

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

From Athens Paul journeyed to Corinth.

This was the capital of Achaia and a short distance from Athens. It was a different city altogether. Corinth was then a great commercial center and had a cosmopolitan character.

Here the Apostle settled down for one year and six months and Silas and Timotheus joined him here.

It was one of the most immoral cities then in existence. The grossest immoralities were here practiced in connection with religion. In different ways this chapter is an interesting one. Besides working at his trade as tentmaker and preaching the Gospel, he wrote by inspiration in Corinth the two Epistles to the Thessalonians and the Epistle to the Romans.

**I. In Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla. His testimony and separation from the Jews** (Verses 1-8).

**II. Encouragement from the Lord in a vision** (Verses 9-11).

**III. Paul and Gallio** (Verses 12-17).

**IV. From Corinth to Ephesus and Antioch. The second journey ended** (Verses 18-22).

**V. Establishing disciples in Galatia and Phrygia** (Verse 23).

**VI. Apollos, the Alexandrian** (Verses 24-28).

**I. In Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla. His testimony and separation from the Jews.**

**“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome), and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.**

**“And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Verses 1-8).**

For the first time Aquila and his wife Priscilla are now mentioned. They appear as prominent characters in the Epistles. Paul was guided to them and abode with them, for like himself, they were tent-makers, an occupation which reminds one of the pilgrim character of the child of God.

Aquila was a native of Pontus, who had settled in Rome. Both he and his wife Priscilla may have been believers, when Paul met them, though the record speaks of him as a Jew. If they had become believers as a result of becoming acquainted with the Apostle the record of this fact would have appeared in this chapter. Perhaps they had heard and believed the Gospel in Rome.

A persecution against the Jewish race had broken out in Rome and they with many others were banished from the city. Rome hated the Jews, many of whom had settled in the city. Tiberius had sent some 4000 Roman Jews into an unhealthy country, in hope that the fever there would destroy them, and Claudius in the year 49 had banished them entirely from the capital of the Roman Empire.

The Roman biographer and historian Suetonius \* in his life of Claudius gives the reason for the harsh edict of the Emperor Claudius because “the Jews were constantly in tumult at the instigation of one Chrestus.” The word “Chrestus” means undoubtedly “Christos,” that is Christ.

\* He lived during the reign of Hadrian in the beginning of the second century.

This interesting couple had established themselves in Corinth, and what a joy it must have been to the Apostle when he was led to their home. How sweet their fellowship must have been as they toiled together and spoke one to another about the Lord!

From the same chapter we learn that after Paul’s ministry had terminated they went to Ephesus (verse 19). From I Corinthians 16:19 we learn that they were still there when that Epistle was written. But in writing to the Romans Paul says, “**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus**” (Romans 16:3), so that they had wandered back to Rome and were in happy fellowship with the Roman assembly.

II Timothy 4:19 tells us that once more they were back in Ephesus where Timothy had his abode. “**Salute Prisca** (an abbreviation of Priscilla) **and Aquila.**” They were indeed strangers and pilgrims, but blessed to know that their wanderings were directed by the Lord.

Priscilla is mostly mentioned before Aquila, from which we may learn that she, like other notable women of apostolic days, “**labored for the Gospel.**”

It is significant that here it is prominently mentioned that the Apostle worked at his trade as tent-maker. He had also done so in Thessalonica.

**“For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail, for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God”** (I Thessalonians 2:9; II Thessalonians 3:8).

He labored at Ephesus. **“Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me”** (Acts 20:34).

From this we learn that he also supported his fellow helpers. Corinth was a wealthy city. He did not take anything whatever from the Corinthians, of which he reminds them in both of his Epistles. In this way he illustrated most blessedly the gift of God, the Gospel, without money and without price. What a contrast with the trafficking in spiritual things we behold about us in our days! And yet it is equally true that the Lord has ordained **“that they which preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel”** (I Corinthians 9:14).

It seems that Paul followed the same method of work as he did in Thessalonica.

First, he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (verse 4). This must have been altogether on Old Testament ground, showing the divine predictions concerning Christ.

When Silas and Timotheus arrived, then he was greatly pressed in spirit and testified to the Jews more fully that Jesus is the Christ. That there was blessed fruit we learn from his Epistles to the Corinthians. He himself baptized Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas (I Corinthians 1:14-16).

And he was with them in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. His speech was far different from the one he had used in addressing the philosophers of Athens. **“My speech was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”** (I Corinthians 2:3-4).

His presence was base unto them. **“Who in presence am base among you”** (II Corinthians 10:1). His bodily presence, these Corinthians said, is weak, and his speech contemptible (II Corinthians 10:10). It is possible that he was greatly depressed. Silas and Timotheus brought him good news from the Thessalonians:

**“But now when Timotheus came from you unto us and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you. Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith”** (I Thessalonians 3:6-7).

He must have written the first Epistle to the Thessalonians immediately after the arrival of Silas and Timotheus. They also may have brought to Paul the fellowship from the saints in Philippi,

which may have reached Thessalonica after Paul had left (Philippians 4:15, 16).

Opposition from the side of the Jews followed after the bold declaration that Jesus is the Christ. Not alone did they reject the Gospel but they blasphemed. Alas! this blaspheming is still heard among the Jews, whenever the full claims of the Lord Jesus Christ are pressed upon their consciences.

*For the second time Paul declares that he will go to the Gentiles.*

Next we behold the Apostle of the Gentiles in the house of a devout Gentile named Justus. His house was next to the synagogue. Here the Lord's special blessing rested upon the testimony, for the chief ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, with his house, as well as many other Corinthians, believed on the Lord. His baptism as well as the others by the Apostle himself we have already mentioned.

## **II. Encouragement from the Lord in a vision.**

**“Then spake the Lord to 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 hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them”** (Verses 9-11).

It is blessed to see when this encouraging vision took place. Paul had been greatly depressed, and fear and trembling, as seen from the first Epistle to the Corinthians, had taken hold on him.

The good news from Thessalonica had cheered him and the conversion of Crispus and the other Corinthians encouraged him much. But he needed a direct encouragement from the Lord. The Lord knew all which awaited His faithful servant. He knew of the plot to bring him before the judgment seat of the deputy of the province. The Lord wanted His servant to be without anxiety and assured him that no man could set on him or hurt him. He also told him that He had much people in Corinth. Perhaps if this vision had not been given to Paul at this time he might have been tempted to leave Corinth, but now he felt authorized to continue for a year and six months. A strong assembly was gathered.

As we do not write on the Corinthian Epistles we cannot follow the most interesting theme of the condition of the Corinthian church. But the Epistles mention that the majority of believers were composed of the poorer class. Of another class were Crispus, the once chief ruler of the synagogue, Stephanas and Gaius, who were given to hospitality and therefore must have been people of means; Chloe, a lady who had many servants; Erastus, who held a responsible position, and others.

Then there were present diversities of gifts, the gift of tongues being prominent and responsible for certain disorders. After the Apostle had left, divisions came in and the leaven of vainglory and worldliness, even to immoralities, got in amongst them and did its dreadful work.

## **III. Paul and Gallio.**

**“And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things” (Verses 12-17).**

Gallio was deputy, or proconsul of Achaia.

This proves the accuracy of the record before us. Achaia up to the year 44 was united to the province of Macedonia. But the Emperor Claudius restored Achaia as a province and it had then its own proconsul. We know from Roman historians a good deal of the personality of Gallio.

“He came from a Spanish family which had won for itself a distinguished place in Roman letters and society. Annaeus Seneca, his father, was a well known rhetorician, Seneca the Stoic and tutor of Nero was his brother, and the poet Lucan his nephew. His own name was originally M. Annaeus Novatus, but having been adopted by Lucius Junius Gallio he also adopted his name. He had attained the highest office in the state, the consulship. But he was best known by his amiable character; ‘sweet Gallio,’ Statius calls him, and Seneca speaks of him ‘as one who could not be loved enough.’ “

Before this man the Jews brought Paul, accusing him that he persuades men to worship God contrary to law. The Satanic attempt, however, laid not so much in the accusation as in the insurrection these Jews made. The whole Jewish community was stirred up by them to impress Gallio with the seriousness of the offence. And the accusation itself was couched in deceptive terms. It reads as if Paul had done something against the Roman law. This is exactly what they meant to do, namely, to constitute the Apostle a transgressor of the law of the Roman Empire.

But Gallio was too keen for them. He at once recognized the deception. It was their own Jewish law about which they were disturbed. So without even listening to Paul, what he had to say for himself, he settled the case at once by a few well chosen words and then drove them out of the court. Then the Greeks who had witnessed the whole scene turned against the Jews. They had their spokesman in Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue. He must have taken the place of Crispus, who had believed on the Lord. Upon him the Greeks fell and gave him a good beating. And Gallio had nothing to say to this. Sosthenes deserved all he got.

If the Sosthenes who is mentioned in the opening verse of the first Epistle of the Corinthians is the same, then he profited immensely by his experience. Paul addresses him as a brother. We believe he is the same person, for the Grace of God delights to take up such characters and show in them what Grace can do.

**IV. From Corinth to Ephesus, Jerusalem, and Antioch. The second journey ended.**

**“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Cesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch”** (Verses 18-22).

The great Apostle was not in a hurry to leave Corinth; he tarried there a good while. **“He that believeth shall not make haste.”**

When the Lord’s own time arrived he took his leave of the brethren and sailed from the port of Corinth, Cenchrea, for Syria. The only companions mentioned are Priscilla and Aquila.

*The interesting item is the statement concerning the vow and the cutting of the hair. To whom does it refer?*

Did Aquila or Paul make the vow? Many able expositors believe that Aquila is meant, while others contend that it was Paul who had made the vow: Those who believe that Aquila is in view, call attention to the fact that the name of his wife Priscilla precedes his name and that in this way Aquila is marked out as the person who made the vow.

But if the reader turns to Romans 16:3 and II Timothy 4:19, he will find that Priscilla is named first, so that this argument does not hold good.

Inasmuch as the Apostle Paul is the prominent figure in the account, the statement must refer to him. Every vow made a visit to the temple in Jerusalem necessary (Numbers 11:1-21). But we learn that Aquila remained in Ephesus and did not go to Jerusalem.

*It is not necessary to charge The Apostle on account of this vow with an out and out violation of the great truths so fully taught in the Epistle to the Galatians.*

To the Jews he became as a Jew and under the law (I Corinthians 9:19-23); and no doubt he made certain concessions in this direction. Some Christians seem to look upon the great Apostle as almost infallible in his actions and repudiate the thought that he could have made a mistake. The great Epistles he wrote are infallible, for the Holy Spirit is the author of them, but no such perfection can be claimed for his Christian life and walk. He too was **“a man of like passions”** and we shall find how faithfully and yet how tenderly the Holy Spirit reveals in the next chapters his actions in self will.

*Ephesus, which was closed by divine authority (16:6) in the beginning of this journey, is now reached by the Apostle.*

It was a fine city known not only by its great commerce and as the capital of the Roman province Asia, but also by the great temple of Artemis. Models of this temple were made to be carried

along for a charm or to be placed in houses (see 19:24). Ephesus had a very large Jewish population. They were wealthy and influential.

The Jewish historian Josephus mentions the fact that the Roman government, as well as the citizens of Ephesus, accorded to them special privileges in the free observance of their customs.

Paul soon entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. The request to stay longer was denied by him. We surely see haste here instead of calmness and waiting on the Lord. Having not consented to remain, he bade them farewell, promising them to return, if it be God's will. The reason given for his haste was his desire to reach Jerusalem to keep this feast, which was Pentecost.

Why he did not stay with such an opportunity and then telling the Jews of the absolute necessity of visiting Jerusalem is indeed strange. What follows reveals still greater haste with no record at all of what he did in Jerusalem or what was accomplished by him. He sailed from Ephesus, landed at Cesarea and went up, which means Jerusalem, he saluted the church and went down to Antioch. Thus ended the second missionary journey. Perhaps an intense love for his brethren in Jerusalem, his deep yearning for them, led him in this course.

#### **V. Establishing disciples in Galatia and Phrygia.**

**“And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples”** (Verse 23).

This work was next laid upon his heart and with it the third journey began.

The account is very brief but if we read the Epistle to the Galatians we can well understand how needful and important this work was.

Judaizing teachers had invaded the churches which had been founded in large numbers. Their teaching was of the most pernicious kind.

- They taught the observance of the law and its works as being absolutely necessary for salvation.
- They perverted the Gospel of Grace and preached that Gospel which had the divine anathema upon it, because it sets aside that blessed finished work of Christ on the Cross.

**“For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain”** (Galatians 2:21). **“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace”** (Galatians 4:4).

Their teaching was extremely bold, for they repeated the false teaching which had been brought before the council in Jerusalem, **“except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”** (Acts 15:1).

At the same time they had impeached the apostolic authority of Paul.

The Galatian Christians, who had been so loving and tender towards Paul, so that if it had been possible they would have plucked out their own eyes to give them to the apostle, the same people were now being moved against Paul and the Gospel he had preached unto them.

The Epistle to the Galatians was undoubtedly written during the Apostle's second visit to Ephesus and it shows that perhaps immediately after the recorded visit in this chapter the Judaizing element increased in strength. Most likely the news of the grave danger which was then threatening the Galatian churches had reached him in Antioch.

## **VI. Apollos the Alexandrian.**

**“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ”** (Verses 24-28).

*This is an extremely beautiful incident.*

A new preacher appeared among the Jews in Ephesus, Apollos the Alexandrian. He is described as an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures. In Alexandria, Philo, the great Hellenistic Jewish Philosopher, had flourished. He was born about 20 B. C. and died after the year 40 A. D. He introduced Platonism into Judaism. In all probability Apollos was one of his disciples, but he accepted that which Philo did not believe.

He had come most likely in touch with disciples of John the Baptist and had been baptized with John's baptism unto repentance. He knew that Jesus is the Messiah, knew the facts of His earthly life and the miracles He did.

Of the meaning of His death and resurrection Apollos knew nothing, nor had he any knowledge of the Holy Spirit. The entire truth of the Gospel of Grace was unknown to Him. He **“taught diligently the things of the Lord”**, that is, the things concerning Jesus. Yet this little knowledge he had concerning Him who had appeared in the midst of His people, in whom he believed as the Messiah and King of Israel, set his soul on fire.

With his great knowledge in the Scriptures, such as the learned Jews possess, he spoke boldly in the synagogue, proving, no doubt, from the Law and the Prophets, that Jesus is the Messiah.

Yet how limited was his message.

What difficulties must have arisen in his mind! What questions, which he could not answer! Nearly twenty years had gone since that blessed Person, in whom he believed, had disappeared,

and that Kingdom which Jewish hope and expectation associates with the King Messiah had not been manifested, and the promises given through the Prophets had not found their fulfilment. Yet he continued to speak boldly concerning the things of Jesus.

But God did not leave him long in this condition. The Lord had guided him to Ephesus, and the same Lord had arranged it so that Priscilla and Aquila remained in Ephesus. He had a service for them. Both Priscilla and Aquila listened to him and must have been made glad by the courageous testimony of Apollos. They felt at once how little he really knew of the Lord, and they did not turn away from him, but sought him out and took him in to expound to him the way of God more perfectly. And the great, eloquent preacher on whose lips hung the multitudes, was humble enough to sit at the feet of a tent-maker and his wife and receive instructions from them.

How little of the patience of Aquila and Priscilla and the humility of Apollos we see in our days!

If some humble Christian would go now to some great and eloquent preacher to show him the way of God more perfectly, what answer would he receive? And how often towards those who are inferior in spiritual knowledge those who are well taught show but little patience. Instead of condemning such who are ignorant of the truth we should seek them out in a loving way and lead them on.

His deeper knowledge of the Lord, the truth of His death on the cross, His presence in Glory at the right hand of God closed his ministry in Ephesus. The Jews in large numbers may listen to an eloquent man, even if he proves from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah, but the preaching of the cross is the great stumbling block. It is still so in our day. Apollos went to Corinth and became a great blessing to the assembly there. Mightily he convinced the Jew, publicly showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

What a blessed factor he became in the Corinthian church is seen from the testimony of the Holy Spirit through Paul in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. **“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase”** (I Corinthians 3:6). But there likewise was a faction of the Christians calling themselves after this great preacher, **“I am of Apollos.”**

Later he left Corinth and returned to Ephesus and was very reluctant to return to Corinth, though Paul had invited him to do so. **“As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren; but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time”** (I Corinthians 16:12). As he was such an humble man, it is probable that he refused to return for fear of attracting the people to himself, as it had been the case already.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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