



## The Book of Acts - Chapter Eighteen

### **VII Acts 15:36-18:22 - The Witness in Greece (continues and concludes)**

#### Summary to Chapter Eighteen

After Paul's relatively short stay in Athens, he went further west to Corinth, the main city of Achaia, where he would build a thriving church in the 18 months or so of his stay.

He met two Jews, Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who had been recently expelled from Rome due to Claudius' edict against the Jews. It seems they were already converts to the faith when Paul met them. They were fellow tentmakers with Paul, and would become close companions of his as well.

Timothy and Silas re-joined Paul in Corinth from their recent visits to Macedonia, reporting that the churches there were doing well, despite the persecution they faced. Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians during the early part of his time in Corinth.

The pattern was now emerging that Paul went first to the synagogue, where some Jews and proselytes believed, including the synagogue ruler and his family, but most opposed Paul's message, so he moved to the private house next door, and proclaimed the Gospel on a daily basis, drawing many Greeks and some more Jews to the faith.

However, most Jews continued to oppose Paul and they brought charges against him before the Roman proconsul Gallio, who dismissed the case without even hearing Paul's defence, as he judged it to be a matter of Jewish law and not an issue for the Roman legal system to take any interest in.

Paul left Corinth, heading for Syria, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. They stopped off at Ephesus, where Paul taught in the synagogue for a short while before continuing his journey, saying he would return if it was God's will, which it was, as Paul would spend three years or so there on his next missionary journey.

Aquila and Priscilla remained behind to build the ministry in Ephesus, but Paul continued his journey, going probably via Jerusalem to greet the church there, before returning to his sponsoring church in Syrian Antioch, where he arrived probably by the autumn of AD51.

The following spring (AD52), he set out again overland on his third missionary journey, visiting the churches he had established on his previous visits, reaching as far as Galatia and Phrygia. He would then continue west to arrive in Asia as reported in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos arrived in Ephesus and started proclaiming the word of the Lord boldly in the synagogue, but he knew only John's baptism, so Priscilla and Aquila invited him to stay with them, to teach him more effectively about Jesus and

the resurrection. After this, he travelled to Corinth, with letters of recommendation from Ephesus and had an effective ministry there, enhancing the work established by Paul.

## VII.h Acts 18:1-17 - In Corinth

Corinth was Paul's last major place of witness on his second missionary journey. His initial establishment of work there (vv.1-11), is followed by an account of a specific incident when the Jews brought him for trial before the proconsul (vv.12-17).

### VII.h.i. Acts 18:1-11 - Paul teaches in Corinth



Paul left Athens in the hands of Dionysius and went down to Corinth in Achaia, a province of the Roman Empire. Corinth was its capital city; it was a wealthy and splendid part of the world to live in at that time.

The satellite image shows the layout of the Peloponnese peninsula that formed the region of Achaia in Paul's day. Paul probably made the short journey by sea from Athens (Piræus) to Corinth (Cenchrea).

**<sup>1</sup> After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.**

### Acts 18:1

Corinth was 46 miles or 74 km west of Athens. A Roman colony, it was the most influential city of the province of Achaia, both politically and economically.

In Paul's day Corinth, though a couple of miles inland, oversaw the territory connecting the Adriatic port of Lechaion on the west with the Aegean port of Cenchrea to the east. Ships were often portaged between these seaports across this narrow stretch of the Peloponnesian isthmus, just under 4 miles wide at its narrowest point. Several rulers in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD attempted to construct a canal across the isthmus, but this was not successfully accomplished until the 19th Century.

The famed Greek city of Corinth, renowned for its artistry in bronze, its wealth, and its wanton sexuality, was destroyed in 146 BC during a war with Rome. The city was re-founded as a Roman colony in 44 BC by Roman freedmen, and the distinct archæological strata in the city centre testify to this gap in its history. Inscriptions from the first hundred years of the new colony were mostly in Latin, although strong marks of Greek culture were also evident in the art and life of the city.

1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinth followed a Roman city plan based on a rectangular grid. Typical urban structures were built or reconstructed, such as shops, stoas, basilicas, a bouleuterion for the city council meetings, a gymnasium, baths, latrines, and a theatre. A few large houses from this period have also been excavated. The centre of the city boasted the refashioned Peirene Fountain as a pleasant place from which to draw spring water. To this day a raised speaker's platform stands in the main forum, and a nearby inscription refers to this platform as the rostra, equivalent to a bēma or tribunal; this is probably the very location where Gallio judged Paul to be innocent, see vv.12-17. Some other significant archæological remains date from post-NT times, such as the odeion, i.e. a small covered theatre.

In Paul's day the great Doric-style temple of Athena or Apollo from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC remained a central feature in Corinth, and multiple temples to other deities could be found in the city. Indeed, when the author Pausanias wrote about Corinth in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD, his description of the city read like a tour guide of pagan monumental sacred sites. Corinth boasted an important sanctuary of Asklepios, the god of healing, where people would come to offer sacrifices to the god and to seek medical care. Marks of the imperial

cult were evident, especially if some are correct in identifying the substantial Temple E as being dedicated to Augustus' sister Octavia, though it may have been for Jupiter. The famous Hellenistic-era temple of Aphrodite on top of the Acrocorinth mountain had been rebuilt as a rather small structure during the 1st Century AD. Scholars debate whether Strabo's 1st Century account of 1,000 temple prostitutes refer to the earlier Hellenistic temple of Aphrodite or to the Roman one of Paul's day; the former seems more probable (Strabo, Geography 8.6.20c). In any case, in Roman times, wanton sexuality would have been common at such a port city.



The image depicts the remains of the temple to Apollo in Corinth.

<sup>2</sup> There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,

### Acts 18:2

Claudius' expulsion of the Jews from Rome in AD49 seems to have resulted from a disturbance in the Jewish synagogues created by the Christian message. Aquila and Priscilla had much in common with Paul, being Jews, tentmakers and probably already Christians, when they fled from Rome.

Aquila was a Jew from Pontus, see 1 Peter 1:1. He and his wife were clearly good company for Paul, probably both on an intellectual level but more importantly in their knowledge of, and commitment to, God.

The Jews had been expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius Cæsar as the Jews were often hated particularly for their monotheism and their unwillingness to socialise with Gentiles, or join in with the idolatrous lifestyle of the Roman Empire at that time. Jews were like the speckled bird in Jeremiah 12:9a <<Has not my inheritance become to me like a speckled bird of prey that other birds of prey surround and attack?>>. There was some confusion over who were Jews and who were Christians in the early days. Some Jews were for Christ and some were against him, which led to conflict and social tension, resulting in the Emperor expelling all Jews. If Jews and Christians hate one another, it is understandable why pagans should have hated them both.

Interestingly, Christians did not come under that same general persecution as Jews across the Empire because they were more sociable, even though they were just as pious. It was only when Nero blamed them for his own crime against Rome that they became sought after across the whole empire. Nero burnt Rome to the ground in AD64, which resulted in the martyrdom of Paul, Peter and thousands of other Christians.

**Despite our differences, God holds out his hand to all and invites them to come and reason with him:** <<“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool>> (**Isaiah 1:18**), **and:** <<“Present your case,” says the Lord. “Set forth your arguments,” says Jacob’s King>> (**Isaiah 41:21**).

**<sup>3</sup> and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.**

### Acts 18:3

**Tentmaker.** Having a trade was common practices for Jews. One Rabbi from the time is quoted as saying: ‘He that teaches not his son a trade is as if he taught him to be a thief’, and another says, ‘He that has a trade in his hand is as a vineyard that is fenced’.

**First Corinthians Chapter 9 may reflect this period of Paul’s ministry in Corinth, when he supported himself rather than receiving assistance from the Corinthians. He confirmed that he was not a burden to the Corinthians, as it was the Macedonian churches that supplied his needs while he was there (2 Corinthians 11:7-15), and he would write a similar message to the church in Thessalonica:** <<nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow>> (**2 Thessalonians 3:8-9**). **It is more to his praise that he did not ask for anything than it is to the churches that did not freely supply him unasked! The words of the apostle John indicate how it should be:** <<Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth>> (**3 John 1:5-8**).

**However, Paul wanted to be like his master:** <<For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many>> (**Mark 10:45**). **The very words of God support this attitude:** <<By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return>> (**Genesis 3:19**).

**Paul acknowledges Priscilla and Aquila in Romans 16:3.**

**<sup>4</sup> Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.**

### Acts 18:4

**He reasoned, trying to persuade.** The Greek word epeithe, ‘he persuaded them’, carries a more urgent meaning to his preaching. It is more like affectionate persuasion, begging them to open their hearts and minds to Jesus and come to know a fuller relationship with God than they had achieved under the Law of Moses. The language used shows the passion that Paul had in trying to persuade his own countrymen to come to Christ, and his exasperation when he was forced to turn away from them to the Gentiles, for, after all, that is what Christ called him to and he should not have seen it as a failure on his part in anyway.

**Synagogue.** The 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD Jewish philosopher Philo emphasised the city of Corinth as a home for Jewish people (Embassy to Gaius 281; confirmed in neighbouring Sicyon in 1 Maccabæan. 15:23). Several funerary epigraphs also confirm a later Jewish presence, as does a rather crude post-Pauline inscription found near the road to Lechaion designating the ‘Synagogue of the Hebrews’.

Greeks in a synagogue context are God-fearers and sometimes proselytes.

<sup>5</sup> **When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.**

#### Acts 18:5

Paul apparently had sent Silas and Timothy from Athens to visit the Macedonian churches, see itinerary given after Acts 17:15. When they again joined Paul in Corinth, they probably were the ones who brought a contribution for Paul's ministry from the Macedonian churches: <<And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so>> (2 Corinthians 11:9).

<sup>6</sup> **But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."**

#### Acts 18:6

When the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive. Paul will spend much time with audiences where there is interest and response, even if they don't immediately believe (v.4), but he did not spend time where he simply faced hostile opposition. It seems the Jews even blasphemed Jesus and, in doing so, blasphemed the God the claimed to worship: <<The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven>> (Revelation 13:5-6).

Shook out his clothes was a gesture of rejection, and had the same effect as shaking the dust off their feet had, i.e. showing that God's judgement was now against them for their own denial of him. In some ways, it is reminiscent of Pilate washing the blood of Christ off his hands: <<When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!">> (Matthew 27:24). Paul will later explain that to the Ephesian elders in Miletus: <<Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men>> (Acts 20:26), and it also reminds us of the responsibilities of the faithful watchmen: <<"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself>> (Ezekiel 3:17-19), and: <<When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself>> (Ezekiel 33:8-9).

Paul would clearly have loved to have gathered God's children back to him, as Jesus had lamented: <<"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing>> (Matthew 23:37), and they would have been healed but it was not to be: <<We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed>> (Jeremiah 51:9a).

Your blood be on your own heads reflects Ezekiel's words about God's prophetic watchman in Ezekiel 33:1-7, as recently discussed. Blood means 'the responsibility for your judgment by God'. Paul had faithfully discharged his responsibility, so that at the final judgment, no part of these Jews' failure to believe could be attributed to his failure to tell them about Christ.

I will go to the Gentiles. Paul then turned to the Gentiles as was his calling but still with the desire to see his own people healed of their hard-heartedness: <<But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them>> (Romans 11:12-14).

**7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus Justus, a worshiper of God.**

#### Acts 18:7

Paul did not completely give up on witnessing to the Jews of Corinth, as his relocating next door to the synagogue indicates. Paul's Jewish opponents cannot have been very pleased about his choice of a new location in such close proximity to the synagogue.

Despite what Jesus had said to his disciples: <<Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house>> (Luke 10:7), the Jews forced Paul to relocate to Justus' house, which must really have been a thorn in the unbelieving Jews' flesh, especially as Paul would be there a long time, 18 months or so, and he would know great success in the Lord's work, due to the vision from the Lord, and the encouragement and re-equipping that it had given him. However, his close proximity would also indicate that the door had not been closed to the Jews and that they had not been abandoned should they choose to change their minds.

Nothing more is known of Titus Justus. He is not Titus, who was with Paul long before the founding of the Corinthian church, see Galatians 2:1.

**8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised.**

#### Acts 18:8

Both Jews and Gentiles were won to the Lord, Crispus, see 1 Corinthians 1:14, representing the former and many of the Corinthians, the latter. The chief synagogue ruler Crispus would certainly help to influence others concerning the authenticity of the Gospel message. Crispus was one of the few men that Paul personally baptised. See comments made on Acts 10:48.

Believed and were baptised. Baptism seems to have followed closely after each person's profession of faith.

**Some people of dubious character were transformed by the Gospel and came to faith, just as Paul would write later:** <<Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God>> (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). **Thank God for his grace and mercy on us all!**

<sup>9</sup> One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. <sup>10</sup> For I am with you and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” <sup>11</sup> So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

### Acts 18:9-11

Up to this point, opposition to his ministry had usually forced Paul to leave a place of witness. But **the Lord**, in a **vision**, assured him that he would have a successful ministry in Corinth and would suffer no further **harm**. In obedience, Paul remained there for **a year and a half**, circa AD 49-51, during which time he wrote 1-2 Thessalonians, as previously mentioned. God’s assurance was immediately confirmed by Paul’s deliverance from an attempt to condemn him before the proconsul; vv.10-11 give helpful insight into Paul’s understanding of God’s providence and predestination in relation to human responsibility for teaching the Gospel.

Although God had told Paul, **I have many people in this city**, indicating that many in Corinth would come to faith in Christ, this did not lead Paul to conclude that he had no further part to play. Rather, **Paul stayed a year and a half**, longer than he stayed at any city except Ephesus on his next missionary journey, proclaiming the Gospel in order that, through his teaching, those whom God had chosen would come to faith. Predestination implied successful evangelism, and that is what transpired.

In Paul’s vision, Jesus gives a personal repeat of what is known as the great commission: <<Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age>> (Matthew 28:19-20). He also added the promise that Paul would come to no harm in Corinth. That did not mean, of course, that he would not face stiff opposition, which he did, but he wasn’t beaten, imprisoned, stoned or chased out of town, as he had been in other places. Corinth was comparatively an oasis of peace in Paul’s ministry, compared with almost anywhere else.

**But Paul still taught about persecution and thus expected it for himself:** <<For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance>> (Psalm 66:10-12). **And, as David wrote:** <<Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me>> (Psalm 23:4), **and God, through Isaiah, said:** <<So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand>> (Isaiah 41:10).

**In the vision, Jesus revealed that there were many people in Corinth that the Father has given to him. They may not yet know Jesus, but would come to do so through the work of Paul and the Holy Spirit in him. But this was not a wishful hope, as Jesus foreknew those whom the Father had given to him, and Jesus takes great care of what he receives from his Father:** <<I have not lost one of those you gave me>> (John 18:9b). This passage again opens up the debate between predestination and Jesus being the Alpha and Omega.

**Corinth is an excellent example of how a local church is grown over a period of time, albeit a relatively short one, just 18 months. Jesus could have had all his people come to faith in one go as he did at Pentecost, but he was allowing Paul time to grow church leaders as well as converts, and then to take the time to fully teach them the doctrine of Christ, so that a healthy and sustainable church was planted, although not one that would be without its problems, as Paul’s letters to the church would later indicate. Paul had planted good seed in good soil:** <<But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away>> (Matthew 13:25), i.e. the false teachers came to town.

## VII.h ii. Acts 18:12-17 - Paul opposed in Corinth

The Jews brought Paul before Gallio, the proconsul of Corinth and deputy governor of Achaia, charged with wrongful teaching. But Gallio dismissed the charges as irrelevant in a Roman court of law, even before Paul had chance to answer the charges. Gallio was, of course, correct, as the Law of Moses, which stipulates how Jews should worship God, was never imposed on other nations by God, nor did Rome have any reason to impose it on their citizens and inhabitants. In any case, the Jews were in error about their own law, for Moses had said: <<The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him>> (Deuteronomy 18:15), which of course, in Jesus, God did and the Jews, for their part, did not! And Jesus himself made a clear statement on the law: <<Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them>> (Matthew 5:17).

**<sup>12</sup> While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court.**

### Acts 18:12

The proconsul of a province was its chief judicial officer. Since Gallio served in this role in AD51-52, this provides one of the key dates used in computing the timelines for Paul's various missionary journeys.

The court, Greek *bēma*, also translated as 'tribunal', was the proconsul's judgment seat. It has been excavated in Corinth and was located in the open air marketplace.

Gallio had previously been called Novatus, but took his new name when he was adopted into the family of Julius Gallio. His elder brother was Seneca the Younger. i.e. Lucius Annæus Seneca, a famous Roman dramatist, Stoic philosopher, and politician. Seneca described his younger brother to be 'a man of great ingenuous and great probity, and a man of wonderful good temper'; he was called *Dulcis Gallio* or Sweet Gallio, for his sweet disposition. His tenure in Corinth was AD51-52 thus placing Paul in Corinth at this time. The information lends support for the Jerusalem Council to have been held before AD50, probably in AD48, to allow Paul to have been in Corinth by AD51 and to be back in Antioch later that same year.

**<sup>13</sup> "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."**

**<sup>14</sup> Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanour or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.**

### Acts 18:13-14

Gallio's judgment, that the Jewish accusations against the Christians concerned only matters of their own religion, established the important legal precedent that Christians were innocent of transgressing Roman law when merely teaching and following Christian doctrine. A similar judgment comes later, in Acts 25:19.

**<sup>15</sup> But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law – settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." <sup>16</sup> So he had them ejected from the court. <sup>17</sup> Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.**

## Acts 18:15-17

Sosthenes may have been a Jewish convert to Christianity, for Paul mentions someone by that name as his co-author in 1 Corinthians 1:1. In v.8, Crispus had been called the ruler of the synagogue, but Sosthenes may have succeeded him when Crispus became a Christian, or there may have been more than one person with this office in that synagogue.

That Gallio took no action seems strange, as a man was beaten by a mob right before his judgement seat in his court. Whatever Gallio's reasoning for not intervening, it seems Solomon was right: <<And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment – wickedness was there, in the place of justice – wickedness was there>> (Ecclesiastes 3:16), and Isaiah agrees, pointing out the consequences: <<So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice>> (Isaiah 59:14-15).

**Later, Paul would refer to Sosthenes in his first epistle to the Corinthians that was written most likely in Ephesus:** <<Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes>> (1 Corinthians 1:1). **Many commentators believe this to be the same Sosthenes that had so bitterly opposed Paul early on in Corinth. If so, he would be the second chief ruler of that synagogue that came to faith. This being the case then this opposition seems to have done more good for the cause than harm!**

## VII.i Acts 18:18-22 - Paul travels from Corinth to Syrian Antioch

But Paul was able to stay for some time (v.18). Then, after completing his Corinthian ministry, Paul returned to Antioch, making a brief stop at Ephesus (vv.18-22) and probably Jerusalem (v.22).

Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him as far as Ephesus, a short journey from Corinth's nearest port at Cenchrea, across the Aegean Sea, where Paul stayed only briefly as he wanted to be in Jerusalem for the festival, probably Pentecost, showing that Paul still abided by the ceremonial law even though he saw no need to impose it on others. An alternative view is that Paul wanted to attend the festival as he knew there would be a gathering of Jews from around the whole region. Then he would have chance to speak to a group he might otherwise never meet. That is one reason why Christian conferences can be so important. It is not what we learn but who we meet there.

**<sup>18</sup> Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken.**

### Acts 18:18

That Paul continued in Corinth for some time seems to be in addition to the 18 months of v.11.

Syria refers to his sponsoring church of Antioch in Syria.

Cenchrea was about 6 miles or 10 km east of Corinth and was Corinth's main port to the Aegean Sea. The Roman harbour of Cenchrea is still visible, although largely submerged, and excavators have identified warehouses, fish tanks, and what they believe may be temples to Isis and Aphrodite.

Paul left Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus (v.19) to establish a ministry there.

Paul's haircut probably indicates he had completed a vow; see Numbers 6:1-21 and Acts 21:20-24. Besides not cutting the hair, such a vow mandated strict purity and refraining from

alcoholic drink. One would have undergone such a vow in seeking divine blessing for an undertaking or to express thanksgiving.

The original text does not make it clear whether Paul or Aquila had their head shaved to discharge a, probable Nazirite vow, see Numbers Chapter 6. Most commentators seem to favour Paul. A Nazirite vow was very much part of the ceremonial law, but should not concern us unduly as Paul would: <<To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law>> (1 Corinthians 9:20). Nazirites were still held in high regard by the Jews and went hand-in-hand with the prophets, for God had said: <<I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not true, people of Israel?>> declares the Lord>> (Amos 2:11).

**<sup>19</sup> They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.**

#### Acts 18:19

Although this was a fleeting visit for Paul, and he was leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to break the new ground before his longer stay the following year, Paul did not pass up the opportunity of giving a message to the Jews in their synagogue. They were much more like the Bereans than the Thessalonian or the Corinthian Jews, and they wanted Paul to stay with them but he had other things to attend to, promising to return if it was God's will that he do so.

On the synagogue in Ephesus, see comments made on v.26.

**<sup>20</sup> When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.**

#### Acts 18:20-21

Paul declined to stay in Ephesus but stated I will come back if it is God's will, affirming that his plans were ultimately in God's hands: <<But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have>> (1 Corinthians 4:19), and: <<Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that">> (James 4:15). Paul's brief appearance in the synagogue prepared the way for his later ministry in Ephesus, recorded in Acts Chapter 19. Indeed, his promise to return if God wills it set the stage and provided the main destination for his third missionary journey.

**<sup>22</sup> When he landed at Cæsarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.**

#### Acts 18:22

Leaving from the main Palestinian port of Cæsarea, as seen in Acts 8:40, 9:30 and 21:8, in the spring or more likely the summer of AD 51, Paul went up and greeted the church, which most interpreters understand to mean the church in Jerusalem, and in that region could be called 'the church' without further specification, and was the location to which one would 'go up' from Cæsarea, given the higher altitude of Jerusalem. Then Paul went down, i.e. from Jerusalem to Antioch.

## VIII Acts 18:23-21:16 - The Witness in Ephesus

This section reports Paul's third missionary journey, circa AD 52-57, which took place primarily in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia, a major commercial centre and home of the famous temple of the goddess Artemis.



The route taken by Paul on his 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey that started from Syrian Antioch and ended in Jerusalem with Paul's arrest.

A reconstruction of the Temple of the goddess Artemis or Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

### VIII.a Acts 18:18-28 - Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollos

In Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila taught the Christian way more accurately to an Alexandrian disciple named Apollos. Prior to this, he had only known the Baptism of John, but was a gifted teacher and had a detailed knowledge of the OT scriptures. From Ephesus, he would go on to establish a teaching ministry in Corinth, continuing the work established by Paul.

<sup>23</sup> After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

#### Acts 18:23

Again sponsored by the church in Syrian Antioch, Paul began his third missionary journey in the spring of AD 52, travelling by foot through the region of his first two missionary journeys into Galatia and Phrygia. On the second missionary journey, the Spirit had prevented him from continuing west into Asia (Acts 16:6), but that did not happen this time, for Paul was headed directly toward the west, in order to reach Ephesus according to his promise in v.21.

<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

#### Acts 18:24

Alexandria was an intellectual centre in Egypt with a world-renowned library. Apollos' eloquence, Greek logos, or 'learned, skilled, eloquent', was undoubtedly accompanied by great understanding, particularly of the OT scriptures. He is described as having a thorough knowledge or was powerful, Greek dynatos, in his use of the OT scriptures, in public teaching and debate, no doubt accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Apollos, possibly Apelles in Romans 16:10, as an Alexandrian Jew from North Africa, came from a part of the world where Jews were dispersed to as part of prophecy: <<The Lord will

send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you>> (Deuteronomy 28:68).

### On Apollos as a teacher it could be said:

1. He was a lively, affectionate teacher, as he had a good head, and a good heart; he was fervent in spirit.
2. He was an industrious, laborious teacher, as he spoke and taught diligently. What he said was elaborate. He would first impress it upon his own heart, and then upon the hearts of his listeners.
3. He was an evangelical teacher. Although he knew only the Baptism of John at the beginning, yet that was the beginning of the Gospel of Christ. He may have heard of the death and resurrection of Jesus and its implication, but probably did not yet have the full understanding of the Gospel, or the power of the Holy Spirit within him.
4. He was a courageous teacher, who would proclaim his message boldly, loudly and in public. He spoke with confidence and with passion, knowing the scriptures and was passionate about the Christ he now followed.

To date, he had only been given one mina but he did not bury it, investing it in the truth that the Gospel message provided for him and his listeners. He was a faithful servant.

<sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

### Acts 18:25

Apollos knew only the Baptism of John, which suggests that he had not heard about the baptism that Jesus commanded after his resurrection: <<Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit>> (Matthew 28:19), and which began to be administered to all believers in Christ on and after the day of Pentecost, see Acts 2:41 and 8:12. Therefore, Apollos' knowledge of the Christian Gospel must have been deficient in some ways, although he taught accurately the things concerning Jesus as far as he knew them. He certainly knew about Jesus' life and teachings, but he had not known the full implications about Jesus' death and resurrection, or about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

<sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

### Acts 18:26

The presence of a synagogue in Ephesus is further evidenced in an ancient inscription mentioning the leaders of the synagogue and the elders.

Presumably Priscilla and Aquila explained the things about Jesus that Apollos did not yet know as discussed in v.25. It is noteworthy that both of them explained, i.e. the Greek verb *exethento* is a plural form of *ektithēmi*, to explain, elaborate, or expound, to Apollos the way of God more adequately.

They invited him to their home means they did not correct him publicly but took him aside and talked to him privately, Greek *proslambanō*, also used in Matthew 16:22 <<Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to

you!" >>, and Mark 8:32 <<He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him>>. As an example of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing about the growth of the church in Acts, this verse provides positive support for the idea that both men and women can explain God's word to each other in private or informal settings, such as personal conversation or a small group Bible study, without violating the prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12, <<I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent>>, which is clearly against women teaching an assembled group of men.

This is an issue that is much debated today and has caused a split in the international Anglican church especially. It seems that most rational people understand this as being a personal comment of Paul's by the language used, and is also deeply embedded in the culture of his time. It was difficult enough to get some Jews to associate with the Gentile believers. Having them taught by women, especially Gentiles, would probably have been a step too far and a barrier for many of that era to come to faith. There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus that prohibits women from bringing the word of God. If that is the gift the Holy Spirit has given them then who are we to oppose God, the very things we are critical of the Pharisees and Sadducees doing.

There are two clear points for us here to note:

1. There is a need for those new to the faith to seek out more mature Christians, who have good scriptural knowledge and spend as much time in their company, discussing the word and works of God, soaking up the knowledge like a sponge to be used later.
2. It is important for the mature Christians to give their time to mentoring new converts in the word of God, and aspects of church life and ministry, so that they can blossom and grow into the mature and useful Christians they were intended to be.

Both points are mutually beneficial as we all learn from each other, no matter how young or old either in years or in faith.

It is also interesting to note that Aquila, although clearly knowledgeable in scripture and fully conversant with the Gospel, did not appear to teach in the synagogue himself. If he had not been given that spiritual gift to teach then it is wise for him not to do so, something that should be noted in the church today. Priscilla would not be permitted to speak openly in public church for cultural reasons, but privately she could: <<teach what is good>> (Titus 2:3b).

<sup>27</sup> When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

### Acts 18:27

Achaia refers particularly to Corinth, which is in the province of Achaia, where Paul had already established a church. Aquila and Priscilla were well known there, and a letter from them on Apollos' behalf would carry great weight. Later, in his first letter to Corinth, Paul acknowledged Apollos' ministry there (1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:4-6, 3:22 and 4:6). Apollos evidently returned to Ephesus after his time at Corinth, for he was with Paul when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, which was written from Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:12), sometime during Paul's ministry there (Acts 19:1 - Acts 20:1).

It is good to note also that, despite Apollos being very welcome and liked in Ephesus, the disciples there were willing to write a letter of recommendation for him to leave them and travel to Corinth. Letters of recommendation were nearly always needed in those days as the only means of communicating the authenticity of a person who came claiming to be somebody or from some place that had recommended them.

<sup>28</sup> For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

### Acts 18:28

He vigorously refuted the Jews in public. Though Paul had been in Corinth 18 months, the church still benefited greatly from the help from Apollos, a gifted scholar and teacher, who apparently had advanced academic knowledge of the scriptures, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul had planted a strong church in Corinth, but there were opponents and Paul's absence would allow the cracks to grow. Apollos' arrival was timely as he could come to water the crop, to fill the cracks and allow the crop to continue its growth, until the apostles were again available to either visit or write to them, sharing words of encouragement for them to persevere through the inevitable hardships that follow Christian living and work.

Apollos, like all good and spirit-filled teachers throughout the ages, had the gift, not only to speak the truth of the Gospel message effectively, but to be able to prove that what he was saying was true and defend its authenticity against those who would argue otherwise.