Acts Chapter 18: Paul in Corinth

Acts Chapter 18, is the final leg of the Second Missionary journey and the beginning of the Third Missionary Journey. Paul leaves Athens and heads to Corinth where he spends the next 18 months teaching and discipling in the city, from there he stops in Ephesus and returns to Jerusalem and finally to Antioch in Syria, where he started (Acts 18:22). After spending some time in Antioch, Paul begins his Third Missionary, where he will spend almost three years in the city of Ephesus.

The time stamp for Acts and the New Testament is marked here with Paul's trial before the proconsul Gallio, who was the governor of Achaia (Acts 18:12), archeological evidence links his term in Corinth between A.D. 51-52. Using that date we can work forward and backward to establish the dates in Acts and the rest of the New Testament.

Corinth is a commercial port city with large amounts of trade and wicked vices. The temple of Aphrodite was the top of a 1100 foot mountain, where the priestesses, who were temple prostitutes, would come down into the city on a daily basis. Paul picks this city as a base of operations, here he meets a Jewish couple who like Paul are tentmakers, but are also believers from Rome. We are introduced to Apollos, a Jewish follower of John the Baptist, who was familiar with Jesus but did not know the complete story.

Paul also demonstrates the role of vocational evangelism, while he was in Corinth, Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, so to pay for expenses, he worked as a Tent-maker or leather worker. This gave Paul freedom to reach out to both Jews and Gentiles, while in the city. Paul sets a template for future evangelist, who would work and proclaim Christ.

Paul Arrives in Corinth

Acts 18:1-28
1 After this Paul left **Athens** and went to **Corinth**.
2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because **Claudius** had commanded all the Jews to **leave Rome**. And he went to see them,
3 and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were **tentmakers** by trade.
4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul now leaves Athens (Acts 17:16-34) and heads to the commercial hub of Achaia, the city of **Corinth**, it was much like New York city and completely different than the city of Athens which was more like a university city. Corinth had two ports, and was filled with a diverse population of 80,000 to 100,000. The city was destroyed by Rome in 146 BC and was rebuilt by Julius Ceasar in 44 BC as a Roman Colony, it was a "New Money" city. It was hyper-materialistic, highly competitive, and populated by Roman freedmen, merchants, sailors, slaves and immigrants looking to strike it rich. The city was about two days journey from Athens about 50 miles, Paul on arriving in Corinth would be met by noise of a bustling global shipping hub.

Corinth had two ports, linked by a road, between them, akin to a railway or a canal that made the city incredibly wealthy. Goods and even ships would be moved over this 4-mile road to the other port. This made system of trade made Corinth very wealthy.

The Isthmian Games
Every two years, Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games, which were second only to the Olympics. The city would swell with athletes, tourists, and vendors. This is highly relevant to Paul's work: the massive influx of visitors created an immense, seasonal demand for **tents and leather canopies**, providing Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla with the perfect marketplace audience to debate and share the gospel.

Religion and Moral Reputation
Towering 1,800 feet above the city was the **Acrocorinth**, a massive monolithic rock hosting the temple of Aphrodite. The city was so notorious for its wild nightlife and sailors' spending habits that the classical Greeks invented a slang verb: *korinthiazomai*, which literally meant "to live like a Corinthian" (to engage in reckless hedonism).
When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about escaping sexual immorality and greed, he wasn't speaking in abstract terms; he was addressing the dominant street culture his converts walked through every single day.

The Bema (The Judgment Seat)
Excavations of the ancient forum have uncovered the **Bema**, a large, elevated stone platform where Roman officials gave public announcements and held court. When the local leaders dragged Paul before the proconsul Gallio in Acts 18:12, this physical stone platform in the center of the crowded marketplace is exactly where the confrontation took place.

Upon entering Corinth, while waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul meets a Jewish Christian couple from Rome, Aquila and Pricilla, who happened to be in the same line of work,

“Tent making” or leatherwork. In AD 49, the Roman emperor **Claudius** kicked all Jews out of Rome because of disturbances regarding Chrestus (Christ)[1], according to the Roman historian Suetonius.

Paul stayed and worked with this couple as fellow **tentmakers.** These tents were the equivalent of our mobile homes, as visitors traveled, they could pay for lodging, or they could set up tents. Since Corinth was a booming town, people needed tents. Also, every two years was Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympics, so with the constant influx of visitors and athletes, there was a high demand for lodging. They were also believers from Rome; they would become Paul’s lifelong friends and travel with Paul when he leaves Corinth (Acts 18:18). They also hosted a church in their home (I Cor 16:19); Priscilla also is demonstration of woman leadership in the early church as she is listed first in helping Apollos understand more fully about Jesus the Messiah (Acts 18:26).

While Paul was working as tentmaker, he would spend his off hours going to the Jewish Synagogue to persuade Jews and Greeks about the identity of Jesus, as the “Suffering” Messiah of Israel.

Paul Spends 18 Months in Corinth

5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.
6 And when they opposed and reviled him, he **shook out his garments** and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the **Gentiles**.”
7 And he left there and went to the house of a man named **Titius Justus**, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.
8 **Crispus**, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.
9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,
10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”
11 And he stayed **a year and six months**, teaching the word of God among them.

Paul main ministry focus with the Jews was to have them understand that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel spoken about by Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. Showing them, the evidence, so they could put faith in Christ for their salvation. Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia brought Paul much needed financial support from the newly established churches, in Philippi, Berea and Athens (2 Corinthians 11:9). Now Paul could spend more time ministering the Gospel.

It’s at this point, Paul makes a major ministry shift, he would focus on building the Churches with the **Gentile** believers. He symbolically “**Shook out his garments**”; this was a practice Jews would do after returning from Gentile lands, shacking off the dirt from their clothes and feet, so they would not be contaminated by gentile dust. Paul was placing the burden back on the Jews who rejected Jesus.

Paul ministered for several week before he transitions to the Gentiles, on person who heard his message was **Titus Justus**, who was a Gentile believer who later accepted Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. **Crispus** was the ruler or president of the synagogue, his turning to Jesus along with his family and getting baptized, must have put the Jewish community of Corinth on edge. Also, Titus Justus, allowing his home to be used as a house church, infuriated them.

Paul must have become alarmed. Remember, Paul, has been stoned in Lystra and beaten and jailed in Philippi, so he must have started to weary of constant threats. In a vision, Jesus encourages Paul with promises:

1. *Do not be afraid*
2. *Go on speaking, do not be silent*
3. *I am with you*
4. *No one will attack you*
5. *I have many in this city who are my people*

Is this message only for Paul? No, Jesus wants his church to proclaim who He is. Paul presents Jesus to both Jews and Greeks, he does not hold back. Satan opposes the message of the Gospel; his goal is to stop it from going forward.

---

[1] In his famous work ***The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*** (specifically in *The Life of Claudius* 25.4), Suetonius drops a brief line that provides the exact backstory for why Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth:
"Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome."

2 Corinthians 4:3-5
3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.
4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

Paul Before Gallio

12 But when **Gallio** was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before **the tribunal**,
13 saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law."
14 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.
15 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."
16 And he drove them from the tribunal.
17 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.

The Delphi Inscription mentioning Gallio. Source: Wikipedia

Gallio: was the proconsul in Roman province of Achaia, he was the brother of Seneca, the stoic Philosopher. Paul was brought under charges by the **Jews**, that what he was teaching was contrary to Roman Law; this time the ruling of the Roman proconsul Gallio, judged from his Bema Seat, the Tribunal, that matter did not concern Rome. Gallio statement; "I refuse to be a judge of these things" gave Paul freedom to operate in Achaia, since Gallio viewed the conflict as inter Jewish, having nothing to do with Roman politics.
The Bema Seat; The judgement seat, was a raised platform in the market at Corinth for public hearings, its where the judge would sit to render a verdict.

A couple important points about Gallio, the discovery of an inscription at Delphi Greece allows the precise dating of Paul's presence in Corinth to AD 51-52. This permits forward and backdating events in the book of Acts and the New Testament, showing the accuracy of Luke's writing.
Gallio, because his brother Senecca, was involved in a plot to kill Nero, both he and his brother were forced to commit suicide.

Sosthenes: Must have replaced Crispus the former synagogue ruler who accepted Jesus as Messiah, along with his household. This individual might have also become a follower of Christ because he is mentioned in I Cor 1:1 as a brother, unless its another person with the same name.

Paul Goes to Ephesus

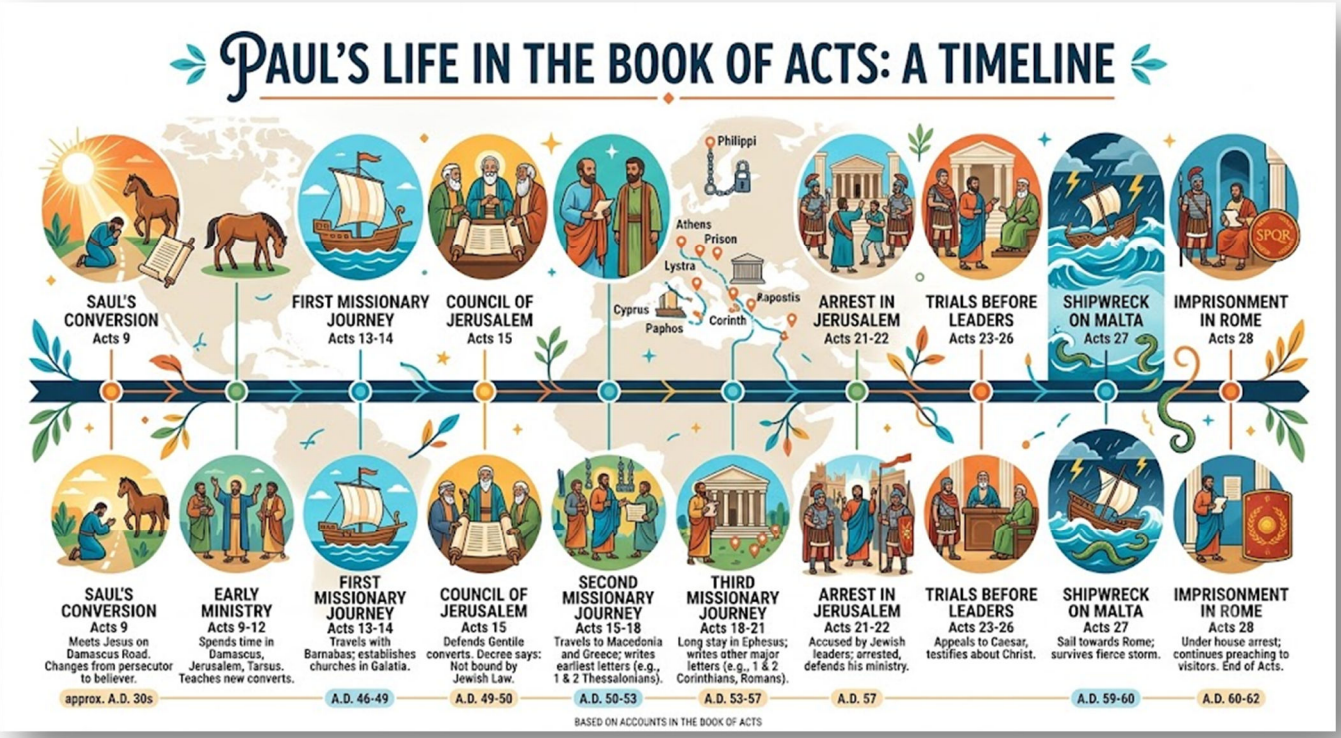
18 **After this**, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a **vow**.
19 And they came to **Ephesus**, and **he left them there**, but he himself **went into the synagogue** and **reasoned** with the Jews.
20 When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined.
21 But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail **from Ephesus**.

After this: the decision by Gallio allowed Paul to stay many days, this decision was made probably in the summer of AD 51, so stayed the winter in Corinth, and left the next summer. He was in Corinth for 18 months, before he left to returned to Antioch, Syria. He had several stops on the way.

Paul stopped in **Ephesus**, at the synagogue to see the conditions for planting a church and evangelism. Again Paul reasoned or dialogued with the Jews, he was showing them how Jesus fulfills Bible prophecy. Seeing Ephesus as fertile ground, he planned to return on his Third Missionary journey, after going to Jerusalem and back to Antioch. Paul had probably made a Nazarite type vow (Numbers 6:1-21), since he

has his hair cut at Cenchreae. So, Paul would have been heading to Jerusalem, from his stop at Ephesus.

Priscilla and Aquila remained in Ephesus, **he left them there,** Paul continued on his way back to Antioch, via Caesarea and Jerusalem.
Paul would make plans, but he also knew sometimes his plans were not God's plan, so he planned on



returning to Ephesus, but God might have a different plan. This is the same with us, we can plan, but God's plan might be different.

Breif Visit to Judea and Syria, Third Missionary Journey

22 When he had landed at **Caesarea**, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to **Antioch**.
23 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.

Paul first lands in Caesarea, this where the Roman centurion from Italy was stationed (Acts 10), so there was an established church in the city, next would be the church in Jerusalem, from there he went to Antioch, there the Second Missionary journey is complete. **Spending some time**: a gap between the 2nd and 3rd Missionary journey. In the first part of the Third Missionary Journey, Paul revisits the disciples and the Churches established earlier on the First and Second Missionary journey, such as Cilicia included Tarsus and **Galatian** area included Lystra, Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia. Later, in Acts 19, Paul will stay 3-years, the longest at one location, in the city of Ephesus.

Before Paul enters Ephesus, we learn about the work of an individual known as Apollos, who along with others were disciples of John the Baptist, but did not have a complete understanding of Messianic plan. Again, this is the job of the church to equip and disciple the people of God. Later, Priscilla and Aquilla the husband and wife duo, would help establish the ground before Paul arrived for his Third Missionary

journey.

Ministry of Apollos

24 Now a **Jew named Apollos**, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, **competent in the Scriptures**.
25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught **accurately the things concerning Jesus**, though he knew only the baptism of **John**.
26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when **Priscilla and Aquila** heard him, they took him aside and **explained to him the way of God** more accurately.
27 And when he wished **to cross to Achaia**, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed,
28 for he **powerfully refuted the Jews** in public, **showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus**.

Before Paul, followers of John the Baptist had been active in the area, one of those who knew about Jesus, but they did not know about his death for the sins of world, nor about the promised of the Holy Spirit, was **Apollos**. He was still in the Old Covenant, saved by faith in the coming of Messiah, not aware of the rest of God's plan. **John** the Baptist spoke about the Messiah/Christ, but his understanding was not complete. Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak in the synagogue and explained to Apollos the completion of God's plan, with the death and suffering of the Messiah, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Apollos then left Ephesus and went to Corinth, where Paul had spent 18 months on his Second Missionary Journey. There like Paul, Apollos showed how Jesus was the Christ. This is an important aspect of apologetics we see in the book of Acts, to know where in the Old Testament, the **scriptures**, how Jesus fulfilled the promises of the prophets. Learning Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah and Psalms should be part of every Christians curriculum.

Gallio Downfall

Nero

Roman marble head of Nero from an oversized statue, Glyptothek museum

Gallio was born into a prominent, wealthy family in Corduba (modern-day Córdoba, Spain). He was the older brother of Seneca the Younger, the famous Stoic philosopher and eventual tutor to Emperor Nero. Seneca dedicated two of his works to Gallio (including *De Vita Beata* — "On the Happy Life") and described him as incredibly charming and universally loved, writing, "No mortal is so dear to one person as this man is to all."

Unfortunately, his close ties to the imperial court led to his downfall. After his brother Seneca was implicated in the Pisonian conspiracy to assassinate Emperor Nero in 65 CE and forced to commit suicide, Gallio fell completely out of favor. Nero ultimately forced Gallio to commit suicide shortly after his brother.