

Paul in Corinth Acts 18:1-17

Missionary Strategy of Paul: While it was true that some of the towns were, in fact, small, this was not the case with Athens, Corinth and Ephesus. Athens may have had less than 10, 000 people, but Ephesus a half million and Corinth nearer to three-quarters of a million.

Athens was the intellectual capital of the ancient world. Students still flocked there from all over the empire. Ephesus was one of the main religious centers of the ancient Greco-Roman world. The imperial cult was in ascendancy there, boasting at one time as many as three temples to the Emperor. Most importantly, it was the renown as 'the guardian of the temple of Artemis' whom the Romans called Diana.¹

Corinth was supremely the commercial capital of the ancient world. It was, "situated close to the isthmus which joined mainland Greece to the Peloponnesian peninsula, it commanded the trade routes in every direction- north/south by land and east/west by sea."² Even before the 3 ½ mile canal was cut it was common to haul small vessels & cargoes over land, saving the perilous 200 mile navigation around the southern trip.

It boasted two ports, Lechaem on the Corinthian Gulf to the west and Cenchrea on the Saronic Gulf to the east. Corinth was a city of seafarers, of maritime merchants. Poseidon, the Greek God of the sea, whom the Roman's called Neptune was worshipped there.

F. W. Farrar imagined it a city "stocked with cosmopolitan goods- 'Arabian balsam, Egyptian papyrus, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goats'-hair, Lycaonian wool, Phrygian slaves'.³ Its strategic importance could not have been missed by Paul. The gospel was able to track along lines of commerce as well as merchandise could.

¹ She was a virgin huntress, that in Ephesus some how became connected with an Asian fertility goddess.

² Stott, p. 293

³ Stott p. 294.

Stott notes that there are five thematic links between Paul's ministry in Corinth and Ephesus.

1. A serious and sustained attempt to persuade Jewish hearers in the synagogues that Jesus was the Christ. **Cf. 18:4-5; 19:8.**
2. Paul responds to Jewish rejection by leaving the synagogues and turning to Gentiles. **Cf. 18:6-7; 19:9.**
3. In both cities the move resulted in the salvation of a large number of converts. **Cf. 18:9-10; 19:11-12.**
4. Jesus spurred Paul on in the work in both cities. **Cf. 18:9-10; 19:11-12.**
5. In both cities the Roman authorities dismissed the opposition declaring the legitimacy of the gospel. **Cf. 18:12ff.; 19:35ff.**

This makes it clear that Luke has two purposes: **(1)** clearly he sees the significance of these great centers upon the spread of the gospel and growth of the early church. **(2)** Clearly he is establishing and commending pattern in the ministry of Paul.

1. **The Initial stages of the campaign. Vv. 1-11.** The journey to Corinth was 45 miles SW by water.
 - a. **His arrival. V. 1.** Paul tells us clearly what his condition was upon arrival. **Cf. 1Cor. 2:2-3.** The reasons for such trepidation are not difficult to discern.
 - i. Corinth was known for its arrogance. They were extremely proud of their city, wealth and culture. It was the political capital of Achaia, outstripping even the famed Athens. The gospel is the axe to the root of any peoples pride.
 - ii. Corinth was known far and wide for its immorality. Behind the city nearly 2000 feet above sea level was the Acrocorinth. On its' summit stood the temple of Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of love. At night 1000 female slaves roamed the streets as prostitutes. The

proverb, to *korinthiazomai* was to sin. A *korinthiastes* was a prostitute. The gospel was a clarion call to faith and repentance with a resultant life of holiness.

- b. **Initial activity. Vv. 2-8.** Upon arrival Luke sketches out three things that were note worthy.
- i. The meeting of Aquila and Priscilla. **V. 2.** They may have already been converts. They showed an exemplary degree of commitment (**Ro. 16:3-4**) and mobility for the gospel (**18:18, 19**).
 - ii. The trade he made use of. **V. 3.** Most translate the Gk. Tentmaker, but 'leather worker' is possible. Paul insisted that teachers had the right to be supported by their students (**Gal. 6:6; 1Cor. 9:4ff.**) but here he didn't:
 1. For two reasons:
 - a. To not be a burden to the young churches.
 - b. To trump the ulterior motives of the false teachers in Corinth, whose hearts were filled with larceny and greed.
 2. Today tent making is becoming popular in cross-cultural ministries. It has on motive in common and one distinct from earlier times. It seeks to not burden, but it may also be the only possible means of obtaining entry.
 - iii. The activity he engaged in. When Timothy and Silas rejoined Paul they, having remained in Bera (**17:14**) came via Thessalonica bearing financial contributions (**Phil. 4:14ff; 2Cor. 11:8-9**). He worked his trade weekdays and every

Sabbath he plied the gospel. His gospel ministry is chronicled in two stages:

1. **His work among Jews. Vv. 4-6. (1)**
The result is strong opposition. The verb only occurs here and can suggest organized opposition. Revile is the word elsewhere rendered *blaspheme*. It could refer to either Paul or Christ. **(2)** He dramatizes their stubborn rebellion with a prophetic display of detestation. **(3)** They are responsible. The sovereignty of God doesn't negate human responsibility. **Cf. Ezek. 33:1ff.**
2. **His work among Gentiles. Vv. 7-11.**
Titius' house marks a twofold relocation. E.g., from public to private, from Jew to Gentile.⁴ It's ironic that the first convert listed is Crispus and his household.

2. **Christ' vindication of Paul's Gentile mission. Vv. 8-17.**
It is a threefold vindication.
 - a. **The conversion and baptism of many Corinthians. V. 8; 1Cor. 1:14.**
 - b. **The vision given by Christ to encourage him. Vv. 9-11.** The two promises are well known and customary promises Yahweh grants to His covenant people. **Cf. Josh. 1:6, 9; Isa. 41:10; 43:5; Jer. 1:8.** It is a threefold promise:
 - i. I am with you.
 - ii. No one will harm you.
 - iii. I have many people in this city.

Whereas in Thessalonica and Berea it was not possible to stay that would not be the case here. They

⁴ Titius some connect to Gaius of **Rom. 16:23**. The name indicates Roman citizenship. This is the last God-fearer mentioned in Acts.

would not be able to drive Him out. What a lesson for us today!

- c. **The exoneration before the Roman tribunal.** **Vv. 12-17.** This happened when Gallio was proconsul⁵. They brought him before the 'bema.' Gallio was the elder brother of Seneca the Stoic philosopher, tutor of young Nero. He was popular but known for tolerance, kindness and anti-Semitism. Proconsul was the head of a senatorial district. The charge?
- i. **V. 13. "Persuading people to worship contrary to the law."** Judaism was regarded as "*religio licita*" Paul's teaching, they charged was "*religio illicita*."
 - ii. **Vv. 14-16. To Gallio Paul's charge wouldn't have been a recognizable offense. (v. 14)** He assessed it as an intramural squabble within Judaism. (v. 15) All he heard was that they didn't particularly like what Paul was teaching. As Paul was about to open his mouth the case was dismissed and they were too. (v. 16) **Cf. Isa. 54:17.**
 - iii. **V. 17. It is likely that "they" refers to Gentile onlookers.** Anti-Semitism was always near the surface in the Roman world. Sosthenes must have succeeded Crispus and may have latter been converted. **Cf. 1Cor. 1:1.** It is difficult to miss the subtle irony here.

- The Church was neither Roman nor Jewish. It transcended both, affirming and condemning both. **(1)** The greatest good in any society is to lift the national heart to God. **(2)** Christians make the best citizens (our at least ought to). **(3)** Christianity challenges the idolatry of all nations everywhere.
- Rome later reversed itself. Not because they were ever a threat to the state but because their allegiance to God challenged allegiance to Caesar and state.

This dismissal had important ramifications for the early Church. Note Paul "**stayed many days longer.**" This judicial decision was the provision of Christ and the means of the salvation of many. It was also a protective shelter provided for the fledgling faith.

Two things: are instructive to us:

⁵ Stott says this would 'almost certainly' be **51-52 AD**. Proconsul was the head of a senatorial district. His stint was short and dateable making this one of the most solid dates in the book.