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PAUL'S RECEPTION IN CORINTH

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
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ACTS 18:1-8

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ACTS 18:1-8 "After these things Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth; 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. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And 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."

Paul didn't stay in Athens very long. The people in Athens had long ago gone on negative signals at the point of God-consciousness and they were not receptive to the gospel. The Athenians had their minds made up about God and they would not be changed and, in the main, it is that way until this day. Paul had to move on to other areas where he would find positive volition and where the people would be receptive to the Word of God. He found such a place in Corinth. The word "departed" means to sever connections because there was no interest in the gospel. Athens had rejected Christ and that's why Paul moved on. He departed because they rejected him and his Christ. Paul's radar was very good and he could sense the atmosphere in the air. Therefore, Paul left Athens and moved on to Corinth.

In 146 B.C. the Roman Republic had one of her great wars and the city of Carthage was wiped out, and as a part of this war, Corinth was conquered. At that time Corinth was the art center of the world, and when the Roman soldiers came into Corinth, they destroyed many of the world's most famous paintings and used the canvas for gambling tables. Corinth had one of the greatest gem collections in the world and a Roman soldier found the gems in a red bag. He liked the red bag but threw "the rocks" away not knowing that he threw away the greatest gem collection in the world. God used two famous men, who were not Christians, to help prepare the way for Paul's work in Corinth. One of these men was the genius, Julius Caesar. He is the one who developed the plan which saved the Roman Empire for almost 500 years. Julius Caesar decided that Corinth was strategically located and he made it a link between Rome and the rest of Asia. At Corinth there is a little strip of land between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. Here Caesar erected a board canal and ships were placed on rollers and rolled across the land from one sea to another. Today a great water canal has replaced the board canal. So Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth and it became a strategic city. The other man who had great influence on the situation in Corinth was a man named Gallio. He was the brother of Seneca and Gallio became the first Pro-Consul of Corinth. God used these two pagan men to help prepare the stage for the visit of Paul to Corinth. Corinth was a cosmopolitan center, and a convention center. Corinth was the great pleasure center of the world. The Isthmian games, even larger than the Olympic games, were staged here. Corinth was one of the most interesting cities in the earth and God had prepared for over a hundred years for the coming of Paul to this great city. Claudius was at that time ruling the Roman Empire, and for many reasons he became disenchanted with the Jews in Rome. For one thing, the Jews were always talking about one named Jesus Christ. For this reason Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome and Aquila and Priscilla were among those who were expelled. These prosperous Jews came to Corinth and set up their tent manufacturing business. Aquila had done quite well in Rome, and when Claudius threw them out, they came and started over in Corinth.

So we have a Jew named Aquila, and a Gentile, his wife, named Priscilla, who were in the tentmaking business. Paul was deeply impressed by them. They both had positive volition toward God and they both accepted Christ. Later on they would help train Apollos, who had received his education in the University of Alexandria. Philo had been Apollo's great teacher, and when he was converted, he didn't know much about the New Testament until he came in contact with Aquila and Priscilla. So Paul hit Athens in the strategic moment, and for eighteen months he would have a fantastic ministry in this amazing city. A great revival would break out and literally thousands would be converted. Gallio, though not a Christian, was a fair ruler and his fair treatment of Paul would make it possible for Paul to function there in peace and safety. Gallio saw that Roman law was enforced and justice prevailed through the city. Gallio would insist on the separation of church and state, and on this principle Paul would be able to operate safely in Corinth. Gallio was a very fair-minded man and was greatly loved and respected by the people. When Nero came to the throne in Rome, he had Gallio and Paul executed. Both men had been successful and Nero had them executed within two years of each other. There were so many factors that converged at this point and the only way to explain what happened is to realize God was presiding over the affairs of history. In 46 B.C. Julius Caesar had the city of Corinth rebuilt, and now ⁹⁷ five years later, in 51 A.D. the stage was set for the entrance of Paul.

ACTS 18:2 "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." You can see the hand of God in all this--the rebuilt city--the new Pro-Consul--the Jewish population--the arrival of Aquila and Priscilla. I call it the perfect timing of God. Remember my oft quoted statement "God's clock is never one minute fast nor one minute slow". God had been working for more than 100 years to get the situation ready for Paul's Corinthian ministry. So here we see Roman law, government, political events, and the private movement of men was all in the hands of God. The very day Paul put his foot in Corinth was the day God had ordained for him to be there. Later on Paul would become despondent, but the Word of God would sustain him and reassure him. Here in Corinth Paul would have some of the greatest days of his life. As Zechariah had said, "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

Aquila was a brilliant business man. He was a tent manufacturer. Having lately come from Rome with his brilliant wife, Priscilla, they settled in Corinth, took Paul in as their house guest, and provided the physical platform from which he could work and lay the foundation for his great ministry in that city. Herod Agrippa had visited Rome on one occasion, and when some in the Roman Senate asked him who would make a good Emperor, he suggested Claudius. As it turned out, Claudius became the Emperor and the Jews were soon expelled from Rome. This was the way God had of placing Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth so they could help Paul in his work.

ACTS 18:3 "And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers." They manufactured tents. Paul worked with them. He was working for a living until he got established, but he had come to Corinth for something far more important than tentmaking. Paul didn't want his motive questioned so he worked to be financially secure and independent until he could prove himself as a faithful witness for Christ.

ACTS 18:4 "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." The word here for "reasoned" is "dia-legomai" from which we get the word "dialogue". This is reason through categories. He asked them questions and then led them along to see the proper solution to their problem. Paul was successful with both Jews and Gentiles. But he couldn't really get down to work for he was engaged in tentmaking.

ACTS 18:5 "And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ." With the arrival of Silas and Timothy, big things were about to begin. For one thing, Timothy brought Paul an offering from Macedonia and this gave him financial stability. This offering is described in the following passages:

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6 "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:"

2 CORINTHIANS 11:9 "And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.

PHILIPPIANS 4:15 "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only."

Please remember he was still not taking money from the Corinthians. It was at this time in his work when Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians.

The phrase "Was pressed in the Spirit" is not exactly the most accurate translation. The Greek actually says, "He was influenced by the Word". It simply means that Paul took time to study and he filled his mind with doctrine and Bible truth. "And testified" simply means that he took much time for study and teaching and it means to communicate vigorously.

ACTS 18:6-8 "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And 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."

We have now come to see the result of Paul's ministry with the Jews. The language means, "They formed an organized opposition". They formed ranks against him. The shaking of his raiment was a gesture to show that Paul was through with the Jews. They had heard and rejected, and now he was ready to turn and witness to the Gentiles for they would hear him. Some people are bent on their own destruction and there is nothing you can do to stop them. This is the picture we have before us here. In many ways this was the turning point in his ministry in Corinth. But deeper down this is a picture of how God works things out in our lives. God had been working for about 100 years in advance to get things ready for Paul and he wasn't going to let anything stop his plan from being carried out.

The man named in verse 7 was Titus Justus. He was a Roman citizen and a member of a famous potter family. His house was next door to the Jewish Synagogue and Paul started a church right there.

Verse 8 tells us that the chief ruler of the synagogue was converted and moved over with Paul. Also Sosthenes came into the Kingdom of God and was badly beaten by his enemies as we will learn a little later on in our study.

ACTS 18:8 "And 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." Please notice the use of the word "believe" in this verse. The first use of believe is concerning Crispus, and the "believe" is in the aorist tense and means that in a point of time he believed and God picked it up and it was continued forever. Then a revival broke out and many were converted and we see the use of the word "believe" again and in this instance it is in the imperfect tense and means that it just kept happening again and again and many were converted. So Paul had one of the greatest experiences of his life in Corinth. From his work will come the church at Corinth and also 1 and 2 Corinthians. Next time we will study about the mob in Corinth and how Gallio, a true Roman leader, insisted of fairness and freedom and justice.