

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Keith Chuvala, Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com

The End of the Second Missionary Journey

1. Corinth; Paul meets Aquila & Priscilla ([18:1-3](#))
2. Paul's Ministry in Corinth ([18:4-8](#))
3. God's Encouragement to Paul in Corinth ([18:9-11](#))
4. Paul Tried Before the Civil Authorities. ([18:12-18](#))
5. The End of the Second Missionary Journey ([18:19-23](#))
6. Apollos Speaks Boldly in Ephesus ([18:24-28](#))

Corinth; Paul meets Aquila & Priscilla ([18:1-3](#))

Corinth was an ancient, major city of the Roman Empire, a commercial center with two harbors, so it was important to trade and travel. It was also a city notorious for its hedonism and immorality. Corinth was a city with a reputation for loose living and sexual immorality. In classical Greek writings, to "act like a Corinthian" meant to practice and promote fornication, and to be a Corinthian "companion" meant you were a prostitute! Sexual immorality was permitted under the worship of Aphrodite (also known as Venus, the goddess of fertility and sexuality), which was widely popular. In 146 BC Corinth rebelled against Rome and was utterly destroyed by Roman armies. The city lay in ruins for nearly 100 years, until Julius Caesar finally rebuilt the city. It quickly re-established its former position as a center for both trade -- and immorality.

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans from Corinth, and when he writes about the corruption of Gentiles in that epistle (Romans 1:21-32), he was likely describing what he found in Corinth.

Paul also knew that people from all over the Roman Empire passed through Corinth, and so a strong church established there could touch lives all over the Empire. Corinth was a tough city, but Paul wasn't only interested in planting churches where he thought it was easy!

Aquila and Priscilla

It is implied, but not clearly stated, that Aquila and Priscilla were Christians. But it is possible that Paul led them both to Jesus as they worked together as tentmakers. Either way, this is the beginning of one of the most important friendships described in the New Testament. Paul called them his fellow workers who had risked their own necks for my life (Romans 16:3-4).

Priscilla may have been from a prominent Roman family, as her name is a diminutive form of the family name Prisca, a powerful families in Rome. In many mentions of the couple, Priscilla's name is written first, which would be unusual, unless she was prominent in some way.

Paul was no unique in plying a trade to support his preaching. Per F. F. Bruce, *"In Judaism it was not considered proper for a scribe or a rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, so many of them practiced a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law."*

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."* We have no details on the name Chrestus, but it's entirely possible that Suetonius was referring to Jesus Christ, but writing 70 or so years after the events took place, had the name mixed up. Either way, 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."* (Bruce) The chronology is not entirely clear, but it seems that this expulsion of Jews from Rome occurred ca. 49 AD.

Paul's ministry in Corinth (18:4-8)

...He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath: We know that Paul was effective in reasoning (discussing, debating) among the Jews and Greeks. The Greeks present in the synagogue were Gentiles interested in, and likely sympathetic to Judaism for familial or other reasons.

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia: When Timothy came, he brought news about how the Christians in Thessalonica were holding steadfast to the faith. This brought Paul great joy; he responded by writing I Thessalonians (I Thessalonians 3:6-10)!

While Paul was in Corinth, financial support arrived from the Christians in Philippi, and he was able to put aside tent making for a while and concentrate more fully on the task of building the church in Corinth (II Corinthians 11:8-9).

But when they opposed him and blasphemed: The blasphemy must have been directed against Jesus, because Paul preached Jesus as the Messiah. Indirectly, this is actually a declaration of the deity of Christ, because by definition, one can only blaspheme **God**.

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. This may seem wrong on some level, but Paul here is fulfilling 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.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household: This demonstrates that Paul treated the Jews of Corinth with love and grace even after they rejected him and his message. In no way did he forbid Jewish people from coming to Jesus; he merely switched the focus of his evangelism from the Jews to the Gentiles. Crispus was one of the few in Corinth whom we know Paul personally baptized (I Corinthians 1:14).

Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized: Paul told us what kind of people these Corinthians were in I 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.”

God’s Encouragement to Paul in Corinth ([18:9-11](#))

Do not be afraid: The implication behind this message was that Paul was afraid, probably not fearing for his life, but instead fearing that his work in Corinth would be cut short by either the opposing Jews (as had happened in Thessalonica and Berea), or by the corruption and general worldliness around him.

But speak, and do not keep silent: The solution to Paul’s fear was for him to remember Jesus’ words; to not be afraid; to speak and not keep silent; in other

words, to keep getting the Word of God out. Jesus didn't tell Paul that his opponents wouldn't try to stop him, only that they would not be successful.

For I am with you: This promise is the basis for God's command to not be afraid and to keep preaching – certainly to Paul, but not just to Paul. When we understand what this means, and Who says it, that is enough!

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

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. The length of Paul's stay in Corinth shows where his heart was in this ministry. He was a tent maker, but he was no "in and out" tent-revival evangelist. He was committed to fulfilling the Great Commission – to making disciples.

Paul Tried Before the Civil Authorities. ([18:12-18](#))

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia: By approaching Gallio, the Jews of Corinth were trying to stop Paul's preaching work in the entire province, not just the city. If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge and found Paul guilty, governors across the province would have had a precedent, and Paul's ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio's refusal to act was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as a *religio licita* ("permitted religion"), a stamp of approval given to non-traitorous indigenous religions by Roman authorities.

When Paul was about to open his mouth: Before Paul could even 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 punishing criminals.

...The Greeks took Sosthenes... and beat him before the judgment seat: Apparently, when Crispus believed in Jesus, he was replaced as ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8) by Sosthenes – who later himself seems to also have become a Christian (1 Corinthians 1:1). For his part, Gallio looked the other way when angry Gentiles beat Sosthenes. It's possible that both Gallio himself and the gathered crowd were more *against* the Jews than they were *for* Paul.

So Paul still remained a good while: Unlike previous cities, Paul wasn't forced out of Corinth. He stayed there "a good while", a fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to him in verses 9 and 10.

Paul developed such a deep friendship and partnership with Priscilla and Aquila that they decided to go with him as he decided to head east back to "Syria", which we'll find takes them towards Jerusalem, and his home base of Antioch.

He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea: 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. The purpose of a Nazirite vow was to express a special consecration to God, promising to abstain from wine, to not cut one's hair, and to never go near a dead body. Paul's taking of this vow shows that Jewish opposition to his preaching had not made him anti-Jewish. Paul was adamant that Jewish ceremonies and rituals must not be required of Gentiles, but he saw nothing wrong with Jewish believers who wished to observe such ceremonies, presumably if the fulfillment of those rites in the person and work of Jesus was also recognized.

According to Jewish tradition, a Nazirite vow could only be fulfilled in Judea. Paul's taking the vow "out of bounds" dictated by tradition shows that a proper Biblical observance of Jewish rituals at times rightly superseded traditional observance of them.

The End of the Second Missionary Journey ([18:19-21](#))

Recall that Paul wanted to preach in Ephesus about two years earlier, but was "prevented" by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6). Now, however, the Holy Spirit permitted him to preach there, and with great results! Sometimes God's answer to a godly desire of ours is "Wait." Of course, He always knows what He's doing when He says it

And left them there: Aquila and Priscilla stayed at Ephesus, apparently at Paul's request. Something good started at Ephesus, and Paul wanted the work to continue with his trusted friends, as he pressed on to present the offering of his Nazirite vow in Jerusalem at an upcoming feast.

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.

He went down to Antioch: Leaving Jerusalem, Paul returned to his home church in Syrian Antioch. 'Tis a matter of pious speculation, but I'll bet the congregation there was thrilled to have Paul return, and tell of all his work over the previous three or so years!

After he had spent some time there: We don't know exactly how much time Paul spent back at his home congregation, but the way Luke writes this gives us the sense that it was not an extended period.

...Went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia...: Paul's first focus on this trip was strengthening the disciples, so he went back to the churches founded during his previous missionary trips. This region would include congregations we've already read about in places such as Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch.

Apollos Speaks Boldly in Ephesus ([18:24-28](#))

A certain Jew named Apollos: As Paul did his work in Galatia and Phrygia, this man named Apollos came from Alexandria to Ephesus. Scripture describes Apollos a pretty remarkable man: eloquent, "mighty in the Scriptures", "instructed in the way of the Lord", "fervent in spirit" (literally "boils in/with the spirit"!), and "taught accurately the things of the Lord". Pretty good resume!

We have no indication that Apollos was sent or commissioned by any specific congregation or apostle. We're simply told that he came to Ephesus.

...He knew only the baptism of John: Here we see 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. Because Apollos knew of the work of John the Baptist, it is likely that he preached that the Messiah had come, but he probably had little knowledge of the full person and work of Jesus Christ.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue: Even if Apollos didn't know everything about Jesus, what he *did* know he taught accurately – and with boldness and passion, which tells us that what he knew about Jesus genuinely excited and inspired him.

Aquila and Priscilla... took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately: To an extent this is Apollos' Christian seminary training, or at least the beginning of it. Aquila and Priscilla's work here was important enough for God to inspire Luke to record it. This is one of the reasons why churches establish and support seminaries for the training of their pastors; it's to better equip these unique servants in order to further the work of God's Kingdom on Earth. We don't train God's call into them; rather, we ensure that they have the benefits of insight, knowledge, and experience of those who have gone before them into the pastoral mission field.

The brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: With instruction from Aquila and Priscilla, and letters of reference from the church in Ephesus, Apollos served effectively in Achaia, especially among opposing Jews, whom he vigorously refuted publicly. He put that "seminary training" to good use, to its best use!

When Apollos went to the region of Achaia, it probably means he went to the city of Corinth. From what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, Apollos apparently had a remarkable ministry there. You might say Apollos went to Corinth to water the soil in which Paul had done the planting.

Because of how Apollos is described here, and by Paul in later writings, some scholars consider him the prime candidate for author of the letter to the Hebrews. We don't know this for certain, but it makes sense. The style of writing in Hebrews is unique, distinct from Paul's, Peter's, and the other NT writers.