

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

## Ministry Crisis in Corinth

Acts 18:1–23

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 18. Acts 18:1–23 is an interesting passage. It's not what you would expect at this stage of Paul's missionary journey. We see a side of Paul here that we haven't seen in the previous chapters.

We have a tendency sometimes to view our spiritual heroes as impervious to discouragement or fear. Sometimes we think of them as these tireless, unstoppable forces for the Christian mission. Paul absorbed beatings for Christ and just kept going. Paul absorbed mockery in Athens and just kept trucking on. Is Paul a machine? **Is he the Christian Terminator of the first century world?**

And yet, there is evidence from time to time that Paul — even the Apostle Paul! — was human.<sup>1</sup> **He had feet of clay.**<sup>2</sup> Case in point, Acts 18:9. While Paul was in Corinth, the Lord Jesus appeared to him one night in a vision and said...

<sup>9</sup> ... "Do not be afraid,

**Why would the Lord have to tell the Apostle Paul that? Because he was afraid.**

<sup>9</sup> ... "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you,

**Why would the Lord have to tell the Apostle Paul to go on speaking? Because he was afraid to keep on speaking. Why would he have to assure Paul that no one will attack him? Because he was afraid that people would attack him. It happened before in other cities. Why would Jesus tell Paul, "I am with you"? Because Paul needed encouragement from the Lord in the midst of fear.**<sup>3</sup>

**Some of you know how fond I am of the great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon. He's one of my heroes. But what you might not know is that Spurgeon struggled mightily throughout his life with discouragement and depression. He said he sometimes experiences such depression of spirit he "could weep by the hour like a child."<sup>4</sup> He told his congregation once before he preached, "I am quite out of order addressing you tonight. I feel extremely unwell, excessively heavy, and exceedingly depressed."<sup>5</sup> **Spurgeon had feet of clay.**<sup>6</sup>**

Similarly, the Apostle Paul was a remarkable man. And the Apostle Paul was a machine for the gospel... metaphorically speaking. But the Apostle Paul, like all of us, needed the help of his Savior. He needed encouragement in the midst of fear. He needed friends to help him, as we'll see in a moment. And he needed some R&R to rejuvenate and recharge.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 322: "Nobody appears to us more fearless or faithful in the bold proclamation of the truth of Christ than Paul, but Paul was a human being. He was not a masochist. Preachers do not love to provoke people to hate them."

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 144: "A little-appreciated truth about the ministry is that pastors and missionaries, perhaps more than other believers, are subject to discouragement."

<sup>3</sup> Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 79: "Apparently, Paul was in need of comfort after the Jewish rejection. Paul, no doubt, wondered if his presence in Corinth would accomplish any good."

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "The Christian's Heaviness and Rejoicing," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 4 (London; Glasgow: Passmore & Alabaster; James Paul; George John Stevenson; George Gallie, 1858), 459: "I was lying upon my couch during this last week, and my spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for."

<sup>5</sup> See the Desiring God article by Zack Eswine entitled, "The Sorrowing Have a Savior," 12-20-24:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-sorrowing-have-a-savior>

<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon said once, "'I am the subject of depressions of the spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I went to.'" Quoted in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 979.

**And here's the applicational takeaway for us today. If the Apostle Paul needed that so many years ago... if Spurgeon needed it... how much more do we need it in our Christian lives and in the mission that we've been called to?**

-----

Our message today is entitled "Ministry Crisis in Corinth." And I want to give you from the text today three snapshots of God's intervention on behalf of his faithful servant. These are powerful displays of grace in the midst of Paul's hardship.

**For your outline, I'm calling this...**

**The Goodness of God in the Midst of a Ministry Crisis:**

**And the first demonstration of God's goodness is God's provision of ministry partners.**

1) God **provides** ministry **partners** (18:1-8)

**You see when the Apostle Paul entered into Corinth, he was like a well-strung bow that was about to snap. He had lived his life under an extraordinary amount of tension.** And at this time when Paul might have thrown in the towel, or called it a career, or even short-circuited completely, God shows up. God shows up and restores him. God rejuvenates and refreshes and reenergizes his faithful servant.

**Look at Acts 18:1.**

<sup>1</sup> After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> And [Paul] found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus,<sup>7</sup> recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. <sup>8</sup> And [Paul] went to see them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked,<sup>9</sup> for they were tentmakers by trade.<sup>10</sup>

Coincidentally this is the only place in the NT where Paul's occupation as a tentmaker (or leatherworker) is mentioned.<sup>11</sup> And it's mentioned here in connection to these other "tentmakers by trade," a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

Luke has a habit of unceremoniously introducing new characters like this that will have a bigger role to play later in the book of **Acts**. And that's what happens here with Aquila and Priscilla. They become absolutely strategic to Paul's work among the churches later. They are fabulous ministry partners.<sup>12</sup>

**And praise God for ministry partners! Amen? I'm very thankful for our elders, our pastors, our deacons, and their wives. And also the collective unity that God has given us as a church. I don't take that for granted.**

Now keep in mind what Paul has gone through in the previous months. When we last saw him, he was in Athens philosophizing with the philosophers. And he was all alone. Silas and Timothy were back in Macedonia strengthening the churches. Paul got kicked out of just about every city in Macedonia before he came to Athens.

And in Athens, he wasn't physically abused, but he was verbally abused. People mocked him (17:32). **"You really believe that some guy named Jesus was resurrected from the dead. That's ridiculous!"** In fact they called him a "seed-picker."

---

<sup>7</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 376: "Jews from Pontus attended the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:9)." Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 756: "Aquila was born (τῷ γένει) into a Jewish diaspora family living in Pontus, the region in northern Asia Minor on the southern coast of the Black Sea, which had been combined with Bithynia into a Roman province (see on 2:9; 16:7). Luke does not mention the city in which Aquila's family lived. The geographical origins of Priscilla are not mentioned; if Aquila moved to Rome in connection with his profession of a tentmaker (v. 3), he presumably met and married Priscilla in his native Pontus."

<sup>8</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 756: "Estimates put the number of Jews living in Rome between 40,000 and 50,000. Only Jews who were resident aliens would have been affected by the edict."

<sup>9</sup> Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 223: "Augustine, who had to censure some idle monks, wrote a letter extolling work's utility in the Christian life, and he drew his argument primarily from Paul's writings. Chrysostom faces an urban audience among whom Paul's manual labor and the home of an artisan carry not honor but amusement. He too makes Paul a goad to their idleness."

<sup>10</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 578: "There was precedent for having such a trade among rabbis (*m. 'Abot* 2.2). Rabbis were not to profit from the study of Torah, nor were they to sit idle."

<sup>11</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 383: "Paul mentioned working to support himself in his letters (1 Cor 4:12; 1 Thess 2:9; cf. 2 Cor 11:7). In Acts 20:34 he reminded the Ephesian elders that while in Ephesus he had supported himself and his coworkers with the labor of his own hands. Only in Acts 18:3 are we told the trade by which he supported himself—that of 'tentmaker.'"

<sup>12</sup> MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 147: "In Corinth Paul first met this husband and wife team who were to become two of his closest friends, even eventually risking their lives for him (Rom. 16:3-4)."

And unlike Philippi and Berea and Thessalonica, Paul was alone this time. Silas and Timothy weren't with him. You might say, **“Well at least he was beaten to a bloody pulp like he was in other cities.”** Yeah, but he was verbally assaulted. And he didn't have anybody to share in that persecution with him.

Sometimes you can endure just about anything, if you have somebody enduring it with you. **One of the worst things that you can do to P.O.W.s, for instance, is isolate them from everyone else in solitary confinement. That's painful.**

So Paul leaves Athens and ventures into Corinth which is about fifty miles away (see map below).<sup>13</sup>



Paul Travels to Corinth<sup>14</sup>

Either Paul took a boat which would only be one day of travel. Or he went by foot which would have taken approximately three days. And you can see too the distance between Rome and Corinth. Priscilla and Aquila were kicked out of Rome, and they travelled about six hundred miles southeast of there to Corinth—no small ordeal for this married couple.

And let me tell you a little bit about the city of Corinth. **If Athens was the Boston of the ancient world, then Corinth was Las Vegas.**<sup>15</sup> I mentioned last week how grievous the idol-worship was in Athens. Well Corinth had idol-worship too. But this city was also a cesspool of sexual perversion. The city had a temple of Aphrodite on top of a local mountain peak called the Acro-Corinth that housed over a thousand temple prostitutes.<sup>16</sup>

Even today you can go to Corinth and see the remnants of their ancient paganism. Here's a picture with the remains of the Temple of Apollo in the foreground.

<sup>13</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 755: “The journey to Corinth, assuming that Paul traveled overland, was about 85 kilometers (50 miles), a three-day journey that would have taken Paul to the cities of Eleusis and Megara before reaching Corinth.”

<sup>14</sup> Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), November 13, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

<sup>15</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 577: “Horace (*Ep.* 1.17.36) calls [Corinth] a town where only the tough survive. It was the Las Vegas of its time.”

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 28: “Every night a thousand prostitutes descended the Acrocorinth to ply their trade in worship of Aphrodite. One could by anything in Corinth if he had the money.”



**The Temple of Apollo and the Acro-Corinth<sup>17</sup>**

In the background, you can see the Acro-Corinth. It's a mountain peak, 1,900 feet high, that contains the ruins of the ancient temple of Aphrodite. In ancient Corinth, temple prostitutes would climb down that mountain from the temple looking for men to sleep with.<sup>18</sup>

Aphrodite, if you don't know, is the Greek goddess of love and fertility. There were actually Greek words that were coined because of Corinth's reputation for sexual indulgence.<sup>19</sup> The phrase "Corinthian girl" was slang for a prostitute. The verb "Corinthianize" meant euphemistically to fornicate.<sup>20</sup>

So this city, Corinth, had a reputation. Idolatry was rampant. Prostitution was rampant. Promiscuity was rampant. Homosexuality was rampant (see **1 Cor 6:9–11**). Some of these issues come up in Paul's later letters to the Corinthian church: **1 and 2 Corinthians**. Even Christians in the city got caught up in immorality. And Paul was furious about it.<sup>21</sup>

Also Corinth was a large, wealthy city.<sup>22</sup> Or at least there was a lot of wealthy people who lived there and a lot of money flowing through it. From Paul's letters there were both wealthy and poor people who made up the church in Corinth.<sup>23</sup> And it's easy to see why there was so much money flowing through this town. It was

<sup>17</sup> This picture is part of "The Museum Collection" of Todd Bolen and A.D. Riddle. Used here with permission.

<sup>18</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 755 assumes that the description of depravity in Corinth is exaggerated in many commentaries. He states that this owes "more to Athens's propaganda against a rival city than to the realities of everyday life in Corinth." But that seems difficult to square with Paul's writings in 1 and 2 Corinthians where the lasciviousness of the city had infiltrated the church.

<sup>19</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 491: "Paul may not have anticipated encountering much receptivity to his message in Corinth because of its prosperity and reputation for immorality."

<sup>20</sup> Arnold, *Acts*, ZIBBC, 180: "'To act the Corinthian' (*korinthiazomai*) means practicing fornication; 'Corinthian companions' (*korinthiai hetairai*) and 'Corinthian girls' (*korinthiai korai*) were prostitutes."

<sup>21</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 766: "We know more about the Corinthian congregation than about any of the other churches that Paul established, mostly because of the correspondence that is preserved in the New Testament. The church included Jews (Acts 18:4, 8; 1 Cor 7:18), proselytes, God-fearers (Acts 18:4, 7), and Gentiles, i.e., former polytheists (1 Cor 8:7). Some believers were members of the local élite; i.e., they belonged to the powerful, the educated, and the wealthy aristocracy (1 Cor 1:26): Crispus (and Sosthenes), who were presidents of the synagogue (Acts 18:8, 17; 1 Cor 1:14); Titius Justus, who had a house (Acts 18:7); Gaius, who owned a house (Rom 16:23); Stephanas, who also owned a house (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15, 17), perhaps Chloe, who seem to have had slaves (1 Cor 1:11); and Erastus, the city treasurer (see on 19:22; cf. Rom 16:23; 2 Tim 4:20). Erastus would have been a Roman citizen; other educated and wealthy Christians in Corinth can be presumed to have held Roman citizenship too. It seems that most of the problems that Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians were caused by this elite group."

<sup>22</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 755: "It is estimated that Roman Corinth had about 80,000 inhabitants; if we include the towns and villages that Corinth controlled, another 20,000 people should be added. The theater could seat 15,000 spectators."

<sup>23</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 385: "We know from Paul's Corinthian correspondence that the church there was sizable, sufficiently so to develop church factions (cf. 1 Cor 1:10–17). Seemingly the majority were ordinary working people, not the 'first families' of Corinth

strategically located on both the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic Sea.<sup>24</sup> And so, many sailors and tradesmen would pass through this town. And many of these people would squander their resources on drunkenness and prostitution in the city. One ancient writer said of Corinth, “**not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.**”<sup>25</sup>

**So again, Corinth was essentially the Las Vegas of its day. What happens in Corinth stays in Corinth.** But Paul decides, “**Well, this is a good place for Jesus to show up... This is a good place to unleash the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.**”<sup>26</sup> And, look at **verse 4**.

<sup>4</sup> And he reasoned<sup>27</sup> in the synagogue<sup>28</sup> every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

So Paul, at first, was alone in Corinth. He was in this city known for being a cesspool of sensuality. He’s been run out of Macedonia. He’s been laughed out of Athens. And he’s waiting on his fellow missionary friends, Timothy and Silas, to join him. And while waiting God pairs him up with Aquila and Priscilla to continue preaching the gospel. I find it interesting here that it wasn’t until Paul found Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth... it wasn’t until he found like-minded, God-fearing, co-laborers in trade and co-laborers in the gospel... that Paul resumed his preaching task.

Now God’s not done bringing ministry partners to assist Paul. Watch this. Look at **verse 5**.

<sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

So Paul acquires two new ministry partners, Aquila and Priscilla, and then his buddies show up from Macedonia. And when Silas and Timothy show up, Paul stops making tents, and becomes occupied solely with preaching the Word.<sup>29</sup>

By the way, we know from other Scriptures that Silas and Timothy brought a financial gift from the church in Philippi (**Phil 4:14–20; 2 Cor 11:8–9**).<sup>30</sup> Paul says in **2 Corinthians 11:9**, “And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.” Paul also says in **Philippians 4:15**, “And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.”

---

(cf. 1 Cor 1:26). Still, some were from the upper social classes. Social cleavage seems to have been the major problem at their gathering for the agape feast in connection with the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17–22).”

<sup>24</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 380–1: “Corinth in Paul’s day was the largest, most cosmopolitan city of Greece. Located at the southern end of the isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus with the Greek mainland, it was a major center for commerce. It had two ports, Lechaenum on the west, which gave access to the Adriatic Sea, and Cenchrea on the east, opening into the Aegean Sea. The isthmus is only three and a half miles wide at its narrowest point. Nero began a canal there, but this was not completed. The canal presently there was dug in the nineteenth century. In Paul’s day ships were often unloaded at one of the ports and the load carried overland the short distance and reloaded on another ship at the other port. Small boats were placed on carts called *diolkoi* and transferred from one port to the other by means of a roadway specially designed for that purpose. Either method was generally preferable to hazarding the treacherous waters around the Peloponnesus. All of this made Corinth the Greek center for east-west trade.”

<sup>25</sup> JOHN CALVIN: “‘It is not granted to everybody to go to Corinth,’ testifies that it was extravagant and full of debauchery [Calvin is referring to the phrase *non licet omnibus adire*, which is attributed to Horace].” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 252.

<sup>26</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 495: “We too are challenged to have a burden for the evangelization of the Corinthians of today.”

<sup>27</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 578: “The verb *διαλέγομαι* (*dialegomai*, debate) is common in the second part of Acts, where it refers either to giving a discourse or to debating, depending on the context (17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8–9; 20:7, 9; 24:12, 25). Its combination with the next verb suggests debate in the synagogue. The verb *πειθω* (*peithō*, persuade) is common in Acts, appearing seventeen times, but this is one of the few instances where it is used in an evangelistic context (17:4; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23–24). Both verbs are in the imperfect, and so the discussion is portrayed as ongoing.”

<sup>28</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 381: “A large stone lintel from a doorway was excavated at the base of the steps that led into the agora and was inscribed as the synagogue of the Jews. Although it dates from the second century, it may mark the site of an earlier synagogue where Paul debated with the Jews of Corinth.”

<sup>29</sup> MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 148: “The God of all comfort met the need of his discouraged servant for companionship not only by providing two new friends but also by bringing back two familiar ones. The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia no doubt greatly encouraged him.”

<sup>30</sup> MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 148: “Although Acts does not record it, Silas and Timothy had apparently rejoined Paul at Athens as he intended (17:15). From there he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1–6). Silas was also sent somewhere in Macedonia, since he, too, came to Corinth from that province. He may have gone to Philippi (cf. Phil. 4:15; 2 Cor. 11:9), since Paul kept frequent communication at this time with his first European church.”

So probably Lydia and her merry band of new Christians in Philippi must have sent Paul some financial aid while he was in Corinth. And this allowed Paul to stop making tents for a while and devote himself completely to the proclamation of the gospel. [Just as an FYI from this and other NT texts: When Paul needed to be bi-vocational, he would do that. But when he had the option to preach fulltime, he didn't hesitate.]<sup>31</sup> Silas and Timothy bring him financial resources from a supporting church, and Paul "occupies" himself with preaching the word and testifying that Jesus was the Christ.

So let's just pause here and add up the ministry partners that God has provided to Paul. We've got Priscilla and Aquila. We've got Timothy and Silas.<sup>32</sup> How important are those guys to the Apostle Paul? Especially Timothy! And also, remotely, you've got the church in Philippi giving Paul financial support. Is God good or what?

**Listen, nobody has to do ministry alone! God is not asking us to be Lone Rangers for Jesus living in isolation from community. That's not good for the Apostle Paul. That's not good for us.**

And the benefit of having this community of friends and helpers is going to become apparent in this next section. Because look at **verse 6**.

<sup>5</sup> ... Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments<sup>33</sup> and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads!<sup>34</sup> I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."<sup>35</sup>

Paul loses it with these rebellious Jews who refused to receive the news about their Messiah. Now let me just make an observation. This is the strongest, most condemnatory, statement that Paul has made towards the Jews. And I think it's borne out of frustration. This statement lacks the tact and the persuasiveness of his speech at Mars Hill.

And even his statement, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" is emotionally driven. It's a knee-jerk reaction.<sup>36</sup> It's a reaction borne out of frustration and aggravation and maybe even exhaustion.<sup>37</sup> And there's a

---

<sup>31</sup> Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 76–7: "Why would Paul labor as a tentmaker? Paul certainly believed that preachers of the gospel deserved wages (1 Corinthians 9:14; 1 Timothy 5:18). Taking time to make and repair tents would have meant Paul did not spend every minute he had preaching the gospel and evangelizing the lost. Paul demonstrates a profound wisdom in making tents. Indeed, he tells us in another letter why he labored as a tentmaker even though he believed gospel preachers deserved a wage. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9, Paul writes, 'You remember, brothers, our labor and toil; we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.' Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 9:18, Paul makes clear why, specifically in Corinth, he made tents, writing, 'What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.' Paul worked, therefore, to avoid burdening anyone while he preached, and because he did not want the Corinthians to think he peddled the gospel for the purpose of financial gain. He wanted no hindrance to the work of the gospel. Paul understood his tentmaking as a vital part of his overall ministry."

<sup>32</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 753: "Compared with other episodes reporting missionary work, Luke mentions the personal names of a relatively large number of local individuals, six in all: Aquila and Priscilla, Jews from Rome; Titius Justus, a God-fearer; Crispus, the president of the synagogue; Gallio, the Roman governor of Achaia; Sosthenes, the new president of the synagogue."

<sup>33</sup> Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 78: "Paul shakes out his garment. This is an allusion to Nehemiah 5:13. Nehemiah commands the people of Judah to no longer oppress the poor among them. He then shakes out the fold of his garment and proclaims, 'So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise.' This garment or robe would most likely have gathered dust, leaves, and debris which would then fall to the ground. This act symbolized judgment for those who had broken Nehemiah's command. Paul imitates Nehemiah and likewise condemns the Jews by saying that, in effect, God has shaken them out."

<sup>34</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 379: "This was not a curse, but a solemn disclaimer of responsibility."

<sup>35</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 496: "While we are responsible to share the message faithfully, we are not responsible for the response of our audience. In fact, if we face continued refusal to consider the claims we present, we may come to the stage where we can wash our hands of the responsibility and move to a more receptive group of people (cf. v. 6)."

<sup>36</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 384–5: "Why did Paul keep returning to the Jews after he seemingly had turned decisively to the Gentiles, and especially when he knew the almost certain resistance that would arise? Perhaps he gave us a clue in his statement that the Corinthian Jews' blood would be on their own heads, not on his hands. We find the same language in Ezekiel's picture of the prophet as a watchman over Israel (33:1–7; cf. 3:18). So Paul always fulfilled his role of witness to his fellow Jews. When it was no longer possible to bear that witness, he moved to the Gentiles. But in the next city he would be back to the synagogue, blowing his warning trumpet."

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 28: "What was getting the apostle down? Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, Paul had been under excruciating tension for a long time, and he was losing his ability to rebound. Elijah took a nosedive after the heart-thumping tension of his encounter with the priests of Baal followed by Jezebel's threats, and Paul was

sense in which this is true, Paul does focus more and more on ministry to Gentiles. But his work among Jews is far from finished. Not even in Corinth, by the way! I'll show you that in just a moment.

And yet here's the grace of God that takes place despite Paul's frustration. Look at **verse 7**.

<sup>7</sup> And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.<sup>38</sup> His house was next door to the synagogue.

So Paul's like, **"You don't like my message. You don't like what I have to say in the synagogue. That's fine. How about I move this operation next door!"** And so, Paul starts meeting at the house of a man named Titius Justus.

And watch what happens next:

<sup>8</sup> Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue [the leading Jew in the city], believed in the Lord,<sup>39</sup> together with his entire household.

So Paul basically gives up on the Jews in Corinth, and that's exactly when the leading Jew and his entire family get saved. Maybe Crispus was scared straight with Paul's statement, "Your blood be on your own heads!" And he decided, **"Hmmm, maybe I should take Paul's preaching a little more serious?"**

So Crispus gets saved. His entire household gets saved and baptized. Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 1:14** that he baptized Crispus himself.<sup>40</sup> And **verse 8** states that after Paul's frustration had led him to unleash on the Jews in the synagogue that...

*many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.*<sup>41</sup>

Not *just* Jews, like Crispus. Not *just* Gentiles, like Titius Justus. How many Jews and how many Gentiles? Luke doesn't say. He just says many Corinthians. Many Corinthians get saved, get baptized, and join the church. Revival breaks out in Corinth, while Paul was not at his best.

I personally find it fascinating that Paul was at his persuasive best in **Acts 17** at the Areopagus and only a handful of people got saved. Most people mocked him. In Corinth, he was at his least persuasive, "Your blood be on your own heads!" And that's where revival breaks out. It's almost like God is the person who orchestrates salvation, not us!<sup>42</sup>

Paul would even say later to the Corinthian church, **"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with lofty speech and wisdom" (1 Cor 2:1). Like he did in Athens, right? "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor 2:2-3).** That's insightful. Paul came to Corinth in weakness and in fear and in much trembling? What was he afraid of? Why was he trembling?<sup>43</sup>

Watch this. Because this is surprising. Here's the situation. Paul had every reason to be encouraged at the end of **verse 8**. He just acquired some new ministry partners in Priscilla and Aquila. Timothy and Silas arrived from Macedonia with financial support. People are getting saved. Things are going great in Corinth.

---

similarly reeling from his multiple encounters in recent months. He probably had not had sufficient time to recover from his beating. He was tired. And he now faced the depressing moral ambience of Corinth."

<sup>38</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 579: "The mention of Titius is the last mention of a God-fearer in Acts."

<sup>39</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 579: "Some scholars question whether 'the Lord' is a reference to God or to Jesus (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003: 1000), but in Acts such contact usually involves Jesus (Acts 9), and in the previous verse (v. 8) 'the Lord' clearly refers to Jesus. So it is assumed that Jesus is in view here as well."

<sup>40</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 380: "According to 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, Paul did not do most of the baptizing, so they were probably baptized by Silas and Timothy."

<sup>41</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 760: "They were immersed in water as a symbol of their acknowledgement of having sinned and needing forgiveness, and as a sign of their acknowledgment that God forgives their sins on account of Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation when they put their trust in Jesus for their salvation and for eternal life. Baptism follows coming to faith, which follows hearing the gospel being proclaimed."

<sup>42</sup> MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 151: "All those in Corinth who 'had been appointed to eternal life' had not yet 'believed' (Acts 13:48)." Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 78: "God calls his people to faithfulness, not necessarily fruitfulness. We could not save ourselves. We cannot, therefore, save another person from their sin."

<sup>43</sup> JOHN CALVIN: "This exhortation shows that Paul had some grounds for being afraid. For it would be superfluous to correct fear when things were quiet and favorable, and especially in the case of a man so willing and eager." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 253.

Yet despite all that goodness, Paul falls prey to fear and spiritual discouragement. We know that's the case, because God appears to him in **verse 9** and says "Do not be afraid."

Why would Paul be afraid? I don't know, but maybe because every place he's been in the last few years he's either gotten chased out of or laughed out of. Yes, the church is starting to grow. Good things are happening. But we know the pattern in the book of **Acts**. When people get saved, when fruitfulness starts to emerge, that's when opposition grows. And that's when Satan mobilizes.

So I can imagine that Paul, in his weakened spiritual state — remember "I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling" — Paul starts fretting over the coming opposition. **"O no, here we go again. I'm going to get another beatdown. They're going to run me out of town again." "It's coming. It's coming."**<sup>44</sup>

And this is what God does in the midst of Paul's fretfulness. Look at **verse 9**.

<sup>9</sup> *And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision,*<sup>45</sup> "Do not be afraid,"<sup>46</sup>

This imperative is actually in the present tense, which means that God is commanding Paul to stop doing something he's already doing. He's not saying, **"When you come across something fearful in the future, do not be afraid."** Instead He's saying, **"Stop being afraid, Paul."**

The implication is that God had to step into the situation with Paul and stem the tide of his fear and dread. Paul's thinking to himself, **"O no, people are getting saved. Something bad's about to happen to me."** And the Lord says, **"Stop being afraid, Paul."**

**Paul's doing something here that a lot of us do. He's "borrowing trouble."<sup>47</sup> Have you heard that term before? "To borrow trouble" means to fret or worry or be anxious about something that hasn't even happened yet. Paul is "borrowing trouble." He's fretting about something that will transpire in the future that hasn't happened yet. Jesus said each day has enough trouble of its own, no need to worry about tomorrow (Matt 6:34).**<sup>48</sup>

That's what Paul was doing, and God says, **"Stop it! Stop being afraid!"**

**"Well, what do you want me to do, Lord?"**

**"Well, do this..."**

<sup>9</sup> ... go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you,

Are those words of comfort right there? "I am with you!" **"Don't be afraid, Paul, I'm with you."** **John Wesley's** final words before he died were this, **"Best of all God is with us."**<sup>49</sup> God's words to Joshua before he entered the Promised Land were similar, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (**Josh 1:9**).

*I am with you [says Jesus to the Apostle Paul], and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."*

---

<sup>44</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 386: "Already the familiar pattern of strong Jewish opposition was rearing its head. How long could his Corinthian ministry continue? The vision from the Lord provided an answer. Paul was to remain in Corinth and continue his witness there. The Lord was with him."

<sup>45</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 386: "The form already is familiar from previous incidents in Acts (5:17–21; 9:10–18; 16:6–10), and Paul would have similar visions on subsequent occasions (23:11; 27:23–24). All of these have elements familiar from the Old Testament texts that treat the call of the prophets—Moses (Exod 3:2–12), Joshua (Josh 1:1–9), Jeremiah (Jer 1:5–10), and the servant of the Lord (Isa 41:10–14). Even the same wording binds all these together: "Fear not; do not be silent; I am with you; no one will harm you" (author's translation)."

<sup>46</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 770: "The vision in 16:9 happened after weeks of uncertainty about a new location for missionary work (16:6–8), and the vision in 18:9–10 was a response to Jewish opposition (v. 6) which over time only intensified (vv. 12–13). Paul's vision of the Lord who reassured him of his presence and of his protection reflects Jesus' promise that he will be with his witnesses until the end of the age (Matt 28:20)."

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 28: "Many of us are pros at borrowing trouble. We feel harassed as we wait for something disastrous and unpleasant to happen. We just know the social event is going to be a flop. What if it rains on our picnic? We are sure SoAnd-So will put the wrong interpretation on our words. So we go through a thousand tribulations we are never meant to undergo — and probably never will."

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 28: "Poor Paul was worrying about troubles he was not facing yet, a terrible habit in which we all engage."

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 28.

So here's what's going on in this passage. God, in one of the darkest moments of Paul's life, says, **"No one will attack you. I'll protect you. In fact, 'I have many in this city who are my people.'"** Who are "God's people" in this city? Well, I think that's a reference to those who have already gotten saved. But I also believe this is an implicit statement concerning God's election. God has *purposed* to save many in the city of Corinth, and soon enough, through the preaching of the Apostle Paul, they'll join the church too.

Now let me be clear about this. Because this is a dangerous verse taken out of context. God doesn't say, **"I will always protect you from harm."** Are we clear about that? That surely couldn't be the case, because Paul has suffered much for Christ before he came to Corinth. And Paul will suffer much after he leaves Corinth. Paul is imprisoned several more times before his eventual execution at the hands of Emperor Nero. He dies a martyr's death in Rome. So God doesn't say to Paul, *or to you for that matter*, **"I'll always protect you from harm."** No. But God says, **"As long as you are here in Corinth, for this period of time, I'll protect you. I'll keep you from harm."** God essentially promises Paul a temporary reprieve from all the suffering he's endured over the last few years.

And **verse 11** says that Paul made the most of this reprieve.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *And he stayed a year and six months [in Corinth], teaching the word of God among them.*

Paul preaches the Word. He grows the church in Corinth. He stays a year and a half. That's an eternity for Paul! That's like putting down roots for Paul. He stays and enjoys this season of respite, and God protects him. And it was during this time that Paul wrote the letters of **1 and 2 Thessalonians** to the church in Thessalonica.<sup>51</sup>

Now watch this. Because God's promise is about to be tested.

<sup>12</sup> *But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia,<sup>52</sup> the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal,*

Here we go again. We've seen this before. Paul is going to get stoned and left for dead. Paul's going to get beaten and brutalized. Paul's going to get imprisoned or banished from the city! Something bad is about to happen. You can just sense it. **"What about your promise, Lord? You said you would protect Paul in Corinth."**

*the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal,<sup>13</sup> saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law."*

So this is a pretty tense moment here. The Jews take Paul to what's called the "bema" seat. That's the place of judgment in the city. And their accusation before the proconsul Gallio is ambiguous at best. They say "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." Contrary to what law? Roman law or Jewish law?<sup>53</sup> It's ambiguous.<sup>54</sup> I get the sense that they don't really care which way Gallio takes it. They just want Paul out of the city.

Now as far as the Jews were concerned, they did have the right under Roman law to practice their religion. And Christianity would have been viewed by the Romans as a sect of Judaism. In fact, we read earlier

---

<sup>50</sup> CHRYSOSTOM: "'Do not be afraid,' he says. This was enough to rouse him, either because he was reproved as being afraid or because he was not reproved but encouraged that he would not suffer this." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 226.

<sup>51</sup> See the series entitled "Kingdom Called" on 1 Thessalonians: <https://www.messiahbible.org/1-thessalonians-kingdom-called> and the series entitled "Kingdom Come" on 2 Thessalonians: <https://www.messiahbible.org/2-thessalonians-kingdom-come>.

<sup>52</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 323: "Gallio's brother Seneca was one of the most famous writers of the Roman world. Seneca was famous as a moralist and a sage in his day; he was celebrated for his wisdom. Seneca dedicated two of his books to his brother Gallio. They shared a common commitment to wisdom and justice, even as pagans. In fact, their commitment to a high standard of justice and morality got them in deep trouble more than a decade later with the wicked Roman emperor Nero. Nero executed Seneca and Gallio. So the man who intervened here in Corinth to save Paul's life and to preserve the legitimacy of his ministry in the Roman provinces was later martyred by Nero, who also killed Paul."

<sup>53</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 762 thinks the accusation has to do with Roman law. Additionally he suggests, "the Jews wanted to signal to the governor that the new congregation that Paul had started and that was meeting in the house of Titius Justus was not a rival synagogue (which would be exempted from the imperial ban on weekly meetings of associations) but a new cult which was meeting contrary to the law."

<sup>54</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 388: "What law? Roman law or Jewish law? There were Roman laws against proselytizing of Roman citizens by foreign cults, but Gallio obviously did not take the charge in this sense. He saw it for what it was—an internal dispute within the Jewish community—their interpretations of 'words' (the Scriptures?), of 'names' (Jesus as Messiah?), of 'law' (the Torah)."

about how Priscilla and Aquila got thrown out of Rome when the Emperor Claudius banished all the Jews. That more than likely resulted because Christians and Jews were at odds with each other in Rome. Claudius got tired of the conflict and banished all the Jews, including Jewish Christians, from the city.

But here in Corinth, what the Jews are arguing is that Paul is advocating a worship that isn't sanctioned under Jewish law. And therefore it isn't allowable under Roman law either. Either way, this guy needs to be stopped.

In the past, it took even less of an accusation than this to get Paul and his missionary friends prosecuted or kicked out of the city. But watch what happens. Watch how God's promise is fulfilled!

<sup>14</sup> But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. <sup>15</sup> But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things." <sup>16</sup> And he drove them from the tribunal.<sup>55</sup>

How about that fulfillment to God's promise? Did God come through or what? Gallio basically says, **"I'm not going to be a judge over your religious disagreements. Get out of my courtroom!"**<sup>56</sup> Paul didn't even have to say a word. Paul didn't even open his mouth. Remember God's words, "Do not be afraid," Paul, "but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you" (18:9–10).

---

<sup>55</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 764: "This was an immensely important verdict, not only because it protected the Christians in the province of Achaia from legal cases against their beliefs and against the existence of their new congregations, but also because this was the first time that a Roman official issued a legal verdict concerning the followers of Jesus. This verdict declared that they should be regarded as a Jewish group, with the corollary that they would have the right to the same legal privileges that the Jews had been granted by the emperors."

<sup>56</sup> Rudyard Kipling wrote the following poem about this passage entitled "Gallio's Song":

*"All day long to the judgment-seat  
The crazed Provincials drew—  
All day long at their ruler's feet  
Howled for the blood of the Jew.  
Insurrection with one accord  
Banded itself and woke,  
And Paul was about to open his mouth  
When Achaia's Deputy spoke—  
"Whether the God descend from above  
Or the Man ascend upon high,  
Whether this maker of tents be Jove [Zeus]  
Or a younger deity—  
I will be no judge between your gods  
And your godless bickerings.  
Lictor, drive them hence with rods—  
I care for none of these things!  
Were it a question of lawful due  
Or Caesar's rule denied,  
Reason would I should bear with you  
And order it well to be tried;  
But this is a question of words and names.  
I know the strife it brings.  
I will not pass upon any your claims.  
I care for none of these things."*

Quoted in Mikeal C. Parsons and Heidi J. Hornik, *The Acts of the Apostles through the Centuries*, ed. John Sawyer et al., Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 197–8.

<sup>17</sup> And they all<sup>57</sup> seized Sosthenes,<sup>58</sup> the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

**Write this down as a second point from the message. We're looking today at the goodness of God in the midst of a ministry crisis. We've seen already that God provides ministry partners to Paul in Corinth. Now we see that...**

2) God **fulfills** his **promises** (18:9–17)

**Now this is really important. Hear me on this. We need to be careful that we don't take a unique set of circumstances and an isolated promise that God makes to Paul, and make that a universal promise that God makes to all of us. We can't take God's promise to Paul in Acts 18, "no one will attack you to harm you" and extrapolate that out as a universal principle for us. That would violate the context of this passage. That would take something descriptive here and make it prescriptive for us.**

**But here is a universal principle we can derive from this passage. Are you ready for it? God always fulfills his promises! Amen?**

**And let me give you a few promises from Scripture that you can count on. Go ahead and write these down in your notes. These are under the heading "Six Promises of God to Believers."**

**1. He will never **leave** us or **forsake** us (Deut 31:6; Isa 41:10; Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5–6).**

God's promises to his people were patterned in the OT. God told the Israelites, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." (Deut 31:6). The prophet Isaiah said, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you (Isa 41:10).

Jesus said in this NT era, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20). Also, Hebrews 13:5–6: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" **Indeed! What can man do to me?**

**To that you might say, "Well Tony, man can do some awful things to other men." True enough. But they can't touch your soul. And men can't do anything outside of God's sovereignty. And men can't force God to leave you or forsake you.**

**2. He will bind up **every** **wound** (Ps 147:1–3; 2 Cor 4:17–18)**

Psalms 147 says about God and his children that "he heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (147:3). **If not in this life, then in the life to come. 2 Cor 4:17–18 says,** "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." **It's a great comfort to me to know that our suffering is never wasted. God uses our suffering to refine us in this life and reward us in the life to come. He binds up every wound.**

**3. He won't let us be **tempted** beyond what we can **handle** (1 Cor 10:13; Phil 4:19)**

1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." **Philippians 4:19 says,** "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

**4. He works all things for the **good** of his **elect** (Rom 8:28)**

---

<sup>57</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 765: "In the context of the previous verse, the substantival adjective 'all' (πάντες) refers to the Jews who brought the legal case against Paul before the governor in v. 12, who spoke in v. 13, to whom Gallio's words in vv. 14–15 were spoken, and who were dismissed in v. 16. As the Corinthian Jews realized that their legal case has been disallowed, and that Paul and his group have been given, by implication, official legal sanction, they beat up Sosthenes in front of the *rostra*, inflicting revenge on him."

<sup>58</sup> Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 80–1: "What happens next, in verse 17, is not entirely clear. Who seized Sosthenes? Why did they beat him? On these matters, the text is difficult to interpret. Some interpret the 'who' as a Gentile mob angry at the Jews for trying to stir up trouble. Other commentators believe Jews are the 'who.' Those who believe it was the Jews doing the beating differ on the 'why.' Some believe the Jews held Sosthenes in contempt for his failure to procure a conviction of Paul. Others believe Sosthenes was a Christian, since Paul mentions a Sosthenes as a brother in his introduction to 1 Corinthians. It may be, therefore, that the Jews took their anger out on Sosthenes, whom they suspected to be a Christian. The first option is more likely and fits with the overall flow of the narrative."

**Romans 8:28** has brought a lot of comfort to Christians over the years. And rightfully so. Because God's Word says, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

**5. He is coming back to take us to our eternal home (John 14:1-3)**

**John 14** says, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (14:1-3).

**6. He will judge all evil and establish perfect justice (Ps 96:13; Acts 17:31)**

**Psalm 96:13** says, "He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness."<sup>59</sup> **Acts 17:31** says, "he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." **God will right every wrong. He will punish every evildoer. He will reconcile every account.**

**That last statement is a promise. But it's also a warning. Every sin in this world has to be punished. Nobody gets away with evil. Either your sin is punished at the cross of Christ, or it is punished for eternity in hell.**

-----  
Let's go back to our passage and finish up here. **Verse 17** says,

<sup>17</sup> And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

So instead of Paul getting a beatdown, they give the ruler of the synagogue a beatdown. And Gallio, either because he's annoyed by this intrusion of his privacy or because he's really an antisemite at heart, does nothing to stop it.<sup>60</sup> This whole episode shows how very capricious the Roman government was. They prided themselves on law and order, but we've already seen a fair amount of vigilantism and hooliganism in the empire. He's another instance of that.<sup>61</sup>

Now let me say two things about **verse 17**. First of all, Gallio has set a precedent now for Christianity that it should be tolerated throughout the Empire. At least for a season, there is a reprieve from the persecution of Christians in Corinth and other major Roman cities. That's good for the gospel. Persecution will return soon. But for now the church gets a reprieve.

Secondly, notice that Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue was beaten. He must have been the ringleader for this whole episode with Paul. Well, interestingly Paul writes in **1 Corinthians** about our brother, Sosthenes (**1 Cor 1:1**). If this is the same Sosthenes of **Acts 18**, then this synagogue ruler, who was trying to bring about the demise of Paul, actually gets saved later and joins the church. How awesome is that? And as much as we might grieve the mob violence in **verse 17** where Sosthenes gets publicly beaten, God may have used that to bring him to Christ.

If that's the case, then the last two synagogue rulers in Corinth, both Crispus and Sosthenes, have gotten saved and have joined the church.

Look at **verse 18**.

---

<sup>59</sup> For more on Psalm 96, see my sermon, "Sing to the King," Psalm 96:1-13, *Messiah Bible Church*, October 1, 2025: <https://www.messiahbible.org/psalm-96-1-13-book-iv-sing-to-the-king-the-lord-reigns>

<sup>60</sup> JOHN CALVIN: "Such non-interference ought to be attributed not so much to the sloth of the proconsul as to hatred of the Jewish religion." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 254. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 580: "Although [Gallio was] popular, he was also known to be anti-Semitic." His younger brother Seneca called the Jews an "accursed race." "Cicero (*Pro Flacco* 280.67-69) saw Jews as holding to a "barbaric superstition." So Rome tended to be anti-Semitic."

<sup>61</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 582: "This is vigilantism, about which Gallio does nothing. This is not a flattering picture of Roman rule."

<sup>18</sup> After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.<sup>62</sup> At Cenchreae<sup>63</sup> he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.<sup>64</sup> <sup>19</sup> And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Here's Paul's journey after Corinth. He travels two-hundred and fifty miles straight west, across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus.



Paul goes to Ephesus<sup>65</sup>

Ephesus was an even larger and more important city than Corinth in the Roman Empire.<sup>66</sup> It's possible that Paul tried to go here earlier when the Spirit prevented him and sent him to Macedonia.<sup>67</sup> Now Paul is in Ephesus. But as we'll see, he doesn't stay long. And he leaves Priscilla and Aquila there to plant a church. We know this, because later Paul writes **1 Corinthians** from Ephesus and he tells the church in Corinth that Priscilla and Aquila, "together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord" (**1 Cor 16:19**).<sup>68</sup>

Look at verse 20.

<sup>62</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 756: "The fact that Priscilla is mentioned before Aquila (as in v. 26; in v. 2 Aquila was mentioned first) is sometimes interpreted as indicative of Priscilla's rising prominence in the Christian movement. While not impossible, this cannot be proven; Paul can write both 'Aquila and Prisca' (1 Cor 16:19) and 'Prisca and Aquila' (Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:9). What is certain, and highly significant for understanding the missionary work of the early church in the first century, is the fact that there were evidently a good number of Jewish couples such as Aquila and Priscilla who proclaimed the gospel and established and led churches. In 1 Cor 9:5 Paul mentions Peter/Cephas and his wife, the other apostles and their wives, as well as Jesus' brothers (James, Joseph, Jude, Simon) and their wives—all of them Jewish couples—who traveled as missionaries and teachers. While Luke does not report on the activity of these sixteen couples, his reference to Aquila and Priscilla and to (some of) their involvement in missionary work suggests that there were other couples engaged in preaching and teaching the gospel."

<sup>63</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 767: "It appears that during Paul's work in Corinth, a church was established in Cenchreae as well, with Phoebe as a patron of the congregation, a woman with means who, five years later, traveled to Rome taking Paul's letter from Corinth to the Roman Christians (Rom 16:1–2)."

<sup>64</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 767–8: "Was the vow not a Nazirite vow but a private religious exercise, in which Paul thanked God for his protection during his mission in Corinth? This suggestion can be connected with an explanation that posits a non-Jewish background: Paul's vow and the decision to cut his hair may be 'a standard Greek cultural reaction to some dream through which came divine guidance.' Or, if it was a Nazirite vow, it could have involved a petition that God will protect him during the upcoming dangerous sea voyage and during his visit to Jerusalem and to Antioch; i.e., the vow would have been part of a petition for future blessings. Certainty is impossible. Luke makes nothing of Paul's vow in his subsequent narrative."

<sup>65</sup> Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), November 13, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

<sup>66</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 586: "[Ephesus's] population was estimated at the time to be a quarter of a million, one of the largest cities of the empire."

<sup>67</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 494: "It is interesting that earlier too he had 'been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia' (16:6). Now for a second time he seemed to discern that the time was not ripe for a full-blown ministry in Ephesus."

<sup>68</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 757: "When Paul left Corinth in early fall of AD 51, the couple accompanied Paul to Ephesus (18:18–19), where a church eventually met in their house (1 Cor 16:19)... By AD 56 Aquila and Priscilla are back in the city of Rome, with a church meeting in their house (Rom 16:3, 5)."

<sup>20</sup> When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God<sup>69</sup> wills,”<sup>70</sup> and he set sail<sup>71</sup> from Ephesus.<sup>72</sup> <sup>22</sup> When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church [this is the church in Jerusalem], and then went down to Antioch.<sup>73</sup>

So again, here’s Paul’s journey after Ephesus. And by the way, God does bring Paul back to Ephesus, and his experiences there are wild. More on that in the weeks to come in **Acts 19**.



Paul goes back to Antioch<sup>74</sup>

Paul goes from Ephesus to Caesarea to Jerusalem and then to Antioch, which for all practical matters is his home church. That’s the place where he was first commissioned with Barnabas. After he finished his first missionary journey, he goes back to Antioch. After finishing his second missionary journey, he goes back to Antioch.<sup>75</sup> **“There’s no place like home.”**<sup>76</sup>

And look at **verse 23**.

<sup>23</sup> After spending some time there,

<sup>69</sup> Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 85–6: “The minor details of Luke’s narrative pack a powerful applications for modern-day Christians. Paul centered his vision on the will of God. In success or failure, conversions or condemnation, salvation or stoning, Paul remained committed to God’s will—even if that meant leaving a place or people in a time of ministry fruitfulness. Paul’s actions, however, do raise the question, ‘How do we know the will of God, especially in the absence of a clear Scriptural command?’ The answer to this question involves many nuances and difficulties depending on the circumstances. Generally, however, Christians must base their decision on the Scriptures. The word of God abounds with wisdom and lessons for life. Furthermore, God has made clear what his will is for our lives in several texts. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification ...’ Our growth in Christ-likeness remains God’s single vision and will for our life. When you approach a difficult decision and wonder what God’s will might be, press in on the Scriptures, pray ardently for God’s direction, and trust that in whatever decision you make, God will be with you.”

<sup>70</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 769: “The phrase translated ‘if God wills’ (τοῦ θεοῦ θέλοντος; Lat. *Deo volente*) was common in antiquity. For Jews, the concern was not so much the avoidance of the suspicion of pride but an expression of dependence on God, who alone knows the future. It derives from the Old Testament principle that “many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Prov 19:21).”

<sup>71</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 768: “Paul’s visit to the synagogue in Ephesus may have been because the ship taking him to Syria docked in the harbor for a few days, allowing him to attend a synagogue service. Or, if Paul had planned his next missionary initiative with his base in Ephesus, his visit to the synagogue may have been a deliberate attempt to establish contact with the Jewish community.”

<sup>72</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 587: “[Paul’s] haste is probably due to a wish to reach Jerusalem for the Passover festival, as some MSS explicitly indicate (see additional note on 18:21), before the sea traffic stops for the winter. If Paul waited until after winter, the window for travel to reach Jerusalem for Passover would be short.”

<sup>73</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 391: “He then ‘went up’ and greeted ‘the church,’ then ‘down’ to Antioch (v. 22). ‘The church’ referred to is almost certainly Jerusalem. It was traditional language to speak of going ‘up’ to the holy city, which sat high on Mt. Zion.”

<sup>74</sup> Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), November 13, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

<sup>75</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 392n130: “One should note the recurrent pattern of Paul’s three missionary journeys. Each began in Antioch. Each ended in Jerusalem. Each had a major speech: in Pisidian Antioch (first journey) Paul preached to Jews; in Athens (second journey) he preached to Gentiles; at Miletus (third journey) he preached to Christian elders.”

<sup>76</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 387: “This is the official conclusion of his second missionary journey. It is also the last time, as far as the biblical record is concerned, that Paul was in Antioch. He did not return to the city again after he left for his third missionary journey.”

After getting rejuvenated, right? After some much deserved R&R. After spending “some time there,” Paul gets back to work on now his third missionary journey.

<sup>23</sup> After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Here’s the thing. Here’s the final point that I want to give you from the text. Luke condenses Paul’s 1,500-mile journey from Corinth to Ephesus to Jerusalem to Antioch to about five verses. And that doesn’t even include Paul’s subsequent journey to Galatia and Phrygia. Those are the places where Paul and Barnabas planted churches a few years before this. I’m sure there were plenty of things that Luke could have commented on. But the primary thing that he communicates is this. Paul goes back to Antioch. He gets rejuvenated there. And then he gets back to work travelling again.

God graciously provides an opportunity for Paul to refuel and reenergize with his home church in Antioch. And it wasn’t long until Paul was back to work again.

**Here’s the final point from the message:**

3) God **rejuvenates** his servant for the **work** (18:18–23)

---

#### **The Goodness of God in the Midst of a Ministry Crisis:**

1) God **provides** ministry **partners** (18:1–8)

2) God **fulfills** his **promises** (18:9–17)

3) God **rejuvenates** his servant for the **work** (18:18–23)

I’ll close with this. According to NT scholar **Eckhard Schnabel**, Paul’s second missionary journey would have involved an immense amount of travel, a total of 1,930 miles by foot and 1,280 miles by ship, during the period AD 49–51. This would have involved a total of 175 days of travel: 155 days of marching by foot and 20 days at sea.<sup>77</sup> Why? Why? Why? Why would anyone subject themselves to this kind of grueling pace, brutal schedule, and the accompanying persecution that Paul experienced in those places?

Why? Because Paul was driven to preach the gospel to those who hadn’t heard it. He was absolutely obsessed with Christ’s mission to take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth.

My prayer in light of this Scripture is “Lord, give me just a taste of that passion. If Paul can do that in the ancient world, then I can commit to making disciples here in San Antonio, Texas.” My prayer is, “God give us, Messiah Bible Church, just a taste of that passion, that drivenness, that kind of commitment to our Lord Jesus.”

---

<sup>77</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 769n1374.