

## ACTS CHAPTER 18

### PAUL IN CORINTH; THE END OF THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY AND BEGINNING OF THE THIRD

#### A. Paul in the city of Corinth.

1. (**Acts 18:1-3**) Paul arrives in Corinth and meets Aquila and Priscilla.

**After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.**

- a. **And went to Corinth:** Corinth was a major city of the Roman Empire, at an important crossroads of trade and travel. It was also a city notorious for its hedonism and immorality.
  - i. In Paul's day, **Corinth** was already an ancient city. It was a commercial center with two harbors and had long been a rival to its northern neighbor, Athens. Corinth was a city with a remarkable reputation for loose living and especially sexual immorality. In

classical Greek, to *act like a Corinthian* meant to practice fornication, and a *Corinthian companion* meant a prostitute. This sexual immorality was permitted under the widely popular worship of Aphrodite (also known as Venus, the goddess of fertility and sexuality). In 146 B.C. Corinth rebelled against Rome and was brutally destroyed by Roman armies. It lay in ruins for a century, until Julius Caesar rebuilt the city. It quickly re-established its former position as a center for both trade and immorality of every sort. One ancient writer described Corinth as a town where “none but the tough could survive.”

ii. “It is significant that it was from this city that Paul wrote his Roman letter; and when one reads his description of Gentile corruption in that Roman letter, one has almost certainly a mirror of what he found in Corinth. ([Romans 1:22-32](#))”

iii. Paul knew that because people from all over the Empire passed through Corinth, a strong church there could touch lives all over the Empire. He knew Corinth was a tough city, but he wasn’t only interested in planting churches where he thought it was *easy*.

b. **And he found a certain Jew named Aquila...with his wife Priscilla ...and he came to them:** It is implied, though not clearly

stated, that Aquila and Priscilla were at this time Christians. But it is possible that Paul led them both to Jesus as they worked together as **tentmakers** (those who worked with leather).

i. This began one of the important friendships of the New Testament — Paul and **Aquila** and **his wife Priscilla**. Paul called them his *fellow workers* who had *risksed their own necks for my life* ([Romans 16:3-4](#)).

ii. “*Priscilla* is a diminutive form of *Prisca*, which is one of the great families of Rome. She was probably related to this family in some way.” (Hughes) In half the mentions of this New Testament married couple, Priscilla’s name is written first — which is said to be unusual.

c. **For by occupation they were tentmakers**: Paul’s tentmaking was an important part of his ministry. Though he recognized his right to be supported by those he ministered to ([1 Corinthians 9:7-14](#)), he voluntarily supported himself in his missionary and preaching work so that no one could accuse him of seeking converts for the sake of enriching himself ([1 Corinthians 9:15-18](#)).

i. In the modern missions movement, people call any work that a missionary does to support himself on the mission field *tentmaking*.

ii. “In Judaism it was not considered proper for a scribe or a rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, so many of them practised a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law.”

d. **Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from**

**Rome:** The Roman historian Suetonius wrote that **Claudius** banished Jews from Rome because they were “indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus.” There have been many attempts to explain who Chrestus was, but a likely solution is that Suetonius referred to Jesus Christ, but writing some 70 years after the events, had the name somewhat mixed up. It seems that the expulsion had to do with “dissension and disorder within the Jewish community of Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the synagogues of the city.”

i. Chronology is often a tricky matter, but it seems that this expulsion of Jews from Rome occurred at about A.D. 49.

## 2. **(Acts 18:4-5) Paul’s ministry among the Jews and Gentiles of Corinth.**

**And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy had come from**

**Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.**

a. **And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath:** Paul was effective as he **reasoned** (discussed, debated) among the Jews and Greeks. The **Greeks** present in the synagogue were Gentiles interested in and sympathetic with Judaism.

i. Paul later described the character of his bold preaching in Corinth: *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified* (1 Corinthians 2:1-16).

b. **Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia:** When Timothy came, he **When** brought news about how the Christians in Thessalonica were remaining steadfast in the faith (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10). This brought Paul great joy, spurring him on in ministry (**Paul was compelled by the Spirit**). He answered back by writing 1 Thessalonians from Corinth.

i. According to 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, while Paul was in Corinth, financial support arrived from the Christians in Philippi, and he was able to put aside tentmaking for a while and concentrate more fully on the task of building the church in Corinth.

**3. (Acts 18:6-8) Opposition rises against Paul in Corinth.**

**But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, “Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.**

a. **But when they opposed him and blasphemed:** The blasphemy must have been directed against Jesus, because Paul preached Jesus as the Messiah (*testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, Acts 18:5*). This is an indirect declaration of the deity of Jesus, because someone can only really blaspheme God.

b. **From now on I will go to the Gentiles:** Paul strongly sensed his responsibility to preach to the Jews first (*Romans 1:16*), but when his message was rejected, he wasted no time in going to the Gentiles.

i. Paul fulfilled the spirit of what Jesus said in *Matthew 7:6: Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.*

When people are determined to reject the gospel, we shouldn't keep trying with them until the door is open again.

c. **He shook his garments:** Paul did this so that not a speck of dust from the synagogue would remain on his clothes, much less his sandals. This was a dramatic way of expressing *his* rejection of *their* rejection. Paul was certainly capable of dramatic and vivid demonstrations of his message.

d. **Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household:** This shows that Paul treated the Jews of Corinth with love and grace even after they rejected him and his message. He certainly did not forbid Jewish people from coming to Jesus; he merely switched the focus of his evangelism from the Jews to the Gentiles.

i. **Crispus** was one of the few in Corinth whom Paul personally baptized (1 Corinthians 1:14).

e. **Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized:** Paul told us what kind of people these Corinthians were in 1 Corinthians 1:26: *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.*

4. **(Acts 18:9-11) God's special encouragement to Paul in Corinth.**

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

a. **Do not be afraid:** The implication behind this message was that Paul was afraid, fearing that here in Corinth his work would be cut short by either opposing Jews (as in Thessalonica and Berea) or by the highly-charged worldliness around him.

i. “There had been culture shock in Athens, and now Paul experienced moral shock in Corinth. Its sweat and perfume and grit smothered Paul’s righteous soul, and he became depressed.”

b. **But speak, and do not keep silent:** The solution to Paul’s fear was for him to *obey* Jesus’ command to not be afraid; and to **speak and not keep silent**, that is, to keep getting the Word of God out.

i. Jesus didn’t tell Paul that his opponents wouldn’t *try* to stop him, only that they would not be successful (**no one will attack you to hurt you**).



c. **For I am with you:** This promise was the *basis* for God's command to not be afraid and to keep preaching. When we understand what this means, and Who says it, this is enough.

i. Spurgeon considered the promise of Jesus, "**For I am with you.**"

He thought it emphasized three things: The *presence* of Jesus, the *sympathy* of Jesus, and the *cooperation* of Jesus.

d. **For I have many people in this city:** This additional promise was a constant assurance to Paul, who must have often had doubts about the survival and health of the Corinthian church.

e. **And he continued there a year and six months:** Paul was in Corinth a year and a half, which seems to be longer than in any other city where he founded a church. His ministry at Corinth is described simply: **teaching the word of God among them.**

i. The duration of Paul's stay in Corinth shows where his heart was in ministry. He was no "in and out" evangelist, but a man committed to making disciples.

**5. (Acts 18:12-17) The Jews of Corinth attempt (unsuccessfully) to convict Paul before the civil authorities.**

**When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying,**

**“This *fellow* persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”**

**And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to *it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*.” And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.**

a. **When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia:** In approaching Gallio, the Jews of Corinth tried to stop Paul’s preaching work in the entire province.

i. “If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge and found Paul guilty of the alleged offense, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent, and Paul’s ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio’s refusal to act in the matter was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as a *religio licita*.”

b. **When Paul was about to open his mouth:** Before Paul could defend himself, Gallio did it for him. He correctly saw that the government has no role in attempting to decide religious matters,

though government does have a legitimate role in matters of **wrongdoing or wicked crimes**.

c. **Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat:** Gallio looked the other way when angry Gentiles beat **Sosthenes**, the leader of the synagogue. Probably, both the crowd and Gallio himself were more *against* the Jews than they were *for* Paul.

i. “It was his duty to let this good man alone, but it was not his duty to allow the Gentiles, on the other hand, to begin beating the Jews.”

ii. Apparently, when *Crispus* trusted in Jesus, he was replaced as *ruler of the synagogue* ([Acts 18:8](#)) by **Sosthenes** — who later himself seems to have become a Christian ([1 Corinthians 1:1](#)).

## B. The end of Paul’s second missionary journey.

1. ([Acts 18:18](#)) Paul leaves the city of Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla.

**So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.**

a. **So Paul still remained a good while:** Unlike previous cities, Paul wasn't forced out of Corinth. He stayed there **a good while**, fulfilling the promise Jesus made to him in [Acts 18:9-10](#).

b. **Priscilla and Aquila were with him:** Paul developed such a deep friendship and partnership with this married couple that they decided to go with him as he headed east, back to Jerusalem and then Antioch.

c. **He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow:**

The **vow** was almost certainly the vow of a Nazirite ([Numbers 6](#)).

Usually this vow was taken for a certain period of time and when completed, the hair (which had been allowed to freely grow) was cut off and offered to the Lord at a special ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem.

i. The purpose of the vow of a Nazirite was to express a unique consecration to God, promising to abstain from all products from the grapevine, to not cut one's hair, and to never come near a dead body.

ii. Paul's performance of this vow shows that Jewish opposition to his preaching had not made him anti-Jewish. He never forgot that he was Jewish, His Messiah was Jewish, that Christianity is Jewish,

and that Old Testament forms and rituals might still be used to good purpose. Apparently, though Paul was adamant that Jewish ceremonies and rituals must not be required of Gentiles, he saw nothing wrong with Jewish believers who wished to observe such ceremonies, presumably if their fulfillment in Jesus was also recognized.

iii. William Barclay suggests that Paul's motive was *gratitude*. "No doubt Paul was thinking of all God's goodness to him in Corinth and took this vow to show his gratitude." But the purpose of a Nazirite vow seems to be more of *consecration* than *thanksgiving*. Perhaps the intense worldliness of Corinth made Paul want to express his dedication and separation unto the Lord more than ever.

iv. By tradition, a Nazirite vow could only be fulfilled in Judea. Paul began this vow **at Cenchrea**, not in Judea. Paul's adoption of the vow out of the bounds dictated by Jewish tradition could indicate a desire to practice a more purely Biblical observance of Jewish rituals.

## **2. (Acts 18:19-21) Paul in the city of Ephesus.**

**And he came to Ephesus and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they**

**asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.” And he sailed from Ephesus.**

a. **And he came to Ephesus:** Paul wanted to preach in Ephesus some two years earlier, but was prevented by the Holy Spirit ([Acts 16:6](#)). Now, the Holy Spirit gave him the liberty to preach in this important city, and great results were seen.

i. God has a special timing for everything in our lives. If Paul could have discerned it, the Holy Spirit was really saying, “wait” when he wanted to go to Ephesus, instead of “no.” Sometimes God says, “wait” and He always knows what He’s doing when He says it.

b. **And left them there:** Aquila and Priscilla stayed at Ephesus, seemingly at Paul’s request. Something good started at Ephesus, and Paul wanted the work to continue with his trusted friends.

c. **They asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem”:** Paul could not stay long in Ephesus, wanting to present the offering of his Nazirite vow in Jerusalem at an upcoming feast.

3. (**Acts 18:22**) Landing at Caesarea, and going through Jerusalem, Paul returns to his home church at Antioch of Syria, concluding his second missionary journey.

**And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.**

a. **Gone up and greeted the church:** When it says that Paul had **gone up and greeted the church**, it means he went **up** to Jerusalem and fulfilled his Nazirite vow in the temple.

b. **He went down to Antioch:** Leaving Jerusalem, Paul returned to his home church in Syrian Antioch. They must have been pleased to have Paul return and tell of all his work over the previous three years or so.

**C. Paul's third missionary journey begins in the regions of Galatia, Phrygia, and the city of Ephesus.**

1. (**Acts 18:23**) In the regions of Galatia and Phrygia.

**After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.**

a. **After he had spent some time there:** We don't know exactly how much time Paul spent back at his home congregation in Syrian

Antioch. Luke wrote the account to give the sense of an immediate move on to Paul's next missionary journey.

b. **Went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order:** Since Paul's first focus on this trip was **strengthening all the disciples**, he went back to the churches already founded on previous missionary works. This would include congregations in Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch.

c. **Strengthening all the disciples:** Paul's passion for building disciples, not merely making converts, was again evident. This work was important to Paul.

i. If Paul were to visit one of our modern congregations, he would want to know: "How strong of a disciple are you? What can I do to strengthen your walk with Jesus Christ?" He would remind us all that it isn't enough to make a strong beginning with Jesus, but we must be always be growing in strength.

## 2. (Acts 18:24-26a) The ministry of Apollos in Ephesus.

**Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he**



**knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.**

a. **A certain Jew named Apollos:** As Paul did his work in Galatia and Phrygia, this man named **Apollos** came from Alexandria to Ephesus.

By many measures, he was a remarkable man.

- Apollos was **an eloquent man**.
- Apollos was **mighty in the Scriptures**.
- Apollos had been **instructed in the way of the Lord**.
- Apollos was **fervent in spirit**. Literally this means, “to boil in the spirit” with the idea of “bubbling over with enthusiasm.”
- Apollos **spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord**.

i. It seems Apollos (like many in his day) was a missionary called by God alone, because we have no indication that he was sent or commissioned by any specific congregation or apostle. He simply **came to Ephesus**.

b. **Though he knew only the baptism of John:** We see again that the reputation and work of John the Baptist was widely known throughout the Jews of the Roman Empire, reaching here as far as Alexandria.

i. Because Apollos knew of the work of John the Baptist, it is likely that he preached that the Messiah had come and we must repent and respond to Jesus, but he probably had little knowledge of the *full* person and work of Jesus Christ.

ii. “Apollos was a well-educated and also a well-traveled man. We can imagine that in his youth he had gone to Jerusalem, especially if he had an interest in the Old Testament, and while there had come under the influence of the preaching of John the Baptist.”

c. **So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue:** Apollos didn’t know much about Jesus, but what he did know was **taught accurately** — and with bold passion. He didn’t know much about Jesus, but what he did know genuinely excited him.

i. “What is mentioned here is ‘fervor,’ and this means not merely skill on his part but conviction based on something deeply embedded in his heart.”

### 3. **(Acts 18:26b-28) Aquila and Priscilla help Apollos.**

**When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the**

**disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.**

- a. **Aquila and Priscilla:** Paul met this couple that shared his profession of tentmaking in Corinth ([Acts 18:3](#)). They went with him from Corinth to Ephesus, and Paul left them there while he continued eastward to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Antioch ([Acts 18:18-22](#)).
- b. **They took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately:** Aquila and Priscilla did something valuable for God's kingdom. They helped someone who had a passion for God and at least some power in serving Him; yet he had limited knowledge and therefore limited resources for truly effective ministry.
- c. **The brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him:** With both instruction from Aquila and Priscilla and letters of reference from the church in Ephesus, Apollos served effectively in Achaia, especially among opposing Jews (**he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly**).
  - i. When Apollos went to the region of **Achaia**, it probably means he went to the city of Corinth in the region of Achaia. From what Paul

wrote in 1 Corinthians, he apparently had a remarkable ministry there. Apollos went to Corinth to water what Paul had planted.

ii. Though some Corinthians fixated on Apollos in a divisive spirit (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4), there is no reason to believe that Apollos himself encouraged this. Paul regarded Apollos as a trusted colleague (1 Corinthians 3:5-7 and 16:12).

iii. Apollos was Jewish, and is described as *eloquent* and *fervent in spirit* (Acts 18:24-25). He also **vigorously refuted the Jews**, and was able to demonstrate **from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ**. Because of these things, some scholars consider him the type of person who could have wrote the letter to the Hebrews.