

Acts Chapter 18

Corinth

The city of Corinth is fifty miles west of Athens and is its rival in reputation. While not Athen's equal as a cultural center, ancient Corinth was the capital city of Roman Achaia and a leading commercial center overlooking two ports, which allowed for easy access to the Aegean and Ionian seas and beyond. The many important civic and religious buildings surrounding the city's agora were known throughout the world, as was the city's reputation for sexual perversion. Ancient Corinth is an important archaeological site today.

We find new details in this chapter. Women play a key part in Paul's missionary journey. We learn that Paul works in the Leather shop of Priscilla and Aquila. Aquila and Priscilla are Jews that have been expelled from Rome. We will find out later that they return to Rome by the time Paul writes his letter to the Romans. They are always named together, once Aquila named first and twice Priscilla named first – showing an equality of status. More likely Priscilla was a key female or maybe key figure (period) in the early church.

Paul is still teaching in the synagogue but is also teaching in a household.

Early in the chapter we hear that Caesar Claudius gives an edict for all Jews to leave Rome. Most place the date at 49CE. They were expelled from Rome because of their constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (Christ). He probably doesn't throw them all out but those that are involved with Jesus' Way.

Aquila and Priscilla shared a faith and trade with Paul. With the arrival of Silas and Timothy Paul seems to become more occupied with proclaiming the Word. It is thought that Silas and Timothy may have brought funds for Paul.

Once again, Paul is frustrated by opposing unrepentant Jews.

So he shook the dust from his clothes and moves on.

Paul rebukes them with – your blood be on your own heads. (recalls Jewish prophecy from Habakkuk to warn hostile Jews that to deny his teaching that Jesus is God's Messiah would result in the loss of eternal life).

This results in Paul moving in with the Gentile God-fearer Titius. This move to the Gentiles is affirmed in a vision (which again is a typical pattern in Acts). This turn yields a stunning success with Crispus and Sosthenes joining the people of Jesus' Way.

So with success Paul stays in Corinth for 18 months.

The vision said there would be conflict but also Paul would be protected. Low and behold this comes to pass.

The Achaian proconsul Gallio takes the stage. The Jews are after Paul again.

The proconsul would have met at the city center for tribunal. Public pronouncements are heard there and cases settled.

The Jews bring Paul there for justice. They charge him with breaking Roman law - the charge seems to be the Judaism is allowed but Paul is preaching outside the bounds of Jewish teaching.

But Gallio renders the legal verdict that this is not a Roman issue but a Jewish one.

For Gallio the matter concerns words (resurrection) and names (Messiah) and Jewish law (Scripture) so deal with it.

For Luke Paul is proclaiming within the bounds of Jewish tradition and law. The Jews don't want to leave it alone, so apparently they take out their ire on poor old Sosthenes who has come to believe. Gallio just watches them beat the poor man. Not Rome's problem, not Gallio's problem, and I do find it interesting that Paul doesn't help his fellow Christian.

As the New Interpreter's Bible commentary says:

“ God's will is done. But the way it gets done is often messy and the agents of God's will are sometimes unsavory people.”

Vvs 18—28

An interlude in the tale.

Paul's follow-up ministry among the congregations founded during earlier campaigns is an important feature of his overall missionary strategy.

We don't know what prompts Paul to conclude his Corinthian mission, nor are we told why Priscilla and Aquila would close their business to accompany him.

Paul gets a haircut. This is to fulfill a ritual vow. His haircut, symbolizes a pious Jew's vow to maintain the purity of his consecrated relations with God. His vow is probably that of a Nazarite described in Numbers 6: 1-21 It symbolizes dedicated service to God. It shows that his mission to the Gentiles does not dilute his Jewish faith nor his connection to the people of Israel. This is in preparation for going to the Holy City - Jerusalem.

Paul does not stay in Ephesus , even though the response to him is hospitable. He is on to Jerusalem again.

This last section of chapter 18 connects nicely with the first 7 verses of chapter 19. They serve as an introduction and discussion of baptism.

Here at the end of chapter 18 we get the story of a faithful Jew named Apollos from Alexandria in Egypt. Alexandria considered the second city after Rome, had 150,000 inhabitants by the third century. Urbanization would prove to be a key factor in the development of North African Christianity. After the crucifixion, the disciples spread out across the known world to take the word of God and the story of Jesus to the people. Mark arrived in Egypt around 42 C.E., Philip traveled all the way to Carthage before heading east into Asia Minor, Matthew visited Ethiopia (by way of Persia), as did Bartholomew.

Christianity appealed to a disaffected Egyptian populous through its representations of resurrection, an afterlife, virgin birth, and the possibility that a god could be killed and brought back, all of which resonated with more ancient Egyptian religious practice.

In *Africa Proconsularis* and its neighbors, there was a resonance to traditional Gods through the concept of a supreme being. Even the idea of holy trinity could be related to various godly triads which were taken to be three aspects of a single deity.

North Africa would, over the first few centuries C.E., become a region for Christian innovation, looking at the nature of Christ, interpreting the gospels, and sneaking in elements from so-called pagan religions.

In the early years of the church, especially after the Siege of Jerusalem (70 C.E.), the Egyptian city of Alexandria became a significant (if not the most significant) center for the development of Christianity. A bishopric was established by the disciple and gospel writer Mark when he established the Church of Alexandria around 49 C.E., and Mark is honored today as the person who brought Christianity to Africa.

Alexandria was also home to the *Septuagint*, a Greek translation of the Old Testament which traditional has it was created on the orders of Ptolemy II for the use of the large population of Alexandrian Jews. Origen, head of the School of Alexandria in the early third century, is also noted for compiling a comparison of six translations of the old testament—the *Hexapla*.

The Catechetical School of Alexandria was founded in the late second century by Clement of Alexandria as a center for the study of the allegorical interpretation of the Bible. It had a mostly friendly rivalry with the School of Antioch which was based around a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Apollos is educated and has a fervent spirit. It is interesting that Priscilla is part of the team that teaches Apollos. So some of the teaching from the letters Timothy against women teaching and preaching were not present for the early church. It is interesting that grace is preached but we find in chapter 19 that the Holy Spirit is lacking or absent from the conversation.

Apollos is able to articulate this new faith and refute the Jews by showing Jesus is Messiah.

Duh.