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### God's Timing is Always Perfect

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## GOD'S TIMING IS ALWAYS PERFECT

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 76  
ACTS 18:18-28

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ACTS 18:18-28 "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. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; 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. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. 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. 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. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

This is a transitional passage. God prepared the way for Paul to go to Ephesus. God has a time for his work and in his schedule his timing of events is always perfect. Paul spent a long period of time in Ephesus, longer than in any other place. In this passage we will see Paul go to Ephesus, tarry for just a short time and then move on. Later he will return and spend almost three years there. So in this passage we see the preparation God is making for his work to be done a little later on. The principle is this--God has a time for everything. God does his work in his own way and in his own time.

ACTS 18:18 "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." This verse describes the things that happened at the conclusion of Paul's fantastic eighteen-month ministry in Corinth. We will notice some parallels between his ministry in Corinth and in Ephesus. Both cities were located near the sea. Both were great centers of population and commerce. Paul took Priscilla and Aquila and left them at Ephesus, but he rushed on to make a brief visit to Caesarea, Jerusalem and Antioch before returning for his great Ephesian ministry. During that short period we will see Priscilla and Aquila come in contact with the brilliant Apollos. Later, after Priscilla and Aquila straightened Apollos out concerning his New Testament theology, we will see him move on to Corinth for his great work. So these verses are transitional verses. God is getting things ready, getting his plans arranged, getting events into their proper timing so his greater work can be done. Apollos was one of the most brilliant men in all the earth. He had the best intellectual background of his day. Let me state it again--the principle is this: GOD PRESIDES OVER HISTORY AND PREPARES FOR HIS WORK CAREFULLY AND CONCLUSIVELY. God never goes off, as we say "Half-cocked". God prepared Paul--he prepared Aquila and Priscilla--he prepared Apollos--and he prepared the people of Ephesus for this ministry. This is just another indication of the truth that there is always a wrong time for something and there is always a right time for something. In other words, as I say to you so often, "God's clock is never one minute fast nor one minute slow". This passage beautifully illustrates this truth. God is always out in front of us, preparing the way for things to come. So this passage is the preparation for the great Ephesian ministry. Paul and Apollos were very much alike in intellect

and brilliance, but Apollos was the more gifted speaker. Apollos had been trained in Old Testament scripture but he knew nothing concerning the mystery of the Church Age. So Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to teach Apollos doctrine. They were the two best trained lay people in the world and had learned doctrine from Paul. They were well equipped for this task.

Apollos came from the University of Alexandria. After Paul left Corinth they were without a preacher for some months, but God was preparing the brilliant Apollos for this task and in time he would be ready for this assignment.

God is not only perfect in his plan for each individual and each nation, but God's timing is perfect and his method is perfect. The right time, the right method, the right people, the right approach--this describes the action of God. This is always the way God operates. "In the fullness of time" refers to God's perfect timing of events. God sees the end from the beginning and he sees all the details in between.

In verse 18 where it says of Paul's stay in Corinth, "He tarried there yet a good while" it refers to the eighteen months of his Corinthian ministry. After this period of intensive teaching and training, Paul departed and took with him these two well-trained business leaders. Aquila was a very successful businessman, in the business of manufacturing tents. Priscilla was one of the greatest believers of all times.

It appears that Aquila had gone quite a long time without having a haircut. Because of God's protection of him and because of God's deliverance of him, he made a vow that he would not cut his hair for a while. You see when people would ask him about it he would be able to tell them why he was growing long hair and it gave him an occasion for witnessing. (Romans 16:3-4 intimates that Aquila and Priscilla were spared from death by God, and evidently this was a vow he took as a memorial for worship concerning this miraculous protection from God.) But before they left Corinth Aquila had his hair cut. This was a bonafide vow and not a legalistic vow like Paul will take later in Jerusalem. Now we have arrived at the Ephesus interlude.

ACTS 18:19 "And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews." Paul didn't stay in Ephesus at this time. He moved on rapidly. Neither did he stay in Jerusalem for any length of time. Jerusalem was a very legalistic church right at that time and it was not time for Paul to be in Jerusalem.

Ephesus was the capitol of the Roman Province of Asia. It had been colonized in the 11th century before Christ. In history it had been controlled by the Persians, Macedonians, and Romans. It was one of the most beautiful cities in the ancient world. Ephesus had one of the most beautiful main streets of any city on earth, and in Ephesus was located one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World--the Temple of Artemas or Diana. It had a population of about 300,000. Before leaving Ephesus Paul had a brief ministry with the Jews in their synagogue. "He reasoned with the Jews" means that he taught them the gospel from Old Testament scriptures. They wanted him to stay, but Paul knew it was not yet time for him to do his great work there. Paul was in tune with the Lord and was quite sensitive to the timing of events.

ACTS 18:20-21 "When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; 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." So here we have Paul's response to their desire for him to remain with them. The real key to these two verses is "The will of God". Paul is operating according to the leadership of God in his life. He was quite sensitive to the leadership of the Lord. But he promised them he would return if it was the will of God.

Possibly I should record here those lines I have spoken to you so many times--

To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge;  
 To find the will of God is the greatest discovery;  
 To do the will of God is the greatest achievement.

So Paul here was operating according to the will of God.

ACTS 18:22 "And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch." Caesarea was the famous city on the Coast of Palestine. Herod the Great had built it as a memorial to Caesar. It was a beautiful white marble city and was headquarters for the Roman Province of Judaea. Paul went to Jerusalem just for a courtesy call. He realized he could do little good there at that time, so he moved on to Antioch, his home church. Here he rested, gave a report of his activities, and prepared for his third great missionary journey.

ACTS 18:23 "And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples." This indicates the beginning of his third great journey. Notice that he went to Galatia and even to Phrygia. This was the third time Paul had been in that area. He went there again to strengthen the churches and to pull them back to Bible doctrine. It is so easy for church people to get the idea they have found the solution to the world's problems and they run off after this or that and every wind that blows. Ever so often the people need to be pulled back to Bible truth. The one thing that will keep people anchored to the Bible and to the will of God is Bible doctrine. (At this point let us for a moment examine the maps to show us these three journeys.)

Instead of going to Troas as he did before, we notice that Paul swung South and came to Ephesus. Verses 24-28 will tell us of the preparation being made for his coming.

ACTS 18:24 "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus." Apollos was indeed a gifted man. "A certain Jew" means a certain Jew God had picked out to do a certain work for him. He came from Alexandria in Egypt. He was born, converted and reared in Alexandria. This city had the greatest concentration of Jews in all the world. It was founded by Alexander the Great and named for him. It was built on a strip of land between the sea and a lake, something like Miami Beach. It had the great lighthouse, one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World. It had the greatest library in the Ancient World. Cleopatra made a great contribution to this library. She was much more than a beautiful sex symbol. She was a brilliant woman. She spoke seven languages. She was one of the world's greatest linguists, and as they say, she had everything going for her. But contrary to popular opinion about her, she was brilliant and helped build the library in Alexandria. Alexandria is where Cleopatra had her palace. In the University of Alexandria, built around this great library, was a student named Apollos. This University had a great Hebrew Department and the Dean of that department was a man named Philo. So Apollos evidently felt the great influence of this amazing man. Apollos had received a degree in Hellenistic culture and in Hebrew.

ACTS 18:25 "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." Apollos was a believer. But he had a bad gap in his understanding. He didn't know about dispensations. He didn't know anything about the Church Age. He had been taught Christianity from the Old Testament standpoint. We read he was taught "The baptism of John" and that is as close as he came to the truth of the Church Age.

Let us note four things about the baptism of John.

1. John declared Christ in his message. John 1:29
2. John understood what it meant to have a personal relationship with the Lord. John 3:30
3. John the Baptist taught "Repent ye", or change your attitude about Christ. Matthew 3:2
4. John had been very accurate about the plan of salvation. Acts 19:4

But with all this, and this was indeed fine so far as it went, it said nothing about the Church Age. So Apollos knew little about doctrine and this is why Priscilla and Aquila were so important in his training right at this time.

ACTS 18:26 "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." As Apollos preached in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila listened to him and they realized that he was saved, he knew the Lord, but he didn't know dispensational truth. He was such a gifted speaker he just swept people off their feet. So Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and briefed him concerning the doctrine Paul had taught them in Corinth. From this contact with them, Apollos realized that the great spiritual truth of the Church Age was unknown to him and he was eager to learn. As they explained doctrine everything fell into place with him and he began to put it all together. You see, the reason God did not permit Apollos to go directly to Corinth was this--the believers in Corinth knew more doctrine than he did, and he needed instruction before he could be an effective witness. So after he finished his Theological education with Priscilla and Aquila, then the Lord permitted him to go to Corinth.

ACTS 18:27 "And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace" Apollos then proceeded to Southern Greece. They sent letters to their friends in Corinth about this brilliant young preacher. Apollos was brilliant and I expect he was the author of the Book of Hebrews. He certainly had the background and training to write such a book. So the born-again believers in Corinth were greatly helped by Apollos.

ACTS 18:28 "For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." His message--"Showing that Jesus kept on being the Christ". He proved this from Old Testament scripture. The ground was being prepared in Ephesus for Paul's ministry there. It is all fitting together in God's perfect plan.