

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

[www.cotask.org](http://www.cotask.org)

### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts***

(SB\_Acts 18B\_End of 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey & Beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup>)

#### **Paul Returns to Antioch & Begins His Third Journey (18:18-23)**

##### *The Nazarite Vow (18:18)*

After remaining a “good while” (v. 18) in Corinth (about 18 months per v. 11), Paul decided to return to Syria (Antioch) and he took Priscilla and Aquila with him to Ephesus as he journeyed back. Also, as they departed Corinth via its seaport named Cenchrea on the coast of the Aegean Sea, Paul took a Nazarite vow which he desired to fulfill in time for a feast in Jerusalem – presumably the feast of Pentecost in the Spring of A.D. 52. Luke does not say anything about Paul’s preaching and teaching in Cenchrea; however, it is very possible that given the time that Paul was in Corinth, he had established a church in Cenchrea, especially given his statement in Romans 16:1 – “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.”

*The Nazarite Vow by Paul* – Typically, as a part of a Nazarite vow, the one making the vow did not cut their hair until the end of the avowal period. However, Luke notes that Paul cut his hair in Cenchrea (v. 18). So, there is a bit of confusion surrounding Paul having taken the Nazarite vow and his desire to go to Jerusalem. Most see a connection between the events and indicate that Paul needed to get to Jerusalem to complete the vow by presenting his hair as an offering in the Temple there symbolizing the completion of the vow. It could be that Paul took all of his hair that had been cut off in Cenchrea with him to Jerusalem and offered it there in the Temple. That would have been consistent with the typical course of events associated with the Nazarite vow; however, that is not entirely clear from this passage. Nevertheless, here are some important things to note about the Nazarite vow:

- The Nazarite vow is described in Numbers 6 and it involved four things:
  - Complete abstinence of wine or of anything made from the grape
  - Allowing one’s hair (head and facial) to grow
  - Not touching a dead body of man or animal
  - Prohibition against the eating of any food that was “unclean” per the Law
- Scripture does not give any guidance regarding the duration of the vow; however the Jewish Mishnah prescribes a period of anywhere between 30 and 90 days.<sup>1</sup>
- At the termination of the vow, the person would present burnt, sin, and peace offerings and would then shave their head and burn the hair in the fire with the peace offering.
- Thus, the Nazarite vow could only be concluded in the Temple at Jerusalem.
- This has led some to conclude that there may have been some allowance made for those who were away from Jerusalem to wait until they had returned to Jerusalem to make their offerings even though the vow was completed prior to arriving at Jerusalem (cf. 21:23-26).

*Why did Paul subject Himself to a Vow That was Very Jewish in Orientation?* Evidently, at some time during his stay at Corinth, Paul had taken a Nazirite vow to God as he asked for God’s protection or for God’s blessing upon his ministry in Corinth. Vows were not considered to be mandatory under the Law. It is clear that they were optional. The fact that Paul took a Nazarite vow does not mean that he considered himself to be required to keep any aspect of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 117.

Law. It only indicates that he chose to keep a certain optional aspect of a very Jewish tradition. Vows were made either in gratitude for God's blessing (e.g. Paul's safekeeping in Corinth) or as a petition for some future blessing.

As Paul had experienced God's protection in Corinth and having had his ministry in Corinth blessed with the establishment of a thriving church, Paul was determined to return to Jerusalem to fulfill his vow by presenting his hair as a burnt offering and offering sacrifices in the temple (cf. Acts 21:26).

Throughout the Transition period (i.e. the period between the Crucifixion and the completion of the Canon of Scripture and even more specifically, the razing of the Temple in A.D. 70), we observe some voluntary continuation in the practice of the Law on the part of Jewish believers. For instance, Jewish believers continued to practice circumcision and the fact that some Jewish believers wanted to impose that practice upon Gentile believers and even make it a requirement for salvation became the subject of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-29). It is also clear that at about the same time, Paul was making a clear dispensational distinction between the body of believers of the present era and the body of believers of the Age of Israel. He specifically teaches in the epistle to the Galatians (approximately A.D. 49) some revolutionary concepts that are consistent with mystery doctrines relevant to the Body of Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

*Observation:* It is very clear that Paul knew, taught and practiced unique grace principles especially as they applied to Gentile believers.

*Observation:* It is also very clear that Paul and other Jewish believers on occasion practiced on a voluntary basis certain observances that were very Jewish in orientation and which had their roots in the Law, e.g. circumcision, the Nazarite vow, and the offering of sacrifices (Acts 21:26).

*Interpretation:* Paul and other grace oriented believers of a Jewish background on occasion carried out certain practices which were consistent with the Law, yet they did so with full knowledge that these practices were not required of them nor did the practices provide salvation or prove their salvation.

*Interpretation:* The practice by Paul and other grace oriented believers of these practices was totally voluntary and is akin today to a believer asking to be baptized in water who has full knowledge that water baptism is not required, nor does it provide salvation or prove salvation.

*Fact:* Some Jewish believers distorted the grace gospel and taught that Gentiles had to keep aspects of the Law to be saved, e.g. circumcision (Acts 15:1)

*Opinion:* There were some Jews who were probably unbelievers who also wanted to see Gentiles keep the Law for salvation – Jews who thought they were saved because they kept the Law and who had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Paul referred to those who distorted the Gospel as Judaizers and he indicated that they were to be accursed in Galatians 1:6-9 (cf. Gal 5:1-4, 12).

*Application:* Beware of those today who try to make non-mandatory practices mandatory for salvation, e.g. baptism. They are as confused as were the Judaizers.

*Application:* Be discerning in your evaluation of the belief systems of others. Some who practice certain rituals (e.g. baptism) do so with full knowledge that the ritual is not efficacious and they have liberty to practice as they please. Some who practice certain rituals are confused and believe that the rituals are efficacious.

### *Paul's Return Trip Through Ephesus to Antioch (18:19-22)*

Earlier in Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, Paul had attempted to go to the southwestern region of Asia in which the city of Ephesus was located, but he had been prohibited to do so by the Holy Spirit (16:6). Now, Aquilla and Priscilla were with him and Paul left them in Ephesus as he traveled onward to Jerusalem and then Antioch. Ephesus was the capital and a very important commercial center of Asia at that time. It was located on the coast of the Aegean Sea. The Jews there seemed receptive to Paul's teaching and no doubt, this encouraged Paul to return.

It is interesting that Luke provides us with very little detail relating to Paul's journey back to Caesarea and then to Jerusalem. Actually, Luke does not mention Jerusalem specifically, but it is very clearly implied. Furthermore, Paul needed to go to Jerusalem to fulfill his vow with the offering in the Temple. Luke also does not provide any details of Paul's dealings with the church in Jerusalem. Paul then departed from Jerusalem and journeyed to Syrian Antioch where in short order he began his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey.

### *Paul Begins His 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey & Meets Apollos (18:23-28)*

After having made previous forays into the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, on his first missionary journey, Paul wanted to return to strengthen the young believers in the faith. Luke is very sketchy on some of the details of this portion of Paul's journey. However, it is important to note that Paul felt the need to continually strengthen believers. Paul wasn't an evangelist exclusively. Rather, Paul understood the need to strengthen the believers in the faith so that their lives could continue to bear fruit.

Luke focuses our attention at the end of chapter 18 upon Ephesus and events that were transpiring there while Paul began his 3<sup>rd</sup> Journey in regions to the northeast of Ephesus and Asia. Remember that Aquilla and Priscilla are still in Ephesus since Paul left them there at the conclusion of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey.

A Jew with a Greek name (Apollos) from Alexandria, Egypt came to Ephesus and was a disciple of John the Baptist. Amazingly enough, more than 20 years after the events associated with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, Apollos only knew of the baptism of John versus the water baptism that had been practiced since Pentecost. Apparently, he knew nothing of what had happened at Pentecost, nor of the revelation that had been given to Paul.

There had been a significant amount of development of doctrine since the days of John the Baptist. God had strategically placed in Ephesus the people who had the knowledge and tact to serve as the mechanism to redirect a man onto the proper course so he could be used in a magnificent manner by God. What is more amazing is the fact that Apollos had the humility to accept the instruction from a couple who were mere tent-makers. This might have been due in part to the fact that Aquilla and Priscilla were perhaps very instrumental in the founding of the church in Ephesus since Paul was in Ephesus for only a brief period of time and he left the couple there at the conclusion of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey.

There are several other observations we should note about this amazing couple (Aquilla and Priscilla) who appear so frequently in Scripture:

- As noted, this couple understood the importance of tact in dealing with others – especially another who was sincere and who was trying to pursue the Truth in understanding and application in his life.
- Aquilla and Priscilla are always named together in Scripture.
- They understood the principle of teamwork and worked together in a secular profession and in a secular trade as leather-workers.

- They were selfless and brave to the point of risking their lives for Paul (Rom 16:3-4a – “Greet Priscilla and Aquilla, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life”).
- They, like Lydia, understood the importance of hospitality and hosted a church in their own home (1 Cor 16:19 – “The churches of Asia greet you, Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”)
- They were flexible and yielded to the Lord’s geographical will for their lives having moved twice – once from Rome to Corinth and then from Corinth to Ephesus with Paul as he completed his 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey.
- They worked together in a secular trade as leather-workers.

My interpretations of these points:

- The character of this couple is illustrated by the fact that they could work together.
- For a couple to work together, there must be a mutual understanding and appreciation by both parties of the contribution that each makes to the marriage
- A strong Christian marriage requires that both parties be absolutely committed to Christ and not their own self-interests.
- A strong Christian marriage requires character in order to appreciate character
- A strong Christian marriage requires mutual sacrifice (not just perceived on the part of one or both)
- A strong Christian marriage requires that both parties accept personal responsibility for their lives, attitudes and actions in the marriage and be a servant to their spouse as Christ was to us.
- If either Priscilla or Aquilla had not been committed, then at least two things would have been the result: 1) the Lord would have not been able to use them as He did; and 2) the unyielded believer would have been a weight or millstone to the yielded believer.
- The key to happiness in marriage is when each partner recognizes their spiritual destiny as a believer and makes decisions that reflect that priority in their lives.
- Marital partners will never recognize their mutual, shared spiritual destiny as a couple until they recognize their individual spiritual destiny as believers.

Some applications:

- If your marriage is stressed or not being used of the Lord, there is one or more spiritual factors at play:
  - A lack of yieldedness on the part of one or both parties
  - A lack of the appropriate doctrine to apply in life situations.
- Are you and your spouse equally yoked in the pursuit of your spiritual destiny as couple?

There are several observations we should note about Apollos and his background before we proceed into chapter 19:<sup>2</sup>

- Alexandria is not named in the Hebrew Scriptures and is only mentioned in passing in several New Testament passages; however, it is very important in Judeo-Christian history.
- By the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C., it housed the largest library in the ancient world and contained over a half-million volumes.
- It was in Alexandria that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures called the Septuagint (LXX) was produced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries B.C.
- The Jews were highly valued as citizens of Alexandria and were encouraged to settle the city and were admitted into the first of three classes of its citizenry having equal rights with its Greek inhabitants.

---

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the points were derived from a reading of Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 44.

- During the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 16), the Jews of Alexandria numbered about one-third of its population.
- It was the center for the production several early NT manuscripts and copies of NT Scripture.
- Later in history, around the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries A.D., the city would become central to the development of early Christian thought as it was the home of early church fathers Clement and Origen.
- During the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., it was the home of the heretical leader Arius and the orthodox theologian Athanasius.<sup>3</sup>
  - Arius was a presbyter in the church at Alexandria who protested against the position of his bishop, Alexander and maintained that the Son of God had a beginning.
  - Alexander called a synod in Alexandria had Arius condemned and deposed as a result of the controversy that ensued.
  - The controversy was about to divide the Catholic Church and the Emperor Constantine (from Rome) stepped into the debate and requested that a council of all bishops in the entire Catholic Church be assembled with the government paying their travel expenses.
  - This council met at Nicaea, Asia Minor in A.D. 325 and Athanasius, a young deacon of Alexander, represented the opposing position
  - One of many results of the council was that the position of Arius that the Son of God had a beginning was “anathematized” by the Catholic Church.
  - To enforce the decisions of the Council of Nicaea, Constantine commanded the burning of all books composed by Arius, banished Arius and his closest supporters and threatened the death penalty for any disobedience of these commands.
  - It is really doubtful that Constantine appreciated the depth of the questions at issue. In his letter to Alexander and Arius, he said that having made “careful inquiry into the origin and foundation of these differences” he found “the cause to be of a truly insignificant character and quite unworthy of such fierce contention.”
  - Constantine’s actions established precedence for subsequent church councils and the desire for an ultimate authority to emerge, namely the bishop of the church in Rome.
- Apollos was a very learned Jew since he was from Alexandria – a city with such a rich history and intellectual orientation. This fact makes his humility all the more amazing.

Apollos went westward where he ministered at Corinth where Paul had planted the seed of the Gospel and began a new church (1 Cor 3:6). The believers in Ephesus encouraged him by providing letters of commendation and financial support (2 Cor 3:1). Apollos was so effective in instructing believers and refuting the Jewish opposition that he developed a personal following even though he surely did not encourage the sectarianism that Paul condemned (1 Cor 1:12; 3:4; 4:9; 16:12).

---

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Volume 1: to A.D. 1500* (Peabody, Maryland: Prince Press, 2000 reprint of New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1953, 1975), 151-156.