

CALLED TO EXPLAIN

DEVOTIONAL READING: Colossians 4:7-15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:1-26; Romans 16:3-4;
1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26

I. Partners with Paul

Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26

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.

.....
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 Cenchrea: 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.

.....

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.

1a. *Paul* had left his primary companions, Silas and Timothy, behind in Berea (Acts 17:13-14) while he traveled south. His time in *Athens*, while dramatic, did not result in planting a church.

1b. Paul proceeded about 50 miles west to *Corinth*. This city was the seat of Roman government for the area. Corinth was a commercial hub, a crossroads for trade because of the business of transporting ships across the Isthmus of Corinth using an ancient kind of railway. This positioned Corinth as a primary way station for goods and people coming to and from Rome and the eastern parts of the empire.

Corinth was also a religious city, with people of pagan beliefs and Jewish faith

living there. Unsurprisingly, then, it had a synagogue (Acts 18:4).

2a. Despite *Aquila* being a Latin name (“eagle”), the man was Jewish. He hailed from the Greek region on the south shores of the Black Sea known as *Pontus*.

Priscilla is an affectionate nickname for a woman named Prisca (see 2 Timothy 4:19). We do not know if she came from a Jewish family, although that is likely.

2b. Because of tensions between different Jewish factions in the imperial capital, Rome, Emperor *Claudius* expelled all *Jews* from *Rome*, whether Christian or non-Christian, in AD 49. Jews were not readmitted to the city until AD 54.

3. Paul joined this couple in a way we have not seen of him to this point in Acts: working at a trade for a living. All three were *tentmakers*, a new piece of personal information about Paul. He was trained to be a rabbi by the famous Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and all rabbis of this period had a professional skill.

The importance of Paul’s willingness to support himself in this manner is seen when he wrote to the church in Corinth several years later (see 1 Corinthians 4:12; 9:1-18; compare Acts 20:34). The accommodations that Paul shared with Aquila and Priscilla may have served as personal lodging, tent factory, and sales shop concurrently.

This is the origin of the tradition of “tentmaking”—bivocational ministry in which church workers receive all or part of their income from employment outside the ministry. In the case of Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul, having an income-producing skill allowed them to be self-supporting as necessary. This gave them the freedom to relocate quickly as circumstances required.

18a. *Paul* stayed in Corinth for about 18 months (Acts 18:11), but eventually

decided to return to *Syria*. Initially, *Priscilla* and *Aquila* accompanied him, leaving their business in Corinth. No other married couple in the New Testament is like Priscilla and Aquila. They worked together as a team par excellence. Luke presents this couple as companions in business and in ministry.

18b. *Cenchrea*, as Corinth’s port town on the eastern side of the Isthmus of Corinth, was the natural place for the trio’s departure.

The *vow* Paul made was likely some form of the Nazarite vow, outlined in Numbers 6:1-21. The vow would have included letting his hair grow. Cutting his hair now suggests that the vow was at an end, though it is possible he would shave *his head* to initiate a vow too. Taking this sort of vow was not compulsory but was a physical sign of a time of spiritual reflection and renewal.

19. *Ephesus* was located on the southwest coast of present-day Turkey. At the time of Paul’s arrival, Ephesus had a large Jewish population with a well-established *synagogue*. Paul set off a riot in Ephesus in the process of establishing a church (Acts 19). On his third missionary journey, Paul would spend the better part of three years in the city (20:31).

20-21. Although Paul received a favorable reception in *Ephesus*, he was in a hurry to get to *Jerusalem* and fulfill his vow. *This feast* likely refers to Passover, the most important annual observance for Jewish people. Passover took on new significance for Christian Jews because of its association with the death and resurrection of Jesus (Mark 14:1-16:8). Apparently *God* did *will* Paul to return to Ephesus (see Acts 19:1).

24. While *Ephesus* had a large Jewish population, *Alexandria* was arguably the world center of Greek-thinking Judaism. *Apollo* was probably educated in sys-

tematic interpretation of Scriptures, using methods drawn from Greek philosophers. Apollos's being *eloquent* is evidence of this education, which would include learning to speak clearly and reasonably. He had far more than a casual acquaintance with *the scriptures*.

25. Apollos's knowledge of *the way of the Lord* indicates that the Christian message had spread to the great city of Alexandria. The result was to be passionate and fervent when he taught the things of the Lord.

Though Apollos's teaching was done *diligently*, he did not yet know the full gospel. *The baptism of John* was a ritual cleansing on the basis of repentance (Acts 13:24). It did not include the gift or baptism of the Holy Spirit, something that began at Pentecost (1:5; 2:38; compare 19:1-7). It is one thing to argue and know that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures' prophesying a coming Messiah. It is a much deeper, transformative experience to receive His gift of the Holy Spirit and live in His power.

26. The Ephesian *synagogue* had not yet divided on the basis of belief or non-belief in Jesus. *Aquila and Priscilla* likely were active in that synagogue when they *heard* Apollos's teaching. Realizing that his understanding of the Christian message was missing an important component, they met with Apollos privately to bring him to a better understanding of the whole gospel message.

A message that does not include the Holy Spirit is hardly a full measure of the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first-century church recognized important connections among preaching about Jesus, baptizing, and the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:4-6; etc.).

To his credit, Apollos accepted this instruction readily and became one of

the most influential preachers of the first century. The prominence of Apollos in the writings of Luke and Paul (examples: 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:5-6; 4:6) speaks also of the importance of Apollos's instruction by Aquila and Priscilla.

II. Leaders with Legacy Romans 16:3-4

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

3. Paul returned to Corinth during his third missionary journey and wrote to the church in Rome about AD 57. Although he had never been to Rome, he knew many people there. To refer to *Priscilla* and *Aquila* as *helpers* accorded them both a high level of respect.

4a. In both Corinth and Ephesus, Paul had been in danger. In Corinth, his Jewish opponents hauled him before the proconsul's judgment seat. While Paul himself avoided punishment, the synagogue leader was beaten by the crowd (Acts 18:17). In Ephesus, Paul encountered a deadly threat in the form of a riot. Paul was prevented from trying to calm the Ephesian crowd by his "disciples" (19:23-30). Perhaps these included Priscilla and Aquila.

4b. From Paul's letters, we know that *the churches* in both Corinth and Ephesus had Gentile members (1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Ephesians 2:1-14). These churches had reason to be thankful for Priscilla and Aquila not only because they protected Paul but also because they continued to minister to *Gentiles*. As Paul's life was preserved by the couple, so were Gentiles whose eternal lives were secured through their unbiased ministry.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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Into the Lesson



What are some of the best performing teams?

What makes these teams so effective?

Today's lesson will look at a team that worked well together for godly purposes.

Into the Word

Improve the group names based on information you read in the assigned texts.

Corinthian Group: Acts 18:1-3

Ephesian Group: Acts 18:18-21

Alexandrian Group: Acts 18:24-26

Roman Group: Romans 16:3-4

Into Life

Focus on how we might have the same type of relationship that we see among Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila.

What would a "tentmaking relationship" look like in your situation?

Who needs to be disciplined by your walking alongside that person as you witness for Jesus?

In what ways could you better support the leadership of your church to accomplish its mission?

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Women and men, singles and couples — all are called to minister.