



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Sermon Notes

#### Paul's Second Missionary Journey Ends

##### *Apollos: A Man Devoted to the Scriptures*

Acts 18:18-28

January 27, 2008

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| <b>I. Paul Concludes His Second Missionary Journey</b> |
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- Luke writes in **Verse 18**, “Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquilla. In Cenckrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.”

- Galio’s ruling, in Verses 14-15, was likely rendered in the summer or early fall of 51 A.D.
- Given this context, Paul likely remained for the coming winter [of 52 A.D.].
- Therefore, Paul went down, likely in the early spring of 52 A.D., for Cenchrrea, the eastern Port of Corinth, with the intent of return to Syria, and specifically Antioch, his home church.
  - It will become clear, however, that Paul intends to travel first to Jerusalem, then on to Syria Antioch.
- Luke writes, also, that Priscilla and Aquila were with him.
  - This husband and wife time had become some of Paul’s closest friends in Corinth, and it is certainly possible that they were financing Paul’s trip from Corinth.
  - No doubt as Paul left the church in Corinth, taking along with him Priscilla and Aquila, he was confident in the leadership he left behind – men such as Gaius, Sosthenes, Stephanus, and Crispus.

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| <b>a. Paul Keeps a Vow</b> |
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- Yet, it is an interesting point that Luke makes, saying, “In Cenchrrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.”
  - Scholars have often debated what this “vow” could have been. Several options exist.
    - The first possibility finds its basis in Greek culture. Often sailors shaved their heads after a difficult journey at sea [Juvenal, *Satires* 12.81-82].
    - The second possibility was that it was a voluntary vow of thanksgiving, demonstrating Paul’s gratefulness to the LORD for fulfilling His promise of Verses 9-10. According to I. Howard Marshall, these types of vows were entered into “either in thankfulness for past blessings (such as Paul’s safekeeping in Corinth) or as part of a petition for future blessings (such as safekeeping on Paul’s impending journey).”
    - Thirdly, and most likely, this was a Nazirite vow [Numbers 6:1-21].
    - The Nazirite vow was usually made for only a short period of time, such as 30 days, although a few biblical figures, such as Samson (Judges 16:17), Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) were life-long Nazirites.

- According to the account in Numbers 6, the purpose of the Nazirite vow was for the Nazirite “to dedicate himself to the LORD, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin. All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall pass over his head, He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long. All the days of his separation to the LORD he shall not go near to a dead person.”  
**Numbers 6:2-6**
- Also, every Nazirite was to complete his vow by offering a sacrifice in Jerusalem in an elaborate ceremony (Numbers 6:13-21).
- However, according to Jewish tradition during Paul’s day [as recorded in the *Mishnah*], a Nazirite who was away from Jerusalem at the end of his vow was permitted to cut his hair prior to offering his sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem, so long as he presented his hair in the Temple within 30 days [of cutting his hair and completing his vow] (Josephus, *Wars* 2.15.1).
- We are not told *why* Paul chose to take a [Nazirite] vow. It may be because he was “being all things to all people” in an attempt to win the Jews.
- Furthermore, Paul was a Jew of Jews [1 Corinthians 9:20; Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:5-6], therefore, it would not have been outside of the realm of possibility for Paul to make such a vow.
- However, regardless of the reason for his taking the vow, as John Stott states, “Once Paul had been liberated from the attempt to be justified by the law, his conscience was free to take part in practices which, being ceremonial or cultural, belonged to the ‘matters indifferent,’ perhaps on this occasion to conciliate the Jewish Christian leaders he was going to see in Jerusalem.”

### b. Paul Reasons with the Jews in Ephesus

- Then, Luke writes, in **Verses 19-21**, “they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, ‘I will return to you again if God wills,’ he set sail from Ephesus.”
  - In **Verse 19** Paul arrives in the city of Ephesus.
    - The city of Ephesus was the most significant commercial city in Asia Minor in the first century.

- It sat at the mouth of the Cayster River and was a major stop on the main trade route that extended east from the city of Rome. Further, it was the dominant trade city in Asia Minor north and west of the Taurus Mountains.
- Ephesus was what was considered a free city, with its own senate and assembly. It was also the capital of the Roman province of Asia.
- Ephesus was the home of many Jews in Paul's day due to the "legal privileges defending Jewish rights" which had been implemented during the reign of Julius Caesar in 44 BC.
- By the time Paul, Aquila and Priscilla arrived in Rome its population was said to be at nearly 250,000, making it one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire.

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- Yet, not only was Ephesus known for its commercial trade, it was known for its pagan deities, especially **Artemis** [Diana].
  - The great temple to Artemis which stood in Paul's day had been built to replace the ancient temple which burned in 356 B.C. The rebuilt temple that Paul would have beheld was so magnificent that it was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
  - The city even prided itself as the "Temple Warden of Artemis."
  - Artemis [Roman equivalent was Diana] was the goddess of the hunt, carrying with her a bow and arrow. She was considered a virgin goddess who valued chastity and also helped women in childbirth. Furthermore, in Ephesus, she was likely worshipped as the *Lady of Ephesus*, the "Mother Goddess" of the city.
  - In fact, the Artemis cult was "expansionist" in its ideology, continually seeking to increase its following.
- Luke writes that Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila arrived together in Ephesus.
  - It seems that Priscilla and Aquila remained there for several years, establishing not only their trade [tent-makers], but helping to establish the Ephesian church in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19). However, likely Priscilla and Aquila eventually return to Rome (Romans 16:3-5).
  - As was always the case, Paul entered into the synagogue in Ephesus and "reasoned with the Jews", no doubt demonstrating that Jesus is the Christ.

- Interestingly, as was the case in Berea, Paul was well-received, so it appears, in Ephesus. In fact, the Ephesian Jews “asked him to stay for longer...” The reader is not told why; however, it may be that the Jews in Ephesus observed Paul’s shaven head and respected his commitment to the Hebrew Scriptures.

**c. Paul Returns to Antioch via Jerusalem**

- Paul does not stay long in Ephesus, wishing to return to Antioch.
- His refusal to remain in Ephesus [Verse 20] was likely do to his desire to reach Jerusalem for a festival [as the Western text indicates] – that is, Passover.
- Furthermore, according to historical records [Vegetius, *On Military Affairs*], sailing did not begin until March 10 on the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. Therefore, had Paul remained through the winter in Ephesus, he would not have had long to travel to Jerusalem for Passover, as the festival in A.D. 52 was in early April.
- Paul, then, in **Verse 21**, leaves Ephesus with the saying, “I will return to you again if God wills.” Then, in **Verse 22**, he landed at Caesarea, the chief port of Israel.
  - Luke says, from Caesarea, Paul “went up and greeted the church...”
    - This was most certainly the church in Jerusalem.
    - Then, he “went down to Antioch.”
      - Often in the biblical text, regardless of geographical accuracy, all travelers and worshipers “go up” to Jerusalem and, consequently, “go down” to every place else. This was because of the theological significance of the city of Jerusalem.
      - Most certainly, the purpose of “going down to Antioch” was to report to his home church there concerning the work God was doing among the Jews and Gentiles, just as he had done in Acts 14:27.
      - With this, Paul concludes his Second Missionary Journey.

| <b>Paul's Second Missionary Journey</b> |                |
|---|----------------|
| <b>City</b>                             | <b>Region</b>  |
| Antioch                                 | Syria          |
| unnamed cities                          | Cilicia        |
| Derbe                                   | Lyaconia       |
| Lystra                                  | Lyaconia       |
| unnamed city                            | opposite Mysia |
| Troas                                   | Mysia          |

|                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| unnamed city            | Samothrace |
| Neapolis                | Macedonia  |
| Philippi                | Macedonia  |
| Amphipolis              | Macedonia  |
| Apollonia               | Macedonia  |
| Thessalonica            | Macedonia  |
| Berea                   | Macedonia  |
| Athens                  | Achaia     |
| Corinth                 | Achaia     |
| Cenchrea                | Achaia     |
| Ephesus                 | Lydia      |
| Casearea                | Judea      |
| Jerusalem [most likely] | Judea      |
| Antioch                 | Syria      |

**II. Paul Begins His Third Missionary Journey**

- Luke writes, in **Verse 23**, “And having spent some time there, he [Paul] left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”
  - We are not told how long Paul remains in Antioch, but the impression that Luke gives is that he left quickly, in haste, seeking to return to the churches he had planted in his first two missionary journeys.
  - Then, upon leaving Antioch, Paul takes the over-land route that he and Silas had taken to begin his Second Missionary Journey. Thus, he crossed the Taurus range by way of the Cilician Gates.
    - Likely, Paul visited Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, strengthening the believers there.

**a. Apollos Teaches About Jesus in the Synagogue in Ephesus**

- Luke, then, rather abruptly shifts his focus from the beginning of Paul’s third missionary journey, to a man named Apollos in the city of Ephesus.

**i. Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew**

- Luke writes, in **Verse 24**, “Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.”
  - The first point that Luke makes is that Apollos was an a Jew from Alexandria.

- Alexandria was the Roman seat in Egypt. It sat at the mouth of the River Nile and was known as one of the greatest cities of learning in the ancient world.
- It was founded in 331 B.C. by Alexander the Great, and had the largest library of the ancient world.
- Furthermore, the Lighthouse of Alexandria, like the Temple of Artemis, was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
- Also, it was in Alexandria where the Septuagint [LXX] was translated in 250 into Greek – the first translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into another language – this would have been the version of the Scriptures that most Jews in Christ’s day would have been familiar with.
- It was one of the larger cities in Paul’s day and boasted a large Jewish population.
- The famed Jewish philosopher and historian Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, was also from Alexandria.
- In short, as Darrell Bock writes, Alexandria was “well known for its educational opportunities as a place of philosophical reflection.”

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- It was this famed city of Alexandria where Apollos [short for Apollonius] was from.
- Luke does not specify how Apollos arrived in Ephesus; however, it is possible that he was, like many foreigners in Ephesus, a merchant who traveled the Mediterranean.
- Yet, Luke describes Apollos several ways which gives us the greatest insight into who he was, and how he will be used by the Lord.

**ii. He was eloquent**

- First of all, Luke writes that Apollos was “an eloquent man.”
  - The Greek word used here for “eloquent” appears only here in the New Testament.
  - As A.T. Robertson writes, the word “can mean either a man of words...or a man of ideas.”

- In other words, it can refer to someone who was good with words, eloquent, articulate; or someone who was well educated and known for his great ideas.
- Given the context here, as well as his city of origin, Apollos seems to be both.

### iii. He had been instructed in the Scriptures

- Secondly, Luke writes, in **Verses 24 – 25**, that “he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord.”
  - Luke states that Apollos “was mighty in the Scriptures.” This is a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. He knew them well. He was grounded in them. He was able to articulate the precepts and the purpose of the Old Testament.
  - Then, Luke gives the reason for this: because “he had been instructed in the way of the Lord.”
    - It should not be surprising to anyone that there is a causal relationship here. Apollos was instructed in the way of the Lord; therefore, he was mighty in the Scriptures [this certainly in know way denies the centrality of God’s grace at work in Apollos as well].
    - The phrase that Luke uses “This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord” likely refers to his understanding through the Old Testament of “knowing the way to God and doing God’s will (Exodus 32:8; Deuteronomy 5:33; Jeremiah 7:23).” Darrell Bock
    - In fact, given the context of this entire section, it no doubt meant that **Apollos knew that the Old Testament pointed to the Messiah, the Christ. Indeed, he was taught to read it as a Messianic document, with a Messianic purpose, pointing to a Messianic hope.**
    - Furthermore, as well be clear in Verse 25, Apollos understood rightfully that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and the **“Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”**

### iv. He was passionate

- Yet, not only was Apollos “an eloquent man...mighty in the Scriptures...[who had been] instructed in the way of the Lord...”; but he was **“fervent in spirit.”**
  - The phrase, here, translated “fervent in spirit” can mean one of two things [and scholars debate which one is meant here]:
    1. The first possible meaning is that the phrase describes Apollos as a person of passion, enthusiasm, or excitement...someone “on fire.”



- The term literally means “boiling” or “seething” [it was used by the ancient Josephus].
  - This would mean that Apollos was passionate, “on fire”, “boiling”...bold, in his declarations concerning the Lord.
  - Those who hold to this view often do so because of a belief that Apollos was not saved at this time [believing that the phrase “fervent in spirit” could not be a reference to the Holy Spirit].
2. The second possibility is that the phrase is a reference to the Holy Spirit – “fervent in the Holy Spirit.”
- This would, then, parallel Romans 12:10-11, where Paul writes of Christians, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”
  - If this is the proper interpretation, it would mean, then, that Apollos’s ability to preach effectively was the result of the ability given to him as a gift of the Holy Spirit.
- It seems that **both interpretations are consistent with the text and are correct.** Apollos was certainly bold and passionate. But, once again, given the context here, it appears that although his knowledge of Christ was incomplete, it was sufficient for his salvation, for he **read the Old Testament properly, biblically, Christianly.** It seems that Apollos, at this point, was an Old Testament saint, whose knowledge of the work of the Messiah was simply limited to the Old Testament and the ministry of John the Baptist.

#### v. He was biblical

- Then, in **Verses 25-26**, Luke writes, “...he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.”
- Therefore, given Apollos’s grounding in the Old Testament and his understanding of John’s baptism, he was able to teach accurately the things concerning Jesus...and he did so boldly.
  - He was able to teach concerning **the Old Testament Law, the Sacrificial System, the Priesthood, etc.** He could have likely described how each of these were insufficient to save, yet sufficiently pointed to One who could. He would have known that it was Jesus was **THE Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.** He would have known of his need to repent of his sins.

- In short, he would have preached Jesus Christ as the long-awaited Messiah. Yet, because he had not been taught the *full* story, he would have been unable to fully articulate why.

#### vi. His understanding was incomplete

- Once again, he was only acquainted with the baptism of John.
- Therefore, he would not have known about the ministry of Christ, His trials, death, burial and resurrection. He would have been ignorant of the Ascension. Furthermore, he would have known little or nothing about the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the significance of this event in light of the work of Christ and the will of the Father.
- Yet, then, come Priscilla and Aquila.

#### b. Priscilla and Aquila Privately Instruct Apollos

- Luke, then writes, in **Verse 26**, “But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”
  - Notice that these two believers, Priscilla and Aquila, heard Apollos and were certainly encouraged by what they heard. Yet, they realized that his understanding was incomplete.
  - Therefore, because they loved the LORD, cared for Apollos, and desired the purity of the Gospel message, they took him away **in private** in order to “fill him in” so to speak, on what he was ignorant of.
  - It is clear that Priscilla and Aquila were not trying to demonstrate their superiority to Apollos, rather, they wanted him to have a proper understanding of the Gospel.
  - Notice how this private meeting further demonstrates the unity of the church through the perseveration of the same gospel message; for, after Paul’s conversion, he went to Jerusalem where he was embraced by the church. Then, Paul went on his missionary journeys, teaching and preaching the same gospel he had been taught in Jerusalem [and commissioned to preach by the LORD on the road to Damascus]. Then, Paul instructs Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. Finally, Priscilla and Aquila, who had come from Rome [but at least Aquila was from Pontus in Asia Minor] instruct Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, who was preaching in Ephesus.

#### c. Apollos Demonstrates that Jesus is the Christ

- We are not told what the *immediate* outcome was from the meeting between Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos; however, what is clear is that Apollos listened and embraced what they were telling him.

- It is clear that Apollos was a gifted man, and he could have been offended that two people [one of which was a woman!], were taking him aside and correcting him in private. However, he did not become angry. In fact, it appears that he was strengthened and encouraged.
  - The reason for this was that **since Apollos was grounded in the Scriptures, and instructed in the way of the LORD, he was committed to the Scriptures and willing to be corrected by them as well! This is the mark of a healthy believer in the LORD – one who is humbly open to correction by the Scriptures.**
  - Furthermore, this scene [assuming Apollos was saved at the time of this meeting] that we are, technically speaking, not saved by what we believe. Rather, we are saved by grace which leads to proper belief. Therefore, true believers will embrace the essentials of the Christian faith [Trinity, two natures of Christ, salvation by grace through faith, etc.] when exposed to them.
- Finally, Luke writes, in **Verses 27-28**, “And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”
  - It seems that Apollos understood the “whole picture” now [after his meeting with Priscilla and Aquilla].
  - In fact, Apollos wanted to continue spreading the good news in Achaia [Greece].
  - Furthermore, Luke writes that the brethren [the Christians] encouraged him, thus demonstrating Apollos’s full acceptance in the Christian community.
  - So much did they accept him, that they “write to the disciples to welcome him.”
    - This is, at least partly, the basis for the modern-day “Transfer of Letters” among local congregations – commending a believer to another local church.
- Upon arrival in Achaia, Luke writes that “he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”
  - What is so significant here is that **the reason Apollos could so effectively demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ was that he knew the Old Testament so well!**
  - Furthermore, at this point, he certainly knew the New Testament as well. He had the “whole picture!”

▪ **Yet, many of us today are no different that Apollos prior to his meeting with Priscilla and Aquila. We do not teach the “whole picture.” We “pick and chose” from the biblical text, selecting stories and passages that we, or our hearers, like. Therefore, the main difference between us and Apollos is that we are willfully ignorant of the full biblical testimony.**

- **As a result, many of us could never demonstrate *how* Jesus is the Christ.**
- In fact, apart from the Old Testament, the identity of Jesus as the Christ is meaningless. With a basic understanding of the Old Testament, we have no idea what sin is and why we need a Savior. Furthermore, it is only through the Old Testament that we see God’s absolute standard of perfection that is required, and the type of sacrifice and mediator that are required to enter into His presence. Thus, it is only through the Old Testament that we can declare that Jesus is the Christ.
- Because we do not understand the Old Testament as it was intended – a Christian document – we avoid it and believe it to be woefully irrelevant to our lives today.
- We must realize that the Old Testament is to the Bible as a foundation is to a home or the roots and the trunk are to the tree. It is as “Christian”...it is as important to the believer today as the New Testament.
- Thus, we must ground ourselves, our children, and new converts in the Old Testament that they, like Apollos, may be able to demonstrate **by the Scriptures** why Jesus is the Christ.
- NOTE: Because of his understanding of the Old Testament and passion for Christ through it, Martin Luther was the first theologian to propose that Apollos was the author of the Book of Hebrews.
- As we leave Apollos, he remains in Achaia preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, we will see him again in 1 Corinthians 3:6, where Paul will speak highly of him, writing, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.”
- May we be like Apollos today, understanding the full counsel of God, grounding ourselves and others in it, declaring the “whole picture” that we might know as Paul did that “All Scripture [specifically referring to the Old Testament] is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”