

The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

Chapter 18

18:1-11

- v. 1-3 – Paul moved on another 50 miles to Corinth. We are told that this was after Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in 49: A.D., so it was probably around 51 A.D. at this point. He met a husband and wife, Aquila and Priscilla, who shared common traits with Paul of heritage (Jews) and trade (tent-makers), and he ended up staying with them. It does not say that they were believers at that time, but it is likely that they were because, later in Romans 16:3, Paul identifies them as believers and says that they risked their lives for him, most likely during this time in Corinth.
- v. 4 – As before, Paul began his ministry “to the Jew first” by witnessing on the Sabbath in the synagogue.
- v. 5 – Then Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, where they had stayed behind. They would have reported on the state of the congregations that had been planted in the region. And it seems likely that Paul wrote his First Epistle (Letter) to the Thessalonians at this time from Corinth because, according to 1 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul writes:
- “But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you.”
- v. 6 – He also encountered resistance from the Jews of the city and he ends his attempt to witness in the synagogue. The phrase, “Your blood be upon your heads” is a picture of someone not heeding a warning and then facing the consequences that could have been avoided. Its intended meaning is evident in a passage in the book of Ezekiel:
- “If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman; and he sees the sword coming upon the land, and he blows on the trumpet and warns the people, then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head” (Ezek 33:2-4).
- So, Paul is essentially telling his audience that they have been warned about eternal consequences that will leave them with no excuse for not believing that Yeshua is the Messiah.
- v. 7 – Perhaps in a symbolic gesture, Paul moved into the home of a believing Gentile, Titius Justus. At this point, Paul could have easily left Corinth and concluded his ministry there.
- v. 8 – But some fruit began to appear, including an influential Jew, Crispus, who was the head of the synagogue.
- v. 9 – And then Paul had a vision from the Lord telling him to stay.
- v. 11 – Paul ended up staying and ministering in Corinth for a year and a half. His commitment to discipleship was paralleled at the same time by Silas and Timothy working with the first believing communities in northern Greece. This was important because the Gentile believers had little awareness of the totality of the biblical message. They had no Scriptures to read, no familiarity with Bible stories passed down on an oral basis, no worship songs to sing, no

pastors to guide them from their own knowledge of the Scriptures and life experiences. They truly needed much help in getting started. And that included the letters to these congregations that Paul had begun writing.

18:12-17

- v. 12 – Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders were not finished in their opposition. Just as had been done in other cities, they took Paul before the local authorities, in this case the Roman proconsul (governor), Gallio.
- v. 13 – Their charge was that Paul “persuades people to worship God contrary to the law.” The law in question had to be the law of Moses or the Torah, not Roman law, because in v. 15 Gallio acknowledges it as a reference to their “own law,” not something of a criminal nature (v. 14). So he refused to hear the case. If this was about a new cult, Gallio would likely had to investigate further and make a ruling. But he, like other Roman leaders, considered the Messianic faith to be a subset of Judaism. They saw it as a continuation of Hebraic worship, not something new.
- v. 17 – Unnamed people took out their frustration on Sosthenes who had become the leader of the synagogue. We do not know if he was a believer and it was Jews who beat him up, or if they beat up their own leader because he failed to bring down Paul and the Messianic faith. Or maybe “they” refers to Greeks who harmed the Jewish leader for making a scene in the city by bringing charges. But obviously Gallio didn’t care one way or another because the historical record shows that he hated Jews in general.

18:18-28

- v. 18 – Paul left Corinth along with Priscilla and Aquila. That tells us that this couple had proven their worthiness to be included in Paul’s ministry team. In fact, in Romans 16:3, he calls them his fellow workers.

But before they boarded the ship in the port city of Cenchrea that served Corinth on eastward journeys, Paul cut his hair because he was taking a vow. The evidence shows that it was likely a Nazirite vow. That act shows that Paul was still faithful to the commandments of the Torah.

Nazirite vows are described in detail in Numbers 6. A person would take such a vow in order to demonstrate complete dedication to God. It required refraining from cutting your hair during the period of the vow (so Paul cut it immediately before taking the vow). The person also had to abstain from wine or strong drink or even grapes of any kind. Normally the vow was taken in Jerusalem, but as part of the oral tradition of that day and later recorded in the *Mishnah* (*Nazir 1:1-9:5*), a person outside of Israel could take the vow if he then went to Jerusalem, which Paul was doing here. According to Num 6:18, the one taking the vow would offer his hair at the altar and burn it by fire along with some other prescribed offerings. By following this practice, Paul was demonstrating his total commitment to God’s calling, as well as continuing to identify with his Jewish heritage. That would be important to the leaders of the believing community in Jerusalem who had not seen him for some time and could only wonder what he was doing.

- v. 19 – When they arrived in Ephesus (on the western side of Asia Minor), Paul only stayed for a short time. This time he only witnessed to Jews in the synagogue, not Gentiles. Paul, then,

left Priscilla and Aquila to continue the ministry in Ephesus.

v. 21 – And then he departed again.

v. 22 – This verse packs a great amount of detail into just a few words. When he arrived in Caesarea, the port city serving Judea, “he went up and greeted the *kehilla* (congregation or assembly).” This is clearly a reference to the believers in Jerusalem because, in terms of orientation, you always went up to Jerusalem (in contrast to our modern way of thinking related to maps in which “up” implies a northerly direction). While there, in addition to visiting with the believers of Jerusalem, he would have had the opportunity to stop at the temple to make his offering in completing the Nazirite vow process. Then he “went down” and returned to Antioch.

v. 23 – It doesn’t say how long Paul stayed in Antioch this time, but it may have been as long as a year. And then he left on his third missionary journey, this time overland to Galatia and Phrygia where he had planted churches on his previous journey.

v. 24-25 – Meanwhile, back in Ephesus, a Jewish man named Apollos was “teaching accurately the things concerning Yeshua.” So, apparently, he had learned somewhere that the Messiah had come and how he fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. This indicates he was a believer in Yeshua, and we are also told that he knew about the baptism of John, which placed an emphasis on repentance and the coming of the kingdom of heaven. But, Apollos was not aware of the rest of God’s plan that had been revealed at Shavuot/Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the people.

The reason for Priscilla and Aquila staying behind in Ephesus becomes evident because they were able to give Apollos the knowledge that he lacked. Two details are important for our understanding:

1. Priscilla, the wife, is equally involved in teaching Apollos in tandem with her husband Aquila.
2. The effective manner in which they handled the situation shows that especially when someone is speaking in a public setting, it is often best to take that person aside and to speak discreetly, rather than confronting them publicly, which can stir up defensive pride.

But, Priscilla and Aquila also were forthright in teaching Apollos what he needed to know. Some translations read that they “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (KJV “expounded”). Luke uses the Greek word *ektithemi*, which literally means “lay out.” In other words, they laid out the full truth to Apollos. That is the same word that Luke uses in Acts 28:23 to describe the way that Paul explained or expounded or laid out the kingdom of God and used the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) to persuade his audience about Yeshua. That same sense of teaching forthrightly applies here to Priscilla and Aquila.

v. 27-28 – It is clear that their co-teaching ministry was successful, because Apollos then began his own ministry by traveling to Achaia in western Greece, where he is described as speaking with power about Yeshua and His fulfillment of the Scriptures.