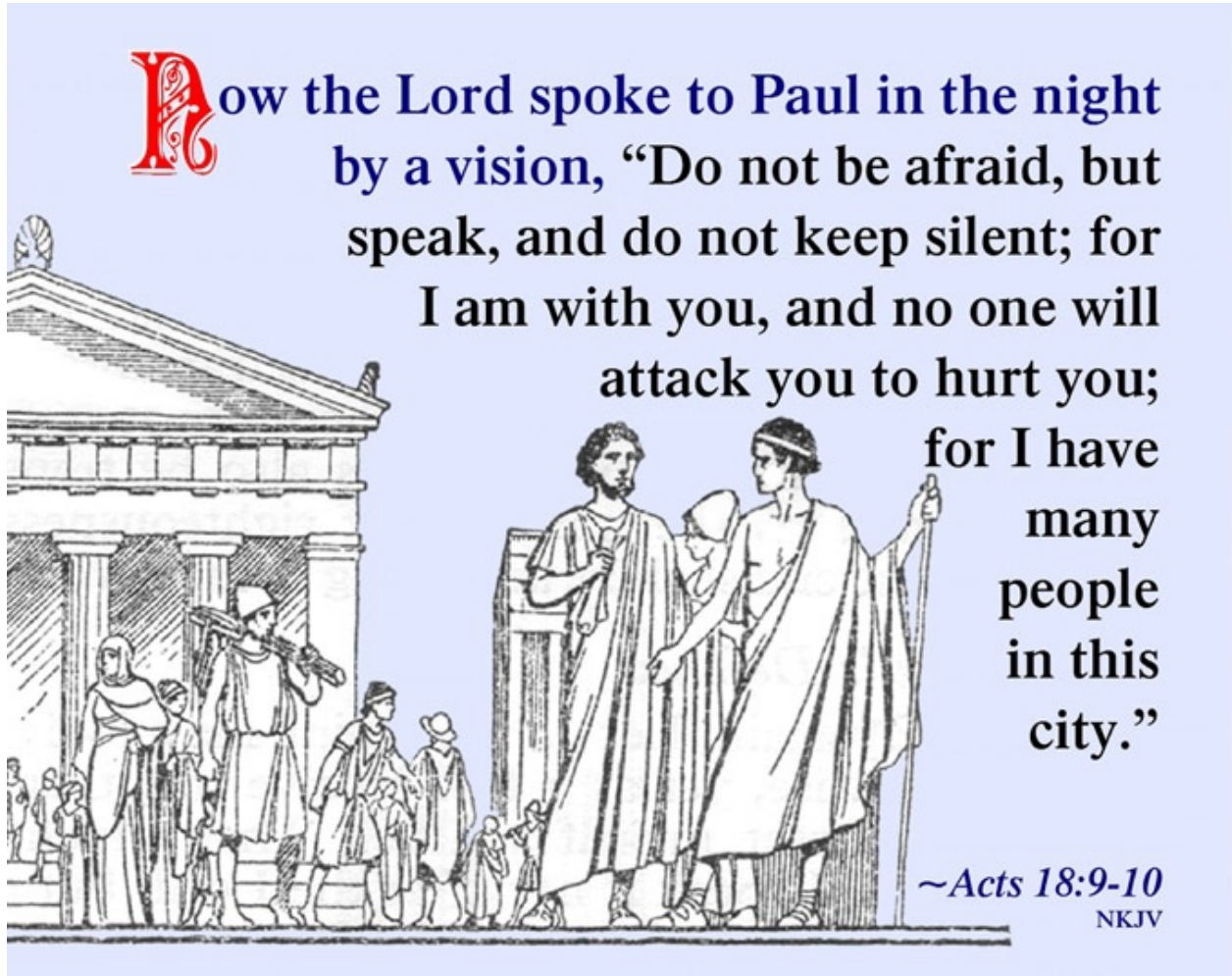


# The Conclusion of the Second Missionary Journey and the Beginning of the Third

Paul at Corinth and Briefly at Ephesus

## A Study in Acts Chapter 18



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## Acts Chapter 18

### The Conclusion of the Second Missionary Journey and the Beginning of the Third

#### Paul at Corinth and Briefly at Ephesus

This chapter concludes Paul's second missionary journey, focusing primarily on his ministry at Corinth. Following his eighteenth month stay in Corinth, Paul also made his first visit to Ephesus before reporting back to the church in Antioch. Then, in Acts 18:23 he began his third missionary journey, visiting many of the churches he had founded in Asia Minor and strengthening the believers. This was the prelude to a more lengthy stay in Ephesus. Meanwhile Aquila and Priscilla, whom Paul left at Ephesus, had a fascinating encounter with Apollos, a man who was "mighty in the Scriptures" but who was deficient in his knowledge of the Christian gospel. A humble man, he was willing to be instructed by Aquila and Priscilla, and later had a fruitful ministry in Corinth.

#### Acts 18:1

Corinth was due west of Athens. It was the capital city in the region known as Achaia and was Greece's most magnificent commercial center:

Corinth was located just south of the narrow isthmus connecting central Greece with the Peloponnesus. Its strategic situation made it the mecca of trade between the East and West....The city derived rich income from the transport of cargoes across the narrow isthmus (a distance less than five miles).<sup>1</sup>

Corinth has been described as the "Vanity Fair" of the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> The city of Corinth was notorious for its wealth and wickedness. Wealth often breeds wickedness, and Corinth was famous for its fornication centers and every kind of immorality (1 Cor. 6:9-11). "Corinth was famed for its Temple of Aphrodite (Venus) on its acropolis [known as Acrocorinth, a hill more than 1800 feet above sea level], in which one thousand sacred prostitutes contributed their sordid influence to the morals of the city."<sup>3</sup> George E. Ladd adds, "The reputation of Corinth is illustrated by the fact that the verb 'to act like a Corinthian' was used of practicing fornication, and the phrase 'Corinthian

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 255 (article under "Corinth").

<sup>2</sup>John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup>Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome—Studies in Acts*, p. 141 (section in brackets was added).

girls' designated harlots."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, when Paul wrote Romans chapter 1 denouncing pagan sins such as homosexuality, he wrote from Corinth.

### Acts 18:2-3

Why would God lead Paul to a city like Corinth? Probably for many reasons. For one, it was here that he met two of his greatest co-workers: Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila was a Jew born in Pontus in northern Turkey (Acts 2:9-10; 18:2). Paul earlier had been forbidden by God to go to the area where Pontus was located (Acts 16:6-9). They lived in Italy until a decree issued by the Emperor Claudius (49 A.D.) expelled all Jews from Rome. Woodbridge refers to this as "imperial anti-Semitism."<sup>5</sup> The reason for this expulsion was due to regular disturbances among the Jews led by a man named Chrestus. This name is only one letter off from the Latin name for Christ which is "Christus." A number of interpreters suggest that in Rome there had been a clash between believing Jews who were preaching "Christus" and unsaved Jews. At any rate, Aquila and Priscilla were forced to leave Rome due to the Emperor, and they came to Corinth. This imperial edict was sovereignly used by God to accomplish His own will!

Paul "found" Aquila and Priscilla. How wonderful is the providence of God, working out circumstances and events in order to bring certain people together! Middletown Bible Church had a book table in 1984 at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut where free Bibles and Christian literature were distributed to the students. A student from Nepal "found" this table, and spent the next six years being discipled by believers at the Middletown Bible Church. Since then he has led numerous people to the Lord in Nepal and has planted five local churches.

Aquila and Priscilla earned a living making tents. Jewish tradition required that every Jewish boy be taught a trade. Paul was trained by his parents to be a tentmaker or a leatherworker, a very useful trade. The province of Cilicia, where Paul was from, was known for its cloth made from goats' hair called *cilicium*. It's possible that Paul made such cloth as part of his trade. He stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and they worked together at their common trade to earn money. Today, when a believer is engaged in Christian ministry and yet must also provide for part or all of his income, the work he does, whatever it might be, is sometimes referred to as "tent making."

William Carey, the great pioneer missionary to India, would never have been able to stay in India if he had not built a printing press and done printing for the government. He became a public printer and with the money he made from the printing press, he constructed his own missionary program.<sup>6</sup>

Whether Paul led Aquila and Priscilla to the Lord in Corinth or whether they came to faith in Christ at an earlier time, we are not told. Jacob W. Kapp argues the former:

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Pfeiffer and Everett Harrison, editors, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1158 (under Acts 18:1).

<sup>5</sup>Charles J. Woodbridge, *Standing on the Promises—Rich Truths from the Book of Acts*, p. 116.

<sup>6</sup>Manford George Gutzke, *Acts*, p. 160.

The account given of him [Aquila] does not justify the conclusion that he and his wife were already Christians when Paul met them. Had that been the case Luke would almost certainly have said so, especially if it was true that Paul sought them out on that account. Judging from their well-known activity in Christian work they would have gathered a little band of inquirers or possibly converts, even though they have been there for but a short time. It is more in harmony with the account to conclude that Paul met them as fellow-tradespeople, and that he took the opportunity of preaching Christ to them as they toiled. There can be no doubt that Paul would use these days to lead them into the kingdom and instruct them therein, so that afterward they would be capable of being teachers themselves (Acts 18:26). Not only did they become Christians but they also became fast and devoted friends of Paul, and he fully reciprocated their affection for him (Rom. 16:3,4).<sup>7</sup>

Those who argue that Aquila and Priscilla were already saved before they met Paul point out that they came from Rome where there was a church. The first to be converted in Achaia/Corinth was Stephanus (1 Cor. 16:15; 1:16). Thus either Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians in Rome, or they were saved through Paul's ministry in Corinth some time after Stephanus was saved. This latter possibility seems less likely. As great as Paul was as an evangelist, not everyone was saved under his ministry!

#### **Acts 18:4**

As was his custom, Paul entered the synagogue every Sabbath where the Jews gathered along with Gentile proselytes. The word "reasoned" is the Greek word "*dialegomai*" from which we get the English word "dialogue." Often it involved a "going back and forth," that is, a two-way discussion that could sometimes include some arguing or disputing if there were differences of opinion. "Discoursed" would be a good synonym for this word. The same word is used in Acts 17:2 and 17:17 ("disputed," KJV) of discussions Paul had with people in the Jewish synagogue at Thessalonica and Athens. Paul always drew his arguments from the Scriptures.

Paul was also persuading the Jews and Greeks (Gentiles who were attending the synagogue). His goal was to persuade them by words and by the use of the Scriptures so that they might be convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, the One promised to Israel. In Acts 18:8 we learn about God's blessing upon his ministry—"And many of the Corinthians believed, and were baptized."

#### **Acts 18:5**

Paul had requested that Silas and Timothy join him in Athens and waited for them there (Acts 17:15-16). Though Acts 17 does not mention their arrival, the "we" of 1 Thessalonians 3:1 suggests that Silas and Timothy were in Athens. From Athens Timothy was sent to Thessalonica to encourage the church (1 Thess. 3:1-2), and Silas went somewhere in Macedonia, perhaps to Philippi (Acts 18:5). Both men rejoined Paul in Corinth and brought a monetary gift from Philippi and perhaps also from the church in Thessalonica (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:15). Such gifts freed Paul from the tedious work of making tents, and allowed him to devote more of his time and efforts to evangelism. He was able to focus more and more on the ministry of convincing people that the true Messiah had come and

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<sup>7</sup>*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, article on "Aquila," written by Jacob W. Kapp, p. 211.

that Jesus was He. It is a wonderful blessing today when pastors and missionaries are supported by God's people and do not need to work full time so they can give themselves wholly to the ministry of prayer and the Word (Acts 6:4).<sup>8</sup>

It was while Paul was at Corinth that he wrote the two epistles to the Thessalonians. This was around 51 A. D.

### **Acts 18:6**

The verb "opposed" means that they opposed and resisted Paul and his teaching.<sup>9</sup> What does it mean that "they blasphemed"? Paul later told Timothy that he himself was a blasphemer (1 Tim. 1:13). This does not mean that Paul or these Jews were denouncing God. A loyal Jew would never do this. Instead, they were denouncing Christ who claimed to be God. They were saying that Jesus was not God. Since Jesus is the true God (1 John 5:20; John 1:1), to say that He is not God is therefore blasphemy.

The shaking off of his garments indicates that he shook off the dust of his garments (Matt. 10:14; Mark 6:11; Acts 13:51). "By this symbolic act a person expresses extreme contempt for another and refuses to have any further contact with him" (Thayer).

Paul then denounced these Jews and told them they were fully responsible for their unbelief: "Your blood be upon your own heads." Since they would not listen, Paul announced that he would bring his message to the Gentiles. We are reminded of Paul's similar statement made to the unbelieving Jews of Antioch in Pisidia: "[They] spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:45-46). Certainly this statement did not mean that Paul would never again enter a Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:1-2; 17:10; 18:4; 19:8).

In addition, Paul was not saying that he would never again go to the Jewish people with the gospel message. His point was that he would never enter into this particular synagogue in Corinth again. This Corinthian synagogue was anathema (cursed) because they blasphemed God's own Son, and rejected God's good news.

The apostle Paul's statement here had simply a local significance (for see, e.g., 18:19), moving on to the Gentiles in Corinth; unlike Acts 13:46 which entailed a broad programmatic shift for the apostle Paul toward the Gentiles (in that regard, see also the very next verse in that chapter, 13:47, "For thus has the Lord enjoined us: I

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<sup>8</sup>"Pressed in the Spirit" (KJV) involves a textual variant where many manuscripts have "Word" instead of "Spirit." Most of the translations reflect this: "Paul began devoting himself completely to the word" (NASB 1995), "Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word" (NET Bible) and "Paul was engrossed with [or constrained by] the Word" (William Kelly's translation).

<sup>9</sup>They did not "oppose themselves" as the KJV suggests.

have set thee for a light of the nations, that thou shouldest be for salvation to the end of the earth.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Acts 18:7**

The house of Justus was bordering on the synagogue, right next door. Justus is described as a “worshipper,” one who is a proselyte. He was a Gentile who embraced the Jewish faith. According to certain manuscripts, his full name was Justus Titius. Even though Paul separated from the synagogue (verse 6), he stayed in close vicinity and entered into the house of Justus who was probably a disciple of Christ. Some identify Justus with the “Gaius” mentioned in Romans 16:23 and 1 Corinthians 1:14. Gentiles often had three names.<sup>11</sup> His house was ideally located: “People who had been accustomed to attend the synagogue did not have to leave their habitual route if they wished to continue hearing Paul; they made their way towards the synagogue as usual, but turned in next door.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Acts 18:8**

On the one hand the Jews in the synagogue blasphemed Jesus and resisted and rejected Paul’s gospel. Yet, on the other hand the chief ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, became a believer along with all the members of his household. No doubt he had heard Paul reasoning from the Scriptures, fell under deep conviction, and turned in faith to the Messiah. This conversion must have had quite an impact upon the unbelieving Jews. Their hostility against Paul and any Jews who followed his teachings was only intensified by every Jewish person who trusted Christ.

Many other Corinthians also believed the gospel message and were baptized. Who baptized them? Paul later wrote to the Corinthians, “Were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus [the chief ruler of the synagogue] and Gaius, lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:13-17). This statement does not mean that Paul was minimizing water baptism or rejecting it as an important first step of obedience in the believer’s life. If that were the case, Paul would not have baptized anyone. Yet, water baptism does not save people, and Paul was careful not to intrude into the territory of what the local church leaders were to do. Paul was a traveling evangelist and a church planter. His preference was that people be baptized by local church leaders, whenever possible. Paul’s point was that his main mission and his main priority was to preach the gospel. Administering water baptism was of minimal significance compared to his main mission. Baptizing new converts could be and was delegated to others.

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<sup>10</sup>James Ventilato, correspondence with George Zeller.

<sup>11</sup>Some identify Justus with Gaius who is mentioned in Romans 16:23. If so, his full name would have been Gaius Titius Justus. Gaius was one of the few people in Corinth that Paul baptized (1 Cor. 1:14).

<sup>12</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 371.

The Corinthians believers were forming divisive groups centered around certain individuals such as Paul and Apollos and Cephas (Peter). Another group claiming to be even more spiritual claimed that their loyalty was to Christ (1 Cor. 1:12). The saints are not to be divided in such a carnal way. We are one body of believers, under one Head, united together by one Spirit, and unified by one God and Father of us all (Eph. 4:4-6). How we need to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3)!

It is carnal and childish to get wrongly attached to personalities, and it can become very divisive. The Corinthians were famous for eloquence, philosophy, brilliance, high education, and yet they were abysmally deficient when it came to spirituality. “For while one saith, I am of Paul and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:4-5).<sup>13</sup>

In spite of carnality, divisiveness, pride and other problems, God was doing a work in Corinth and men and women were coming to faith in Christ. The book of 1 Corinthians was written later to address the many problems these believers had.

### **Acts 18:9-10**

Paul was getting discouraged with all that was happening in Corinth: fighting, controversy, blasphemies, divisions, etc. In spite of the fact that people were coming to faith in Christ, Paul was weary to the point of exhaustion, and he was afraid (1 Cor. 2:3). After being beaten repeatedly and stoned once, it is understandable that Paul, who was not sinless, could at times become fearful. So one night the Lord spoke to Paul with tender and comforting words: “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”<sup>14</sup> In light of Paul’s frequent persecutions in other cities, this promise that he would not be hurt (beaten, etc.) must have been a great encouragement to continue speaking and evangelizing.

We remember when Jeremiah was almost ready to resign from his ministry and speak no more in His Name. God then dealt with his heart in a special way (Jer. 20:9-11). In Exodus chapter 3 Moses gave excuse after excuse (to paraphrase): “I can’t preach. I don’t know enough theology; I’m not eloquent; Maybe Aaron is Your man, etc.” In spite of all his excuses, God selected Moses to be His instrument to bring His people out of Egypt. The Lord used him in a great way.

Likewise Paul was told marvelous things by God. Indeed, God revealed to Paul so many wonderful revelations that God had to humble him and give him a “thorn in the flesh...lest [he] should be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:7). One thing Paul did not have was eloquence, and that offended the Corinthians who were typical Greeks. They loved beautiful ways of saying things by the use of lovely expressions and figures of speech. Paul did not have eloquence, but he had something even

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<sup>13</sup>Dr. Whitcomb spoke in hundreds of local churches and was often asked to put his autograph in a person’s Bible. On one occasion a young boy came up to him and said, “Sir, are you famous?” He humbly replied, “Not really.” The boy responded, “Well then, you should not sign my Bible!”

<sup>14</sup>God spoke to Paul here and in Acts 9:4-6; 16:6; 23:11; 27:23.

more important. He had the truth of God, and he knew how to proclaim the truth, “not with excellency of speech or with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

So in the night, by means of a vision, God gave Paul great encouragement. God’s personal presence would be with him. God would not allow him to be hurt.<sup>15</sup> And his ministry would bring forth fruit: “I have much people in this city.” In spite of the wicked environment of this city, the carnality among believers and a fleshly spirit of divisiveness, yet God would still give Paul many converts.

God knew that there were “much people” in this city who would come to know Christ and be saved. God promised that Paul’s ministry in Corinth would be met with success. God knows them that are His (2 Tim. 2:19), and God knows who will be saved even before they are converted. God had marked them out for His own. This in no way eliminates human responsibility to respond to God and to His precious Word which must be proclaimed by God’s servants. Paul did not say, “Well, Lord, if you have much people in this city, then they are already predestinated and elected, so I don’t even need to talk to them.” No, that is not the way to solve this antinomy. We do what God tells us to do and God will do what only He can do. We must do our part and God will surely do His part, according to His sovereign purposes. The doctrine of election should be of great encouragement to us, knowing that God has people that are going to be saved. We just need to pray and bring the message to them, trusting God to bring conviction and conversion. What a joy to be co-workers together with God in the evangelism of lost souls!

In our [twenty-first century] the presence of the Son of God is still a challenge to reach the “much people” who are designated as His own. Up and down the busy thoroughfares of the world’s cities these needy souls wander. In the country, in villages, on the sea, there are men and women with an unseen word which Christ has stamped on their foreheads: MINE. It is the seal of ownership, the stamp of possession. In the most unlikely places such persons may be found, untouched as yet, but waiting, waiting until some Christian has the courage to speak and to point the way to the Lamb of God.<sup>16</sup>

What a strange phrase! ‘Much people in this city’? Where were they? All Paul could see were pagans, totally ignorant of the true and living God. Yes, that was true. But the people God had in that city were not yet saved. They were still in sin. They were groping in error. But God had chosen them and purposed to save them. He would follow them, disturb them, convince them, and convert them. Such a statement reveals the practical importance of the doctrine of election to the work of evangelism. “I have much people in this city.” Be encouraged, Paul. Your preaching will not be in vain. Were it not for My electing grace your evangelistic efforts would be fruitless. Were it not for the gracious lifting of the spiritual blindness which at this moment envelops the hearts of the elect, all your reasonings and efforts would produce nothing. Go now and evangelize with the assurance that your preaching will be blessed with results. “I have much people in this city.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Was it providential that Paul was not hurt in Corinth because his doctor was not with him? Dr. Luke had remained back in Philippi. His beloved physician was absent, but God was with him to protect him from harm.

<sup>16</sup>Charles J. Woodbridge, *Standing on the Promises—Rich Truths from the Book of Acts*, pages 121-122 (brackets added).

<sup>17</sup>Ernest Pickering, *The Theology of Evangelism*, p. 37.



### **Acts 18:11**

Paul settled [stayed, continued, literally “sat”] eighteen months in this city. It was very rare for Paul to spend so much time in one city. He devoted the time to teaching them the Word of God. It was during this year and a half period that Paul wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians.

### **Acts 18:12**

Gallio was the Roman official in Corinth. It is an established fact of history that Gallio was in Corinth from 51-52 A.D, a very helpful fact in dating the time of Paul’s stay in Corinth. Gallio was a famous Roman official and judge. He was very gracious, friendly and highly respected. Gallio was the older brother of a much more famous Roman dramatist and philosopher, by the name of Seneca. Seneca was a Stoic philosopher and tutor of Nero. Gallio’s nephew was Lucan the poet. Gallio would later be killed by Nero. As Paul ran into trouble with the Jews, God used Gallio to bring about His purposes.

The angry Jewish mob brought Paul to the judgment seat (bema seat) in Corinth. In 1952 Dr. Whitcomb visited Corinth as part of a Holy Land tour. Archaeologists had discovered this bema seat. It was a beautiful, blue marble platform. Right on the front of this platform, in Greek, was written, “BEMA.” At this judgment seat all kinds of matters were brought to be evaluated. Controversies had to be settled and rewards were handed out for athletic contests.

These Jews thought that Gallio was a friendly and considerate Roman official who would listen to their case against Paul and act accordingly, but they misjudged him totally. “The king’s heart in the hand of Jehovah is as brooks of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov. 21:1).

### **Acts 18:13**

They accused Paul of persuading Jews to worship contrary to Jewish law and Jewish practices. They were suggesting that Paul was a trouble maker and a disturber of the peace, and they wanted Gallio to step in and do something about it.

### **Acts 18:14**

Paul was about to open his mouth and defend himself, but before he could do so, Gallio gave his answer. His patience with these Jews was rapidly being exhausted. They could show no real crime that Paul had committed. “Wrong” (KJV) indicates a misdeed or an unrighteous act. “Lewdness” (KJV) is translated from a Greek word only found here. It means a prank or a trick, but here it refers to a more serious misdeed. It should probably be translated “crime” (NKJV, NASB), an evil and deceitful crime. Gallio would have put up with these Jews if they had showed him a real crime; but they failed to do so. Gallio considered the matter to be an internal Jewish dispute that the Jews needed to work out among themselves.

## Acts 18:15-16

Notice the emphasis on “your law.” They were fighting over Jewish law, which included words from the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures. What names were they disputing? Probably these were names such as “Messiah” and whether that term could rightly be applied to Jesus who claimed to be the Messiah, the Christ.

The Jews may have suggested that Paul was promoting an insurrection against Rome. Obviously there is some truth to this. In Daniel chapter 2, for example, we are told that there will be a stone cut out of the mountain made without hands, and that stone will destroy the ten toes of the final form of the Roman Empire. It will totally demolish the whole image, pulverize it, and the stone will become a mighty kingdom, set up by God Himself (Dan. 2:44-45). This will indeed take place at the second coming of Christ. At that time Christ will establish a kingdom which will replace all earthly governments. This will all happen in the future, but the purpose of the Church on earth during this present age is not to overthrow human governments. Rather it is to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:8) and to announce the good news to all men everywhere (Mark 16:15; Acts 17:30). Paul was an evangelist, not an insurrectionist.

The argument of the Jews was that Paul was making blasphemous statements concerning Jesus. They wanted Paul and his fellow Christians to be punished or expelled from the land. Yet, Gallio refused to be a judge of such matters, and he drove them from the judgment seat.

Gallio said that if the matter was concerning religion or about some religious thing, then they should take it and handle it themselves. He was a Roman magistrate and he was concerned with enforcing Roman law. But when the case did not involve Roman law, he would not interfere. He told them to handle religious matters themselves. He adopted a “hands off” policy. He separated church and state. He would not interfere with Paul’s preaching in the city of Corinth.<sup>18</sup>

Gallio had wisdom, courage and decisiveness, and Paul was the benefactor of his decision. He dismissed the case completely. This was in sharp contrast to the actions of Pontius Pilate about twenty years earlier. Pilate should have said, “You Jews are fighting over names and words in your law concerning the claims of Jesus. I will have nothing to do with this. I am a Roman official. This is a Jewish matter; you handle it!” Pilate should have dismissed the case and driven the Jewish leaders out. Instead he caved in to their arguments and to their pressure, even though he knew that Jesus was innocent of any crime.

If Gallio had decided against Paul, this would have had grave consequences with respect to the spreading of the gospel:

The verdict of a Roman governor would not only be effective within his province but would be followed as a precedent by the governors of other provinces. Had the proconsul of Achaia pronounced a verdict unfavorable to Paul, the story of the progress of Christianity during the next decade or so would have been very different from what it actually was.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Acts Chapters 15-28*, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 373.

The Lord had promised to protect Paul (verse 10) and Paul left the courtroom scene without any bodily harm. God was faithful to His promise.

### **Acts 18:17**

The Greeks (Gentiles) who were probably witnesses of all of these things, took action against the Jews and punished Sosthenes the chief ruler of the synagogue. There is some minor ambiguity as to who these people were that beat Sosthenes. The Majority Text has “the Greeks” (Gentiles) being responsible for this action, which is most likely the case. The Critical Text omits “the Greeks” and reads, “And having all laid hold on Sosthenese the ruler of the synagogue, they beat [him]” (William Kelly’s translation). In his textual notes, Kelly explains that the crowd who did this must have been made up of Greeks (Gentiles), and not Jews. Why would Jews attack their own synagogue leader?

We learned from Acts 18:8 that Crispus had been the chief ruler of the synagogue. However, Crispus had believed on Christ and was replaced by Sosthenes. If this were the same man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1 then Sosthenes later became a believer because Paul addressed him as “Sosthenes our brother.” In Corinth, Paul had great success at converting two synagogue leaders! Exactly when the conversion of Sosthenes took place is unknown, but it must have taken place after this beating. Sometimes a terrible experience like this can cause a person to wake up to ultimate realities.

“Gallio cared for none of these things.” Barclay writes, “[This] has often been taken to mean that Gallio was uninterested; but its real meaning is that he was absolutely impartial and refused to allow himself to be influenced.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Acts 18:18**

After staying eighteen months in Corinth (verse 11), it was finally time for Paul to depart from the city. Paul’s goal was to return to Syria in order to report back to his home church at Antioch. Priscilla and Aquila were with him as he commenced this journey. Cenchrea was a port city of Corinth at its eastern harbor. Its modern name is still Kenchreae, although its popular name is Kikries. It is about eight miles from Corinth. In Romans 16:1 we learn that there was a church in that location.

What is the significance of Paul’s vow? Some believe that Paul may have taken a temporary Nazirite vow, especially since he cut his hair (cf. Numbers 6:1-21). We are not told why he did this. A Nazirite vow involved separation from the world and a special yieldedness to God’s service. A Jew performing such a vow would normally go to Jerusalem to present the appropriate offering and sacrifice (Numbers 6:10-17). He would also shave his head and burn it at the altar of sacrifice (Num. 6:18-19).

When a Jew specially wished to thank God for some blessing he took the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21). If that vow was carried out in full it meant that for thirty days he neither ate meat nor drank wine; and he allowed his hair to grow. At the end of the thirty days he made certain offerings in the Temple; his head was shorn and the hair was burned on the altar as an offering to God.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (revised edition), p. 137.

<sup>21</sup>William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (revised edition), p. 138.

Paul cut his hair when he was in Cenchrea. “The cutting of his hair indicates that the period of his vow had come to an end.”<sup>22</sup> The text says that he “made a vow” and it is assumed this was done at Corinth. On this trip Paul did go to Jerusalem (Acts 18:22), but the reason stated for going there was that he wanted to keep a feast (Acts 18:21, according to the Majority Text). He may have also wanted to fulfill his vow in Jerusalem, but this is not stated. Probably one should not unduly speculate about this vow since we are told so little about it. Homer Kent summarized this vow as follows:

Apparently Paul had taken a Nazirite vow during his stay in Corinth and the period of the vow (usually thirty days) was now over. Such vows are described in Numbers 6:1-21. At the conclusion of the vow one’s hair was cut (or shaved) and burned with a sacrifice at Jerusalem. It must be remembered that Acts describes a period of transition, and it should not surprise us to find Christian Jews still observing Jewish ritual as a matter of choice.<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Whitcomb believed that Paul took this vow because he did not want any Jew to question his appreciation of Jewish traditions and customs. Such customs had nothing to do with salvation or sanctification, but they had a lot to do with building bridges to the Jewish people whom Paul loved in the Lord and wanted to win to Christ (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1). Paul was very serious when he said, “And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews” (1 Cor. 9:20).

Following certain Jewish customs did not make Paul a legalist. He had the freedom to do so and he had the freedom not to do so. As a believer he was not under the Mosaic law (Rom. 6:14-15).<sup>24</sup> If he had required Gentiles to do the same, or even if he had required this of Jewish believers, then he would have been a legalist.

Other commentators believe that Paul acted contrary to New Testament principles by taking this vow and needed to mature in his understanding:

Luke tells us that when Paul was at Cenchrea, he shaved his head, having made a “vow.” This committed him to go to Jerusalem in time for the Jewish feast there (vs. 21), for the discharge of every vow required a trip to the temple, the place where the Lord had put His name (Deut. 12:11). We see in this that even though Paul had been given special revelations as to the nature and unity and calling of the Church (as being a heavenly company of believers who are distinct from Israel), he still, as to experience, was not completely clear of his ties to Judaism, and thus observed some Jewish customs. It was not until he was captive in Rome that he clearly saw [all that was involved in] the distinction between Israel and the Church, as attested to in his later epistles — especially Hebrews 13:10-13. Therefore, what Paul did here is not to be taken as a pattern for Christians. J. N. Darby said, “We see to what extent he was still bound to Jewish customs. He takes a vow and shaves his head in Cenchrea. He feels obliged in his heart to observe the feast at Jerusalem; and gives this to the Jews at Ephesus as to his motive for not then remaining in their city. He is a true Jew

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<sup>22</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 377.

<sup>23</sup>Homer A. Kent Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome—Studies in Acts*, pages 144-145.

<sup>24</sup>See George Zeller’s booklet, *What is the Believer’s Rule of Life?*

<https://middletownbiblechurch.org/doctrine/rulelife.htm> [accessed 3/6/24].

and acted as one. The Spirit records these facts that we may understand the bonds which still held the spirit of the Apostle. *Collected Writings*, Vol. 25, p. 404.”<sup>25</sup>

William Kelly presents a more balanced view:

There is a clause at the end of verse 18 which has afforded matter for debate. The ancients do not seem to have doubted that Paul himself is in question, the preceding words being parenthetical. Others, especially of late, as Wieseler and Meyer, have been more willing to attach the vow, and shaving of the head, to Aquila. But the great apostle went far in compliance with, and in condescension to, Jewish forms in certain circumstances which left the grace of the gospel untouched. It was the effort to impose the law on the Gentiles who believed, which roused a tempest of feeling and irresistible argument, as indeed his whole soul was engaged with burning zeal at once for the cross of his Master, and for the liberty of the souls imperilled by that effort.

Not only was Paul’s head shorn in Cenchreae, and this as a vow, but we ought to gather from the subsequent history, if not from the immediate context, that it was of the Spirit to reveal the fact as important for us to observe in the account He is giving of that blessed man and of his labours. Not that we are meant to infer that Paul in thus acting was at the height of the fresh revelations of Christ given to him, but that along with these he acted thus with a good conscience. He was apostle of the Gentiles and minister of the church, but he was also, as he said, a Pharisee, son of Pharisees, who even after this charged himself to his nation with alms and offerings, and was found purified in the temple. Grace was bringing out its new and hitherto unrevealed wonders in Christ, and in the church, to God’s glory; but the most deeply taught and fully furnished witness of heavenly truth heartily loved the ancient people of God and never forgot that he too was an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin; and this, not only within the precincts of Jerusalem and the land, but, as we see here, among the Greeks. This is often a great difficulty to those imbued with the spirit and habits of traditional Christianity, but it is because they are and would be logical, where the Holy Spirit is giving in those most honoured of the Lord things just as they were. Prejudices and prepossession are not so quickly shaken off, even where we behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile. The Lord deals pitifully with a true heart, where a cold intellect can only spy out an inconsistency; but the criticizing mind could not follow that heart for a moment either in its zealous service or in the spiritual might and power which pursues the service to the Lord’s glory.<sup>26</sup>

## **Acts 18:19**

Paul arrived at Ephesus where he would leave Aquila and Priscilla. As was Paul’s custom, he went

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<sup>25</sup>Bruce Anstey, *The Book of the Acts: Divine Record of the First 30 Years of Christianity*, <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/the-regions-beyond-paul-apos/stanley-bruce-anstey/the-book-of-the-acts/bruce-anstey/la171983>.

<sup>26</sup>William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (newly translated from an amended text), third edition. [https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/2Newtest/ACTS\\_PT3.html#a18](https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/2Newtest/ACTS_PT3.html#a18) [accessed 3/6/24].

into the synagogue to evangelize the Jews.<sup>27</sup> The city of Ephesus was a key city in Asia. Earlier, the Holy Spirit had forbidden Paul from going there (Acts 16:6). This was now Paul's first opportunity to come to this tremendous city of 300,000 people. From this one city he could then reach out to all of Asia (Acts 19:9-10).

Ephesus was at that time the greatest commercial city of Asia Minor, although its harbour required constant dredging because of the alluvium carried down by the Cayster, at whose mouth it stood. Standing on the main route from Rome to the east, it enjoyed political importance in addition to its geographical advantages; it was the capital of the province of Asia.<sup>28</sup>

Also at Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the magnificent Temple of Artemis or Diana.

### **Acts 18:20-21**

Those in Ephesus wanted Paul to remain with them for a prolonged period, but amazingly Paul did not agree to stay. He felt the need to go to Jerusalem to observe a feast, and perhaps also to fulfill his vow, but he promised he would return. Paul stated "if God wills" (compare James 4:13,15). His heart was cognizant of God's sovereign governance over all circumstances, and from Acts 19 we know that his God did indeed so will. The Lord through Paul is thus setting the stage for three years of ministry in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:31). While Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he most likely reached out also to the other six churches that are mentioned in Revelation 2-3 (compare Acts 19:10). It's possible that this work was done in part by some of his disciples in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). These men may have helped to plant churches even in areas Paul had never visited.

### **Acts 18:22**

Paul landed at Caesarea, where Philip the evangelist was living with his four daughters. Cornelius the centurion had been converted in this city. It is also the city where Paul would be imprisoned for two years on his way to Rome. Caesarea was not far from Jerusalem, and the church mentioned in this verse was the church at Jerusalem, even though it is not so named. He had to "go up" to that church because Jerusalem was at a high elevation (about 2500 feet above Caesarea which was almost at sea level). Some believe that the feast Paul wanted to observe was the Passover.

Paul saw a very serious situation in Jerusalem. The believers there were struggling and starving. They had been excommunicated and ostracized. They could not get jobs. In short, they were in desperate straits. How do we know that? Later, his third missionary journey, Paul made every effort in every city he visited to collect money for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Apparently there was something that Paul saw in this brief visit to Jerusalem that shocked him and left a lasting impression. He was determined under God to relieve the saints in Jerusalem and meet their desperate need. He also wanted to build a bond between Gentile Christians and the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem. It was a wonderful goal. We learn about Paul's provision for Jerusalem

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<sup>27</sup>Paul "reasoned" with the Jews. See the discussion under Acts 18:4.

<sup>28</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 378.

in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. He believed that Gentile Christians were members of the same body as Hebrew Christians and there was to be no middle wall of division between them.

Following his visit to Jerusalem, Paul “went down” to his sending church at Antioch, most certainly giving them a report of all that had taken place on his second missionary journey. He had done the same after his first missionary journey (Acts 14:27).

### **Acts 18:23**

This verse marks the beginning of Paul’s third missionary journey. He launched this missionary journey with no companion at all. What happened to Silas? We are not told. He disappeared from the sacred record. Peter may have mentioned Silas in 1 Peter 5:12 as some believe Silvanus was another name for Silas. Yet here Paul was all alone. He had neither Barnabas nor John Mark nor Silas; he was by himself. Imagine the hundreds of miles that Paul traveled, often by foot. “Although this missionary journey, occupied more time than his previous ones, it took Paul to no new areas. Thus it was more of an instructing and confirming mission than a pioneering venture.”<sup>29</sup> The Galatians were a great burden to Paul and he began by visiting those churches with the goal of strengthening all the disciples.

### **Acts 18:24**

In the meantime Apollos arrived in Ephesus, one of the most powerful preachers the world has ever known: “an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures.” The word “eloquent” is *lógios*, an adjective which is derived from the Greek word *logos*, meaning “word.” This adjective means “learned, a man skilled in literature and the arts” (Vine’s). It has a twofold meaning: 1) someone who has a vast knowledge and is well-read; 2) someone who is eloquent or skilled in words. From what we know about Apollos, both were true. He was a learned man, and especially well-versed in the Old Testament Scriptures. He was also a powerful preacher, being able to powerfully refute the Jews and show that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:28). The majority of the translations prefer the meaning of “eloquent.”

Apollos was “mighty in the Scriptures.” Mighty [*dunatós*] is an adjective meaning “powerful, mighty, able, strong.” He was mighty in the way he could understand the Scriptures and apply the truth to himself and his hearers. Every believer is to be strong when it comes to the Word of God: “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you” (1 John 2:14). The Lord Jesus described such power in John 15:7—“If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

Apollos was born in Alexandria. Alexandria was a great city with a large Jewish population. Some estimate that there were a million Jews in that city. Others estimate that a fourth of the population of Alexandria was Jewish. How did the Jews get there? When Alexander the Great came down with his armies, he swept right through the Holy Land, went to Egypt, and established a city called Alexandria which was named after himself. Josephus says that when Alexander came to this part of Egypt, the Jewish priests opened the Scriptures and showed him from the book of Daniel that he was the subject of some of these prophecies. He was so impressed by the Holy Scriptures of the

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<sup>29</sup>Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome—Studies in Acts*, p. 147.

Jewish people and the predictions about himself, that he invited the Jews to come down to help him establish the great city of Alexandria. Vast numbers of Jews did just that. As time went on, these Jews spoke the Greek language but had problems reading their own Hebrew Scriptures. As a result, the entire Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek, a version we now call the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX). This translation was made about 150 years before Christ's birth. Alexandria was thus a huge center of Jewish culture and presence.

Apollos taught diligently the things of the Lord (verse 25), and the term "Lord" referred to the Lord Jesus.<sup>30</sup> He knew certain things about Jesus from the teaching of John the Baptist, but he was lacking vital information about the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

### **Acts 18:25-26**

Luke gives an amazing description of Apollos. He was well-instructed in the way of the Lord. He was fervent in the spirit (on fire for the Lord), and he was a diligent teacher (v. 25). He spoke boldly in the synagogue (v. 26), helped believers greatly (v. 27), and mightily refuted the Jews showing that Jesus was the Messiah (v. 28).

The verb "instructed" is in the passive voice indicating that someone instructed him, yet we are not told who his teacher or teachers were. From the context it may have been disciples of John the Baptist. At any rate, he was well-instructed in the way of the Lord. As we shall see, the teaching he had was good, but it was not complete. He lacked important truth that God would soon supply.

Apollos had somehow heard about John the Baptist. He knew "only the baptism of John" (verse 25). His understanding of truth was deficient. In a sense, he was a pre-Pentecost saint. John the Baptist had made an enormous impact on Jews for years. John's purpose was to prepare the Jews for the Lord Jesus, Israel's King. He was the forerunner, and he and his teachings were known far and wide. We will learn in Acts 19 that even some Jews in Ephesus had heard about John the Baptist's teachings and believed in the Messiah, the One that John the Baptist had pointed to. Yet they needed help to learn the rest of the story.

Apollos was brilliantly trained in the Old Testament Scriptures and he was disciplined by John the Baptist directly or indirectly. He was a humble man and very teachable. After he had concluded one of his great sermons in the synagogue, Aquila and Priscilla approached him and said (as Dr. Whitcomb paraphrased), "Sir, would you kindly come to our home. We will have potato chips and Coca Cola, and we would like to talk with you please." It would be fascinating to have an audio recording of this interview! This husband and wife team "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (verse 26). "Have you heard, sir, that the Lamb of God whom John the Baptist predicted did come, and died for our sins, and rose again from the dead. Forty days later He ascended to heaven, and ten days after that the Church was created. We would like to share with you all the details!" Amazing! Apollos humbly and graciously accepted this new teaching from this godly couple. "The great, eloquent preacher on whose lips hung the multitudes, was humble enough to sit at the feet of a tentmaker and his wife and receive instructions from them."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>The alternate reading in the second part of verse 25, based on certain Greek manuscripts, would read "teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus" (NASB 1977).

<sup>31</sup>Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 321.



The instruction that was given to Apollos was done privately (taking him aside) and not publicly. The Majority Text/KJV Version has the names of this couple in that order, that is, Aquila the husband first. Priscilla is named first in the Critical Text and if that is the correct reading it may suggest that she was the more gifted of the two in being able to “unfold to him [Apollos] the way of God more exactly” (John Darby translation). Yet whatever part Priscilla played, it was not done apart from her husband and not done apart from his headship.

As a result of having the gospel of the grace of God presented to him and believing it, Apollos was suddenly transformed from being an earthly Jewish Old Testament saint to a heavenly saint in Christ.

This incident illustrates the transitional state which many of the Hellenist Jewish saints were in during those days. Living abroad, like Apollos in Alexandria, and not having the modern communications we have today, they waited in faith for the Messiah to come, not knowing that God had already fulfilled His promise by sending the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus, as to his understanding, Apollos was still very much on Old Testament ground, “knowing only the baptism of John.” What Apollos needed, and what Aquila and Priscilla supplied, was the full light of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. J. N. Darby said, “We are ignorant as to how Apollos was fully introduced into the Christian position. He was doubtless baptized, and had received the Holy Ghost, but nothing is said about it. All we know is that he was instructed in the way of the Lord by means of Aquila and Priscilla through the Word” (Collected Writings, vol. 25, p. 405).<sup>32</sup>

### **Acts 18:27**

Apollos left Ephesus and traveled to Achaia, the province where Corinth was located.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps Aquila and Priscilla had told him about the different problems at Corinth, including the strong opposition of the Jews. This was quite an assignment that Apollos took on, later described by Paul in this way, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6). The Corinthians believed on Christ through Paul’s ministry and then Apollos “watered” the crop and helped them greatly in their spiritual growth. Sadly, some Corinthian believers sowed carnal division and claimed to be followers of Apollos (1 Cor. 1:10). God’s desire is that all believers be united around Jesus Christ, and to follow and imitate a man only as that man imitates Jesus Christ: “Be followers of me (Paul), even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Who were the “brethren” who recommended Apollos to the Corinthians? They could have been Aquila and Priscilla and perhaps other believers in Ephesus. They encouraged Apollos in his desire to go to Corinth.<sup>34</sup> They urged him forward, believing he could be used of God at Corinth. This is one example showing that believers from different areas and from different assemblies

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<sup>32</sup><https://bibletruthpublishers.com/the-regions-beyond-paul-apos/stanley-bruce-anstey/the-book-of-the-acts/bruce-anstey/la171984>.

<sup>33</sup>The Romans divided Greece into two provinces, Achaia (the Peloponnesus or southern Greece) and Macedonia (northern Greece).

<sup>34</sup>This is the only occurrence of this verb “exhort” (KJV), meaning to “urge forward, encourage” (Thayer).

communicated with each other, and in this case they recommended a qualified man whom the Corinthians were not familiar with.

This gives us a little snapshot of the inter-assembly fellowship that existed in those days. They used “letters of commendation” for people who were not known in an area to which they were traveling (Rom. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:1). These letters were written from one local assembly to another, commending persons to the practical fellowship of the assembly to which they were going. The letter was not to ask the brethren in the locality to which the person was going to receive him into fellowship; the letter announced that the person was already in fellowship, and that the assembly to which he was traveling should receive him as such.<sup>35</sup>

This raises a question: Who were “the brethren” in Ephesus who wrote this letter? Until now, we don't read of there being any other believers in the area, besides Aquila and Priscilla. Were people saved at the time of Paul's brief visit to the synagogue on his way to Jerusalem at the close of his second journey? (Acts 18:19-20) Luke does not mention it. Would “Epaenetus,” who was the first to get saved in Asia, be one of those brethren? (Rom. 16:5 – J. N. Darby Trans.) Or, “Trophimus?” (Acts 21:29) It is more likely that the gospel went out faithfully in Paul's absence through this quiet couple, and conversions resulted. If so, it shows us that one does not need to have the gift of an evangelist to share the good news of Christ with those whom we meet in our daily activities. An assembly must have been formed there, though we are not told so specifically.<sup>36</sup>

Apollos was God's man at the right place and at the right time, and he helped and assisted the Corinthians greatly. It is of great interest to see how Luke described these believers: They were those “which had believed through [*dià*] grace.” The very act of believing is dependent upon the grace of God. Not only were they saved by [*dià*] grace (Eph. 2:8-9), but they also believed by [*dià*] grace. Just as a person cannot be saved apart from God's grace, so a person cannot believe apart from God's grace. Holy Spirit conviction and God's gracious enablement are necessary in order for a person to believe.

Let us consider some other passages of Scripture which illustrate the importance of God's grace and God's working when it comes to the act of believing:

1) “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44).

No man can come or no man is able to come to Christ unless God the Father draws him. What does it mean to “come to Christ”? This question is clearly answered in the context of John chapter 6. Coming to Christ is synonymous with believing in Christ. For example, if a person really believes that a surgeon can help him, then he will come to him and allow him to operate. Likewise, if a person really believes that Christ is able to save, he will come to Him and allow Him to do His saving work. In John 6:35 we see that these two expressions are synonymous: “He that cometh to

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<sup>35</sup>Bruce Anstey, accessed at <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/the-regions-beyond-paul-apos/stanley-bruce-anstey/the-book-of-the-acts/bruce-anstey/la171984>.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Me shall never hunger; and he believeth on Me shall never thirst.” What does it mean to come to Jesus? It means to believe in Him.

Applying this meaning to John 6:44, we learn that no one is able to come to Christ or believe in Christ unless the Father draws him. God’s drawing is wonderfully described in Jeremiah 31:3—“I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

So John 6:44 is saying that we cannot come to Christ, we cannot believe on Him, unless God the Father does something. He must draw us. With that in mind, consider John 6:65: “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father.” No one can come to Christ or believe in Him unless it were given unto him from the Father. It cannot happen apart from God’s gracious enablement.

2) “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17).

Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Did he figure this out on his own or did God supernaturally reveal it to him? Could Peter congratulate himself that he had so brilliantly figured out who Jesus Christ really is? The same is true for all of us. When I understood who Jesus Christ really is, was God involved? Did God reveal to my sin-blinded heart who Jesus Christ really is?

3) Consider Acts 16:14 regarding Lydia’s conversion. Did God have anything to do with her salvation? Did He open her heart? How we need to thank God for opening our hearts so that we could understand the message of the gospel! Remember, our hearts were once blinded (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4).

4) Finally consider Acts 26:18. When you believed in Christ, did God open your blind eyes? Once I was blind but now I can see, and I give God the credit for giving me spiritual sight! I did not open my own eyes. It required a supernatural work of God!

As you think about your salvation testimony, do you see God’s hand in bringing you to faith in Christ? Can you think about how God worked in your life to bring you to that point where you trusted in the Saviour? Perhaps God brought the right person to you at just the right time to give you just the message you needed to hear about Jesus and His love.

One of the most remarkable examples of the sovereignty of God in salvation is Saul of Tarsus. This fierce persecutor of the Church was headed for Damascus to imprison Christians. Suddenly, God met Him, Saul’s eyes were opened as to who Jesus Christ is, and he was instantly converted. Saul was not seeking salvation; he was not desiring salvation. Instead, he was seeking to imprison Christians. But the Saviour suddenly met him on that road to Damascus and conquered him.

Dr. John Whitcomb, in one of his Seminary lectures on the attributes of God, made this statement: “The story of our salvation is that we resisted God, fought Him every inch of the way, and finally **He won, we lost, and we are His.**”

We all believe that God must do a work in the heart of unsaved people if they are to believe. We believe this because we pray this way. We ask God to work in their hearts. We often pray in this manner: “Lord, draw this person to yourself; open his eyes to the truth of the Gospel; help him to see

what Christ has done for him. Lord, do whatever You need to do so that this person might come to the end of himself and see his need for Christ. Lord, may the Holy Spirit convict this person and move in his heart, that he might believe on Christ and pass from death unto life.”

By praying in such a way, we are acknowledging that if a person is going to be saved, God must do that wonderful inward work in the heart that only He can do. So I not only thank God for the gift of salvation, but I also thank Him for working in my heart in a wonderful way with the result that I came to faith in Christ.

### **Acts 18:28**

Apollos also had a dynamic evangelistic ministry among the Jews at Corinth, powerfully demonstrating to them from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.<sup>37</sup> Apollos, using the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, played a key role in establishing the church at Corinth and in reaching lost Jews with the gospel of Christ.

Some of the Corinthians thought so highly of Apollos that they united around him in a carnal way and said, “We are of Apollos” (1 Cor. 1:11-13). Apollos was probably not to be blamed for their schismatic behavior, nor were Paul or Cephas, Cephas being another name for Peter (1 Cor. 1:12).

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In the next chapter we will continue with Paul’s third missionary journey, especially the great work God did through him in the city of Ephesus.

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<sup>37</sup>Dr. Whitcomb said the following about Apollos: “I could be wrong, but I believe that Apollos, under God, could have been the author of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews is one of the most beautiful presentations of the Lord Jesus Christ in the light of Old Testament truth. It was written by someone with a mastery of the Old Testament.” That is, Hebrews was written by someone who was “mighty in the Scriptures.”

## Appendix

# Aquila and Priscilla

1) ***Aquila and Priscilla were industrious.*** They were diligent and occupied in a good way. They were tentmakers (Acts 18:2-3) and they worked hard at their trade. We should note that Aquila was a Jew (Acts 18:2). Although Paul first met these two believers in Corinth, they were originally from Rome (Acts 18:2).

2) ***They were hospitable*** (Acts 18:3). They opened their home to the Apostle Paul who was also a tentmaker. They opened not only their home to Paul but also their hearts.

3) ***They were teachable.*** Aquila and Priscilla were probably converted under Paul's ministry. We have no record that they were saved prior to their encounter with Paul in Acts 18. They not only received Paul into their home but they received Paul's Christ into their hearts. With all eagerness and readiness of mind they received with joy the message that Paul preached. They were disciples of Paul. They absorbed the doctrine and the truth which the Apostle gave them.

4) ***They were Bible orientated*** (Acts 18:24-26). Not only were they teachable, but they were able to teach others also. Apollos was a great preacher who was mighty in the O.T. Scriptures, but he was ignorant of the essential facts of the gospel (and weak on dispensational truth). With a godly concern for this man, Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. It is possible that Priscilla may have taken the lead in this session with Apollos because in some Greek manuscripts her name is mentioned first in Acts 18:26. Some wives are better able to explain Bible doctrine than their husbands, and in the right setting it is permissible for the woman to take the lead (though certainly not in a local church teaching situation). She knew God's Word and she was able to deal with these kinds of doctrinal matters. This husband and wife team was well grounded in God's truth and able to minister that truth to others.

5) ***They were local church orientated*** (1 Cor. 16:19 and Rom. 16:5). Both of these passages speak of the church that was in their house (both in Rome and in Ephesus). Their home was a place for believers to assemble—a place for worship, singing, preaching, fellowship, prayer and the breaking of bread.

6) ***They were a husband and wife team.*** Priscilla's name is mentioned six times in the N.T. and in each place her husband's name is found as well. She is always mentioned with him. This implies harmony in their relationship and unity of purpose. She worked with her husband, not against him. They functioned as a team in the service of their Lord.

7) ***They were rightly orientated to God's gifted man*** (Rom. 16:3). In this verse they are described as Paul's "helpers" (literally "fellow workers"). As Priscilla and Aquila came to Paul's mind, he was able to say, "These dear believers are my helpers, my fellow workers." Can your pastor say the same thing about you? What kind of relationship do you have with

God's gifted man (compare Eph. 4:11)? Are you a help or a hindrance to your pastor? Are you working with him or against him? Does he see you as a plus or a minus? Paul certainly considered this husband and wife team to be a great PLUS to his ministry and service for Christ.

8) ***They were courageous*** (Rom. 16:4). Apparently Paul owed his life to this brave husband-wife team. We are not told any of the details, but they somehow risked and hazarded their lives for Paul's sake. They laid down their own necks in order to save Paul's life, and as a result Paul and all the churches of the Gentiles owed them a debt of thanks. Paul was God's special apostle to the Gentiles, and if Priscilla and Aquila had not intervened, Paul might have died and his ministry to the Gentiles might have come to an abrupt end. Priscilla and Aquila manifested a genuine love for Paul in the spirit of 1 John 3:16. Whatever incident Paul was referring to, it is possible that Priscilla played the more significant role in light of the fact that her name is mentioned first in Romans 16:3. This brings us to our next point.

9) ***Priscilla was submissive, but she was not suppressed.*** In the six New Testament references where this husband/wife team is mentioned, Priscilla's name comes first in three of these places (some would say this is true in four out of these six places because her name comes first in Acts 18:26 in some Greek manuscripts). Since it was customary to list the husband's name first, why did Priscilla's name come first in these passages? We are not given the reason why and we can only surmise. Was it because she was the more energetic of the two? Did she have the stronger character? Did she have superior zeal? Did she have superior ability in certain areas? Did she play a more significant role in risking her own neck for Paul's sake? Without trying to speak where the Scriptures are silent, the following might be said:

***She was not suppressed.*** She seemed to have special gifts or abilities or a unique devotion to Christ which enabled her in some areas to surpass her husband in such a way as to merit special recognition from Paul.

***She was submissive.*** In the six places where she is mentioned in the New Testament (by Luke and Paul), it is never implied that she was out of line in any way. She is never rebuked but only commended. She is always mentioned in connection with her husband. She was a submissive wife.

10) ***They were faithful and consistent to the very end*** (2 Timothy 4:19). This is Paul's last letter, written about 14 years after he had first met Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla). They were faithful believers. Nothing negative is said about these two believers in any of the writings of Paul or Luke. As far as the record shows, between Paul and Aquila/Priscilla there was always harmony. Paul never had to say of them what he said of Demas (2 Tim. 4:10). What about you? What will your spiritual condition be fourteen years from now? May we not leave our first love and may we not lose the joy of our salvation.