

Bible Commentaries

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Acts 18 ▾

Verse 1

The conclusion of the second missionary tour is recorded in this chapter (**Acts 18:23a**) and the beginning of the third (**Acts 18:23b**). Paul left Athens for Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla (**Acts 18:1-4**); great success attended his efforts during eighteen months work at Corinth (**Acts 18:5-11**); Jewish opposition came to a climax soon after Gallio became proconsul, but it was frustrated (**Acts 18:12-17**); Paul concluded the second journey via Cenchraea and Ephesus to Antioch in Syria (**Acts 18:18-23a**); and after some time there, he started the third journey (**Acts 18:23b**). Luke next included some background material on the work at Ephesus, where Paul's next great labors would occur, relating the preaching of Apollos, and the further instruction given him by Priscilla and Aquila (**Acts 18:24-28**).

After these things he departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. (Acts 18:1)

No organized opposition to Paul's preaching developed in Athens, but he did not long remain there, probably because of the arrogant snobbery of the shallow intellectuals who dominated Athenian society at that time. "The philosophers were too easy, too indolent, and too wise in their own eyes to receive the gospel."^[1]

Luke gives nothing of the manner of Paul's journey to Corinth, and the speculation of Hervey is as good as any:

If (he went) by land, (it was) a forty mile, or two days journey; if by sea, a one day's sail. Lewin thinks he came by sea, that it was in winter, and that possibly one of the shipwrecks mentioned in **2 Corinthians 11:25** may have occurred at this time.^{Acts 2p. 87.}>^[2]

To Corinth ... A significant portion of the New Testament is addressed to Christians in Corinth; and a little more attention to this city is appropriate:

CORINTH

Corinth was situated on the narrow isthmus that joins the mainland of Greece to the Peloponnesus, thus lying between the Saronic and Corinthian gulfs, ideally located for trade and commerce. The outstanding physical characteristic of the city is the Acro-Corinthus, a fantastic vertical mountain rising just south of the isthmus to a height of 1,886 feet.^[3] There was a flat area

on top, occupied in antiquity by a heathen temple with "one thousand religious prostitutes"^[4] dedicated to Aphrodite.

As could be expected, the city's morals were the scandal of ancient times. The Greek language "made a verb out of the city's name, `Corinthianize' meaning to practice whoredom."^[5] Even as late as the seventeenth century, the "Corinthian" in Shakespearean dramas was always a debauchee, making his entry on stage in a state of drunkenness. How great was the power of the gospel that established faith in Christ in such a center!

In the times of Paul, Corinth was the capital of Achaia,^[6] and, as Ramsay said, "the greatest center of trade and exchange in Greece from the beginning of Greek history onward."^[7] Presently, the city has faded from its former glory, having only some 17,728 population in the 1951 census.^[8] At the time Paul came to Corinth it was a more important city than Athens, and this could have influenced his cutting short the time he gave to Athens.

^[1] John Wesley, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House), in loco.

Acts 2p. 87.">^[2] A. C. Hervey, Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1950), Vol. 18, **Acts 2**p. 87.

^[3] Encyclopedia Britannica (Chicago: William Benton, Publisher, 1961), Vol. 6, p. 441.

^[4] Everett F. Harrison, Wycliffe Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 450.

^[5] E. M. Blaiklock, Cities of the New Testament (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1965), p. 58.

^[6] Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit., p. 441.

^[7] Sir William M. Ramsay, Pictures of the Apostolic Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1959), p. 201.

^[8] Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit., p. 441.

Verse 2

And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome: and he came unto them; and because he was of the same trade, he abode with them, and they wrought; for by their trade they were tentmakers.

Scholars have advocated opposite positions with regard to whether or not Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when Paul met them. Milligan thought they were not, basing his view on Luke's introduction of them, not as Christians, but as being of the same trade.^[9] Bruce said, "The odds appear to be in favor of the view that they were already Christians when they left Rome."^[10] But it was not Christians but Jews whom Claudius expelled. It might have been, as Henry thought, that "the Gentiles were so confused that they could not tell a Jew from a Christian."^[11] This writer agrees with Ramsay and Boles that "we do not know."

Claudius ... This edict of expelling the Jews from Rome is placed at 52 A.D.^[12] by some, and a little earlier by others. This emperor has the distinction of being the only Roman emperor whose name occurs twice in the New Testament (**Acts 11:28**).

Aquila and Priscilla ... became firm and faithful friends of Paul, even saving his life on one occasion, for which they are extravagantly praised in **Romans 16:3-4**.

Tentmakers ... All Jews, even the wealthy and learned, were taught a trade. "The Jewish law, after their exile, held that a father who taught not his son a trade, taught him to be a thief."^[13] Paul's necessity of supporting himself by manual labor was temporarily relieved when Silas and Timothy brought contributions from Macedonia (**Acts 18:5**).

[9] Robert Milligan, *Analysis of the New Testament* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Bosworth, Chase and Hall), p. 378.

[10] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1954), p. 368.

[11] Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1960), Henry and Scott Edition, p. 501.

[12] J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 843.

[13] Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles* (Austin, Texas: Firm Foundation Publishing House), p. 122.

Verse 4

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.

Paul's turning to the Gentiles after rejection in the synagogues should be understood in the local sense; for he always began with the Jews wherever he went.

Verse 5

But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

About this time, probably as soon as Silas and Timothy had brought Paul word of the churches in Macedonia, Paul wrote 1Thessalonians. "The news Timothy brought to St. Paul caused him to write those beloved converts ... which is the first of his epistles to be preserved to us."^[14] (Note: Howson accepted the later date of 55 or 56 A.D. for Galatians; but this writer prefers the earlier date, understanding it to have been written to the south Galatians, making it perhaps the oldest of Paul's letters which have come down to us.) "Harnack placed the date of First Thessalonians at 48 A.D., and Zahn placed it at 53 A.D.; and it is likely that these two dates represent the extreme limits."^[15]

Constrained by the word ... "This means that Paul was engrossed by the word or engrossed by the preaching of the gospel."^[16]

[14] J. S. Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1966), p. 303.

[15]; **ISBE**, Vol. V, p. 2966.

[16] H. Leo Boles, Commentary on the Acts (Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Company, 1953), p. 287.

Verse 6

And when they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook out his raiment and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own hands; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

They opposed themselves ... All opposition against the word of God is in reality a disaster to the opposer, not to the gospel. "The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him (John)" (**Luke 7:30 KJV**).

Blasphemed ... This means that they blasphemed both Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Shook out his raiment ... This gesture was the equivalent of shaking off the dust of his feet against them as in **Acts 13:51**.

Verse 7

And he departed thence, and went into the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

As Ramsay said, "This juxtaposition was not calculated to sweeten the relations with the Jewish opposition, and legal proceedings soon ensued."^[17] It is not indicated here that Paul transferred his residence to the home of Titus Justus, but that he taught from his house. He probably continued to abide in the home of Priscilla and Aquila.

ENDNOTE:

[17] Sir William M. Ramsay, op. cit., p. 205.

Verse 8

And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Crispus ... the ruler of the synagogue was one of the noble, or mighty, who accepted the Lord, of whom Paul said not many of them did so. This was one of those whom Paul baptized with his own hands (**1 Corinthians 1:14**); therefore, it is impossible to view the statements that "he believed" as excluding the baptism without which no New Testament conversion was ever completed.

Hearing believed, and were baptized ... There is only one plan of salvation for alien sinners; and here is a concise statement of it. The "plan" also included the repentance of those who accepted Christ.

Verse 9

And the Lord said unto Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to harm thee: for I have much people in this city.

A vision ... The Lord repeatedly appeared to Paul to strengthen and encourage him in his proclamation of the truth.

No ... man shall harm thee ... Almost at once, there would occur the most remarkable providence on behalf of Paul, in that those who sought to harm him were themselves dispersed and one of them beaten in the presence of Gallio. This promise of the Lord did not mean that men would not assault Paul, but that they would be unsuccessful in their efforts to thwart his preaching.

I have much people in this city ... Alexander Campbell thought this referred merely to the size of the city,^[18] but it would appear more logical to view the Lord's statement as meaning: "That there were much people, not yet saved, but who would accept the gospel when they heard it."^[19] Therefore, we view this as a promise that Paul would convert many souls in Corinth.

[18] Alexander Campbell, op. cit., p. 123.

[19] H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 289.

Verse 11

And he dwelt there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

One of the great difficulties of New Testament chronology is the ambiguity of such a statement as this which may be understood as covering the entire period of Paul's work in Corinth, or, just as logically, that "he tarried after this yet many days" (**Acts 18:18**).

Verse 12

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment-seat, saying, This man persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

Gallio ... This man was the older brother of the philosopher Seneca, advisor to Nero. He was born Marcus Annaeus Novatus; but upon being adopted by a rich man, Lucius Junius Gallio, he took the full name of "Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus."^[20] A fragment discovered at Delphi in 1905 marks the beginning of this man's proconsulship as 51 A.D.; but as Jack P. Lewis observed:

We do not know how long he was proconsul, nor for certain whether Paul was brought before him at the beginning or end of his term. It is assumed that Gallio was proconsul only one year and that Paul was arraigned at the beginning of his term, giving the conclusion that Paul arrived in Corinth in 49-50 A.D.^[21]

Recent archeological discoveries support the earlier date for First Thessalonians, as advocated by Harnak, as 48-49 A.D.

This man persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law ... This means "contrary to Jewish law"; but as Judaism was a legal religion in Rome, the implication is that Christianity was not. These Jews were not nearly as clever in their opposition as those in Thessalonica; and their efforts were quickly suppressed.

The usual assumption is that Gallio, who amiable disposition was widely acclaimed, no sooner entered into his proconsulship than the Jews descended upon him demanding action against Paul.

Paul was all set to defend himself against the Jewish charges, but before he ever opened his mouth, Gallio gave sentence in his favor and dispersed the accusers.

[20] Jack P. Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971), pp. 153-155.

[21] *Ibid.*

Verse 14

But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If indeed it were a matter of wrong or of wicked villainy, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if they are questions about words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; I am not minded to be a judge of these matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat.

True to the Lord's promise, Paul was protected in this encounter. Gallio's brother was a close friend of high authorities in Rome, where only recently the Jews had suffered expulsion by Claudius; and therefore he was fully confident in thus dismissing their charges abruptly. Hervey noted that:

"He drave them ..." as used by Demosthenes in exactly the same context, means the ignominious dismissal of the case, without its being even tried.^[22]

ENDNOTE:

[22] A. C. Hervey, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

Verse 17

And they all laid hold on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things.

Sosthenes ... was likely the successor of Crispus who had accepted the truth; and as the new leader of the synagogue he had determined to take legal action against the Christians. The people who beat him were the Greek population of Corinth who seized upon any pretext to vent their hatred of Jews. Gallio's denial of them even a hearing of their charges, and his turning away indifferently when the populace assaulted Sosthenes, terminated the Jewish efforts to use legal means against the Christians in Corinth.

On the basis of **1 Corinthians 1:1**, it is alleged that the Sosthenes who was beaten here later became a Christian; but such speculation is uncertain.

Lange observed that Gallio was right in refusing to hear charges against Paul, but that he was wrong when he turned his back on deeds of violence such as the beating of Sosthenes, indicating that "The indifference of men to religion may lead them to be equally negligent in the administration of justice."^[23]

ENDNOTE:

[23] John Peter Lange, Commentary on Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1866), p. 339.

Verse 18

And Paul, having tarried after this yet many days, took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila: having shorn his head in Cenchraea; for he had a vow.

Yet many days ... The uncertainty of reckoning this in the eighteen months (**Acts 18:11**) has already been noted. It would seem that from the use of "but" at the beginning of **Acts 18:12**, the scene before Gallio was introduced retrospectively; and in that case, the "many days" of this place would be the time remaining in the eighteen months.

Shorn his head; for he had a vow ... It is grammatically possible to refer this to Aquila; but the subject of the whole paragraph appears to be Paul, and scholars are sharply divided on the question of whose vow it was and whose head was shaved. In the light of **Acts 21:26**, it is clear that Paul, as a Jew and not as a Christian, might easily have done such a thing; and if he did not do so, no point could be made of it, because his friend Aquila, who was also a Christian, would hardly have done such a thing against Paul's wishes. Rather than citing extensive arguments with reference to who did it, we are content to say with H. Leo Boles that we simply do not know. As Boles said:

As a Jew, Paul kept up his observance of the ceremonial law for some instances, but refused to impose it upon Gentiles.^[24]

ENDNOTE:

[24] H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 293.

Verse 19

And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

He left them there ... anticipates Paul's departure mentioned in the next verse; and the meaning seems to be that as Aquila and Priscilla went about establishing their residence in Ephesus, Paul did some teaching in the synagogue.

Verse 20

And when they asked him to abide a longer time, he consented not; but taking his leave of them, and saying, I will return again unto you, if God will, he set sail from Ephesus.

Verse 22

And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and saluted the church, and went down to Antioch.

Went up and saluted the church ... refers to a visit to Jerusalem, this being the fourth trip to that city since Paul's conversion.

He went down to Antioch ... This was the Syrian Antioch, the "sponsoring church" as some would say today, which had sent Paul on his missionary travels. The statement in the next verse that he "spent some time there" indicates that he gave a full report of all that the Lord had done through him on the mission field. This terminated the second missionary journey of Paul. It had required about three years time; and a summary of the places visited is this:

He first revisited the churches of South Galatia, Lystra, Derbe, etc.

They came to Troas where the Macedonian call occurred.

They went to Philippi where Lydia and the jailer were baptized.

Paul and Silas preached in Thessalonica.

The noble Bereans accepted the gospel.

Paul went to Athens.

He was joined by Timothy and Silas in Corinth.

Via Ephesus and Caesarea, he came to Jerusalem, and thence

He returned to Antioch in Syria.**SIZE>**

Verse 23

And having spent some time there, he departed.

This gives the end of Journey II and the beginning of Journey III.

And he went through the region of Galatia, and Phrygia, in order, establishing the churches.

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY TOUR

This journey began just like the second, with a revisitation of all the congregations previously established in Galatia and Phrygia, having exactly the same purpose, namely, that of establishing

the young churches in the most holy faith.

In **Acts 18:21**, Paul had promised Aquila and Priscilla that he would return to them at Ephesus, the next great scene of Paul's labors; and in anticipation of that return, Luke here gave some background information on what was going on in Ephesus.

Verse 24

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, 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 spake and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John.

Although his information regarding the gospel was incomplete, he knew enough to proclaim the kingdom of God which John had declared to be "at hand," and to command people to be baptized unto the remission of sins, as John had done, declaring at the same time, of course, the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

He was a man of eloquence, learning, and great ability. No higher compliment can be paid than the one Luke gave, namely that he was mighty in the scriptures. As appears a little later, he baptized many.

Verse 26

And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of the Lord more accurately.

Strong agreement is felt with Harrison who said, "Quite likely, Apollos was now baptized by Aquila in the name of Christ."^[25]

ENDNOTE:

[25] Everett F. Harrison, op. cit., p. 453.

Verse 27

And when he was minded to pass over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him: and when he was there, he helped them much that had believed through grace; for he powerfully confuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

These two verses extol the effectiveness of Apollos in answering Jewish objections to Christ as Lord and Messiah; and his effectiveness led to support and encouragement by brethren throughout the area. It may be accepted as certain that Aquila and Priscilla were leaders in sponsoring and encouraging this effective new voice for the Lord.

Paul himself advocated and encouraged Apollos' work (**1 Corinthians 16:12**); and in this passage, Luke, Paul's great friend and companion, speaks of the noble Alexandrian in terms of unstinted praise and appreciation. How wonderful that among such great leaders there was no hint of jealousy.

Pass over into Achaia ... This indicates that Apollos went to Corinth, the capital of Achaia, where the carnality of the Corinthians promptly led to the development of a faction calling itself after Apollos (**1 Corinthians 1:12**). No doubt Apollos' work there was very successful, for Paul himself affirmed that "I planted, Apollos watered; but it is God who giveth the increase" (**1 Corinthians 3:6**).

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