

PART 23: GOSPEL MINISTRY IN AN IMMORAL CULTURE

ACTS 18:1-22

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SUMMARY

After ministering in Athens, Paul traveled about 46 miles southwest to the city of Corinth.

Corinth was a leading commercial and political center in Greece on a major trade route, and had a reputation for its immorality. He was joined once again by his coworkers, Timothy and Silas, who had remained in Athens after Paul departed.

In Corinth Paul meets Priscilla and Aquila who were kicked out of Rome with other Jews. As was his practice he preached the gospel to the Jews first. Many Jews openly opposed him and abused him, so Paul decided to preach to the Gentiles.

In spite of possible harm, physically and legally, the Lord assured Paul that he would be protected and he was to continue preaching the gospel in Corinth.

Later, Paul's Jewish opponents take him to court before Gallio, the Roman proconsul (governor of Achaia). Gallio refused to get caught up in what he viewed as an internal squabble within Judaism.

In desperation these Jews took out their anger on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue and beat him in front of Gallio, but Gallio took no notice of it.

After 1.5 years Paul left Corinth and returned to Antioch (18:18). This completed his second missionary journey.

I. COMMENTS

A. THE CITY OF CORINTH

Corinth was significant in the ancient Roman world because of its geography, its wealth, and its regional influence. In the Bible, Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and was situated on the Isthmus of Corinth, and about 40 miles west of Athens in Greece. It was a large city that controlled two harbors: one on the eastern side of the isthmus, and another on the western side. Providing a natural refuge for the city was the Acrocorinthus, a large monolithic rock rising about 1,800 feet above the surrounding plain. Corinth had a large population of both Jewish and Gentile residents.

Paul spent about eighteen months in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). Both Jews and Gentiles believed Paul's message about Jesus, and these new believers became the Corinthian church.

B. WHO WERE AQUILA AND PRISCILLA?

Aquila and Priscilla: a husband and wife team who became two of Paul's most valued colleagues in ministry; probably already believers when they met Paul.

C. WHY WAS PAUL A TENTMAKER?



Paul, like Priscilla and Aquila, made a living by making tents. Paul's tentmaking was an important part of his ministry. Though he recognized his right to be supported by those he ministered to (1 Corinthians 9:7-14), he voluntarily supported himself in his missionary and preaching work so that no one could

accuse him of seeking converts for the sake of enriching himself (1 Corinthians 9:15-18).

D. WHY DID PAUL PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE JEWS FIRST?

Ways in which Jews have priority over Gentiles	Ways in which Jews do not have priority over Gentiles
<p>The Jews are to be evangelized first when the gospel penetrates a new region (Romans 1:16).</p> <p>Jews are the historic chosen people of God.</p> <p>Jews are the guardians of God's special revelation, the Old Testament Scriptures.</p> <p>The Messiah and Savior, Jesus, comes to the world as a Jew to Jews.</p> <p>Salvation is from the Jews, since everyone who is saved is saved by being connected to the covenant with Abraham by faith.</p> <p>The Jews will enter first into final judgment and final blessing.</p>	<p>The Jews do not have priority in righteousness or merit.</p> <p>The Jews do not have priority in how they are saved.</p> <p>The Jews do not have priority in participation in God's covenant blessings.</p>

E. WHY DID THE JEWS (JUDAIZERS) CONSISTENTLY OPPOSE PAUL?

The Jews continued to accuse Paul of persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the Mosaic Law (18:13).

Paul taught that a person is saved by faith in Christ, not by law-keeping. In contrast, a Judaizer taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law.

Circumcision, especially, was promoted as necessary for salvation. Judaizers insisted that Gentiles had to become Jewish *first*, and *then* they could come to Christ. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law).

This false doctrine was dealt with in Acts 15 (Jerusalem Council) and strongly condemned in the book of Galatians.

F. WHY DID PAUL CUT OFF HIS HAIR (18:18)

Paul most likely had taken a temporary Nazirite vow that ended with shaving his head or cutting hair and offering the hair as a sacrifice (see Numbers 6:18).

The Nazirite/Nazarite vow is taken by individuals who have voluntarily dedicated themselves to God. The vow is a decision, action, and desire on the part of people whose desire is to yield themselves to God completely. By definition, the Hebrew word *nazir*, simply means “to be separated or consecrated.”

The Nazirite vow, which appears in Numbers 6:1-21, has five features.

- It is voluntary
- It can be done by either men or women
- It has a specific time frame
- It has specific requirements and restrictions
- At its conclusion a sacrifice is offered. This vow is not related to salvation

It is most likely that his hair-cutting represents the end of the period of time he spent devoted to God in Corinth.¹

II. APPLICATION

1. In order for us as believers to share the gospel of Jesus Christ we must _____.
2. To have the gospel but to hold it back because of _____ renders it useless.
3. Proclaiming the gospel and witnessing for Jesus Christ can have a _____ on the county where you live.

¹ Bible Hermeneutics, < <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/15350/did-paul-take-the-nazarite-vow-in-cenchreae-if-so-why-this-vow>>.