

Study 27: Acts chapter 18

Introduction

The second missionary Journey concludes, and Paul spends considerable time at Corinth on that journey.

We will not deal with the whole of the 18th chapter in this study, but will stop at vs 23 at the conclusion of the second missionary journey.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

Content: *What are the major events?*

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Body of the Study

Why was Corinth important?

What does Paul do when he comes to Corinth?

Silas and Timothy come from Macedonia

What has the reception been like in Corinth?

How did the Jews react?

The conclusion of the second journey

What was the vow in Cenchrea?

At Ephesus

Homework:

Read the notes as a review of the study.

- *What do we learn about “church planting” from observation of Paul on the second journey?*
- *In what ways is the Corinthian society like our Western society? How could we expect the church to grow, based on what happened to the church in Corinth?*

Read the rest of chapter 18, and chapter 19 in preparation for next week

Notes for study 27: Acts chapter 18

Introduction

The second missionary Journey concludes, and Paul spends considerable time at Corinth on the third journey.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

Chapter 18 provides us with another “peg in the sand” in dating the events in Acts.

From what we know of Roman history, Luke is amazingly accurate in the words he uses to designate the various governing officials of Roman provinces.

Gallio was the son of Marcus Annaeus Seneca, the distinguished Spanish rhetorician (50 B.C.-A.D. 40). He was born in Cordova at the beginning of the Christian Era and named Marcus Annaeus Novatus. On coming to Rome with his father during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41-54), he was adopted by the Roman rhetorician Lucius Junius Gallio, and thereafter bore the name of his adoptive father. He was renowned for his personal charm. An inscription at Delphi mentions Gallio as being proconsul of Achaia during the period of Claudius's twenty-sixth acclamation as emperor--that is, during the first seven months of A.D. 52. Proconsuls entered office in the senatorial provinces on July 1, and therefore Gallio became proconsul of Achaia on July 1, 51, but only for a brief period of time.

Paul seems to have been preaching in Corinth for eight or nine months before Gallio came to Achaia as proconsul (i.e., from the fall of 50 to July 1, 51). When he took office, the Jews decided to try out the new proconsul. They brought Paul before him on a charge that he was preaching a *religio illicita* and therefore acting contrary to Roman law. (NIVBC)

This places the date of Paul's arrival in Corinth no earlier than around September AD 50, and no later than AD 52, as he spends 18 months there, leaving at the earliest in late AD 53 to early AD 54 at the latest.

Another “peg in the sand” is the edict of Claudius that all Jews must depart from Rome (18:2). This edict is generally dated at AD 49, although there is considerable uncertainty as to the accuracy of this date.¹ Claudius reigned between 41 and 54 AD, and so the date of 49 AD is not inconsistent with the events discussed in Acts.

Content: *What are the major events?*

Paul leaves Athens for Corinth, Silas and Timothy come from Macedonia, The Jews reject the gospel, and Paul goes to the Gentiles. Two years in Corinth, Sails to Syria by way of Ephesus, Casaerea, Antioch.

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

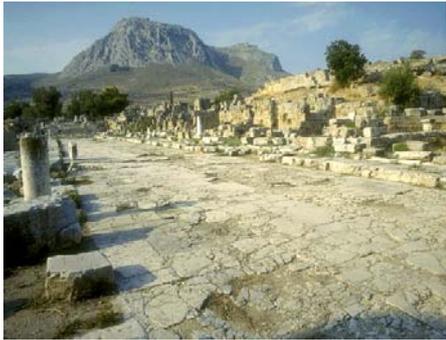
Paul, Silas, Timothy, Aquila & Priscilla, Gallio

Body of the Study

Why was Corinth important?

After a disappointing time “...Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth...” (18:1 NKJV). Corinth was the leading city in Greece at that time, and greatly overshadowed Athens. Geographically, Corinth was (and is) strategically placed. Greece is essentially a peninsular between two seas – the Adriatic Sea on the western side and the Aegean sea on the east, where Athens is located. At the bottom of the peninsular lays a good portion of Greece, in the land mass known as the Peloponnese. Corinth lies right on the narrow peninsular joining the two seas, dominating the north-south travel route and through which any army heading either north or south would need to pass.

¹ For a discussion on this date, refer to Reese, p xiv.
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Lechium Rd – The main St in Corinth in Paul’s time.

Corinth had two harbours with the city of Cenchrea 14 km away located at the eastern harbour, and Lechaion to the West. At the narrowest point, the isthmus was about 5 km wide. This gave a strategic position to Corinth, as much trade would pass through the city as a “short-cut” between the two seas, rather than making the difficult sea journey around the lower part of Greece. Several attempts have been made to build a canal between the two seas, as that would make a much shorter journey from Athens to Rome, avoiding the uncertainties of weather associated with sea journeys in the Mediterranean. Nero commenced one of these attempts around the time of Paul’s visit², however it

was abandoned after a very short distance. The canal was in fact completed in 1893.

In Paul’s time, a railway with wooden rails 6 km long was used to transport fully laden small ships (boats) from one sea to the other. Slaves would haul the ships for this journey, and whilst they were undertaking the task, the sailors would have shore leave in Corinth. This greatly contributed to the vice and immorality in the city.

Corinth was renowned for its immorality, with the temple of Aphrodite – the goddess of love – placed just above the city, and with it the associated temple prostitution. The Corinthian games were held at least every two years.

The old city was destroyed in 146 BC due to its rebellion against Roman rule. It was re-established by Julius Caesar in 44 BC as a Roman Colony. In Paul’s day, the city probably numbered around 400,000 people.



The Corinthian Canal – 6.3 km long. Construction difficulties for the first century are obvious.



The diaklos – the road used to transport ships across the peninsular in Paul’s time.



The Acrocorinth sits overlooking the city.

² Conybeare & Howson, p324.
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It can be said that the character of the city is expressed and reflected in the problems that later grew in the church, and the church at Corinth has been described as follows:

Imagine a church wracked by divisions. Powerful leaders promote themselves against each other, each with his band of followers. One of them is having an affair with his stepmother, and, instead of disciplining him, many in the church boast of his freedom in Christ to behave in such a way. Believers sue each other in secular courts; some like to visit prostitutes. As a backlash against this rampant immorality, another faction in this church is promoting celibacy – complete sexual abstinence for all believers – as the Christian ideal. Still other debates rage about how decisively new Christians should break from their pagan past. Disagreements about men’s and women’s roles in the church add to the confusion. As if all this were not enough, alleged prophecies and speaking in tongues occur regularly, but not always in constructive fashion. A significant number of these immature Christians do not even believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ!³

With such a background, it would at first glance be a highly improbable source of fertile ground for the gospel. Yet God assured Paul “...*I have much people in this city...*” (18:10). With such a reputation, it is not surprising that Paul says “...*I came to you...in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling...*” (1:2:1-3 NKJV).

What does Paul do when he comes to Corinth?

When Paul came to Corinth, “...*he found a certain Jew named Aquila ... with his wife Priscilla...*” (18:2 NKJV). They were of the same trade as Paul, and he involved himself in the business of tentmaking with them. They had “...*recently come from Italy...because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome...*” (18:2 NKJV). We do not know when they became Christians. If they were already Christians, then it is surprising that Luke did not note them as *brethren*, rather than describing Aquila as *a certain Jew*. On the other hand, Luke does not mention Paul converting them as he did in the case of Lydia. Nor are they mentioned in either 1 Cor 1:14 ff or 1 Cor 16:15 as being “...*the firstfruits of Achaia...*”.

Paul began his *usual* practice of “...*reasoning in the synagogue every sabbath...*” (18:4), where he taught both the Jews and the Greeks (Proselytes of the Gate) who were attending there. So, we find Paul teaching every sabbath day, and also working at his trade in order to support himself.

Silas and Timothy come from Macedonia

Silas and Timothy had remained in Macedonia, and Paul had sent for them via the brethren that had escorted him from Berea to Athens (17:15). They arrived whilst Paul was still at Athens, but Timothy was sent straight back to Thessalonica to report on how the church there was doing (1 Thess 2:18-3:2; and presumably Silas had gone to Berea). By the time they returned, Paul had moved on to Corinth “...*When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia...*” (18:5 NKJV). They brought good news from Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:6), and Paul wrote the first letter to the Thessalonian church, and sent it via Timothy again. Upon Timothy’s return with another report and many questions, Paul then immediately wrote the second letter, probably also sending Timothy back again to deliver it.

It is likely that Timothy and Silas brought some money for Paul’s support from the churches in Macedonia (2 Cor 11:9), which allowed Paul to spend less (or even no) time at his secular work, and “...*devote himself completely to the word...*”.

The Jews reacted to Paul’s teaching, and “...*they resisted and blasphemed...*” (18:6) which caused him to move away from the Jews and turn his attention to the Gentiles. He went to the

³ Blomberg, Craig: The NIV Application Commentary – Quoted from Jenkins, F: Christ and Culture at Corinth, Florida College Lectures 1996.

house of a man named Titius Justus. Since he has a Roman name, it is most likely that he was a Roman citizen. Ramsay⁴ has suggested that he was Gaius Titius Justus, and he was the Gaius mentioned as one of Paul's first converts in Corinth (1 Cor 1:14). This man's "...*house was next to the synagogue...*" (18:7). A synagogue has been found in the ruins of Corinth, however it may be from a later date than the time of Paul.

Along with Gaius as one of the first converts in Corinth "...*Crispus the ruler of the synagogue, believed ... with all his household...*" (18:8 NKJV). He must have heard Paul speak in the synagogue, and then gone next door when Paul left to go to the house of Justus.

What has the reception been like in Corinth?

So far, Paul has had a modest response (Crispus and Gaius / Justus including the whole household of Crispus). After being rejected by the Jews he went to the Gentiles in the city, and "...*many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptised...*" (18:8 NKJV). The growth was steady.

The Lord appeared to Paul in a vision. Up to this time Paul had been apprehensive. We can understand this when we understand the culture at Corinth. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his apprehension during his early work there "...*I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling...*" (1 Cor 2:3 NIV). This is not surprising since almost everywhere Paul had been up to now resulted in persecution and physical harm at the hands of the unbelieving Jews.

Jesus encouraged him to continue in the work, and told him literally "...*to stop being afraid...*" (18:9). Jesus outlines the basis of that fear – Paul was afraid of attack and physical harm – but God has "...*many people in the city...*" (18:9). The statement of Jesus is in the future / potential sense – there were many people whom God knew would obey the gospel. That is not to say that God had already selected or destined them to be saved. God knew their hearts, and knew that when presented with the facts of the gospel, that they would embrace and obey it so that they might be saved. This is evidenced from the very statement of Jesus here – "...*do not be afraid to speak, and do not keep silent...*" (18:9 NKJV). Paul was not to be afraid to preach the gospel. If Jesus referred to people who were *already saved*, then why would Paul need to preach to them? Why would they not already be meeting with the church?

The encouragement was so strong, that Paul stayed in Corinth for a period of 18 months, and perhaps even as long as two years. Notice that it is said that Paul "...*continued there a year and six months...*" (18:11), which suggests that that time began when the Lord spoke to him. He had already been there for some time before that, and remained for some time after the events of Gallio. This would place the time of his departure no earlier than the end of AD 53 to early AD 54 at the latest.

How did the Jews react?

The Jews reacted with hostility towards Paul. This was more than just a passive attempt to suppress his teaching. Paul was captured and brought to the judgement seat. The raised platform (judgement seat) is called *bema* in Greek, and was in the market place. The site has been found, and the raised platform is still visible.

On certain days, the Roman officials would seat themselves in a chair on the raised platform – and a court session was held. The people could bring a grievance to the official to have their grievance heard – and this is what happened on this occasion. The position of Gallio as Proconsul of a Roman colony was the highest position that Paul had so far confronted. To be found guilty under such circumstances could have serious ramifications in other parts of the empire. Luke says "...*Now when Gallio was proconsul...*" (18:12 NKJV) which suggests that the Jews took the opportunity with the new civic leader as a "try on" to get rid of Paul.

⁴ Ramsay, p.256-257.

The charge against Paul was:

- He persuades men (true)
- To worship God (true)
- Contrary to the Law (true)

The question is which Law? It is true that Paul was teaching that the worship of God was different than the Law of Moses, but that would hardly be an issue for the Romans. The Jews must have made out that there was something contrary to Roman law, or they were simply trying to confuse the issue by the generic use of “the law” hoping that Gallio would think of Roman law, when they meant Moses’ law.

Paul was about to defend himself, but Gallio intervened – correctly assessing the situation as one of Jewish religion, rather than Roman law. He recognised that Paul had not done any “...*wrongdoing or wicked crimes...*” (18:14 NKJV) worthy of punishment. Gallio must have been rather impatient towards the Jews, and regarded them as a “most polluted race”⁵

Gallio’s hearing and dismissal of Paul’s accusers was a landmark case for several reasons. The dismissal of the Jews as a matter of “Jewish law” was one of the fairest hearings that Paul ever had. But further, as Proconsul, this could later be called upon as evidence and precedent.

The Jews were ordered to clear the area – more than just dismissed – but commanded to get out. They then reacted by taking Sosthenes, who was “...*the ruler of the synagogue...*” (18:17 NKJV) and beat him in front of Gallio. Either Sosthenes became ruler of the synagogue after Crispus left, or Crispus and Sosthenes were both leaders together. It is most likely that the Jews commenced beating him (and it seems that he got a jolly good hiding) because he had brought a case to the court in such a poorly presented way that it was dismissed before it was even heard. Alternately, Sosthenes may have been very slow to leave the court, and received a beating by the Romans for not heeding the command to vacate the court as directed by Gallio.

Gallio was repelled by this action – which suggests that he was a gentle minded man – and it would seem also prudent, by his quick assessment of the situation with Paul.

Paul remained there a good while longer – as a result of the favourable response from Gallio, he had many more opportunities to teach almost unrestrained.

The conclusion of the second journey

Paul left Corinth by way of Cenchrea (the eastern seaport), taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. This was before “...*the coming feast in Jerusalem...*” (18:21) which would probably be either Passover or Pentecost, making the timing of his departure early AD 54.

What was the vow in Cenchrea?

The assumption is usually made that Paul had his hair cut off in Cenchrea because of a Nazarite vow. Firstly, it needs to be considered *who* had the vow? Luke departs from his usual naming of Aquila and Priscilla, to that of Priscilla and Aquila – and then says, “...*for he had a vow...*” (18:18) which could indicate that it was Aquila who had the vow, and not Paul. The construction of the Greek language does not make it absolutely clear which one it was.

Secondly, there has been much discussion as to the nature of the vow, and it is commonly regarded as a Nazarite vow. Under such a vow, the person would undertake self-imposed restraints – such as abstinence from wine, allowing the hair and beard to grow, and not coming in contact with dead bodies (Num 6:1-21).

However, when the duration of a Nazarite vow was fulfilled, then the hair was to be shaved off by a priest at the Temple in Jerusalem, and burned on the alter as a burnt offering. In cases where it was not possible to be in Jerusalem, then the hair was to be cut short but not shaved, and the hair was to be taken to Jerusalem on the next journey and then offered. [Remember that Jews were required to come to Jerusalem for the three pilgrim feasts every year if possible: Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement].

⁵ Augustine, City of God, vi:10
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This is clearly ***not*** what happened here, since Paul was heading to Jerusalem specifically to keep the coming feast (18:21), which shows that the vow was *not* a Nazarite vow. Perhaps it was a vow of gratitude to God for his deliverance and the growth of the church in Corinth. It would be something that the Jews would immediately recognise, and may have helped Paul convert some of them after the dealings involving Gallio. It is another example of Paul (assuming that it was Paul who had the vow) displaying the *Nationality* issues as a Jew, rather than the *keeping of the Law of Moses* that might at first be presumed.

At Ephesus

Paul finally comes to the great city of Ephesus, where he drops off Aquila and Priscilla. He has a good reception “...*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...*” (18:19-20 NKJV). This entices Paul to return on his third journey. However, he does not wish to stay in Ephesus at this time, as he wants to get back to Syrian Antioch and then “...*I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem...*” (18:21 NKJV).

A discussion about Ephesus can be found in my notes on the introductory study of Ephesians.

It would have taken Paul about a week sailing from Corinth to Ephesus, and about a month sailing to Caesarea.

Upon landing at Caesarea, Paul went up to greet the church there, and then immediately went to Antioch – the church that had sent him out on his journeys.

We notice Luke’s use of the singular – “...when ***he*** had...” (18:21, 22, 23). Paul was heading home. He had left experienced workers in the places where he had been so that the church might grow. Luke stayed in Philippi, Timothy went back and forth to Thessalonica, Silas stayed in Berea for a time, then (probably) stayed in Corinth after Paul left. Paul himself stayed in Corinth for about 2 years, and Aquila and Priscilla were left in Ephesus.

Paul had been gone for three years – AD 51 to AD 54. He had visited the churches in southern Galatia, and started new churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. As part of Paul’s life-long relationship with the church that sent him out on his journeys, he came “home”, and “...*spent some time there...*” (18:23 NKJV). We can certainly get the sense of feeling that Paul had for these brethren, and they for him, when he continued to come back again and again, and on every visit “spent some time”.

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