

The Acts of the Apostles

LESSON 20

Paul ministers at Corinth (Acts 18:1-17)

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 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. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. 5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. 6 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.” 7 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. 8 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.

Paul came into Corinth determined to preach the foolishness of the cross and to function in the power of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 1:18-25; 2:1-5). We read these verses in the last lesson, but suffice it to say that Paul came from Athens with a renewed determination. He determined that the sinner was not going to be won over by intellectual arguments. He determined the Gospel was powerful enough in and of itself and did not need his powers of persuasion to succeed. He determined that the power of God trumps the natural reasoning of man.

Paul teamed up with Aquila to start a business (Acts 18:2-3). At this point in time Paul is still alone (Silas and Timothy still in Thessalonica). Paul may have been running low on funds and needed to get his business going.

Paul often mentioned the fact that he worked with his hands to support his work and the work of those who accompanied him (Acts 20:34; I Cor. 4:12; I Th. 2:9; II Th. 3:8). Later on he reminded the Ephesian elders how he had functioned when he was with them.

I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:33-35

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. II Thessalonians 3:7-10

Paul's ability to make tents meant that he did not have to rely on the sending church for the funding of his ministry. Actually, there is no evidence that he ever expected the sending church to fund his ministry. Tent making was a very portable business that required very little overhead or set up costs. This made it a perfect trade for Paul. Paul did not see the fact that he worked with his hands as an evidence of an inferior ministry.

Paul met Aquila and Priscilla through this new business venture (Acts 18:2). Aquila was of the same trade as Paul. Paul most likely stayed with them. They most likely met in the synagogue. They were most likely converted to Christianity under the ministry of Paul. They would be end up being lifelong friends even traveling with him at times (Acts 18:18; Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 16:19; II Tim. 4:19). After their conversion Aquila and Priscilla would become pillars in the church and traveling ministries (Acts 18:26). They were a true team ministry couple who were never mentioned independent of each other.

Paul ministered in the synagogue (Acts 18:4). He seems to have only laid a foundation for what he would say when the rest of the team joined him. When the rest of the team came he declared that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah. The message split the synagogue right down the middle. Some of the people opposed. Some of the people believed and were baptized including the chief ruler of the synagogue—Crispus and his household.

Paul had a great foundation for a new church. He had Aquila, Pricilla, Crispus, his household and a small group of other believers. He also had Silas and Timothy. Paul moved his teaching center to the house of Justus next door to the synagogue. Paul continued his ministry in Corinth for an additional 18 months (Acts 18:11). During this time he wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians. During this time his life would be threatened (Acts 18:9-10; I Cor. 2:3).

I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.
I Corinthians 2:3

During this time the Jews would try to press charges against him with bad result (Acts 18:12-17). The Roman proconsul Gallio viewed the dispute as a religious matter and had little patience for it. Roman officials were not sympathetic to the Jewish cause. The end result was that the Jews were driven from the judgment seat and the new chief ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes was beaten by an angry Greek mob. Gallio could not be troubled with any of it.

Who knows? They may have knocked some sense into Sosthenes if he is the man whom Paul later mentioned in his first letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 1:1-2).

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth...

Paul Returns to Antioch (Acts 18:18-23a)

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. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21 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. 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.

- Paul left Corinth and began his journey toward home (Acts 18:18).
- Aquila and Priscilla went with him as far as Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19).
- Paul ministered in the synagogue and found an open door (Acts 18:19-20).
- Paul left quickly because he wanted to get to Jerusalem in time for the feast (Acts 18:20-21).
- Paul promised to return to Ephesus in the will of God (Acts 18:21).
- Paul went home to Antioch (Acts 18:22). This completed his second missionary journey.
- Paul most likely went to Jerusalem for the feast (implied).

Paul Begins Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23)

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

Very little is recorded about how long Paul stayed in Antioch. Most people feel that it was a short time. The purpose for this trip would be threefold. To follow up on his church plants. To pick up where he left off in Ephesus. To collect an offering for the saints in Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:1-4).

This offering would most likely have been discussed on his first visit and then collected on his way back to Jerusalem.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

Paul makes reference to this offering on a number of occasions (II Cor. 8-9).

Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God. So two good things will happen--the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanksgiving to God. You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts. For your generosity to them will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the wonderful grace of God shown through you. Thank God for his Son--a gift too wonderful for words! II Corinthians 9:11-15, NLT

He was accompanied by Timothy at the first and others as time went on. This included Erastus, the treasurer of the city of Corinth (Acts 19:22; Romans 16:23). This included many others who seem to have been representatives of congregations from whom he had received funds (Acts 20:4).

And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia--also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

The Ministry of Apollos (Acts 18:24-28)

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 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. 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27 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; 28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

Apollos is covered in this section because of his connection to Ephesus. He was a man who had an incomplete message.

- He had sat under the ministry of John the Baptist.
- He had repented and prepared his heart for the coming Messiah.
- He had gone out to spread what he knew to others.
- He evidently did not know about Christ death, burial and resurrection.

He was a man who serves as a model for the true spirit of a leader. He was humble and wanted all that God had to give him (Acts 18:26). Even though he had been preaching his message for twenty years or more he was still open to receive from others, including a woman and a tentmaker.

He was fervent in spirit (Acts 18:25). The word “fervent” here means “to be zealous, hot or boiling.” He was mighty in the scriptures (Acts 18:24). You do not become mighty in the

scriptures without giving yourself to the scriptures. He was eloquent in speech (Acts 18:24). He was someone who understood the importance of his message and was willing to hone his skills to make himself more effective at what he was called to do. He was accurate in ministry (Acts 18:25). He understood how important accuracy and diligence was in the ministry of the word (II Tim. 2:15). It is the truth that sets free not our interpretation of the truth. He was bold in speaking (Acts 18:26). He was carrying words of life. There is no reason to be timid or apologetic when it comes to the message of the Gospel. He was a great help (Acts 18:27).

Some people are a help when they are around. Others are a great help. You cannot be a great help unless you place a high value on others and have the true spirit of a servant. He was vigorous in all that he did (Acts 18:28).

The word “vigorous” in this passage literally means “at full stretch.” The only other place this word is used in the New Testament refers to the way in which the Jewish leaders opposed Jesus (Luke 23:10). You cannot defeat an enemy that is raging with half measures. We must run at full stretch. There was no keeping this man down. As vigorous as he was in ministry before he met Aquila and Priscilla, he was just as vigorous after he met them with this refined message.

Paul Ministers at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10)

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples 2 he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” 3 And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” 4 Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. 7 Now the men were about twelve in all. 8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Paul arrived in Ephesus and encountered twelve disciples of Apollos (Acts 19:1, 7). They seem to have had the same experience of Apollos in that they only knew the baptism of John (Acts 19:3). Paul examined the foundation of these disciples before he began to build the church (Acts 19:1-7). He asked them direct questions relating to their foundation experiences including:

- Water baptism
- Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Paul ministered in the synagogue where he had left off (Acts 18:19-21). He seems to have had an open door in the synagogue for three months. When the door closed in the synagogue he started the church (Acts 19:9-10).

- He used a school facility as a base of operations in Ephesus.
- He taught daily for a period of two years.
- He raised up a strong eldership in this church (Acts 20:17-21, 27).

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; 20 how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

It is not difficult to see why the church at Ephesus became the strongest, purest and most doctrinally sound church in all of Paul’s ministry (Rev. 2:1-7).

The Miracle Power of God at Ephesus (Acts 19:11-22)

Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. 13 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

God did unusual miracles in Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12).

Handkerchiefs were carried from Paul and placed on the bodies of the sick and they were healed. This is presented as an illustration of “unusual miracles.” This reference implies a couple of things:

- It implies that this was an unusual miracle and not meant to be a pattern for regular church practice (as anointing with oil and the laying on of hands for healing).

- It implies that miracles were such a big part of the ministry of the apostles that miracles had to be categorized as special or unusual.

Some counterfeit ministries were exposed in Ephesus (Acts 19:13-17). The seven sons of Sceva believed that you could do the works of God without a personal relationship to God. They saw ministry as a formula instead of a relationship. They would have embarrassing results.

God accomplished a great work of repentance among the people (Acts 19:18-19). Genuine repentance will always involve specific fruits of repentance. Those fruits were evident here in the fear of the Lord, the confession of sins and the willingness to burn their bridges to the past without consideration for the cost involved.

There were powerful results from the ministry in Ephesus.

- The fear of the Lord fell on the people.
- The name of Jesus was magnified.
- The word of the Lord grew mighty and prevailed.

Paul made his first declaration of his desire to go to Rome (Acts 19:21-22).

The Riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41)

While all of these wonderful things were happening in the spiritual realm, conflict was arising in the natural realm. The Gospel has conflicted with religious tradition, political institutions, philosophical thinkers and now the world of business. The business community of the city of Ephesus was in an uproar.

The goldsmiths and the silversmiths were concerned about their business in souvenirs (Acts 19:23-28). The temple to the goddess Diana was the main tourist attraction in the city.

The temple to the goddess Diana was one of the wonders of the world at that time. Josephus describes it as a very magnificent structure. The gold and silver smiths would make small shrines of the temple to be sold in the marketplace. They accused the apostles of teaching that such gods were not gods at all.

The Ephesians believed that Diana was the mother of all gods, yet she consisted of nothing more than a meteorite that had fallen from the sky. The black stone resembled a many-breasted woman. She became a symbol of the bounty of nature and fertility.

They testified of the great impact that the Gospel was having (Acts 19:26-27).

For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. 25 He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. 26 Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia,

this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. 27 So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.” Acts 19:24-27

The whole city assembled together in a rally for Diana.

The Jewish leaders in Ephesus tried to capitalize on the uproar against Paul. It backfired on the Jewish leaders. As soon as the Ephesians saw that the Jews were involved they increased their chanting and eventually beat up a key Jewish leader by the name of Alexander.

A wise assemblyman dismissed the meeting and restored order. In doing so he affirmed a couple of things...

- That it is a blessing where good government exists (Rom. 13:4).
- That the apostles never preached against false gods, they preached Jesus and the other gods fell to the ground (Acts 19:37).

For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.



The above map covers the third missionary journey and trip to Jerusalem from Acts 18:23 to Acts 21.