsed before the apostle found it advisable to separate the brethren.

The first thing which struck St. Paul, on his second visit, and has perplexed the interpreters of the Acts of the Apostles ever since, was the existence of the twelve brethren, who 'had been baptized into John's baptism.'

These men were in the same condition in which Apollos had recently been. The two cases are placed together by the historian, and will throw light upon one another.

What, then, was exactly the position of Apollos, when Aquila and Priscilla 'took him unto them, and expounded to him the way of God more accurately'?

He was, we read, 'an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures.' So much might be predicated of many a Jewish Rabbi. But he 'had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and spake and taught accurately the facts concerning Jesus.' He was therefore a Christian, and, indeed, in some sort, a Christian minister. He was 'fervent in spirit,' but he had this defect that 'he knew only the baptism of John.'

Now when we combine this statement with St. Paul's question to the Twelve, 'Unto what then were ye baptized?' and their answer, 'Unto John's baptism,' it becomes evident that the words are not to be taken in any transcendental sense, but as a plain allegation of fact. Apollos and the others had received, not Christian, but pre-Christian baptism.

It is usually assumed that they had all been baptized by one of John's disciples, and not a few have inferred that the twelve had been baptized by Apollos himself. To me it seems almost certain that the rite had in all cases been administered by John the Baptist in person.

For these men were Jews, and every true Israelite recognized the moral obligation of going on pilgrimage to the city of David at least once in his life. A place like Ephesus sent many scores of Jews every Pentecost to keep the Feast. Jews of Jerusalem also migrated to the city of Artemis, and settled down there for the purpose of trade. It is

practically certain that there would be at least twelve men then living at Ephesus, who in their youth had shared in the general enthusiasm, when 'all Jerusalem and all Judæa and all the region round about Jordan' had gone forth to John's baptism.

For a short season John had in very truth been 'a burning and a shining light.' But I see no indication that his work was continued by his disciples after his death. Already in his lifetime he had begun to 'decrease.' Jesus 'made and baptized more disciples than John.' And when once John had pointed out the Lamb of God, his work was accomplished. It was impossible that he should appoint any other successor than our Lord.

Moreover, if these twelve men had been baptized by Apollos, why did he not impart to them his more perfect knowledge before leaving Ephesus? He was in no hurry to go. According to the Western text of the Acts, certain Corinthians, who were sojourning in Ephesus, invited him to return with them to their country. To leave his converts, without so much as introducing them to Aquila, is a more heartless thing than we like to suppose him guilty of. No one can have had such claims upon him as these firstfruits of his ministry.

Aquila, if I read his character aright, was no orator. He could not stand up in the synagogue, like Apollos, and address the congregation. But he had worked side by side with St. Paul at their common trade. And he invited to his house and held private conversations with such as were willing to hear a plain man talk on religious questions. He had initiated Apollos into certain mysteries of the faith, and he would gladly have initiated the others, if they had consulted him.

But we have yet to grapple with the central difficulty of this remarkable narrative. How comes it that Apollos, a Christian minister, 'knew only the baptism of John?'

Readers of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES are aware (see vol. vii. p. 241) that in 1895 Dr. F. Blass, Professor of Classical Philology in the University of Halle, put forward the idea that Apollos had learned what he knew of Christianity from some written book, and not from the mouth of a Christian teacher.

If such a book existed at that early date (about 50 A.D.), we should all agree with Dr. Blass that it must have been St. Mark's Gospel, or some first edition thereof.

It is much to be noticed that of late years independent investigators, working on different lines and from different standpoints, have been forced to the conclusion that our Gospels, or their component parts, were in existence at a very early date. We who remember the time when the most strenuous efforts of our apologists were needed to prevent the Gospels from being relegated to the second century, cannot but rejoice at the change which has come over critical opinion. Far be it from me to quarrel with anyone who, being a competent scholar, puts forth opinions so exceedingly welcome.

But still it is our bounden duty dispassionately to examine the grounds for this opinion, and to reject it, or at least postpone its acceptance, if we are not satisfied.

Hence the Editor of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES pertinently pointed out that the word 'instructed,' in the sentence: 'Apollos was instructed in the way of the Lord (Jesus),' is the rare and significant *κατηχέσθαι* 'to be catechised,' which is expressly assigned to oral teaching.

If this objection could not be removed, Dr. Blass's theory must fall to the ground. And therefore he soon replied to it (p. 564), and argued that *κατηχέσθαι* has not a very strict meaning as to where the instruction comes from, whether from a book directly or from a person. He continues, that in Rom. ii. 18, *κατηχέσθαι*, and, in John xii. 34, *ἀκούω*, 'to hear,' are used of book knowledge, even as Plato (*Phædrus*, 268 c.) writes *ἐκ βιβλίου ποθὲν ἀκούσας*, 'having caught up from some book.' Thus, he concludes, even *ἀκούω* itself does not necessarily imply oral instruction.

I find myself unable to agree with these expositions. To begin with the last; Plato is describing a quack doctor, a mere ignoramus, who sets up for a physician because he has happened upon a few pills, and 'has heard [some prescriptions] from a pamphlet.' It seems to me that there is a sting in the condensed phrase: 'heard from a pamphlet.' Plato wishes to insinuate that the impostor can neither read nor write, but has employed someone to decipher the MS. for him.

Again, the accomplished Jew of Rom. ii. 18, who poses as a guide to the blind, an instructor of fools, a teacher of infants, 'cannot be one of the vulgar crowd of Jews, but must be able to study the law for himself, like the Jews of Berea.' True, but even such a Rabbi was once an uncon-

scious babe, and began, like Timothy, 'to know the Holy Writings,' with other boys at the feet of the *Chazzan*, who 'catechised them out of the law.' Learning by heart, as I have shown elsewhere, was almost the only conception of education in the East. And the catechumens were certainly not allowed to finger the sacred rolls. Their teacher read a passage to them; they (probably) copied it down upon their tablets, and then recited it, like modern Chinese boys, at the top of their voices, until by noise and repetition it 'was dinned into them,' as the word implies, and so became a life possession.

Learning the law by heart is so contrary to modern habits that a Western reader does not readily grasp the idea. Yet when the Pharisees said, 'This multitude which knoweth not the law is accursed' (John vii. 49), they were speaking of men who, from their tender years, had habitually heard the Pentateuch read in the synagogue, and were far better acquainted with it than most devout Englishmen are with the New Testament. Only as they could not repeat it *verbatim*, they fell short of the standard which the Pharisees expected.

To come to the next passage (John xii. 34), 'We have *heard* out of our Bible that the Messiah abideth for ever.' The Pharisees, who speak thus, may either be recalling the catechetical lessons of their youthful days, or they may be proudly boasting of their regularity in attendance at the synagogue. Or, as our Gospels are not built upon the reports of shorthand writers, but on the free recollections of 'illiterate men,' the exact words which the Pharisees used may have been altered into what a layman would say. There are plenty of ways of escape for those who question whether 'heard' can ever mean 'read.'

But, indeed, as *ἀναγνῶναι*, 'to read,' means strictly 'to read aloud,' the familiar phrase, 'Did ye never read?' points, I think, to the public reading of Scriptures in the synagogue, rather than to private study. Copies of the Septuagint may have been fairly common amongst Greek-speaking Jews, but the Hebrew Bible was not so accessible. In the face of 'Ye search the Scriptures' (John v. 39), we can hardly doubt that some Rabbis possessed the sacred rolls, but at a later date touching them 'defiled the hands,' and must have been discouraged both at that time and long before, or such a notion would never have arisen.

I freely admit that the sentence, 'I *heard* from Mr. Smith this morning that he had been ill,' conveys to the educated Englishman the idea that you had received a letter from him in which the fact was stated. But the transference is due to the penny post, which has superseded the verbal message of the courier. My contention is that oral teaching in the time of the apostles was so familiar an institution, that the word which denotes it must be supposed to have its proper meaning, unless the context demands some other rendering. Now *κατηχέσθαι* occurs only eight times in the New Testament. And in six of these (Luke i. 4, Acts xviii. 25, Rom. ii. 18, 1 Cor. xiv. 19, Gal. vi. 6 *bis*) it seems to me to have its full meaning. Twice (Acts xxi. 21, 24) it is used in its primitive sense respecting the Church at Jerusalem, which 'has had dinned into its ears' the falsehood that St. Paul induced the Jews of the Dispersion to give up circumcising their children and offering sacrifices in the temple 'when they became followers of Christ.

It may be that clearer examples of *ἀκούσαι*, in the wider sense of *μαθεῖν*, can be produced from classical authors. These would require to be examined on their own merits. I only ask for delay and consideration before we accept the laxity of use for which Dr. Blass contends. I find nothing to correspond to it in the Septuagint, which has very great weight in determining the meaning of New Testament words.

Dr. Blass admits that St. Mark's Gospel already at that early date must have reached Apollos in its present mutilated form, the concluding verses being lost, which I think probably corresponded to Matt. xxviii. 8-10, 16-20, in the latter of which the disciples are ordered to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. But this admission throws immense difficulties in the way. For if the Gospel circulated so many years during St. Mark's lifetime, why did he not replace these lost verses? He was alive when 2 Tim. iv. 11 was written (A.D. 66), and even when 1 Pet. v. 13 was written—probably a much later date.

Again, if St. Mark's Gospel had been widely circulated in primitive times, how came St. Matthew and St. Luke to present so many variations from it? Much longer time is needed for the oral stage to produce the state of text which we actually find in the Synoptists.

For these reasons, although I strongly hold that St. Mark's Gospel—or about two-thirds of it—existed in oral form some years before A.D. 50, I do not see my way to concede that the written Gospel was in existence at that date. I shall offer some further reasons for this reluctance below.

But, to return to Apollos; he had been baptized by John. He had been taught to expect the Messiah at once. Possibly Jesus had been pointed out to him as such. He then, according to the Western text of Acts xviii. 25, returns to Alexandria, where rumours would reach him from time to time of what was happening in Palestine. He would hear of our Lord's ministry, of His mighty works, His rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection. For a long time report would give him only the broad outlines of the facts, but in the course of twelve or fifteen years one of those catechists, whom the Church of Jerusalem sent out in large numbers, visited the metropolis of Egypt. This itinerant was neither apostle, evangelist, nor preacher. He had learned by heart, and was anxious to teach others, 'the facts concerning Jesus,' and he formed a class for that purpose. Apollos became one of the pupils, and, like Theophilus, was 'orally instructed' in the way of the Lord, until he became perfect and was able to teach others also. For when he came to Ephesus, 'being fervent in spirit,' he could not keep silence, but '*repeated by rote*, and taught accurately the facts concerning Jesus.'

I once more adopt the Western reading, ἀπελάλει, but I have ventured to assign to it *meo periculo* a new interpretation. The word is so rare that it is only known to occur again in Lucian, *Nigrinus*, sec. xxii., where the authorities explain it 'to chatter much.' But this rendering does scant justice to Lucian, and is plainly unsuited to St. Luke. It seems to me that as the ordinary sense, 'to forbid,' found in ἀπαγορεύω and in ἀπέειπον, is out of the question, it is not impossible that in the silver age ἀπολαλῶ may have been used for ἀπὸ στόματος λαλῶ or ἀπὸ γλώσσης λαλῶ, both of which phrases signify 'to repeat by rote.' If 'to speak off the mouth' and 'to speak off the tongue' were English phrases to denote *extempore* discourse, 'to speak off' would be likely soon to acquire the same meaning.

My interpretation, if true, will give new point to the quotation from Lucian, who is describing the miseries of parasites at their patron's dinner

table, and complains, amongst other things, that they are called upon for *recitations* of passages unfit for publication, to amuse the company. At the same time, it is so admirably adapted to what St. Luke, according to my view of the situation, wanted to say, that I feel bound, for that very reason, not to press it too strongly. It is something, however, to have found a meaning which gives point to both passages, and if only the rendering, 'glibly recite,' be conceded, I shall be content.

Apollos had been baptized by John: ought he to seek rebaptism? His master had told him, 'I baptize with water . . . but the Messiah will baptize with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.' But the Messiah's ministry was over. He had ascended into the heavens. Apollos could not approach Him. Was it necessary, or desirable, or indeed of any use, to apply to one of His disciples? The question, like many questions which agitated the Church in the first age, was a difficult one. Christ Himself had been baptized by John, and in this had 'fulfilled all righteousness.' What was enough for our Lord, may well have been thought enough for His servants. The catechist, who had taught Apollos, had not been sent to baptize. Like St. Paul he preferred to keep to his own department. I can well believe that even evangelists were wont to keep the question of baptism in the background, lest in their haste they should introduce false brethren and informers into the fold. Rebaptism is never popular. The Anabaptists were particularly hated. Roman Catholics now on receiving a man insist only on conditional rebaptism, or they would find great difficulties in imposing it. For it is a slur on your original baptism, a confession that your first teacher was incapable. I can well believe that Apollos, knowing the efficacy of John's baptism, and not yet having experienced the superiority of Christian baptism, deliberately decided to abide as he was. And if he felt thus, what wonder if the other twelve men, who were only laymen, should follow his example? Neither Alexandria nor Ephesus had been visited by an apostle, by the laying on of whose hands the gifts of the Spirit were bestowed. And, until he met Aquila, Apollos had seen no one who had received those gifts.

Much difficulty has been introduced into the situation by the assumption that the case of these men was exceptional. The truth I suspect to be

that St. Paul was exceedingly familiar with such cases: John's disciples were scattered everywhere over the Roman Empire, and St. Paul, in the course of his journeys, must have encountered them repeatedly. Nor were the converts of the great day of Pentecost less numerous or much more grounded in the faith. They had received Christian baptism, and had witnessed some of the gifts of the Spirit; but they had been imperfectly instructed, and their Christianity was defective in doctrine.

When St. Paul met Christians in Churches which no apostle had visited, his desire was to 'impart to them some spiritual gift' (Rom. i. 11, etc.). To this end he asked, 'Did you receive any spiritual gift when you were made Christians?' This means, 'Have you ever come in contact with an apostle? Did he ever lay his hands upon you?' The twelve replied, 'We did not even hear that gifts of the Spirit were granted.' By this they admit the possibility of such gifts, for the saying of the Baptist had taught them so much; but they were not aware that the gifts were already obtainable. They probably expected to have to wait for them until they reached the other world. St. Paul—no doubt after a good deal of instruction—baptized them into the name of the Lord Jesus; and then laid his hands upon them, and

their faith was confirmed by the possession at last of these gifts.

There is something attractive in the picture of the unity of early times, when the ordinary Jew, the disciple of the Baptist, and the full-grown Christian could worship in the same synagogue, and felt no call to excommunicate and curse one another. Let us remember that this was only possible because Christianity was at a very low ebb. These Christians believed that Jesus was the Christ, but in nothing else did they, as a rule, differ from the Jews. They insisted on the necessity of circumcision. They upheld sacrifices as the only atonement. They regarded the crucifixion as a stumbling-block. They ignored it as far as possible, holding that it was only a necessary prelude to the resurrection. They did not preach Christ crucified. The sermons of Apollos differed very little from the sermons of an ordinary Rabbi. The catechetical teaching of Apollos was accurate, but his doctrine was grievously defective. Aquila, who had been trained under St. Paul, felt its hollowness. St. Paul's activity inevitably led to disruption.

We, in these days, may pray for unity and strive for unity; but let us remember that unity may be bought too dear. If we got it by renouncing all that is valuable in our creed, we should have reason to regret that the old days of cursing have passed away.

## The Expository Times Guild of Bible Study.

NEITHER Deuteronomy nor St. Mark seems a book that men are anxious to study. Both the number of new names and the number of papers received were quite below the average. As for the latter, they are few enough to be dealt with privately. Those who sent papers in will receive their volume as promised if they apply to the Editor for it.

What shall we choose for next year? In the Old Testament let us try the Book of Judges, and in the New, the Epistle to the Philippians. The Book of Judges presents difficult problems for the student of the history and literature of the Old Testament, but what a table it spreads for the preacher! And as for the Philippians, is it not Bishop Lightfoot who says that it stands to the Epistle to the Galatians as the building itself stands to the buttresses that support it?

The conditions of membership in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES Guild of Bible Study are simple. Whoever undertakes to study (that is to say, not merely to read, but more or less carefully, and with the aid of some commentary or a concordance at least, to study), either the Book of Judges or the Epistle to the Philippians, or both, between the months of November 1897 and July 1898, and sends name (in full with degrees, and saying whether Rev., Mr., Mrs., or Miss) and address to the Editor of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES at Kinneff, Bervie, Scotland, is thereby enrolled in the membership of the Guild. There is no fee or other obligation.

A concordance is an excellent aid to Bible study. Bishop Westcott says *he* knows no better, and wants no other. Messrs. T. & T. Clark have recently