

Acts 18A

- Paul is now moving to Corinth, and the next chapter of his second missionary journey begins

[Acts 18:1](#) ¶ After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.

[Acts 18:2](#) And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,

[Acts 18:3](#) and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.

[Acts 18:4](#) And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

[Acts 18:5](#) ¶ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

- Corinth is the final major European city to receive Paul, and it's here that Paul has one of his greatest successes as a church planter
 - Corinth lay 50 miles west of Athens on a thin stretch of land called an isthmus
 - The isthmus separated the Peloponnesus from mainland Greece and had shores on two different seas
 - The city has an ancient past, probably dating back to time of Japheth, one of the sons of Noah
 - The city of Paul's day traced its history back nearly 1,000 years
 - It had been destroyed and its inhabitants enslaved by Rome in 146 BC
 - Later rebuilt by Rome in 46 BC and given its current name
 - Within a couple of decades it had already become a Roman capital of the region of Achaia
 - By Paul's day it was 500,000 strong with two major seaports, one in the Med and another in the Aegean Sea
 - It was the center of Aphrodite worship, the goddess of love
 - Her temple was located on a high hill 1,800 feet above the city and featured over 1,000 prostitutes for hire

- This was a sailors' favorite port making it the center of immorality in the ancient world
- In fact, it had the reputation as the Sin City of its day
 - Greek and Roman writers of the day coined a phrase for extreme depravity based on the city's name:
 - To "corinthianize" came to mean living an immoral life
 - Elsewhere it was known as the Corinthian life
 - And a prostitute was sometimes called a Corinthian Girl
- Into this setting, Paul enters with the Gospel, and by his own testimony in 1Cor 2 he was fearful and intimidated by what he saw
 - Paul immediately finds support in the form of a Jewish couple names Aquila and Priscilla
 - This couple becomes prominent in the early church and are mentioned in numerous letters of the NT
 - Often the woman's name is mentioned first, suggesting she was the more important member of the marriage, perhaps by position or gifting
 - Luke says they were originally from Pontus, which is in Asia Minor
 - This is significant because Jews from Pontus were reported to be at Pentecost
 - Perhaps Aquila was present at that moment or was converted by those returning from Jerusalem
 - This detail explains that they had been believing Jews for sometime
 - Additionally, we're told they were expelled from Rome by Claudius
 - In AD 49, a riot broke out among the Jews in Rome over the name of Christ
 - Believing and unbelieving Jews were rioting, but the emperor decided to expel all Jews from the city

- Later they were able to return
- These two believing Jews have come to Corinth and have met Paul
 - They probably met because both had the same purpose: they needed work
 - Tradesmen in that day had to belong to guilds to work in their trade, and men of like trade would visit their local guild to find work
 - Luke explains their meeting by saying they were both tentmakers, which means they were likely at the same guild seeking work
- Clearly, this relationship was a great blessing to Paul, and the Lord provided it to encourage him in his early days in the city
 - It's probably hard for us to appreciate how hard it must have been for Paul to enter that city alone
 - He had no financial support, no friends in the city, he was bringing a difficult message to a huge and famously sinful city
 - Naturally, Paul was trembling and fearful as he describes himself in 1Cor 2
 - But the Lord was kind to Paul and picked him up with the blessing of Jews who knew the Lord already
 - The Lord is still doing this today
 - Men and women who step out into the mission field can tell countless stories of God making an appearance when they most needed Him
 - Money from nowhere, strangers who lend a hand at just the right time, government bureaucracies that mysteriously bend the rules
 - Don't ever let the enemy convince you that you're alone in this work
 - Paul was given a couple who shared his faith, his Jewish culture and even his trade so that Paul was immediately comforted
 - Paul knew the Lord was providing every step of the way

- Strengthened for the hard work ahead, Paul again starts with the local synagogue
 - He is reasoning every week trying to convince Jew and Greeks (probably God fearers) to know the Lord
 - But from the text it's clear he wasn't getting very far
 - In fact, it seems he received not a single convert for weeks on end
 - Remember this moment in the Paul's life during the book of Acts the next time you find yourself working for the Lord but finding nothing to show for it
 - If the Apostle Paul could have dry periods with no converts, then why shouldn't we?
 - I'm sure Paul was getting a little discouraged too, but notice what Paul did
- When Timothy and Silas arrived, it gave Paul opportunity to double-down his efforts
 - First, the men bring reports of good news from the church in Thessalonica
 - Paul mentioned how encouraged he was by the news in his first letter to that city (1Thes 3)
 - Secondly, they brought donations from the church in Philippi
 - As Luke says, this allowed Paul to "devote himself completely" to word
 - The phrase in Greek is sunecho, which means to be seized by or to be taken custody by something
 - Paul became complete focuses on God's word
 - What Luke is implying is that Paul stopped working and lived on the donations and spent every waking hour on God's word
 - We can't overlook an obvious and Biblically founded principle here
 - Ministry as a profession is largely dependent on the financial gifts of those who receive the ministry

- Ministers shouldn't be without the ability to support themselves
- Even the Jewish Rabbis taught the need to be self-sufficient

"Paul was a Rabbi, but according to Jewish practice, every Rabbi must have a trade. He must take no money for preaching and teaching and must make his living by his own work and his own efforts. The Jew glorified work. 'Love work,' they said. 'He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery.' 'Excellent,' they said, 'is the study of the law along with a worldly trade; for the practice of them both makes a man forget iniquity; but all law without work must in the end fail and causes iniquity.' So we find Rabbis following every respectable trade." Barclay

- Neither was Paul dependent on support, in the sense that he didn't want for money to arrive before he began to minister
 - He used his tent making skills out of necessity to feed himself so that ministry never stopped
- But Paul knew that self-sufficiency was the goal, but a means to an end
 - And as long as he worked to feed himself, he was taking time away from studying, teaching and preaching
 - So Paul expected the churches he planted to eventually step up and support his work
 - In that way, each church participated in the planting of the next
 - Paul commands this principle should continue in the church

[1Tim. 5:17](#) ¶ The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

[1Tim. 5:18](#) For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

- Paul points to a classic picture from farming for how to treat pastors, elders and teachers
- A farmer depends on the hard work of his ox
 - An ox who performs well ensures the farmer is well fed and satisfied and his work in the field is fruitful

- If a farmer were to restrict the ox's ability to feed itself, the farmer would be doing a foolish thing
 - He is undermining his own situation
 - His own work and prosperity suffers
 - He has held back a small thing (a bag of feed) but put at risk a much larger thing (a field of grain)
 - Paul's application is obvious: don't make it hard for your elders, pastor and teachers to support you with what truly matters: the word of God
 - Support them to ensure they aren't distracted from that work and given cause to restrict what they provide us
- So Paul devotes himself fully to the word, but what do you think Paul was doing in the word?
 - First, we know he taught other churches
 - He wrote both 1 and 2 Thes in the span of a few weeks in Corinth
 - Paul also writes a letter back to the church in Rome, perhaps upon the suggestion of Aquila
 - Secondly, Paul probably did his homework to address the doubts and objections of the Jews in the synagogues in Corinth
 - He hadn't converted anyone yet, so he must have been looking for additional Scripture evidence to use in "reasoning" with the Jews
 - Finally, Paul would have studied to strengthen his resolve and confidence and attitude in the face of this opposition
 - Just the daily exposure to the sin and debauchery of that city must have weighed on Paul
 - Plus the discouragement of having no converts and hostile audience
 - If the thought of spending time in God's word doesn't strike you as a comforting place to go when life gets you down, then you don't know what you're missing

- And it may be a sign that you are still in an immature state of spiritual growth
- For the love of God's word and a reliance upon it in times of distress is the hallmark of the strong faith

[Acts 18:6](#) But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

[Acts 18:7](#) Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.

[Acts 18:8](#) Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

[Acts 18:9](#) And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;

[Acts 18:10](#) for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

[Acts 18:11](#) And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

- Despite his best efforts, the hardening of the Jewish heart is evident in their response
 - They resist Paul, but the word in Greek is stronger
 - It means battled against Paul
 - They eventually blaspheme the Lord, causing Paul to dismiss them with a classic gesture of shaking the dust out of his clothes
 - Paul is clearly frustrated here and he vows to give up on the Jews in this city
 - By giving the Jews so much of himself, Paul declares that he is free from his obligation to preach to the Jews here
 - Paul is frustrated because this is the first time he has failed to convert a single Jew in a establishing a church in a new city
 - Paul probably kept preaching waiting for at least some Jew in the waiting remnant to respond, but none did
 - So finally, he gives up

- Curiously, Paul marches out of the synagogue and directly into the home of a believing Roman Gentile living next door to the synagogue, Justus
 - This entire experience must have been unsettling for Paul
 - Was he supposed to plant a church in Corinth or not?
 - But then Paul gets his first Jewish convert
 - The text doesn't say, but my assumption is that Crispus followed Paul out of the synagogue and confessed Christ
 - Paul later writes that Crispus was one of the few people he personally baptized in Corinth
 - Here's more proof of how God likes to work
 - We exhaust ourselves working for Him, but when we stop and give it over to God, He begins to work
 - I might be wrong about how this transpired, but it seems that Paul was studying and working to convert at least a few Jews
 - And meanwhile God was waiting for Paul to stop trying to do this in his own power
- I don't want to appear to second guess the Apostle, but the timing of this conversion is suspect to me
 - I see God making clear that the conversion of Corinth - whether Jew or Greek - was in His providence, not Paul's skill
 - I'm particularly struck by two things in this regard
 - First, God appears to Paul in a vision and encourages Paul to continue to preaching and that no one will harm him
 - Paul must have been pretty down and out for God to present this vision
 - It's the only time Paul is encouraged in such a direct way by God
 - It suggests that Paul had been striving in his own power and was now feeling like he failed or was threatened
 - And then God adds that He has many people in this city

- Now when these words were spoken, there were virtually no Christians in Corinth
- In fact, there might have been less than two dozen or so
- So when God says He has “many” people in this city, He is clearly speaking in the future tense
 - Meaning that Paul will find many converts in the city eventually
 - But from God’s point of view, they are already out there, just waiting to be found
 - This is a great example of the “Easter Egg” hunt example of how evangelism works in light of God’s sovereignty
- So God has stepped in dramatically to reassure a struggling Paul that Paul’s ministry is destined to produce fruit
 - But God is also implying that He will bring the fruit when and where He wants
 - Paul can’t let his lack of results in a given context discourage him
 - To be discouraged is to think that we are the ones in control of the outcome
 - The second reason I believe Paul may have come to see himself as too important is what Paul says when writing about his experiences in Corinth

[1Cor. 1:26](#) ¶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

[1Cor. 1:27](#) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

[1Cor. 1:28](#) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

[1Cor. 1:29](#) so that no man may boast before God.

[1Cor. 1:30](#) But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

[1Cor. 1:31](#) so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

[1Cor. 2:1](#) ¶ And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

[1Cor. 2:2](#) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

[1Cor. 2:3](#) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

[1Cor. 2:4](#) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

[1Cor. 2:5](#) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

- Perhaps this experience was Paul's own opportunity to understand this principle in practice
 - For the next 18 months Paul lived and taught in the city

[Acts 18:12](#) ¶ But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,

[Acts 18:13](#) saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

[Acts 18:14](#) But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;

[Acts 18:15](#) but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters."

[Acts 18:16](#) And he drove them away from the judgment seat.

[Acts 18:17](#) And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

- The proconsul of Achaia was Gallio
 - He had a famous family
 - His father was a famous Stoic who tutored Nero
 - His brother was Seneca and his nephew was a famous Greek poet
 - Nero eventually executed him and his brother in a fit of madness
 - He was known as a pleasant and likable person according to ancient documents
 - As they have done in the past, the Jews decided to use the Romans to bring the law down on Paul's head
 - They drag him to the judgment seat or the bema in Greek

- This was the place where authorities passed judgment, like a courthouse
 - God has already promised Paul that he won't see harm come to him while in this city
 - So when Paul appears before the proconsul, the Jews charge Paul with violating Roman law by teaching something outside Judaism
 - Only officially sanctioned religions could be taught under Roman law, so the issue was whether Christianity was new or merely a sect of Judaism
 - When Gallio hears the charge, he immediately dismisses the complaint
 - He says he would have been willing to consider their charges if the matter involved a vicious crime or a matter of wrong, meaning against Roman law
 - But as a matter of Jewish Law, he says settle it yourselves
- Gallio's decision is significant for two reasons
 - First, it immediately establishes official Roman position that Christianity is a part of Judaism and therefore is legal
 - This removed the threat of Roman persecution for preaching the Gospel
 - Paul was now free to preach the Gospel without Roman interference at least for a time
 - Secondly, the fact that this decision was made by a proconsul meant it was respected far and wide in the Roman empire
 - Truly, God is at work protecting Paul's work in this city
 - And turning what seemed to be a bad situation into a good one for Paul
- At the end of the proceedings, Gallio has the Jews and Paul forcefully ejected from the bema seat
 - And as they are forced out, the Gentile crowd begins to beat the synagogue leader, probably as the result of an anti-semitic outburst following the ruling

- The proconsul showed no interest in religious battles even to the point of ignoring the beating
 - Interestingly, he said he was willing to hear a case if the charge was a vicious crime, but beating Jews didn't qualify
- Next time we find Paul leaving Corinth and headed back to Antioch to complete his second missionary journey