

## BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

by Mario Seiglie

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### ACTS 18-19 PAUL IN CORINTH; EPHESUS; JERUSALEM FOR PENTECOST



In this study, we will see Luke is so historically accurate. From Athens, Paul heads fifty miles west to the famous Greek city of Corinth, where historians estimate 200,000 people lived there. It is located next to a narrow land bridge between Greece and Achaia (Peloponnesus). It had two ports, Lechaeum to the west and Cenchrea to the east. Smaller ships were put on rollers and pulled across the 3 ½ mile isthmus from one port to the other. The famous Isthmian games were held there every two years. It was full of sailors, merchants and prostitutes, so it had a sordid reputation. Sadly, since the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Greek verb "to corinthianize" meant to participate in sexual immorality. In the future, Paul would have to deal with many sexual sins in that congregation.

Luke reports, "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" (Acts 18:1-3). Once in Corinth, Paul, whose secular profession was that of a leatherworker (making tents and other leather products), joined up with a Jewish leatherworker and his wife, who became Christian converts. Jewish guilds were known to help each other out.

Luke accurately mentions Claudius' expulsion decree of the Jews. As *Expositor's* points out, "Due to the Edict of Claudius, an expulsion order proclaimed during the ninth year of Emperor Claudius's reign (i.e., January 25, 49 to January 24, 50 A.D.) and directed against the Jews in Rome to put down the riots arising within the Jewish community there (cf. Suetonius, *Vita Claudius* 25.4" (note on Acts 18:2).

*The Archaeological Study Bible* adds, "Suetonius wrote that Claudius had given the expulsion order because of '[the Jews] continual tumults instigated by Chrestus' (a common misspelling of 'Christ'). If 'Chrestus' does in fact refer to Christ, the riots obviously were 'about' him rather than led 'by' him" (2005, p. 1803). Tacitus, another Roman historian, in his work, *Annals*, also mistook the

name of Christ for Chrestus (a common Greek name) when he called His followers, "Chrestians."

Luke continues, "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. 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" (Acts 18:4-8).

As was his practice, Paul spoke on the Sabbath at a synagogue since he was still considered an esteemed Pharisaic Rabbi--but one that taught Jesus was the Messiah. Silas and Timothy then arrived from Thessalonica bringing good news that the brethren held firm despite persecutions and doctrinal issues. They also brought badly-needed funds from the Philippians. He then wrote his First Epistle to the Thessalonians from Corinth. Notice his greeting: "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, 'To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'" (1 Thes. 1:1). Later in the epistle he mentions being in Athens and how Timothy came from Thessalonica to see him (1 Thes. 3:1, 6).

The Jews in Corinth were mostly opposed to his teaching about Christ, but one of the Gentile God-fearers, Justus, did accept the truth and offered his home as a meeting place. Incredibly, the Jewish ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, was converted and Paul personally baptized him (see 1 Cor. 1:14).

Luke then writes, "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" (Acts 18:9-11).

So Paul had arrived in Corinth with a lot of concerns on his mind. He had been persecuted in just about every city he had visited and wondered whether this was going to happen again at Corinth. So Christ intervened and comforted him. While sleeping, Paul saw a vision where Jesus told him he was going to be protected and that he would remain there for a long time, since Christ had "many people in this city." Of all the places to have a large church, it would be this cosmopolitan and wicked city where God would call many people.

As Paul would later write to them, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). So Paul had his work cut out for him! But God did provide help and protection.

Luke writes, "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" (Acts 18:12-17).

Here is one of the key historical references to date Paul's travels. *The Archaeological Study Bible* comments, "Gallio was proconsul of Achaia in 51-52 A.D. The date is accurately known thanks to an inscription discovered in Delphi, Greece, a copy of a letter from Emperor Claudius referring to 'Lucius Junius Gallio my friend, and the proconsul of Achaia.' Seneca II [Gallio's brother], wrote of Gallio's charm and humility and dedicated two of his books to him. The Gallio inscription is of

enormous importance in dating Paul's 18-month stay in Corinth. It suggests that he was there from the fall of 50 until the late spring of 52" (Ibid., p. 1806).

Gallio's decision not to get involved in the Jewish disputes between Paul and the Jewish leaders also set a legal precedent which allowed Paul to continue preaching without much hindrance from the rulers. At this time, Christianity was only seen by Gallio as another sect of Judaism and so enjoyed Roman protection as being a "*religio licita*" or an "approved" religion in the Roman Empire.

*Expositor's* adds, "Gallio, however, after hearing their charges, was not at all convinced that this was true. For him the squabble was an intramural one about 'words and names and their own law'--which doubtless means a squabble concerning 'a message' (*logos*), not some disruptive action, 'names' having to do with an expected Messiah (*onomata*), and particular interpretations of the Jewish law" (notes Acts 18:12).

The account continues, "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" (Acts 18:18).

This is an interesting comment from Luke. Paul begins his return trip and goes with Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus. But, why put Priscilla first? We can't be sure, but it seems she was the most active one of the two. In future references, Priscilla is always the first one named. It reminds us of Lydia, who was the prominent person in Philippi.

Also notice that Paul, as a Jewish Christian leader, still considered religious Levitical vows as important, probably taken to ask for additional spiritual help from God. We see here he was not against "the Levitical law" as such, but just that Gentiles converts did not have to partake of it. So Paul made a formal vow, known as the Nazirite vow (Num. 6:1-21), where he didn't cut his hair for a determined amount of time, and after cutting it, would present it along with a sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. It was in Cenchrea that he completed the vow and got the haircut.

Luke writes, "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. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch" (Acts 18:19-22).

When they arrived in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila set up shop. From the different epistles where Paul mentions them, they remained there for several years, hosting a congregation in their home and sending greetings from Ephesus back to their Corinthian friends (see 1 Cor. 16:19). They were likely present during Demetrius's riot (Acts 19:23-41), even risking their lives to protect Paul (Rom. 16:4). Sometime after Claudius's death in A.D. 54, they returned to Rome (see Rom. 16:3).

At Ephesus, Paul briefly went to the synagogue where they were mostly receptive to the message, but he had to continue his trip, although he promised them he would return. One reason was he needed to complete his vow in Jerusalem and also to be with the Church and the leaders during the great feast of Pentecost. Here is convincing evidence that Paul was still keeping God's Feasts.

The ship's next stop was the Judean port of Caesarea, which had a direct route to Jerusalem. So Paul went up to complete his vow at the Temple and to visit the Jerusalem Church on Pentecost. Then he went back to Antioch, his headquarters, thus ending his second missionary trip.

Luke continues, "After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. 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. 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, [to visit Corinth] 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" (Acts 18:23-28).

Paul now begins his third and final missionary journey recorded in Acts. He goes through the region of the Galatian churches "strengthening the brethren" and then heads east by road to Ephesus, where he would stay for several years.

Before he arrived in Ephesus, a prominent Jewish teacher and disciple of John the Baptist, Apollos, visited the synagogue at Ephesus, where Priscilla and Aquila were attending with the good graces of the synagogue leaders. Apollos had been converted by the followers of John the Baptist but was not directly tied to the Church. So after services, Priscilla and Aquila invited him home where they explained more perfectly about Jesus Christ. He readily accepted His teachings and Him as Lord and was incorporated into the Church. He was a gifted speaker and was sent to Corinth by the brethren in Ephesus, where he refuted the unbelieving Jews and was greatly appreciated by the Church brethren, as Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians bears out (see 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-5).

Next, Paul arrives in Ephesus and Luke records, "And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples 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.' And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?' So they said, 'Into John's baptism.' 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.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all" (Acts 19:1-7).

Similar to Apollos' conversion, now a group of John the Baptist's disciples in Ephesus were converted. They had been baptized but not into Jesus' name. So Paul gave them additional instructions, which they accepted, and were baptized into Jesus' name. Then hands were laid on them and they received God's Holy Spirit.