

Corinth and Paul's return to Jerusalem

Notes for 26 Aug

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Read: [Acts 18:1-23](#)

Thanks to Paul we know more about Corinth than any other 1st century city in Greece.

He leads us on a journey to Corinth, demonstrating the challenges and questions arising in his presentation of Christ as the Messiah.

Corinth was situated on an isthmus between Greece's two most important cities, Athens and Sparta. It was initially sacked by the Romans in 146 BCE and refounded in 44 BCE as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar.

There were temples to the imperial cult, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Apollo and the healing god, Asclepius.

Like every other city, the mix of the population consisted of Roman freedmen, ex-slaves, and Roman businessmen. Most probably there was a huge social imbalance, with a few rich, many poor, and at least half of the population en-slaved.

Aquila and Priscilla originally came from Pontus on the Black Sea. They had been living in Rome until Claudius banished the Jews for rioting. This occurred somewhere between 41 CE and 53 CE. It has been stated by some historians that the cause of the disturbance was likely the preachings of Hellenistic Jews in Rome and their insistence that Jesus was the Messiah.

They arrived in Corinth as part of the Roman business community. Like Paul they were tent makers. Their friendship with Paul was close, because he lodged in their house.

Paul begins his apostolic work in the synagogue. His focus is on the Messiah who died and rose again. He quotes scripture to substantiate his claims. The Jewish world was not expecting a crucified Messiah. Much of the Roman non-Jewish world found it hard to take that a crucified Jew is the overall Lord (Kurios).

Gallio's tenure as proconsul of Achaia can be fairly accurately dated between 51-52 CE. Therefore, the events of Acts can be dated to this period. This is significant because it is the most accurately known date in the life of Paul. It appears that Paul was in Corinth for some time over a year, according to Acts, one year and six months.

1. "He reasoned in the synagogue..." What does this imply about Paul's style of preaching?
2. Verse 5: When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching. What were the changed circumstances that permitted this to occur?
3. Some of the Jews opposed and abused Paul. I feel a certain degree of discomfort from the following phrase: "Your blood be on your own heads". Can you help me to be more comfortable with the phrase?
4. "From now on I will go to the Gentiles". How long should we persevere with a group if they don't respond positively to our message?

5. "Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord". Can you speculate as to why the author mentioned this conversion?
6. The implication of verses 9 and 10 was that Paul may have been experiencing the threat of serious violence. We live in an era and country where violence and intimidation for speaking about our faith are unheard of. However, we may face mockery. How would you deal with this?

John Stott, has this to say on Acts 18:12-18 (original [here](#)):

Paul is vindicated by Roman law.

At some point during these eighteen months Jewish opposition to the gospel, which had earlier led Paul to turn to the Gentiles (6), erupted again: "The Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court" (12b), or 'before the tribunal' (RSV, JB), the "bema", which was 'a large, raised platform that stood in the "agora"... in front of the residence of the proconsul and served as a forum where he tried cases'. It was in keeping with Christ's promise that no-one would harm Paul (10) that the Jews took him to court "while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia" (12a, almost certainly AD 51-52), for Gallio proved to a friend of justice and truth. He was the younger brother of Seneca, the Stoic philosopher and tutor of the youthful Nero, and Seneca spoke appreciatively of his brother's tolerant kindness. Incidentally, Luke was correct to call Gallio 'proconsul', since 'Achaia was at this time a "senatorial" province of the Empire, and therefore governed by a proconsul – as opposed to an "imperial" province, which was governed by a legate'. The province's status had changed only in AD44.

Of what offence did the Jews accuse Paul? 'This man', they charged, 'is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law' (13). But which law was he supposed to be contravening? Gallio understood them to be referring to what he called 'your own law' (15), but they knew as well as he that debates about the Jewish law were beyond his jurisdiction. So they must have been trying to make out that Paul's teaching was against Roman law, because it was not an authentic expression of Judaism. Judaism was a "religio licita", an authorized religion. But Paul's teaching was 'something new and un-Jewish...; it was, they urged, a "religio illicita", which accordingly ought to be banned by Roman law'.

The proconsul gave the accused no opportunity to reply to this charge, for he refused to hear it himself. Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanour or serious crime [that is, an obvious offence against Roman law], it would be reasonable for me to listen to you (14). But since it involves questions [NEB, "bickering"] about words and names and your own law – settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things' (15). Having made his decision not to hear the Jews' case, Gallio "had them ejected from the court" (16). An unpleasant example of mob rule followed. Although it is not certain who is meant by "they all" in verse 17, it seems to be the crowd of Gentile onlookers who, 'in an outbreak of the anti-Semitism always near the surface in the Graeco-Roman world', now "turned on Sosthenes", who had evidently succeeded Crispus as the synagogue ruler (see also 1 Cor. 1:1), and beat him in front of the court (17a). Luke's addition that "Gallio showed no concern whatever" (17b) does not mean that he was indifferent to justice, but that he considered it judicious to turn a blind eye to this act of violence.

Gallio's refusal to take seriously the Jewish case against Paul or to adjudicate was immensely important for the future of the gospel. In effect, he passed a favourable verdict on the Christian faith and thus established a significant precedent. The gospel could not now be charged with illegality, for its freedom as a "religio licita" had been secured as the imperial policy. Luke's concluding comment is logical: "Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time" (18a), not now because of his vision of Jesus, but because of the judicial decision of Gallio. Jesus would keep his promise to protect him; the chief means of his protection would be Roman.

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7. Corinth was a prime Roman town. Paul was brought before the proconsul, Gallio for judgement. Gallio dismissed the case. How significant was this for Paul and his companions?
8. Yet, after the trial, Sosthenes was beaten by the mob, in front of the tribunal. Why was this permitted to happen?