

# The Story of Aquila and Priscilla

In the year 52 A.D. the Roman emperor Claudius issued an edict expelling all Jews from the city of Rome. It seems, from what the Roman historian Suetonius says, that they were persecuting their Christian neighbors and causing considerable disturbance in the city. Claudius cared little about the reason for the trouble, and even less about who the guilty parties were. He knew they were Jews, and that was enough; so all Jews were uprooted from their homes and banished from Rome, the innocent along with the guilty.

That was when a Jew named Aquila, who had migrated to Rome from the province of Pontus on the Black Sea, packed his belongings, bid farewell to his friends, and embarked for the city of Corinth. By his side was his faithful wife, Priscilla. We do not know for certain whether she was Jewish or Roman, nor are we sure whether or not they were both Christians at the time. But one thing we do know—they were together. In fact, they were always together. One's name never occurs without the other.

For one thing, *they made their living together*. “For by trade they were tent-makers” ([Acts 18:3](#)). Every Jewish boy in New Testament times was taught some kind of trade. Since tents were such a prominent part of Hebrew life, Aquila's parents chose to have their son learn this practical means of earning his livelihood. Their tents were made of rough goat's hair fabric which took great skill to cut and sew properly. Aquila had acquired that skill and later taught it to his wife, and she happily assisted him in his business.

Not every husband and wife can work together like this. It takes a mature relationship to work closely under the kind of pressure a job sometimes generates. But that is evidently the kind of relationship Aquila and Priscilla had. They were not only mates and lovers, they must have been good friends and companions. They had to be willing to give to each other more than they tried to take. They had to be able to accept suggestions as readily as they offered them. They enjoyed being together and working together. They were inseparable, and they were equals.

So when they arrived in Corinth, they scoured the marketplace together for a small open-air shop to rent, and proceeded to set up their tent-making business. The timing was obviously of God, for no sooner had they gotten settled down in their shop than another Jewish tentmaker arrived in town fresh from an evangelistic crusade in Athens, the Apostle Paul. Whenever he entered a new city, he would stroll through the marketplace looking for

opportunities to talk about Jesus, looking for indications of God's direction for future ministry, and, of course, looking for work to sustain him as he ministered. It was inevitable that he would amble into the tent-making shop of Aquila and Priscilla. Scripture tells the story like this: "After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers" ([Acts 18:1-3](#)).

Their affinity for each other was instantaneous, and a deep and lasting friendship was born that day. Paul came to work with them in their shop, and even lived with them in their home during his stay in Corinth. If they had not known Christ before this, they certainly met him now, for no one could spend time in Paul's presence and not be infected by his contagious and enthusiastic love for his Savior. These two who lived together, worked together, and suffered exile together, came to know and love Jesus Christ together, and it made their marriage complete. Now they were one in Christ, and His love made a good marriage even better. That may be just the thing your marriage needs. If either one of you has never placed your faith in the sacrifice which Christ made for your sins, your marriage cannot be complete. True oneness can only be found in Christ.

From the day Aquila and Priscilla met the Savior, *they grew in the Word together*. No doubt they went with Paul to the synagogue each Sabbath day as he reasoned with the Jews and Greeks and encouraged them to place their trust in Christ for salvation ([Acts 18:4](#)). Not everyone received his testimony. Some resisted and blasphemed. So he withdrew from the synagogue and began teaching in the house of Titus Justus next door. And God blessed his ministry. Even the chief ruler of the synagogue came to know Christ. "And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" ([Acts 18:11](#)). Think of it, eighteen months of intensive Bible study under the greatest Bible teacher in the early church. How Aquila and Priscilla must have grown!

And after the lessons were over, the three of them probably went home together and sat up into the early hours of the morning talking about the Lord and His Word.

They grew to love God's Word. And although they worked long and hard running their shop, making and repairing tents, maintaining a home and caring for their distinguished guest, they always found time for serious Bible study. Sharing the Word together strengthened their love for each other and their spirit of togetherness.

This is exactly what many Christian marriages lack. Husbands and wives need to open the Word together. That is not difficult to do in a pastor's home. When I am preparing a message, I often talk to my wife about it and get her thoughts on the passage I am studying. If she is preparing a lesson, she may come to get my help in understanding a particular verse, and we find ourselves sharing the Word together. But it may be more difficult at your house, especially if you have never done it. Teaching a Sunday school class and sharing the preparation with each other might be a comfortable way to begin. Reading and discussing a Bible-centered devotional guide would be profitable. Reading through a book of the Bible together will allow God to speak to our lives. However we make use of it, God's Word is one necessary ingredient for enriching our relationship with each other.

The events that follow in the account of the Acts reveal how thoroughly Aquila and Priscilla learned God's Word. When Paul left Corinth for Ephesus, they accompanied him, and he left them there when he embarked for his home church in Antioch ([Acts 18:18-22](#)). The move was providential, for while Paul was gone "a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue" ([Acts 18:24-26](#)).

Aquila and Priscilla went to hear him and were deeply impressed by his sincerity, his love for God, his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, and his brilliant oratorical ability. He could be mightily used in the service of Jesus Christ, but his message was deficient. All he knew beyond the Old Testament was the message of John the Baptist, which merely looked forward to the coming Messiah. "But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" ([Acts 18:26](#)). They lovingly and patiently rehearsed the life and ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, His sacrificial and substitutionary death on Calvary's cross for the sins of the world, His victorious resurrection from the tomb and glorious ascension into heaven, the necessity for personal salvation from sin by faith in His finished work, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the birth of the Body of Christ, and other great New Testament doctrines.

Aquila and Priscilla may not have been accomplished public speakers, but they were diligent students of the Word, and they loved to share it with others. They were even willing to invest the time necessary to take one young man under their spiritual care and pour into his life the things of Christ. Apollos had a keen mind and a quick understanding. He absorbed the truth they taught him and made it a part of his life and ministry. And as a

result of this encounter with Aquila and Priscilla, he became an effective servant of God whom some of the Corinthians later placed on a level with Peter and Paul ([1 Cor. 1:12](#)). Some of us will never be powerful preachers, but we can be faithful students of the Word, and our homes can be open to people whose hearts are hungry to hear the Word. We may have the joyous privilege of nurturing a young Apollos who someday will have a wide and powerful ministry for Jesus Christ.

Aquila and Priscilla not only made their living together and grew in the Word together, *they served the Lord together*. We know it from what we have already seen, but there is another facet of their Christian service that bears mention. When Paul left Antioch on his third missionary journey, he traveled through Asia Minor by land and returned to Ephesus, where he remained teaching the Word of God for approximately three years (cf. [Acts 26:31](#)). During that period of time, he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians and said, “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house” ([1 Cor. 16:19](#)).

When they were just getting started in business in Corinth their home was probably not big enough to hold all the Christians, so the house of Titus Justus was used. But now it looks as though God had blessed them materially, and they were using their resources in Ephesus for His glory. Their home was a meeting place for the Ephesian church.

And that would not be the last time their home served that purpose. When Paul left Ephesus for Greece, they evidently believed God was directing them back to Rome. Claudius was dead now, so the move seemed safe, and Rome surely needed a gospel witness. So off they went! Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans from Greece on that third missionary journey, and he said, “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; Also greet the church that is in their house” ([Rom. 16:3-5](#)). They had hardly gotten to Rome and already there was a church meeting in their house. Churches in New Testament times could not afford to own land and build buildings, nor would it have been wise to do so if they could, in view of the continual pressure and persecution. They met in homes. And the home of Aquila and Priscilla was always open to people who wanted to learn more about Christ, and for Christians who wanted to grow in the Word.

While we have church buildings, there is no substitute for the home as a center for evangelism and spiritual nurture in the community. Some Christians conduct evangelistic dinners, where they invite unsaved friends to hear an outstanding personal testimony. Many dedicated women use coffee cup evangelism, establishing close friendships with their

neighbors and sharing Christ with them over the kitchen table. Home Bible classes can be an effective tool for reaching the lost or getting believers growing in the Word. Young people have profited greatly by adults who have opened their homes to youth groups. The possibilities for using our homes to serve the Lord are unlimited. This might be a good thing for husbands and wives to discuss and pray about together.

There was one short statement in the greeting in the Book of Romans that we cannot afford to pass over lightly, however: "Who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." We do not know what Paul was referring to, nor when it happened, but somewhere, somehow, Aquila and Priscilla together endangered their own lives to save Paul's. And for that we also can give thanks to God. Our knowledge of divine truth would be incomplete without the epistles which God inspired him to write. His two friends were willing to give everything in the service of the Savior, even their lives.

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned one more time in the New Testament, in the last chapter of the last book the Apostle Paul wrote. It had been sixteen years since Paul first met them at Corinth, and now he was in a Roman prison for the second time. His death at the hands of the emperor Nero was imminent, and he was writing the last paragraph of his long and fruitful life. "Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus" ([2 Tim. 4:19](#)). He is thinking of his dear friends who were then back in Ephesus where Timothy was ministering, possibly having left Rome to escape Nero's latest outburst of persecution against Christians. It was just a brief and simple greeting, using the shorter form of Priscilla's name that we have seen in several other passages. But Paul wanted to be remembered to them in the last hours of his life.

There is an interesting observation to be made from that short verse, however. Priscilla's name appears before Aquila's. In fact, her name is first in four out of the six biblical references to them. And that is unusual! Most references to husbands and wives in the Bible place the man first. Why the switch? Several explanations have been suggested, but the most reasonable one seems to be that Priscilla was the more gifted of the two and often took the more prominent role. Yet it appears that that never affected their love for one another, their understanding of each other, nor their ability to work together.

It does not always happen that way. Some husbands feel threatened because their wives are more knowledgeable or capable than they are, and in order to avoid embarrassment and save face they sometimes become spiritual dropouts. It is easier for them not to show

up at all than to have their wives outshine them. Others become overbearing and belligerent in an attempt to establish their position of authority.

In some cases the wives are to blame. They seem to have something to prove, competing with their husbands for the spotlight, grasping after authority and preeminence. It is no wonder their husbands feel threatened. God's order of authority in marriage never changes. Although the wife may be more intelligent and resourceful than her husband, God still wants her to look to him as her leader. That is not always easy for an extremely talented woman to do, but Priscilla did it. She was not competing with Aquila. She was just using her God-given abilities, as a helpmeet to her husband for the glory of God. I am sure Aquila thanked God for her many times and accepted her wise counsel on many occasions. She was one of the world's truly liberated women, for there is no freedom that brings more joy and satisfaction than the freedom of obeying God's Word.