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# Paul's Encounter with the Disciples of John the Baptist

Ac 19:1-7 as Introduction to the Narrative of Paul's Third Mission Journey

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## Introduction

The following study concerns Ac 19:1-7, which is part of the narrative of the third mission journey of Paul (Ac 18:23-20:38) and begins with the account of Apollos (Ac 18:23-28). This is the only mention of John's disciples in Acts, and it is also noteworthy from the fact that Paul's encounter with this group occurred about twenty years after John was executed. An obvious conclusion to be drawn is the fact that the death of John did not bring an end to his movement which possibly had a messianic character. The relationship between the messianic character of Paul's missions and the messianic character of John the Baptist's movement does not seem to be accidental, rather it was purposely included in the narrative of Acts. The narrative of the third mission journey focuses mostly on the development of the Christian Movement in Asia Minor, where a significant progress of mission to the Gentiles is shown together with constantly growing opposition toward Paul's activities, as a result of socio-economic factors in Ephesus. Nevertheless, the narrative ends with accounts strictly limited to a Christian context (the speech at Miletus; Paul's visit to Achaia), where it is

shown that the Christian communities in Ephesus had grown and were self-sustaining. Paul's speech is of crucial importance (Ac 20:18-35) because of its teaching addressed to the elders of the communities. It is also the only speech in the whole narrative that regards a strictly Christian audience. In this context the "conversion" of John the Baptist's disciples seems to be something more than a simple record of the event. In this study, we will argue that Ac 19:1-7 indicates the problem arising from the existence of an alternative messianic movement, that according to Luke's narrative should also be an object of mission activity for the followers of Jesus the Resurrected Messiah.

### **1. The background of the narrative Ac 19:1-7**

As is usual in Luke's method, before he enters the main topic of a particular narrative he first prepares the necessary background, which serves both as an introduction to the following, and offers a continuation of the topic that has just been presented. In the case of Ac 19:1-7 the preparatory unit concerns the Jewish teacher Apollos from Alexandria in Egypt, who participated in spreading the kerygma about Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah in the region of the Aegean Sea. Luke begins the presentation by giving his name (Apollos) and his hometown (Alexandria), which provides much information regarding his social background.

The first detail concerns his Jewish roots, even though he was a Hellenized Jew, as is seen in his Greek name (Apollos), and that his family were settled in Alexandria probably for a considerable period of time (Ac 18:24)<sup>1</sup>. This, he was a Jew of the Diaspora, with an education in a dual culture that contributed much

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<sup>1</sup> In the third century BC, the Jewish community in Alexandria is estimated to have been about 100,000 Jews. E.J. Schnabel, *Acts. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids 2012, 784.

to his linguistic and rhetorical skill. Luke says nothing about the details regarding his Hellenistic education and culture, but only uses the general phrase ἀνὴρ λόγιος – *eloquent, skilled in speech, learned, educated, skilled in knowledge* – that points to his solid education that seems to be greatly respected by Luke. However, concerning his Hebrew education, Luke makes clear that Apollos was well educated in the Hebrew Scripture (Ac 18:24)<sup>2</sup>. This would prepare him well to be a Rabbi in the service of spreading the message of the Scripture and the faith.

The second detail about Apollos provided by Luke regards his knowledge of Jesus' messianic movement (Ac 18:25). According to Luke, when Apollos came to Ephesus, he already not only knew the teaching of Jesus' messianic movement but most probably he was also convinced and believed that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah (Ac 18:25). The information of his zeal for spreading the kerygma about Jesus is amplified by Luke's description of this teaching as an exact and accurate proclaiming of Jesus the Messiah<sup>3</sup>. The only disturbing characteristic of Apollos in his presentation by Luke lies in the fact that he knows only John's Baptism, which was for the forgiveness of sins and for redemption, but he did not yet know Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit. This automatically raises the question about which messianic movement Apollos was following. Considering his teaching and convictions, Apollos must be recognized as being a follower of Jesus, however, on the question of baptism, there is no other option than to number Apollos as a follower of John the Baptist, who follows his master in

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<sup>2</sup> The city of Alexandria was ranked as the second leading intellectual center in the Roman Empire, with the greatest library in the ancient world. It was here that Jewish Scribes translated the Hebrew Scripture to Greek (Septuagint). D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2009, 525.

<sup>3</sup> It is possible that Apollos, as man "*powerful in the writing of the Scripture*", used his knowledge of the Hebrew Bible to argue for his conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah.

recognizing Jesus as the Messiah<sup>4</sup>. Considering the whole narrative of Ac 18:24-28, which lacks information about Apollos' receiving baptism with the Holy Spirit from Priscila and Aquila, we prefer this second option. Namely, Apollos was a disciple of John the Baptist, who based on his knowledge of the Hebrew Bible accepted that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. This conviction he probably spread among the Jews not only in Alexandria, but similar to Paul, he devoted his life to spreading it also to Diaspora Jews in many places, including Ephesus and Achaia (Corinth). This interpretation seems to be attested by Ac 18:28 where the place of Apollos' mission activity is given as the Synagogue. This again is similar to Paul's *modus operandi*, but, unlike Paul, there is no indication of an opposition to his teaching. Lack of any indication of the effects of Apollos' activity is most probably the result of Luke's narrative aim, which is focused on his encounter with Priscila and Aquila in the Synagogue that probably involved some correction of Apollos' presentation of Jesus as the Messiah<sup>5</sup>. What kind of corrections Priscila and Aquila introduced to Apollos' understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah remains a matter of speculation, and the only aspects that possibly needed correction in Apollos' understanding of Jesus as the Messiah may have been the recognition of the consequences related to the appearance of the Messiah, rather than to the manner of Apollos' argument that Jesus is the Messiah<sup>6</sup>. Attention should be given to the phrase ἀκριβέστερον

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<sup>4</sup> Codex Bezae (Codex D) describes Apollos as one who was already Christian in Alexandria. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Fortress: Philadelphia 1987, 157-158.

Scholars differ in their answer to this question. For J. Munck, Apollos is one of the disciples of John the Baptist; for E. Schweizer he is a Jewish missionary; for E. Kesemann, he is an unorthodox Christian from Alexandria. B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles. Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1998, 564-565.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase ἀκριβέστερον αὐτῷ ἐξέθεντο τὴν ὁδὸν [τοῦ θεοῦ] – *more accurately explained him the way of God* seems to prove our statement.

<sup>6</sup> Ac 18: 24-25 indicates that Apollos' arguing for Jesus' messianic dignity is sufficiently presented.

αὐτῶ ἐξέθεεντο τὴν ὁδὸν [τοῦ θεοῦ] - *more accurately explained him the way [of God]* which seems to suggest that the content of the correction did not refer to “*things concerning Jesus*” (Ac 18:25) but to *the way of God* which here probably refers to the way in which God wants to save mankind by the words and deeds of Jesus<sup>7</sup>. There is no clear indication that Apollos received the baptism of the Holy Spirit from the hands of Priscila and Aquila, however, Ac18:26 shows clearly that they accepted Apollos as the missionary spreading the true teaching about “*things concerning Jesus*” as well as about “*the way of God*”, which is attested by their letter of recommendation to the communities in Achaia which Apollos is about to visit. We know much about Apollos’ mission activities in Corinth (Ac 19:1; 1Cor 1:12; 3:4-6. 22; 4:6; 16:12) after he left Ephesus (Ac 19:1), but very little about his mission activity in other places, with the exception to Crete, which he probably visited, as Tt 3:13 directly suggests, and may have spent some time there.<sup>8</sup> The general picture of Apollos seems to be that of a very active missionary in many places, where he contributed greatly to deeper understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection for salvation (Ac18:27). He also contributed much with presenting Jesus’ messianic dignity during debates with Jews in the Synagogue, due to his extensive knowledge of the Hebrew Scripture (Ac 18:28). In this very short introduction and schematic account of Apollos, Luke shows him to be a missionary on the same, or almost the same level as Paul. Although Luke probably purposely avoided in his narrative mention of the encounter of Paul with Apollos (Ac 19:1), this relationship between Paul and Apollos is to some extent shown by Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 1:12; 3:4-6. 22; 4:6; 16:12)<sup>9</sup>. The first time Paul mentions Apollos, it is in the

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<sup>7</sup> E.J. Schnabel, *Acts*, 785-786. Witherington III refers the phrase *the way of God* to “*Christian praxis*”. B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 566.

<sup>8</sup> Collins thinks that Tt 3:13 presents Apollos as “*Paul’s emissary*” to Crete. R.F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1999, 79-81.

<sup>9</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 158.

context of the issue regarding the diversity of the Christian communities in Corinth, with both sides claiming a certain equal status, differing only in the difference of their founders (1Cor 1:12). It shows clearly that Apollos not only undertook mission activity in Corinth but also that he did it in his own fashion, with the result that there was one group of believers in Jesus following Apollos' way of spreading the kerygma. The Western text of the Acts in Ac 18:27 suggests that one reason for Apollos' visit to Corinth was a direct invitation by some Corinthian believers who were impressed by his rhetorical skill<sup>10</sup>. Paul's criticism is not addressed to Apollos or exclusively to his group, but to all divided Christian groups in Corinth (1Cor 3:4). The second time Paul mentions Apollos (1Cor 3:4-6) he continues to admonish the divisions in Corinth's communities, but he gives a positive evaluation of Apollos, which implies that they cooperated, and their efforts were complementary. Paul calls himself and Apollos servants in the service of the Lord for the purpose of the Corinthian Christians (1Cor 3:5)<sup>11</sup>. Noteworthy is Paul's mention of limitations related to the service of each of them: Paul seems to be the one who founded the communities in Corinth, and Apollos seems to be the one who contributed to the development of these communities (1Cor 3:6)<sup>12</sup>. In both cases, however, they are not just persons who assist the community, but each in his way, contributed greatly to establishing and developing of the communities<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, in final the words regarding the problem of the comparative attitude between the communities in Corinth, Paul expresses his conviction that all missionaries who

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<sup>10</sup> This exposition of Apollos rhetorical skills contrast with Paul's self-evaluation of his rhetorical skills in 2 Cor 11:6. J. Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, The Liturgical Press: Collegeville 1999, 175.

<sup>11</sup> A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2000, 299.

<sup>12</sup> In 1 Cor 3:7 Paul called himself "the planting man" and he calls Apollos "the watering man". B. Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1995, 132.

<sup>13</sup> A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 300-301.

by will of God were working in Corinth, did so for all Christians in Corinth, not for any particular group (1Cor 3:22). When the Corinthians were saying “*I belong to Paul*” or “*I belong to Apollos*” (1Cor 3:12), Paul says in 1Cor 3:22 “*but you belong to Christ and Christ belong to God*”, which is a strong redirection of their convictions<sup>14</sup>. This thought of Paul is more directly presented in 1Cor 4:1 where he insists that Christian in Corinth should look on Paul, Cephas and Apollos as Christ’s servants and stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God. 1Cor 4:5 shows clearly that the Corinthians’ attitude goes as far as to judge each of the missionaries, and this attitude is considered by Paul to be unwise (1Cor 4:5-6). Concerning judgment on the missionaries’ works, Paul looked to the only just judge the Lord, and in accord with His judgement “*then everyone will receive from God the appropriate commendation*” (1Cor 4:5)<sup>15</sup>. Paul allows that all missionaries contributed to the Corinth community, and regarding the Lord’s reward there are no differences between them.

The last reference to Apollos is included by Paul at the end of his letter (1Cor 16:12), where he discusses the case of Timothy who would deliver the letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1Cor 16:9-12). H also mentions Apollos, calling him ‘brother,’ and encourages him (unsuccessfully) to make a trip to Corinth (1Cor 16:12). This information suggests that at the time when Paul was writing 1Corinthians, Apollos was with him in Ephesus. It indirectly proves that the relationship between Paul and Apollos was one of friendship and cooperation.

All references to Apollos in the First Letter to the Corinthians strongly indicate a positive relationship between Paul and Apollos, which raises a question about Luke’s reason for avoiding mention of an encounter between Paul and Apollos in his narrative (Ac 18:23-28). It can be assumed that Luke knew about the

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<sup>14</sup> G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1987, 153-154.

<sup>15</sup> R.E. Ciampa, B.S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2010, 173-174.

relationship between Paul and Apollos and was also familiar with Apollos' impressive credentials. His fame among the Corinthians was due to his rhetorical skills that caught the attention of well-educated Corinthians, both Jews and Christians<sup>16</sup>. Luke also was aware of the evaluation of Paul and Apollos (and other missionaries) by the Corinthians, where Apollos, a cultured person, seems to have been given a more favorable evaluation than Paul, who was less impressive in their eyes and was even involved in conflict with some of them<sup>17</sup>. Although there was not trace of personal antipathy between Paul and Apollos, they became the "excuse" justifying probable strong animosities between several Christian communities divided by their different social status. Luke could not simply omit the case of Apollos, due to his important contribution to proclaiming the kerygma (Ac 18:27-28), but he reduced his presentation to a short, schematic account, that also leaves the impression that Apollos was considered to be inferior due to the lack of Jesus' baptism<sup>18</sup>. Probably for this reason, Luke includes the narrative regarding the assistance of Aquila and Priscila given to Apollos in order to fulfil his understanding of "*the way of God*" (Ac 18:26). Luke's approach in Ac 18:24-28 probably derives from his intention to present Paul as the man who successfully taught the Gentiles the monotheistic concept of God, and salvation by faith in Jesus the Messiah<sup>19</sup>. For this reason, and due to some similar issues found in 1Corinthians and the Letter to Galatians,

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<sup>16</sup> P. Gardner, *1 Corinthians. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids 2018, 80.

<sup>17</sup> D.E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Academic: Grand Rapids 2003, 44.

<sup>18</sup> Considering Luke's strong theological interest in pneumatology, his apparent downplaying the role of Apollos may be the caused by his personal theological priorities rather than by anything based on the real relationship between Paul and Apollos. Cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Yale University Press: New Haven & London 1998, 639.

<sup>19</sup> There is no reason, based on the narrative of Acts and Paul's account found in 1 Cor, to assume differences in the theological teaching of Paul and Apollos, although the presentation of the teaching may have differed according to the skills of each of the missionaries.

Luke in his narrative purposely omits any comparison between Paul and other missionaries working in the same regions<sup>20</sup>.

Summing up: the narrative of Ac 18:24-28 concerns Apollos the Alexandrian Jew who as the disciple of John the Baptist proclaimed the kerygma about Jesus the Messiah in the same places as Paul, namely Corinth and Ephesus, where he established his reputation as a skillful preacher, arguing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. Although Luke says little in Ac 18:24-28 about Apollos, what he says is almost exclusively positive (except for his baptism). Apollos did exceptional work in the service of the Lord, contributing greatly to the common course of Jesus' messianic movement through his skill, based on his excellent education and his zeal for Jesus the Messiah. For some reasons Luke decided not to connect Apollos with Paul in his narrative (even if this relation is included in the 1Corinthians by Paul himself), however, he gives to Apollos most of the same credit given by Paul in his presentation of Apollos in 1Corinthians.

## **2. The narrative of Paul's encounter with disciples of John the Baptist (Ac 19:1-7)**

The narrative of Ac 19:1-7 is the beginning of Luke's account of the so-called third mission journey of Paul (Ac 18:23-20:38), which starts with his coming to Ephesus (Ac 19:1). The preparatory unit of Ac 18:24-28 introduced the readers to Apollos the disciple of John Baptist who was proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, and who, according to Luke, left Ephesus before Paul came to the city<sup>21</sup>. The first detail recorded by Luke concerns Paul's encounter with some

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<sup>20</sup> From this point of view, Paul's letters make a great contribution to our understanding of the sometimes laconic and enigmatic narrative provided by Luke in the Acts.

<sup>21</sup> Ac 19:1 forms a natural transition of the topic between the narrative of Ac 18:24-28 and the narrative Ac 19:1-7. E.J. Schnabel, *Acts*, 787.

disciples of John the Baptist, which seems to be the second stage of developing the theme relating to the relationship between Jesus' messianic movement and the messianic movement of John the Baptist (a theme that is also present in the four Gospels). In Ac 18:23-28 this concerns the individual (Apollos) who is a disciple of John the Baptist believing that Jesus is the Messiah; in Ac 19:1-7 the relation concerns a group of about twelve disciples of John who know only the baptism of John. On the question of baptism, there is no difference between Apollos and these twelve disciples, but that is the only similarity between them, since Apollos, unlike the twelve disciples, was believing and proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah. A question naturally arises about the identity of the twelve disciples<sup>22</sup>. The three main options are: they are disciples of John the Baptist; they are converts of Apollos; they are disciples of Jesus. Luke's use of the enigmatic expression *τινας μαθητάς* – *certain disciples, some disciples* – seems to favor the first possibility, even though sometimes expressions similar to *certain disciples* refer to Jesus' disciples (Lk 11:1; Ac 9:10), and on the other hand, the expression *disciples* may refer to the disciples of John (Lk 5:33; 7:18; 11:1)<sup>23</sup>. The possibility that the twelve disciples are converts of Apollos is the less probable, although it is accepted by some scholars<sup>24</sup>.

The last possibility, that the twelve disciples were disciples of Jesus, seems to be excluded, but concerning this issue some nuances must be considered. First, Paul's question (Ac 19:2) indicates that they are believers, which here means that they have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Luke's presentation of the issue, however, seems to lessen the status of these disciples of Jesus since they had not

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<sup>22</sup> For an account of scholarly discussion concerning the identity of the twelve disciples, see: C.S. Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary Vol. 3*, Baker Academic: Grand Rapids 2014, 2813-2817.

<sup>23</sup> The theological argument for this option will be presented in the analysis of Ac 19:4-5.

<sup>24</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making, Volume 2. Beginning from Jerusalem*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2009, 760.

progressed in their understanding of a characteristic for Jesus' messianic movement in the teaching concerning the Holy Spirit and his role in fulfilling the eschatological times. In an indirect way it seems to indicate that the twelve disciples found by Paul in Ephesus were disciples of John the Baptist who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but in different manner and probably for a reason different from the real disciples of Jesus. Their belief is closely similar to that of Apollos (Ac 18:25; Ac 19:2), but a fundamental difference lies in the zeal for service to the Lord that is mentioned in the narrative about Apollos (Ac 18:26-28) but is missing in the narrative concerning the twelve. Furthermore, the narrative regarding Apollos being corrected by Priscila and Aquila about "*the way of God*" shows him to be a man fully trusted to contribute to the mission in Corinth (Ac 18:26), and the encounter of the twelve disciples with Paul points to their full acknowledging of the eschatological times (Ac 19:4-7). Luke shows clearly that the twelve disciples who believed in Jesus in John's way, became disciples of Jesus after they were baptized by Paul (Ac 19:5)<sup>25</sup>. The sequence in the narrative of the process of baptizing the twelve (first true teaching – Ac 19:4, then baptism – Ac 19:5, then receiving the Holy Spirit – Ac 19:6) is striking, and it may function in Luke' narrative as a kind of "proper instruction for incorporation into Jesus' messianic movement".

In Ac 19:2-3 Luke presents three characteristics of these disciples: first is their faith in Jesus as the Messiah; the second is their lack of Jesus' baptism; the third is their lack of a concept of the role of the Holy Spirit (Ac 19:2). Their confession about knowing only the baptism of John (Ac 19:3) was probably sufficient for

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<sup>25</sup> Luke in case of Jesus and John's infant narrative (Lk 1-2) from the beginning precisely makes distinction in dignity between both of them. Probably similarly in the narrative regarding Apollos and the twelve disciples, he also makes a radical distinction between John's baptism (for forgiveness of sins and repentance) and Jesus' baptism (receiving the Holy Spirit as the sign of the eschatological times). L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Liturgical Press: Collegeville 1992, 337.

Paul to recognize that they were disciples of John the Baptist – perhaps a group that accepted John’s teaching about Jesus as the Messiah, but without its eschatological outcome (the gift of the Holy Spirit)<sup>26</sup>. This is a direct reason for Paul’s treatment of the twelve disciples who need to be properly educated in “*the things concerning Jesus*”. It begins with Paul’s explanation of the meaning and purpose of John’s baptism (Ac 19:4), which according to Paul has two goals: first there is the preparatory character of his baptism by water that initiates the process of repentance and includes forgiveness of sins. The return of the nation to God was essential for the realization of God’s plan of salvation, in which Jesus of Nazareth was indicated by John as the Messiah (Ac 19:4). This was the second goal of John’s ministry, namely, to prepare the way for the Messiah, but after God’s plan was fulfilled by Jesus, John’s baptism by water is no longer necessary<sup>27</sup>. Because Luke’s narrative concerning Paul’s teaching is presented in a short and schematic manner (as is usual in cases where there are additional topics of his narrative), it gives the impression of being a close sequence of events, but the process of educating the twelve by Paul probably took longer than the narrative suggests<sup>28</sup>. Luke is interested in the outcome of Paul’s effort, which is incorporation of the twelve disciples of John into the Christian community in Ephesus by their baptism in the name of Jesus<sup>29</sup>. This makes them to become disciples of Jesus and at the same time they are no longer disciples of John the Baptist. Ac 19:5 is probably the most important passage in Acts that attests that the disciples of John were the subject of Jesus’ followers mission activities, gradually incorporating them into the Christian movement, and probably resulted in the final disappearance of John’s messianic movement.

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<sup>26</sup> E.J. Schnabel, *Acts*, 789.

<sup>27</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1988, 364.

<sup>28</sup> C.S Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary Vol. 3*, 2822.

<sup>29</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 159.

The last stage of Paul's education of the twelve disciples of John concerns their reception of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Paul (Ac 19:6). This information contains some important details that put more light on the real meaning of this passage. The first concerns Paul by whom the twelve received the Holy Spirit, thus exercising the same function as Peter and John, namely laying on of hands on those who came to the faith (Ac 8:17)<sup>30</sup>. The second concerns two results of the event mentioned in Luke's narrative. The first refers to their speaking in unlearned languages (speaking in tongues), that is reminiscent of the Pentecost event (Ac 2:2) and indicates the immediate effect of receiving the Holy Spirit<sup>31</sup>. The second result of the event refers to their prophetic ability, which is also a gift of the Holy Spirit, but unlike the gift of speaking in tongues, it did not occur simultaneously with or immediately after the laying on of hands. The grammar of Ac 19:6 allows the meaning that all twelve disciples received both gifts, speaking in tongues and prophecy, but it also does not exclude the possibility that some of them received the gift of speaking in tongues, while others received the gift of prophecy<sup>32</sup>. The gift of prophecy was probably used by the twelve in their later service to the community into which they were incorporated. Considering the fact that Luke follows Paul's theological perspective, and the fact that Paul in 1 Cor 12-14, valued more the gift of prophecy (which he considered to be a gift intended to build the community) than the gift of speaking in tongues (which he considered to be gift intended to build up the spirit of the individual). Their reception of the

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<sup>30</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1996, 256.

<sup>31</sup> This is the third account in Acts concerning "speaking in tongues" (Ac 2:4; Ac 10:45-46). However, it is the first time when the gift of speaking in tongues relates to the gift of prophesy. C.S Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary Vol. 3*, 2822.

<sup>32</sup> C.S Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary Vol. 3*, 2821-2824

gift of prophecy may indicate that they became valued members of the community in Ephesus<sup>33</sup>.

Summing up: the narrative of Ac 19:1-7 concerns the encounter of Paul with twelve disciples of John Baptist in Ephesus. These disciples show that they believe in Jesus as the Messiah, but in a way that that was insufficient in Luke's evaluation, since they did not know about the role of the Holy Spirit. This becomes the direct reason for Paul's three actions undertaken in their regard. First he taught them about the real purpose of John's baptism, which had only a preparatory function (Ac 19:4), in order to receive the true baptism by the Holy Spirit (Jesus' baptism). After this process of re-education, Paul baptized them by the Jesus' baptism, by which they became the disciples of Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit in a manner similar to the Apostles and others who believed in Jesus the Messiah. Ac 19:1-7 is a narrative regarding the incorporation of the members of John messianic movement into Jesus' messianic movement, and this latter has already developed into what will become the Christian Church.

### **3. The Purpose of Ac 19:1-7**

The narrative concerning the third mission journey of Paul (Ac 18:23-20:38) starts with information that Paul is undertaking another mission journey (Ac 18:23), but at once the narrative is interrupted by a preparatory unit (Ac 18:24-28) concerning the mission activity of an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos before Paul came to Ephesus. Apollos was a disciple of John the Baptist, believing in Jesus as the Messiah to whom he gave testimony in many Synagogues visited

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<sup>33</sup> There is a possible similarity with the prophets of the community in Syrian Antioch (Ac 13:1-3).

by him during his mission journeys (Ac 18:25-26). Although he knew all "*things concerning Jesus*", which means here that he was able to successfully argue and convince Diaspora Jews that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah (Ac18:27-28), however, his knowledge about "*the way of God*" was not sufficient in the eyes of Paul's co-workers Priscilla and Aquila, who are presented by Luke as mentors for Apollos on his way to fully understand God's plan of salvation. This encounter of Apollos with Priscilla and Aquila made of him a trustworthy disciple of Jesus who is accepted by Jesus' believers and by the leaders of the communities (Ac 18:26-28). It makes the account of Ac 18:24-28 to contain the message that the disciples of John believing in Jesus as the Messiah cannot be automatically counted as Jesus' disciples because of the absence of some essential teachings about Jesus in John's teaching regarding the One who will come after him, which Luke refers to as the thing concerning "*the way of God*" and most probably it regards the eschatological application of words and deeds of Jesus.

After this short episode concerning Apollos' activities in Ephesus, Luke returns to the main theme of the narrative concerning the third mission journey that focuses on his mission in Ephesus (Ac 19:1-40). Luke's narrative of Paul's mission activities in Ephesus contains several events, starting with Paul's encounter with the twelve disciples of John the Baptist (Ac 19:1-7), followed by a short and very schematic account of Paul's mission work in the city (Ac 19:8-12), the impact of which is shown in the narrative concerning the outcome of Paul's mission work, namely the decreasing influence of magicians in the city (Ac 19:13-20), and concludes with the narrative regarding the growing opposition to Paul's influence in Ephesus (Ac 19:21-40). From the structure of the narrative of Ac 19:1-40 it becomes clear that it consists of two major units; the first refers to the relationship between the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus' believers (Ac 18:24-19:7), and the second unit is focused

on the outcome of Paul's mission in Ephesus (Ac 19:8-40). Luke's narrative concept of the three mission journeys has a developing character that begins with the first mission journey almost exclusively focused on the Diaspora Jews, and continues with the second mission journey that mostly concerns the mission to Gentiles, and ends in the third mission journey, where the most elaborated narrative regards existing Christian communities, it possible to suspect that the inclusion in the narrative of the third mission journey the unit referring to relationship between the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus' believers, is not accidental. Luke seems to limit himself to what is indispensable in his account of this relationship, but the purpose of the account becomes enigmatic. He was dealing with a situation that was in fact a major problem for the early Christian Church, namely the existence of individuals and groups with fragmentary knowledge about Jesus as the Messiah. Some derived their knowledge from sources different from Jesus' messianic movement itself, resulting in variation in the kerygma about Jesus the Messiah. Luke could not omit this issue in his narrative, since this problem is widely elaborated in all Gospels, including the Gospel of Luke. This was the problem of the relationship between the messianic movement of John and messianic movement of Jesus<sup>34</sup>. It seems that this issue was real problem for Luke, which does not necessarily mean that it was also such for Paul if we consider his presentation of the relationship between himself and Apollos in 1Corinthians. However, if the *Corpus Lucanum* was written twenty years or more after 1Corinthians, Luke may refer not merely to conditions during Paul's ministry, but he may also indicate a problem that affected his times, namely the period after the destruction of the Temple<sup>35</sup>. Probably Luke's main concern in this narrative reflects the theological

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<sup>34</sup> Here we refer to the public evaluation of John's activities rather than to state of things in light of God's plan.

<sup>35</sup> We refer here to possible disturbance within the early Christian Church about theological

issues, with the author strongly indicating that those who came to faith in Jesus the Messiah through the tradition of John Baptist must accept the official theology of the early Christian Church, which in Luke's particular case means Pauline theology<sup>36</sup>. C.R. Holladay goes as far as to state that Luke looks on John's disciples as rivals, who must be imbued with the early Christian convictions (theology), with particular emphasis on their baptism in the name of Jesus<sup>37</sup>. It is possible that after AD 70 the Christian communities made an effort to incorporate John's disciples and possibly all those who accepted Jesus as the Messiah into the early Christian Church rather than allow them to return to Rabbinic Judaism<sup>38</sup>.

Luke in his presentation of the issue of relationship between Jesus' messianic movement and John Baptist's messianic movement in the Acts focused particularly on the last stage of this relationship, which concerns the gradual incorporation of the members of John's movement into the early Christian Church whose roots went back to Jesus' messianic movement. Contrary, the authors of the four Gospel reflect the stage when both movements were actively involved in spreading their teachings among Palestinian Jews.

Summing up: the main purpose of the narrative Ac 19:1-7 is to present Luke's conviction that believers in Jesus as the Messiah must be properly baptized in the name of Jesus, and after that they may be incorporated into the Church. Luke

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issues deriving from the differing background and traditions of the Christian believers. In Luke's perspective they should be suppressed and incorporated into the mainstream teaching based on the true Gospel message.

<sup>36</sup> C.R. Holladay, *Acts*, Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville 2016, 35-369.

<sup>37</sup> C.R. Holladay, *Acts*, 367.

<sup>38</sup> Here we assume that John's messianic movement, even after the death of John, continued as an independent movement that in first-century Judaism may be situated between Pharisaic Judaism (before AD 70), including also Rabbinic Judaism (after AD 70), and Jesus' messianic movement.

attributes this conviction exclusively to Paul, giving it as a kind of instruction in the process of incorporation (teaching; baptism; laying on hands). In Ac 19:1-7 Luke leaves no room for the continuation of the John's messianic movement after the fulfilment of God's plan by Jesus the Messiah, the founder of the new messianic movement.

#### **4. A brief account of the relationship between John's messianic movement and Jesus' messianic movement in the Synoptic Gospels.**

All the Gospels contain narratives regarding the relationship between John the Baptist's movement and Jesus' messianic movement. Although most of the accounts regarding the relationship are common to the four Gospels, the presentation in each of the Gospels differs significantly. In the case of the Gospel of John the relationship between these two movements is presented in a radically different perspective from that of the Synoptic Gospels which are almost identical, though they consider the relationship in different narrative contexts. The following is a brief summary of the presentation of the issue in the Synoptic Gospel<sup>39</sup>.

##### 4.1 The Gospel of Mathew

The Gospel of Matthew includes seven accounts regarding the relationship between the messianic movements of John and Jesus: Mt 3:1-12; 3:13-17; 9:14-17; 14:1-12; 16:13-20; 17:1-9; 21:23-27. In his presentation of this relationship Matthew seems to be more focused on John's attitude toward Jesus, rather than

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<sup>39</sup> The reason for narrowing the comparative material to the Synoptic Gospels is that the account of Ac 18:24-9:7 regarding the relationship is similar to the Synoptic Gospels, but not to the Gospel of John.

*vice versa*. Matthew presents John as an esteemed figure within Jewish society. Although he ranks John as a prophet with a specific mission in the coming eschatological times, he does not make any reference to him as possibly being the Messiah<sup>40</sup>. In Matthew's Gospel John is not only the one who prepares the way for the Messiah but is also the first to recognize and accept Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. The most important element is Matthew's presentation of John as being subordinated to Jesus' will, even if his expectations quite often contrast with Jesus' attitude as the Messiah. The relationship between John as the leader of the messianic movement according to Jewish expectation, and Jesus as the *de facto* leader of the messianic movement, shows the relationship between these two similar movements. John who recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah, to some extent was doubted by Jesus and his movement due to his attitude toward the Law and the Jewish tradition.

Concerning Jesus' attitude toward John and his movement, Jesus recognized the importance of John in the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation, and on that account praised him highly. At the same time, Jesus shows the limit of John's activities. They are recognized as the necessary preparation, but no more. According to Matthew, Jesus considers John the Baptist and his movement to be inferior to His movement due to the difference in the level of realization of God's plan. That means that Jesus recognized John's movement as a necessary stage in the preparation for the appearance of the Messiah, but at the same time his movement was time-limited, and it ended when Jesus fulfilled God's plan. According to Matthew, these two movements are similar in having a common purpose in contributing to the realization of God's plan of salvation but differ in the way the purpose would be achieved. This makes it impossible that they achieve their common purpose in the same fashion. Despite this fact, the two

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<sup>40</sup> This contrasts with the expectation of some of the people.

movements and their leaders were in constant dialog in order to understand each other.

Summing up: Matthew presents the relationship between Jesus and John and their movements as one of cooperation, where each movement has its part in making possible the realization of God's plan. Despite significant differences in the attitude of each movement, they were in constant dialog, even though there were instances of doubt and confusion, as well as recognition and respect for each another.

## 4.2 The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark includes seven accounts about the relationship between the messianic movements of John and Jesus: Mk 1:4-8; Mk 1:9-11; Mk 1:14-15; Mk 2:18-22; Mk 6:14-29; Mk 8:27-30; Mk 11:27-33. The first three accounts (the proclamation of John the Baptist - Mk 1:4-8; the baptism of Jesus - Mk 1:9-11; the proclamation of the gospel by Jesus - Mk 1:14-15) introduce the two persons involved in the relationship (Mk 1:4-8; Mk 1:14-15), where the main aim of Mark's narrative is to present the most important event involving both of them in Jesus' baptism (Mk 1:9-11). This account is in fact the only one that includes a direct encounter between John and Jesus, but even this account is narrated by Mark in a very brief and schematic manner, which suggests that the author attempts to say as little as possible about this event by reducing it to the simple statement (*It was the time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John*). It allows us to conclude that Mark separated Jesus' messianic movement from that of John's messianic movement in order to suggest to his readers which of the two is the true movement.

The other three accounts (a discussion on fasting -Mk 2:18-22; Herod's testimony about Jesus- Mk 6:14-29; Peter's confession - Mk 8:27-30), contain opinions about Jesus and his movement. Mk 2:18-22 is general in its approach since unspecified people give the opinion. The second opinion (Mk 6:14-29) is given by Herod Antipas, one of few reminders of the dynasty of Herod the Great, which makes him in Mark's narrative to be the leader of the nation, even though he was not so in fact. The third opinion is given by Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, who is the first to directly express his faith in Jesus as the true Messiah. In this way, Mark shows that the people did not understand Jesus' movement and his activity, and that Herod Antipas confused Jesus with John, but only his disciples – here in the person of Peter as head of Twelve – recognized who Jesus really was.

The last account (Mk 11:27-33) regarding the relation between Jesus and John and their movements is narrated by Mark in a way that aims at showing the ill-will of the social and religious leaders of Jews who rejected both John and Jesus because of their prejudice. According to Mark, the authorities of the Temple rejected that John's activity was rooted in God's will and based on God's authority. The authorities also failed to accept Jesus' activity as being a realization of God's plan. Despite the fact that the activity of John and Jesus were part of God's plan, they differed in the level of their purpose and differed greatly in their realization. Contrary to Matthew and Luke, however, Mark avoids in his narrative any comparison between the two movements in order to underline the authorities' conservative attitude towards any change in the socio-religious *status quo* in Judea during the Roman period.

Summing up: concerning Mark's presentation of the relationship between these two movements we can say that he attempted to separate them by minimalizing the narrative regarding their direct encounter. At the same time, Mark' narrative regarding the relationship leads throughout to the final

conclusion (Mk11:27-33) that indicates the rejection of both leaders and their movements by the official socio-religious authorities<sup>41</sup>.

### 4.3 The Gospel of Luke

As one of the Synoptic Gospels the Gospel of Luke contains considerable amount of material that is similar or identical with the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Matthew, however, Luke is also that author of the Acts of the Apostles, which is of crucial importance for this study due to the fact that the narrative regarding the relationship between Jesus and John and their movements does not concern only the time of Jesus and John's activity, but it concerns also the time after their activities came to the end, and their disciples continue their movements. There is another distinguishing feature between Luke's Gospel and other the Synoptic Gospel, and it refers to the narrative that can be found exclusively in the Luke's Gospel. Among the accounts regarding the relationship between John and Jesus and their movements, Luke's narrative contains seven accounts regarding the relationship that are similar to or identical with that in the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of Matthew (the introduction of John and his ministry - Lk 3:1-20; the baptism of Jesus - Lk 3:21-22; the controversy about fasting - Lk 5:33-39; John's doubts - Lk 7:18-35; Herod evaluation of Jesus - Lk

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<sup>41</sup> Mark exposed in a progressive way the narrative regarding the relationship between Jesus and John and their movements. The first set of accounts (Mk 1:4-8; Mk 1:9-11; Mk 1:14-15) has an introductive character and they provide initial information about John and Jesus and they relationship. The second set of accounts (Mk 2:18-22; Mk 6:14-29; Mk 8:27-30) focused entirely on evaluation of Jesus by society, namely by people, Herod Antipas, and Peter, where the evaluations expose that only the disciples of Jesus (Peter) recognized the true dignity of Jesus as the Messiah. The last account (Mk 11:27-33) contains narrative regarding Jesus' arguing with the Sanhedrin, in order to points that His authority and John's authority comes from God, but it is not recognized by the Temple authorities. Despite the same source of the authority, the merit of the authority differs greatly. John possesses the authority of a prophet, and Jesus possesses the authority of the Messiah.

9:7-9; Peter's confession - Lk 9:18-21; the question about authority - Lk 20:1-8), but three accounts are only found in Luke: the infancy period of John and Jesus - Lk 1:1-2:52; the Lord's prayer - Lk 11:1-4; Jesus' evaluation of the time of John - Lk 16:14-18).

From the beginning of his Gospel, Luke makes clear the difference in the dignity of John and the dignity of Jesus (Lk 1:1-2:52) in order to shape the basic statement of his Gospel, that John is the prophet chosen by God, but Jesus is the Messiah sent by God to the nation. This clearly indicates that Luke's presentation of the relationship between Jesus and John has a strongly theological approach that is presented in the socio-culture context of Judea. The purpose of this approach is to indicate that John and Jesus are parts of God's plan of salvation, and consequently there is a strong connection between the life of John and the life of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. The account concerning the infancy of John and Jesus shows the synchronism in the narrative approach of the author (the conception of John and Jesus are both by the will of God; their names are decided by God; the purpose for each of them is determined by God)<sup>42</sup>. Although Luke's narrative strongly connects John with Jesus, it also presents differences between their dignity and the purpose of their lives. John is born to the family of the Temple priest, and by the will of God he will grow to become the prophet who will prepare the Jews for appearance of the Messiah. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit to an unmarried young woman, and he will grow to the status of being the nation's Savior<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> D.S. Dapaah, *The Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth*, Oxford: University Press of America 2005, 40.

<sup>43</sup> W. Wink rightly points to the fact that Luke uses the reference to Elijah (Lk 1:17) for a comparative reason. Accordingly, Luke in his narrative omitted the concept of the eschatological return of the prophet Elijah, which is present in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark. W. Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, West Broadway: Wipf and Stock Publishers<sup>2</sup> 2000, 42-43.

After the presentation of the infancy narrative, Luke in the second section introduces John's activity in Judea (Lk 3:1-20) that is followed by an account of Jesus' baptism, which marks the beginning of his mission activities (Lk 3:21-22). Concerning John's activity Luke gives an extensive account – the socio-political background; according to the Scriptures; the response of the nation to John's call; a summary of John's teaching; John's testimony concerning Jesus – in a way that shows his prophetic dignity, and his elimination of the idea that he himself might be the Messiah. Concerning Jesus, Luke limits the narrative to a brief and schematic account with little focus on the baptism itself and the stress placed on the revelation that took place.

The third section contains only one event, namely the discussion about fasting (Lk 5:33-39) which occurred between the Scribes, the Pharisees, and Jesus. This is the only account in Luke's Gospel that contains criticism of Jesus and his movement because of their neglecting the nation's customs<sup>44</sup>.

The fourth section (Lk 7:18-35; Lk 9:7-9; Lk 9:18-21) is indirectly connected with the third, and it contains three different evaluations of Jesus by John the Baptist, Herod Antipas, and Peter. Of special importance for this study is the account concerning John's doubts (Lk 7:18-35), which presents his critical evaluation of Jesus' mission that did not meet John's expectation about the true Messiah. Although John's doubts were allayed adequately by Jesus, the account shows the difference in the realization of God's plan by Jesus and his movement and by John and his disciples. John, who was the first to recognize Jesus' Messianic dignity and prepared the nation for His appearance, could not accept the new way in which Jesus realized the same plan of God. It shows that between the messianic movements of Jesus and John there were several differences that

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew and Mark present further grounds for criticism directed at Jesus.

prevented them from seeing that they were both engaged in realizing the same Divine plan.

The fifth section (Lk 11:1-4; Lk 16:14-18; Lk 20:1-8) concerns Jesus's testimony about John, in which he recognized John as the prophet whose activities contributed to the common goal, however, they still linked to the old religious way of Pharisaic Judaism, and consequently are evaluated by Jesus as being inferior in comparison to Jesus' messianic movement. After fulfilling his task John Baptist's time has ended, and his way can no longer contribute to fulfilling God's plan<sup>45</sup>. However, both John and Jesus and their movements were rejected by the mainstream religious authorities in Judaism.

Summing up: Luke presents highly theological interpretation of the relationship between John and Jesus, the leaders of two messianic movements. From the beginning of his narrative he makes a clear distinction between John the Baptist who is the prophet, and his movement that has a preparatory purpose, and Jesus the Messiah whose movement is the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation.

### **Conclusion: The Synoptic Gospels' presentation of the relationship between John and Jesus and the account of Ac 19:1-7**

The topic of relationship between John and Jesus and their movements is included in all three Synoptic Gospels (and also in the Gospel of John) as well as in the Acts of the Apostles written by the author of the Gospel of Luke. Considering that all these writings came from a later period and are not just exact accounts of the events, their narratives are for the most part similar, but

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<sup>45</sup> This may explain Paul's attempt to convert the disciples of John in Ephesus (Ac 19:1-7).

each has differences due to the purpose of each author. The differences in the accounts referring to the relationship between John and Jesus show that each author treated the same topic in his own way, but the diversity in the exposition does not necessarily reduce the merit of the overall presentation of the topic. All accounts in the Synoptic Gospels show that John is the prophet and Jesus is the Messiah, consequently John's movement had a preparatory character, and Jesus' movement was one of fulfilment. Thus, there were two similar messianic movements that emerged at the same time, and both leaders of the movements found supporters who were ready to claim the title of Messiah for them<sup>46</sup>. All the Synoptic Gospels responded to this problem, but in separate ways. The Gospel of Mark separates the two movements, reducing the narrative concerning the relationship to necessary minimum (Mk 1:9-11) in order to focus on developing the arguments that Jesus is the Son of God, and He is the Messiah. The Gospel of Matthew shows the relationship in a sequential and cooperative way, where John's movement has a preparatory character and is necessary for the appearance of Jesus and His movement that have a fulfilling character. Both movements are essential for the realization of God's plan. The Gospel of Luke shows the relation in way similar to that found in the Gospel of Matthew, with one critical difference in showing the inferiority of John's preparatory movement in comparison with Jesus' messianic movement. This attitude of Luke in presenting the relationship continues in the second volume of Luke's writing (the Acts of the Apostles) the narrative concerning the conversion of the John's disciples in Ephesus (Ac 19:1-7) where the author shows the necessity for the incorporation of John's disciples into the Christian movement, which is the fulfilment of the promises made by God to the nation.

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<sup>46</sup> Jesus earned the claim to be Messiah during his activity in Galilee, and he accepted it. John was seen by the authorities of the Temple and the people of Judea as having sufficient qualifications for the title of Messiah, but he refused to accept it.