



**Sunday School Lesson for November 20, 2005
Released on November 16, 2005**

"Aquila and Priscilla: Team Ministry"

Printed Text: Acts 18:1-4, 18-21, 24-28

Background Scripture: Acts 18:1-19:10

Devotional Reading: Luke 10:1-11

Acts 18:1-4, 18-21, 24-28

1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome,) and came unto them.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: (for by their occupation they were tentmakers.)

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

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18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchreae: for he had a vow.

19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

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24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Today's Aim

Facts: To examine passages from Acts 18 that reveal the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla.

Principle: To show that God always has a place of service for His faithful servants.

Application: To encourage Christians to emulate the faithfulness and availability of Aquila and Priscilla.

Introduction

Many Christians believe that there are only certain ways they can serve the Lord. If called to the mission field or pastoral ministry, they would readily respond. Others believe that they can best serve the Lord by teaching Sunday school, working with young people, or singing in the choir. While all of these are needful ministries, there are a number of other ways we can serve God.

According to Romans 12 there are many members in the body of Christ, but not all members have the same function (cf. vs. 4). While some may function as teachers and preachers, other ministries include encouraging others, leadership, contributing to the needs of God's people, or being merciful to the hurting. To limit our service only to highly visible ministries is to limit our avenues for serving the Lord.

Lesson Background

The ancient Jews who lived outside their homeland of Palestine came to be called the Diaspora. Such Jews could be found in cities such as Rome, Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch of Syria. The term *Diaspora* came from the idea of scattering seed. Since the days of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities (the eighth through sixth centuries before Christ), the Jews had been scattered widely outside of Palestine.

Priscilla and Aquila were Diaspora Jews who became Christians. Diaspora Jews were not always popular in Roman society. Romans looked with suspicion on Jewish

religious practices, and they loathed the Jewish contention that there was but one God. From time to time, conflicts surfaced between Jewish and Roman elements within society, as happened during the reign of Claudius Caesar, who reigned A.D. 41-54. The Roman historian Suetonius describes how Claudius expelled the Jews from the city of Rome because of riots between Jews and Gentiles, which apparently were caused by disputes about someone called Chrestus. Most scholars take this name as a reference to Christ and believe that Claudius wanted the Jews to leave because of their supposed role in the instigation of this trouble. The date for this decree was A.D. 49 or 50. The Roman leadership of the time really didn't see Christianity as a separate religion, but as an offshoot or variation of Judaism.

So Jewish residents such as Priscilla and Aquila were forced from their homes. Conditions in the Roman world were relatively favorable to travelers, so Jews driven from Rome did have options. The commercial centers of the Mediterranean world were connected by a network of roads, and travelers moved along these thoroughfares on a regular basis. Roman shipping lanes crisscrossed the Mediterranean Sea, so travelers could journey from Rome to any site in an eastward direction in a matter of a few weeks.

Today's lesson picks up the story of Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18. They enter the narrative of Paul's travels because of his encounter with them in the city of Corinth.

Partners in Trade (v. 1-4)

1. Why were Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth? (v. 2)

As Paul continued his European ministry, he made a short journey to Corinth, a Greek city. Corinth was notorious for its immorality. In fact, the name "Corinthian" was a byword for an immoral person in ancient times. Corinth had a wide variety of travelers coming to and fro, since it was a notable commercial center. Corinth was ripe for the harvest.

In Corinth, Paul became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, two fellow Jews. Just prior to coming to Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla was living in Rome. Emperor Claudius issued an order for all Jews to leave the city in A.D. 49 or 50. Although the Bible gives no reason as to why the emperor made this decree, there is reason to believe that the decision revolved around a controversy concerning Christians. According to the Roman historian Suetonius, there were riots among the Jews concerning a certain "Chrestus," likely a reference to Christ. Rather than deal with these troublesome Jews, the emperor simply expelled them.

2. What was Paul's occupation? How did he learn this trade? (v. 3)

All Jewish boys learned a trade, usually from their fathers. In this case, both Paul and Aquila were tentmakers. This common occupation brought them together, and they became business partners.

Paul often used his skills to provide for his material needs. While Paul received financial support on occasion (II Cor. 11:8); Phil. 4:15-19), his usual practice was to support himself in the ministry of the Word. Although Paul was entitled to receive

support from the churches he planted, he worked at his calling to get what he needed for his daily survival. He was not too proud to use his hands to work.

3. How do we keep ministry and work balanced?

Although God called everyone to some kind of ministry, that does not mean that we can give up our jobs/careers. Even some pastors have jobs outside of the ministry. It is important to remember that we must seek God's wisdom as to how much time we give to work and ministry. God has called some people to be in the ministry full-time. For the rest of us, we must dedicate our time in ministry according to God's will. God blesses people with jobs/careers to support their daily needs. Often, it is difficult to keep ministry and work balanced, especially when one starts to demand more of your time. Even in your job, you can still minister to lost souls.

4. What was Paul's purpose in going to the Jewish synagogues? (v. 19)

As seen throughout Acts (13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17), Paul began his ministry in Corinth in the Jewish synagogue. As a visiting rabbi (22:3), he would have been asked to speak a word of exhortation (13:15) to the gathered worshippers.

The word "reasoned" (18:4) indicates that Paul was presenting arguments to convince his Jewish brethren that Jesus was the Christ. That he was successful in this regard is seen from the fact that "Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (vs. 8).

We cannot judge who will be receptive to the Gospel message. Jesus commanded believers to preach the Gospel to everyone. It is encouraging when someone we introduce to Christ accepts Him as his or her Lord and Savior. Knowing the Word of God helps us reach out to lost souls. It is also important to remember that the person you lead to Christ can lead others to Christ as well.

Partners in Travel (v. 18-21)

5. Why did Paul shave his head in Cenchrea? (v. 18)

After a successful evangelistic ministry of eighteen months in Corinth (v. 11), Paul decided to return to Antioch and then journey on to Jerusalem.

His partners in trade, Aquila and Priscilla, now became his partners in travel. Since Priscilla is often listed before her husband (18:18-19, 26; Ro 16:3; 2 Ti 4:19), we may conclude that she came from a higher social status than her husband or was in some way considered more important. Aquila was a former Jewish slave who became a freedman in Rome and married a Jewess connected with the Roman family Prisca, which possessed citizenship rights.

Cenchrea was the seaport located about five miles east of Corinth. Those traveling east would usually board ship in this city. It was there that Paul had his head cut in fulfillment of a vow he had made. This was probably a Nazarite vow (cf. Num. 6:1-21). His shorn hair would then be presented at the temple in Jerusalem (v. 18).

Sometimes, Paul participated in various Jewish rituals, but he never forced those practices on the Gentiles. Likewise, we should be very careful when we tell new believers how to worship. We should never become so focused on tradition that we make it bigger than God.

Partners in Teaching (v. 24-28)

6. Where was Apollos from? What was this city known for? (v. 24)

Apollos, a Jew, was from Alexandria, Egypt. This city boasted a large Jewish population, and it was second in importance only to Rome. The Hebrew scriptures were translated to Greek in this city. This translation, the Septuagint (LXX) was the translation referenced by the New Testament writers when they quoted the Old Testament.

7. How is Apollos described? (v. 25)

Apollos is described in verse 24 as being mighty in the scriptures. It was one of his keys to success. He is also described as being eloquent. The word translated eloquent carries a double meaning. The Greek can mean either a man skilled in the use of words (an eloquent speaker), or a man eloquent in ideas and thinking (learned).

Apollos was "fervent in the spirit," which means that he was zealous, passionate, and enthusiastic in his preaching. These are recognized qualities that generally ensure an eager, listening audience.

8. What knowledge did Apollos have of the Lord? What can we infer from this concerning the disciples of John the Baptist? (v. 25)

Apollos was "instructed in the way of the Lord" and "taught diligently the things of the Lord." It is unknown as to how he learned about the Lord Jesus. He lacked some understanding of the Christian message, since he knew "only the baptism of John." His message was correct, but incomplete.

Apollos apparently understood that John the Baptist was the forerunner to Jesus, and the time had come for the fulfillment of the ancient messianic promises. Paul encountered other followers of John (19:1-7). It is possible that after John's death, his disciples were scattered, taking the message John the Baptist had proclaimed with them.

9. How did Aquila and Priscilla deal with Apollos's lack of understanding of Christian teaching? (v. 26)

As Apollos was speaking in the synagogue, Aquila and Priscilla knew that Apollos's understanding of the Christian faith was incomplete. Instead of embarrassing Apollos on the spot by pointing this out in front of everybody in the synagogue, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside to explain to him more accurately the things of the Lord. Being a teachable individual, Apollos received this instruction to his benefit so that he could teach others what he had learned.

It is important to remember that if correction is needed, it should be done in love. There is no need to tell everybody if a believer is doing something wrong. Correction should be given in a way that helps the person grow and not discourage them in the faith. By doing this, we maintain the fellowship that Christ commands us to keep with other believers, and we demonstrate God's love towards sinners to the world.

It is also noteworthy that although Apollos's understanding was incomplete, he did not let that stop him from teaching about Christ. Although it is very important for Christians to study the Word of God daily and gain new revelations, we will never learn everything there is to learn about God. When it comes to sharing the Gospel message, we need to give our personal testimonies and tell what we know about Christ.

10. Where did Apollos go after he left Ephesus? (v. 27)

Apollos decided to travel to Achaia (southern Greece, where Corinth was located). The Christian brethren wrote letters of recommendation on his behalf (v. 27). Apollos had a significant ministry in Corinth as described by Paul in Paul's first Corinthian letters (1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12). Even though human instruments are essential for the spreading of the Gospel, it is God that gives the increase (3:6).

Christians are described as believing through grace (Acts 18:27). This demonstrates that faith is a production of God's grace in the heart. The Corinth church would take advantage of this, and Paul would have to correct them.

Although the Spirit brings about conversion and conviction, we must still persuade people to obey the Gospel message by showing that Jesus is the promised messiah. Apollos did this in the synagogues he visited, "showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (v. 28).

Conclusion

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he needed a home and a means of supporting himself. He was welcomed into the home of Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers like him.

Later, when Paul moved on to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him. When Paul departed for Jerusalem, he left Aquila and Priscilla behind in a strategic ministry.

Aquila and Priscilla's ministry was multiplied when they disciplined the gifted Apollos.

God always has a place of service for those who will serve Him faithfully. Aquila and Priscilla are good examples of this.

Prayer

Father of all believers in Jesus, we ask You today to remind us that we belong to Your family. We ask that all rivalry, jealousy, and triumphalism against other Christians will disappear in favor of the unity and peace that comes to Your people

wherever Jesus is truly honored as Lord. Through Christ who adds us to His church we pray, amen.

Thought to Remember

May the voices of Christians working together for Christ blend as one.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Paul's farewell meeting with the Ephesian elders is the subject of the quarter's final lesson.

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