



ACTS: ENDS OF THE EARTH ACTS 18:1-17

STUDY GUIDE
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ACTS 18:1-17 ESV

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. 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. 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.

STRUCTURE

- I. **A ministry partnership: Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila (18:1-4)**
 - a. Paul connects through business with two persecuted Jews (18:1-3)
 - b. Paul works during the week but preaches on Saturdays (18:4)
- II. **A ministry transition: Macedonian arrival, full-time preaching, and Gentile focus (18:5-8)**
 - a. Paul receives Silas, Timothy, and an offering that frees him for ministry (18:5)
 - b. Paul is persecuted by Jews and shifts his focus to Gentiles (18:6-8)
- III. **A ministry anchor: God's promise, man's persecution, and Paul's endurance (18:9-17)**
 - a. Jesus promises His Presence, Protection, and Partnership (18:9-10)
 - b. Paul remains in Corinth long-term (18:11)
 - c. Paul is protected through a pagan (18:12-17)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

The theme of God's sovereign leadership, which began in Acts 16:6-10, continues here. An ethnic deportation and a shortage of funds combine to link Paul with two key partners: Priscilla and Aquila. Claudius drove the couple from Rome, where they met Paul in their mutual occupation of tentmaking. The holy couple would go on to clarify gospel truth to Apollos, who in turn became the pastor in Corinth, complementing Paul's apostolic work of church planting: "I plant, Apollos waters, but God gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6).

God definitely gave "the increase" in Corinth. Despite being run out of town in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, and despite scant success in Athens, Jesus ensured Paul's prolonged stay in Corinth—eighteen months, to be exact. With Timothy and Silas joining him and providing donations that enabled his full-time ministry, the church in Corinth exploded. Two synagogue rulers joined the faith named Crispus and Sosthenes. Crispus's whole household believed, and he probably hosted the first house church, followed by Gaius (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14) and perhaps Stephanas (1:16; 16:15)—a church of house churches. Sosthenes co-wrote 1 Corinthians (1:1).

As was typical, Paul began by preaching to Jews, who "opposed and reviled him" (Acts 18:6), causing Paul to focus on Gentiles. Given his track record, Paul feared further persecution, but our Lord appeared to him in a dream, which likewise emphasized God's sovereignty (His rulership over our lives). Not only would Jesus be with and protect Paul; Jesus had gone before Paul to ensure success. Jesus sovereignly spoke. He sovereignly guided. He sovereignly protected. He sovereignly saved. Before Paul ever preached, and before the Corinthians Gentiles heard the gospel, Jesus already called them "My people" (18:10). Salvation begins not with the preaching of God's Word but with the sovereign grace of God, which visited us before time began (2 Tim. 1:9).

The story concludes with God's sovereign protection through a pagan proconsul. Gallo judged in Paul's favor, which covered the Corinthian church plants for years to come. In Philippi and Thessalonica, the Jews had successfully

provoked Gentile rulers to oppose Paul's team, shortening his stay in each city. In Corinth, he will remain a year-and-a-half. Jesus presided over all of it. Persecutions led to church plants in more cities; protection led to deeper roots in each city. Whether through success or through suffering, Jesus reigns. He reigns over ethnic deportations, fund shortages, ministry connections, persecutions, what we dream, and who gets saved.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

—Paul received a sovereignly wide-open door to speak in the Areopagus, yet his ministry yielded little fruit. Sometimes God leads us to ventures that appear unsuccessful. Success is defined by faithfulness over fruitfulness.

—Beginning in 16:6-10, the theme of God's sovereign leadership pervades Paul's missionary work to cities. In Philippi, God sovereignly opened Lydia's heart, evicted a demon, sent an earthquake, and saved a suicidal Prison Ward. God continued sovereignly leading Paul's team from Thessalonica to Berea to Athens and now Corinth.

—Sometimes God's sovereignty doesn't lead to "success." It just leads us to the next place.

—If Athens was the intellectual capital of the world, Corinth was a center for sex and commerce. Athens was Silicon Valley; Corinth was Las Vegas. A thousand prostitutes served the goddess of love, Aphrodite (aka, Venus), in her temple and on the streets. To "act like a Corinthian" meant to throw away sexual restraint.

—"Corinth": At its peak, the city had about 750,000 people. It was the capital of Achaia. Corinth became an important commercial and cultural hub, strategically located on the narrow isthmus between the Aegean and Ionian Seas. This made it a vital center for trade, travel, and cultural exchange. It also became a key location for Roman governance in the region of Achaia, which is why it served as the capital of that province.

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.

—"Pontus" was in Asia, North of Galatia and Cappadocia. Some representatives from this land were in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:9).

—Paul's encounter with Aquila and Priscilla occurred due to the need for cash (which drove Paul to tentmaking, a career shared by Aquila/Priscilla) and an ethnic deportation. Despite these human frustrations, God was in it. This couple becomes a key partner. We must not grow disheartened by "interruptions." God is sovereign over them; He uses them for good.

—"Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome": Some scholars say that this deportation owed to conflict with Christians.

—The partnership of Aquila and Priscilla:

- Later, Paul brings them to Ephesus (18:19) where they remain (18:21-22: shift of pronoun from "they" to "he"), supporting the work after Paul departs.
- They lead Apollos into a fuller understanding of the truth and write a letter of their support so that he can minister effectively in Corinth (18:24-28).
- Rom. 16:3-5: "Greet **Prisca and Aquila**, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house."—Apparently, they eventually returned to their hometown of Rome.
- 1 Cor. 16:19: "The churches of Asia greet you. **Aquila and Prisca** greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."—Paul, writing from Ephesus.
- 2 Tim. 4:19: "Greet **Prisca and Aquila**, and the household of Onesiphorus."
- In sum, Priscilla (aka, Prisca) and Aquila served alongside Paul in pastoral roles, sharpening others in the truth of the gospel, risking their lives for the gospel, and hosting house churches for spread of the gospel.

—Spurgeon on Priscilla and Aquila: "When two loving hearts pull together they accomplish wonders. What different associations cluster around the names of 'Priscilla and Aquila from those which are awakened by the words 'Ananias and Sapphira'! There we have a husband and a wife conspiring in hypocrisy, and here a wife and a husband united in sincere devotion."

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

—Paul maintains this strategy in every city, focusing first on Jewish synagogues. The Greeks he sought to persuade would have been “God-fearers” who worshiped Yahweh.

—At this point, he was working in the synagogue on Saturdays, but he wasn’t “full-time” in ministry. He had the right to draw his income from the gospel but chose not to to avoid the appearance of milking his church plants like a cash cow (1 Cor. 9).

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

—This verse marks a shift in Paul’s income stream. He now devotes himself full-time to gospel ministry, drawing support from the church he planted in Philippi. 2 Corinthians 11:7-9: “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God’s gospel to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. 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.”

—If the church in Philippi had not been generous toward Paul, we would have had no church in Corinth and no letters to the Corinthians. How important it is that we give to missions!

—God returned the favor to Paul. He labored in Macedonia to plant a church, and now that church plant supported him in Corinth. God had a plan for the season of tentmaking that led to a pivotal partnership, but now He has a plan for Paul’s full-time endeavors.

—Paul refers to Timothy’s arrival in 1 Thess. 3:6-10: “But **now that Timothy has come to us from you** and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?”

—Paul had just delivered a masterful speech with a divine opportunity in Athens, and yet he left there with no church, unlike in Philippi. The soil was hard there, and Paul could do nothing about it. Now he was in a new town filled with immorality. How would his gospel prevail here? God saw him and encouraged him: first, through the arrival of his friends who brought good news; second (about to happen), through an appearance of the Lord.

—The NKJV reads, “⁵ When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*.” The footnote says “in his spirit” or “by the Spirit.” But clearly the NKJV manuscript is different here. One commentary: “The NIV gives the sense of it, but the actual expression is that Paul ‘was seized by the message,’ as though it had overpowered him and he was no longer master of when he would preach but rather the servant of a message that would be preached ‘in season and out of season.’”

—Schnabel translates it “wholly absorbed with the proclamation of the word...”

—Spreading God’s Word should absorb us. As Paul says elsewhere, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). We use the phrase, “Woe is me” to mean “poor me.” But in Jewish culture, this meant, “God’s curse has befallen me if I do not preach the gospel!” Prophets pronounced woes—divine consequences—upon the unrepentant.

—“the Christ was Jesus”: Sometimes we read that Paul proved “Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 9:22; 17:2-3). Here Paul proves the inverse. Is there a difference? If so, one would mean that Paul proved that a man named Jesus had fulfilled prophecies about the Christ (“Jesus is the Christ”). The other would mean that Paul proved how prophecies about Christ were fulfilled in Jesus (“the Christ is Jesus”). I’m sure he did it both ways, and so should we.

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.”

—Mt. 10:14-15: “And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”

—Neh. 5:13: I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!” At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

—This was not merely a display of emotion but a prophetic denouncement. Gospel proclamation is a form of prophecy because we are acting as God's mouthpiece. As it says in Rev. 19:10, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

—The role of the missionary is to declare the message. Once we have done that, the blood is off our hands. But if we fail to be faithful watchmen, the blood is on our hands. Ex. 18; 33.

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.

—"worshiper of God": Titius Justus was a Gentile convert to Judaism. He probably converted to Christianity also, given his dangerous friendship with Paul's team.

—"the house": Christianity spread from house to house, not just pulpit to pulpit.

—"next door to the synagogue": a dangerous place to be! Right next door to the source of their peril. The missionary follows the path of open hearts, not just the path of safety.

—Some textual variants of Romans 16:23 say that Titius Justus also sends greetings, but it is uncertain whether this was in the original manuscript.

—"Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue": Paul won the heart of the most influential synagogue member—the "ruler" or leader of it. He was one of two whom Paul baptized personally in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14).

Crispus's influence is further observed in that his entire "household" and "many of the Corinthians... believed and were baptized."

—"together with his entire household": Paul's missionary strategy was to win not only individuals but also households. Every open heart is a gateway to others.

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, 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. 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."

—Since it was a "vision," it was not just auditory but visual. Jesus appeared to Paul in his dream. If the Lord appears to you in a dream, it can still be classified as a visitation or appearance of the Lord. It's not *just* a dream.

—Another example is when Yahweh appears to Solomon twice in 1 Kings. Though they occur in his dreams, Scripture refers to these as appearances of Yahweh, not just fleeting visions.

—What perfect timing! Paul has fled from town to town, and the persecution has begun again. How easy it would be to predict that the same old triggers lead to the same old problems! Yet Jesus says that will not be the case.

—Without dreams and visions, we will be underequipped to fight the good fight. Paul's vision of Jesus strengthens him to remain "a year and six months."

—I'm reminded of Paul's words to Timothy: "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, **in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare**" (1 Tim. 1:18).

—Prophecy strengthens us for spiritual warfare! O, how important it is to hear the voice of God and worship in a community that hears Him!

—"Do not be afraid":

- How does Paul's courage display itself? By continued preaching ("go on speaking and do not be silent").
- Why does Paul not need to fear? Because of the presence of Jesus ("I am with you"), which protects him from persecution ("no one will attack you to harm you").
- Why does God shield Paul in Corinth in a way that goes beyond His protection in other cities that chased him out of town? Because God had ordained the future salvation of many in that city ("for I have many in this city who are my people").

—This is similar to the Great Commission, where Jesus says to make disciples, assuring us, "Behold, I am with you, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Jesus not only sends us on mission but also labors alongside us—ensuring we bear fruit—and He protects us.

—Spurgeon says there are three offers within the single promise to always be with us: (1) the Presence of Jesus ("I am with you"); (2) the Comfort of Jesus ("Do not be afraid"), and (3) the Cooperation of Jesus ("I have many people in this city").

—When persecution breaks out, Gentile pagan comes to Paul's defense. When Immanuel shares our mission, even pagans can become partners.

—“for I have many people in this city who are my people”:

- In a sense, they are not yet God's people because Paul still must preach to them, and they must embrace the gospel. In another sense, they are already God's people because grace visited them before the world began. As Paul writes to Timothy later, “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of **his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began**” (2 Tim. 1:9).
- How can God grant grace “before the ages began”? And how can people belong to God before their birth? Because God knows the end from the beginning. He holds time in His hand like a paperclip. Long before we choose God, He chose us.
- This verse from Acts 18:10 (“I have many people in this city who are my people”) resembles John 10:16 (“I have other sheep who are not of this fold”). They had not yet become sheep *in time* by following Jesus—they were not yet “of this fold”—but they were sheep *in eternity*. God had chosen them.
- Despite God's predestination, Paul still had to preach the gospel. God's sovereignty does not remove human responsibility. God acts; therefore, we act.
- Some people teach that if we believe God predestines salvation, we will not be motivated in evangelism. On the contrary, Paul's motivation to persevere in Corinth owed to Christ's affirmation that He had elected “many” there for salvation.
- Peter Cameron Scott, founder of Africa Inland Mission, first went to Africa in 1867 with great hope but was struck down by malaria, a fate that befell many missionaries. Although he survived, he returned to England broken and needed time to heal. He returned to Africa with renewed hope, this time accompanied by his brother, John, but tragically, within weeks, John died from the fever, and Scott's health deteriorated again. Despite these hardships, Scott did not question God, unlike many modern evangelicals might have done. Instead, he sought inspiration from the tomb of David Livingstone in Westminster Abbey, where the inscription “Other sheep I have that are not of this fold. Them I must bring” inspired him to continue his mission. After experiencing personal sanctification and trials, Scott returned to Africa a third time and saw great fruit, leading to the establishment of tens of thousands of Christians and churches connected to Africa Inland Mission.

—“tribunal”: also translated, “place of judgment”. It was a huge, elevated platform where cases were tried.

—“contrary to the law”: Judaism was legal in Rome, but not all religions were. The Jews claimed that Paul taught contrary to Judaism, making Christianity a heretical and therefore illegal new religion.

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.

—Gallio did not take the bait. He did not consider Christianity to be an obviously distinct religion considering its Jewish foundation. Therefore, he refused to try Paul on what seemed to him a trifle over Jewish Scriptures.

—“about to open his mouth”: Paul didn't even have to open his mouth. God protected him through the pagan Gallio.

—This victory would secure the Corinthian church from persecution for years to come. It all began with a vision of Jesus.

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.

—“Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue”:

- Crispus had earlier been mentioned as the ruler of the synagogue, but now it is Sosthenes. Some speculate that Crispus had been the prior leader and now held something like an “emeritus” role.
- Since Crispus housed Paul and Sosthenes was beaten up, both synagogue rulers had probably come to faith in Jesus. The salvation of two influential synagogue leaders surely played an important role in the conversion of many Corinthians.
- Sosthenes is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1 as a co-author of Paul's epistle: “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes.”

—“Gallio paid no attention”: Despite intervening to rescue Paul, Gallio was no saint. He turned a blind eye to unjust violence.