

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 18****“EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN SIN CITY”**

“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” (18:11)

What happened in Corinth did not stay in Corinth! We have the written report of what happened in this 18th chapter of Acts. The account of Paul’s activities in this sinful city begins with these words, *“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.”* (v.1)

Welcome to Corinth! Albert Barnes introduces Corinth in his commentary as follows: “It was one of the most populous and wealthy cities of Greece and at the same time one of the most luxurious, effeminate, ostentatious, and dissolute. Lasciviousness here was not only practiced and allowed, but was consecrated by the worship of Venus; and no small part of the wealth and splendor of the city arose from the offerings made by licentious passion in the very temples of this goddess. No city of ancient times was more profligate. It was the Paris of antiquity; the seat of splendor, and show, and corruption. Yet even here, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of splendor, gaiety, and dissoluteness, Paul entered on the work of rearing a church; and here he was eminently successful.”

Publius Annius Florus, Roman author, called it “the glory of Greece”; Cicero said that it was “The light of all Greece.” This city called “The light of all Greece” was in reality a sin-darkened place. Corinth was a perfect setting for *“the light of the glorious gospel of Christ”* (II Cor. 4:4) that Paul preached. Let us survey the situation facing Paul in Corinth as follows:

A & P Bed And Breakfast

“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.” (vs.1-2)

Travel worn, weary, alone and perhaps somewhat discouraged because of the results of his ministry in Athens, Paul traveled 40 miles to Corinth. There the Lord had a special husband and wife, Aquila and Priscilla, ready to help His tired servant. How they found each other in the large city of Corinth is not known but they found each other. I am certain that the Lord brought them together.

I heard about a Christian who was in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. He was in Tokyo walking alone down a street. Other Navy men had gone to various sinful attractions but he refused to do so. He said he was feeling very alone and out of habit began to whistle the

chorus “Heavenly Sunshine.” In a few minutes an English speaking Japanese man walked up to him, said that he recognized the tune, “Heavenly Sunshine,” and introduced himself as a fellow Christian. He invited him to his home where the man and his wife entertained him.

Paul too, needed companions in a strange city. Later he wrote to the Corinthian Christians saying, *“I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”* (I Cor. 2:3) What a help and comfort Aquila and Priscilla must have been to him. An old song that should always be in vogue is “Help Somebody Today.”

Help Somebody Today

“Look all around you,
Find someone in need.
Help somebody today!
Do a neighborly deed,
Help somebody today!

Chorus:

Help somebody today,
Somebody along life's way;
Let sorrow be ended,
The friendless befriended,
O, help somebody today!”

- Carrie E. Breck

The Tentmaker From Tarsus

“So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.” (v.3)

The three of them, Aquila, Priscilla and Paul entered into a joint commercial venture. They were tentmakers, or leather workers. Most tents were made of dried skins, leather. It was the custom of Jewish parents to teach the son the trade of the father. Paul was born in Tarsus which was famous for the tents made there of goats skin.

Their tent shop may have been in the city's commercial marketplace, the agora. This would have afforded Paul numerous occasions to speak with customers and passers-by of the resurrection of Christ. He worked because he was trying to begin a new work in a new city and did not want to be a financial burden to the small nucleus of believers.

Churches were few, small and far between. They could not support him financially. A servant of the Lord can be a missionary and at the same time make a living by manual labor. There are many “Tent Maker” missionaries in the world today. Some Mission Agencies have special category for those who are willing to go cross culture with the gospel and support themselves by “Tent Making,” that is, by being employed. Paul was not above getting his hands dirty and neither was Jesus in the carpenter shop in Nazareth!

Not In Our House!

“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.” (vs.4-6)

Paul had been practicing the *“To the Jew first”* principle (Romans 1:16) wherever he went. As a result Jewish opposition in the previous cities he visited, Thessalonica and Berea, resulted in him leaving those cities and going to Corinth. Now, the Jews in Corinth rebelled and repelled Paul and his message. Paul preached *“that Jesus is the Christ”* which stirred such deep anger among the Jews that they cursed him, *“blasphemed”* him, right in the synagogue!

Paul seemed to say, *“That’s it! I’ve had it with you!” “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”* Meaning, *“I’m washing my hands of the entire matter and your judgment is self-determined!” “From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*

Paul was a Jew and he had been witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles wherever he went. In Acts 13, when a controversy arose over the same issue, we read, *“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 13:46-47)*

Wherever Paul went he zeroed in on the local synagogue and began to preach. Some Jews were saved but there was always severe opposition. Their response was the same: *“Not in our house!”* And they expelled him. Here in Corinth, because of their rebellion, he determines to focus more upon ministry to Gentiles, however, not exclusively, as we shall later see.

Hospitality House

“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.” (vs.7-8)

It seems that Justus provided Paul with some justice! Justus invited Paul to move into his house, which was next door to the synagogue, and continue his ministry there. Think of it: Paul started a church right next to the synagogue! That was a bold move and one that proved a blessing. The ruler of the synagogue and his family were saved as well as many other Corinthians. Paul had no *“quit”* in him! As the old saying goes, *“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”*

Reassured And Renewed

“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.” (vs.9-11)

Ministry is work. It is taxing physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Moses, in talking to the Lord said, *“Why have You afflicted Your servant that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?”* (Numbers 11:11) Ministry is indeed a burden – but it is also a blessing! However, the body, mind and soul can take only so much. Paul was feeling the strain of the opportunities and responsibilities of ministry in Corinth and it was at that time that the Lord graciously appeared to him in a vision and greatly encouraged him.

The Lord gave him a word of comfort: *“Be not be afraid”*; a word of counsel: *“but speak and do not keep silent”*; a word of courage: *“I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you”*; a word about companions: *“I have many people in this city.”*

Notice the concluding word in v.11 *“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”* Paul continued in Corinth with renewed vision and vigor. Often times the place of greatest discouragement becomes the place of greatest encouragement; the place of fierce adversaries can become the place of fast advancement. It worked out that way in Paul’s case.

No Crime, No Time

“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 wrong doing 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.” (vs.12-17)

There is a cliché: “Do the crime, do the time,” meaning, if you commit a crime you will spend time in prison. Paul was dragged before Judge Gallio by outraged Jews and charged with violating Jewish religious law, not Roman civil law which Gallio was responsible to uphold. The judge wisely refused to consent to the demands of the Jews, saying that Paul was not guilty of *“wrong doing or wicked crimes”* and therefore, set him free. No crime, no time!

Gallio saw the whole case as nothing but a quarrel over theology and he was not about to get the Roman government entangled in a religious controversy. The judge, by not assenting to the demands of the rabid Jews and setting Paul free, was saying in essence that preaching the gospel was not illegal. *“So Paul still remained a good while.”* (v.18)

Back To Antioch

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. 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. After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” (vs. 18-23)

After his eighteen months in the sin filled city of Corinth, Paul “*he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria Cenchrea Ephesus Caesarea Antioch.*” It is interesting that Aquila and Priscilla went with him as far as Ephesus. God has another “encouragement” ministry for them. Paul then went on to Antioch. This was the end of his second missionary tour. And, what a journey it had been!

Missionary pioneers are a special breed of Christian servants. They are the ones who introduce new cities, cultures and countries to the gospel, blazing trails for others to follow in their wake. History records the exploits of many of these noble souls, none more valiant than the Apostle Paul who modeled church planting and churchmanship for all who have come after him.

Although the church in Corinth had many problems, Paul and associates were successful in establishing a sizeable local church there. The two letters that Paul later wrote to the church there contain church problem-solving principles that are not found anywhere else in the New Testament and are an invaluable source of instructions for churches today.

Meet Apollos

“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, 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.” (vs.18-28)

Chapter 18 of the Book of Acts ends with the reader being introduced to an exemplary evangelist named Apollos. Dr. Luke records that he was an orator, a powerful preacher, fired up by the Holy Spirit, not lazy or ashamed of the Gospel. But with all these good qualities he was not theologically correct for “*he knew only the baptism of John.*”

There is another commendable quality about him: he could take correction graciously which revealed his humility. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him speak, they detected his theological error and they took him aside, gently informing him of his mistake and set him straight. Apollos’ message was not inaccurate, it was incomplete. Aquila and Priscilla brought him up to date and Apollos accepted this constructive criticism, continuing on to become an even more effective witness for the Lord.

Summation

What does this chapter have to say to me personally? Many things, depending upon one's level of spiritual maturity, however, there are several major thoughts that stand out and challenge us all.

First, in the midst of vice, we can, like Paul, be victorious. Our environment on earth is never going to be ideal for a Christian but we can be overcomers.

Second, a fresh vision of the Lord will revive our spirits and we can resume our vocation with vigor. When you feel down, look up!

Third, manual labor, whether tent making, carpentry, etc., should never be looked upon as beneath our dignity as servants of the Lord. "*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.*" (Eccles. 9:10)

Fourth, keep persevering! My home-made definition of perseverance is: "Keep on *purring* regardless of how *severe* the situation may be." Paul teaches us that it is always too soon to quit!

Fifth, be an encourager! Aquila and Priscilla are models of sensitive souls whom the Lord uses to great advantage.

Sixth, be humble enough to accept correction and instruction as did Apollos. Some of the best teachers in life are not in a formal educational institution, but are met along the way as we are pursuing God's will for our lives.

Seventh, when one mission for the Lord is completed, don't think that you have done enough. Rest up and get ready for your next assignment! Paul was soon to begin his third missionary journey!

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