

Acts 106

Religious Freedom

Acts 18:12-18

May 13, 2026

Dr. Andy Woods

We are at the tail end of finishing up the second missionary journey, so you could take your Bibles and turn them to Acts 18:12. In Acts 1:8, after He resurrected, Jesus said to His disciples,

"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

That is a nice three-part outline of the Book of Acts: The church's witness in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7); the church's witness in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12); and then we are in that third section, the church's witness to the remote parts of the earth (Acts 13-28).

Structure (Acts 1:8)

- Jerusalem (Acts 1–7)
- Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12)
- **Remotest part of the earth (Acts 13–28)**
 - 1st missionary journey (Acts 13–14)
 - Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-35)
 - **2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36 –18:22)**
 - 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17)
 - Trip to Rome (Acts 21:18–28:31)



That part has a bunch of subparts. There is the first missionary journey, (we covered that); the Jerusalem Council (we covered that); now we are at the tail end of Paul's second missionary journey.

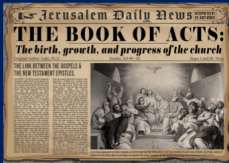
All the missionary journeys start in Antioch. The second missionary journey is no different. Paul launches out to these various places, and he has made his way all the way to Corinth. That is where we are in Acts 18. There has been an initial schism going back to Acts 15 between Paul and Barnabas, and we studied that. We saw Paul's progress into Syria and Cilicia, and the vision of the Macedonian man saying, "Come over and help us." That is how the gospel made it into Europe (Acts 16).

We also covered the Philippian ministry (Acts 16); the Thessalonian ministry, the Berean ministry, and the Athens ministry, including Mars Hill (Acts 17). Now here we are, with Paul in Corinth. We are going to finish that one up tonight, Lord willing.

Acts 15:36–18:22

2nd Missionary Journey

- I. Schism between Paul & Barnabas (15:36-41)
- II. Syria & Cilicia ministry (16:1-5)
- III. Macedonian call (16:6-10)
- IV. Philippian ministry (16:11-40)
- V. Thessalonica ministry (17:1-9)
- VI. Berean ministry (17:10-15)
- VII. Athens' ministry (17:16-34)
- VIII. Corinthian ministry (18:1-18)**
- IX. Ephesus' ministry (18:19-21)
- X. Return to Antioch (18:22)



We have seen Paul's arrival in Corinth (Acts 18:1-4) and his ministry in Corinth, which is always the same pattern, except in cities where there is no synagogue: he will go to the synagogue first. He will try to show the Jews in the synagogue, and the proselytes gathered there in the synagogue, that Jesus is the Messiah, from their own Scripture (Hebrew Bible/the Old Testament).

Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)

- I. Corinthian Ministry (18:1-18)
 - A. Arrival (1-4)
 - B. Ministry (5-11)
 - C. Paul Before Gallio (12-17)
 - 1. Opposition (12-13)
 - a) Circumstances (12)
 - b) Charge (13)
 - 2. Gallio's decision (14-15)
 - 3. Judgment's results (16-17)
 - D. Paul's Departure (18)

He usually does that for a few weeks in every city, and then they kick him out. So he says, "I am done with you people in this city. I am going to go to the Gentiles." He is not saying, "We are not evangelizing the Jews in the next city." He is just saying, "In this city, I am finished with the synagogue. You are unreceptive." So he goes to the Gentiles and they start getting saved like crazy.

Then the Jews in the synagogue get jealous of his influence among the Gentiles, and they stir up trouble against him. That is actually God at work, pushing him out of that city into the next city, where virtually the same thing happens. This pattern goes on and on in the Book of Acts.

We have seen Paul's ministry there in Corinth, and now Paul is brought before a man named Gallio (Acts 18:12-17), who makes a ruling that is massive for the development of the church—this legal ruling that is about to be handed down in Corinth. When that is complete, then Paul will depart and head back to the land of Israel to wrap up his second missionary journey.

What brings Paul before this guy named Gallio, the proconsul there in Corinth? As typically happens with Paul, he experiences opposition. When you experience opposition in your Christian life, do not think it is some weird thing. Paul experienced it constantly. Pastor Jim and I were talking a little earlier about 1 Peter 4:12 where the apostle Peter says,

"Beloved, do not be surprised by the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;" (1 Peter 4:12).

When we suffer, we have a tendency to think, "God, this is weird." Peter says, "Don't think it is weird. It is the normal journey in the Christian life. This is how God moves us from place to place. This is how God matures us." That statement in 1 Peter 4:12 was made as the group there was about to suffer terribly at the hands of a madman named Nero in what is called the Neronian persecution—the first formal, empire-wide persecution of Christianity. It was something that Paul did not even experience when our story here in Acts 18 unfolds.

The opposition is described there in Acts 18:12-13. You see the circumstances in Acts 18:12. Achaia is a whole region. It is like a county, if we put it in modern-day vernacular, with Corinth being a city within the county. All of these places can be found on a map. This is not a fairy tale book; this is not "Veggie Tales" or "Jack and the Beanstalk." This is real history that happened. People who have looked into this say that Luke is just a first-rate historian. The geography and locations that he describes are exactly true.

"But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord—" (Acts 18:12).

Do you see who is jealous of Paul? It is the unbelieving Jews. They do not like his success outside the synagogue. You see that success described in Acts 18:8.

"But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat," (Acts 18:12).

You have unbelieving Jews working behind the scenes trying to cause trouble for Paul, and they are the culprits. They bring him before the judgment seat. The expression "judgment seat" is used in Acts 18:12, 16, and 17. It is a translation from the Greek word "bēma" (βῆμα), which Paul is going to use elsewhere. He uses it in 2 Corinthians 5:10, where he says,

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,—” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The word "bēma" (βῆμα) is used there. As we talked about it a little bit last time, that is a future judgment for all Christians. It is not to determine heaven or hell, because that issue was resolved the moment we trusted in Christ for salvation. It is to determine rewards that we will receive above and beyond salvation, based on how we allow the Lord to express Himself through us during our earthly sojourn. The Lord wants to use us in this life, and He wants to reward us for our usefulness in the next life. Some Christians are more rewarded than others. If I am reading my Bible correctly, some Christians are not rewarded at all, but they are saved as though by fire.

When Paul talks about this Bema Seat Judgment to the Corinthians, he is using things that they knew about in their city, because the judgment seat was where Gallio was; that was where he made rulings. It was like a city council, where decisions were made that affected the whole city. That is what the bema seat judgment was in Corinth. Paul says, "Just as you Corinthians are familiar with the bema seat, in heaven you are also going to experience a similar kind of Bema Seat Judgment." That is where that whole concept of the bema seat comes from. It comes from the political structure that the Corinthians knew all about.

"—the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat," (Acts 18:12).

Now, when it says, "*Gallio was proconsul of Achaia*" (Acts 18:12), one of the things to understand is that this guy is a known fact of history. It is like saying "George Washington" or something. We all know that George Washington existed or that Thomas Jefferson existed, in the pre-photographic era. Just like nobody second-guesses Napoleon or these known figures of history, no one is going to second-guess this guy, Gallio. He is a known historical character.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes,

"The existence of this proconsul [Gallio] is well documented outside the Scriptures. Gallio's father was Seneca the Elder (ca. 50 B.C. - ca. A.D. 40), a famous Roman rhetorician from the Iberian Peninsula. Gallio had two brothers, one of whom was Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 B.C. - A.D. 65). Better known as Seneca the Younger, this brother was the Stoic philosopher, statesman, orator, and writer, who tutored Emperor Nero. Gallio was born in Cordova (Cordoba) around the year 5 B.C. He was originally named Lucius Annaeus Novatus, but assumed the name Gallio after his adoption by the senator L. Junius Gallio. He served as proconsul of Achaia, as mentioned in this verse, for only two years, in A.D. 51-52. Seneca the Younger said of him: 'No mortal is so pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody.' Emperor Claudius referred to Gallio as 'my friend and proconsul' in the Delphi Inscription, a collection of nine fragments of a letter written by Claudius in ca. A.D. 52. Hence, this man's

name and the fact that he was proconsul in Achaia is recorded elsewhere. In the year A.D. 65, Emperor Nero, in one of his fits of madness,—"¹

Nero had not come to the throne yet when these events were happening, but he would come to the throne when Peter wrote his letter that we quoted a little earlier about. Don't think it is strange that some trial is occurring to you.

"In the year A.D. 65, Emperor Nero, in one of his fits of madness, forced Seneca the Younger to commit suicide. It seems that Gallio followed suit shortly after. It was this man before whom Paul was now brought by the opposition."²

The reason I bring some of these things to your attention is that I want us to get a sense that the Bible is actually a history book. It is not like the Book of Mormon or the Quran, where there are all kinds of things that are historically inaccurate. The Mormons' whole deal is that Jesus came to North America and founded Mormonism and all of these kinds of things. It is interesting that Brigham Young University, a Mormon school, has one of the best academical archeological departments in the world, and they cannot find one archeological piece of evidence to support the Mormon beliefs. Yet with the Bible, in the land of Israel, particularly, almost every time a shovel goes into the ground they are unearthing something that corroborates the Scripture. Here is another example of it.

Gallio is a known person in history; he is a historical character. You could document that outside the Bible as well as inside the Bible. The Bible is filled with these kinds of examples. Everybody used to doubt whether Pontius Pilate existed. They found an inscription to Pontius Pilate in Caesarea. I could go on and on describing these things in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

So, the Jews stir up trouble, Paul is brought before Gallio, and the Jews offer a charge. They want Gallio to charge Paul with something. The charge is described in Acts 18:13. What were these unbelieving Jews saying about Paul?

"... 'This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law'" (Acts 18:13).

That is the charge. The way it worked in the Greco-Roman world was that you got one religion per people group. "This people group over here, they get their single religion. This people group over here, they get their single religion." The Jews get one religion, but now that Paul is saying that Jesus is the One that Hebrew Bible points to, the unbelieving Jews are saying, "Now he is teaching two religions. Now he is bringing a second religion for Judaism." and that went against Roman law.

The Jews are telling this to Gallio because they want Gallio to issue a sentence against Paul and put him out of commission. This is one way to get rid of the guy—just say that he is breaking the law. What does Gallio do? Gallio makes a decision, and it has massive ramifications for the church. I read over this account for years and years and

¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 381.

² Ibid.

really did not fully understand the significance of this, but once I explain it to you, you will get it and you will see why Luke, who was very selective in terms of what he included and did not include, would bother to tell us this.

That is one of the things you need to do as you read the Bible: you do not only ask yourself, "What is it saying?" You also ask yourself, "Why is this here?" Why, of all of the things Luke could have talked about, is this ruling before Gallio such a big deal, and how does it contribute to his overall theme that he is trying to communicate?

When you are reading Matthew 1 you are reading the genealogy leading to Jesus. You do not just ask yourself, "What is this genealogy saying?" You are saying, "Why is Matthew telling us about this genealogy? Why spend eighteen verses or so in an opening chapter giving us the genealogy of Jesus leading back to David and then Abraham?" The reason is that he is trying to show who Jesus is as the rightful heir to David's throne. He is the one that Hebrew Bible pointed to.

That is what you do as you are reading the Bible. You are not just asking yourself "What?" You are asking yourself "Why? Why is this here?" I will explain to you why it is here in a moment, but first, what is this decision? What exactly happened? The decision is recorded in Acts 18:14-15:

"But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters'" (Acts 18:14-15).

The charge is that Paul is teaching a new religion. If Gallio says, "You are right. He is teaching a new religion." then do you know what just happened to Christianity? It became illegal right out of the gate in its infant form.

Therefore the spread of Christianity, which is what Luke is trying to catalog for the benefit of Theophilus, would have been dramatically short-circuited. But because Gallio's decision goes the other way, the legal system now looks at Christianity not as an alternative religion, but just as another denomination within Judaism. Christianity continues to move forward for several decades before it falls under empire-wide persecution under Nero.

Notice that Paul did not even have to talk to get this ruling. He did not even have to open his mouth. He was very capable of opening his mouth and defending himself, as happens frequently in the Book of Acts, but here was a case, beginning of Acts 18:14, where Paul did not even have to say anything. Acts 18:14 says: "But when Paul was about to open his mouth,—" He did not say anything yet, and now this incredible ruling is handed down to further the spread of Christianity.

There are times in the Christian life where God does your fighting for you. One of my favorite verses is Exodus 14:14. This is as the nation is leaving Egypt, when the Red sea I think is about to part:

"The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent" (Exodus 14:14).

There have been a lot of times in my life when I have wanted to get in there and defend myself and argue my point and get everybody to see things my way, when the Holy Spirit will impress upon me, "Do not say anything. I will take care of this and I will do a much better job defending you than you will do yourself, even though you might be very confident of your knowledge and your abilities."

There have been times when I have not listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and I have made a total fool of myself. There have been other times when I have listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit does exactly what He said He would do: He takes care of the issue without me having to exercise any energy whatsoever. I would just challenge you, in your personal walk, when God brings you to that place where you will want to defend yourself—it might be a situation where you need to defend yourself, or it might be a situation where you just stay silent—that you let God take care of it and ask the Lord which path you should go down. He is pretty good at making His will clear in those circumstances.

The great Apostle Paul did not win this tremendous legal precedent through his own power. He did not even open his mouth. God took care of the whole situation for him. Then the ruling is handed down. We already read about that.

"...Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if these are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters'" (Acts 18:14-15).

What did Paul do that was so bad? Did he steal something? Did he murder somebody? Did he commit arson? No, it was not anything like that that he was accused of. He was accused of starting a new religion, because he was teaching that Jesus is the fulfillment of Hebrew Bible. Gallio is looking at this, saying, "That is an inter-denominational matter." He looked at it like an argument between the Southern Baptists and the Northern Baptists—"Should we sprinkle in baptism? Should we immerse?" and those kinds of inter-church squabbles about this and that.

Gallio says, "I am not equipped to talk about something like that or to rule on something like that. You figure that out—whether you want to take your communion service before the sermon or after the sermon, that is your business. As far as I can tell, Paul hasn't broken any major law. You guys work it out yourself. If this was a crime of some kind, then I could make a ruling; but I am not going to rule on this matter."

Because Gallio did that, he was basically saying that Christianity was a sect within Judaism. That is what he was saying—"It is just another offshoot within Judaism. It is just another Pharisaical disagreement." There were a lot of Pharisaical disagreements. The school of Hillel interpreted one way the 'indecent thing' about divorce in Deuteronomy about when it is permissible to divorce. The debate relates around the 'indecent thing,' whatever that means. The school of Hillel was pretty lax with that. You could divorce your wife for any reason—if she put too much salt on your food then she

had committed the indecent thing, so you could divorce her. Then the school of Shammai came along and said, "No, it must be adultery. She has to commit adultery. Then you can divorce her."

My point in bringing this up is that within Judaism there were all these disagreements about different things like that. Gallio says, "This is just another disagreement. You guys over here do not think the Hebrew Bible points to Jesus and these guys over here, like Paul, think Hebrew Bible does point to Jesus. So I am not going to get involved in this kind of argument. You guys are all within the same religion. This is not a new religion. This is a squabble within an existing religion."

The moment Gallio did that, he gave Christianity freedom to travel, because as long as it is one religion per people group, even though within the religion there could be disagreements, Christianity has freedom. This is why Luke tells us about this.

Luke, as we have studied, is writing to a man named Theophilus. He is trying to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the church so as to affirm him and what he has believed. Theophilus is most likely located in Rome, and so Luke is trying to tell Theophilus how the gospel got to Rome, to him. This is partly how God did it: He used Gallio.

Paul did not even open his mouth to argue his case, to persuade Gallio to issue a ruling that was a religious freedom ruling. Now Christianity could move and Christianity could travel. It was not illegal. It would not be illegal until later on under Nero. That is how the gospel made it all the way to Rome. The message of the Book of Acts is about the birth and the growth of the church, numerically, geographically, and ethnically.

It is cataloged by looking at progress reports showing how the church grew numerically. There is a lot of geography in the Book of Acts—Achaia, Cenchrea, Corinth, Philippi, Macedonia. Why all this geography? Because Luke is trying to show how the church grew geographically, how it traveled from Jerusalem to Rome.

There is a lot in this book about how the church is becoming more ethnically Gentile as it moves. This would relate to the geographical movement of the church, because Gallio made a religious freedom ruling here that had a huge effect on Christianity. Dr. Mal Couch, in "A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles," nails it. He says here,

"Gallio's actions in the book of Acts will have a profound effect on the growth of Christianity in the Roman world by postponing official persecution..."³

It is not that the church is not being persecuted, it is just not being dealt by Rome with a heavy hand yet. That is going to come, but the church really is not mature enough to handle that at this point.

"[Gallio's] refusal to indict Paul has ramifications throughout the Empire. Had he [Gallio] sided with the Jewish leaders and proclaimed Christianity

³ Dr. Mal Couch, *A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles*, 348.

a new religion, it would be illegal under Roman law. A precedent would have been set that could outlaw the church at a time it is still weak and vulnerable."⁴

The church has just been born. If you take a brand-new human being, the time that human being is most vulnerable is in its newborn state. It is not equipped yet to handle viruses and things of that nature.

"[Gallio's] refusal to indict Paul protects the preaching of Christianity for a time."⁵

It is not going to stay that way forever, but for a time, Christianity is protected until Nero comes to the throne. The better you understand the background of this, the better you can answer the question, "Why is this here?" Once you have this explained to you, you can see why Luke, of all of the things he could talk about, includes this event. The bottom line is that at this point, the church is not considered a new religion beyond Judaism, so it enjoys the same protected status that Judaism enjoyed.

Then you go down to Acts 18:16-17 and you see the results of this judgment. This is where it gets weird. The case is dismissed (Acts 18:16); there is this strange attack on the Jews by the Gentiles (Acts 19:17). When this attack occurs, Gallio still does not care and will not get involved. So Gallio dismisses the case.

"And he drove them away from the judgment seat" (Acts 18:16).

There, "judgment seat" is a translation of that Greek word "bēma" (βῆμα), which is used in Acts 18:12 and Acts 18:17, as we mentioned before.

There there is this strange attack that goes on against the Jews:

"And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat..." (Acts 18:17).

I guess what happened is that the Gentiles who were watching all of this could see that Paul was being unfairly treated by the unbelieving Jews. They were trying to bring him up on trumped up charges. The Gentiles saw this and did not like it, so these anti-Semitic Gentiles, who did not like the Jews anyway, who were bystanders, used this incident to attack the synagogue leader. The synagogue leader's name was Sosthenes.

What happened to Crispus? I thought Crispus was the synagogue leader. Remember Acts 18:8 says, "*Crispus, the leader of the synagogue.*" Why aren't they attacking Crispus? Well, Crispus got saved under Paul's ministry, so he is not the leader of the synagogue anymore. Look back at Acts 18:8:

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

"Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized" (Acts 18:8).

This could explain why these Jews, unbelieving Jews, were very angry at Paul and why they brought him before Gallio on this fallacious charge. Paul, under the power of the Holy Spirit, had just converted the leader of their whole synagogue. The synagogue leader was now a believer in Christ. He was a Christian. Now that he was a believer in Christ, he had to be replaced by somebody else. The replacement leader's name was Sosthenes. That was why this attack by these Gentiles does not go against Crispus. It went against this other newly installed leader of the synagogue.

As this attack is going on, Gallio says, "You know what? I still don't care. Not only am I not going to intervene in these little squabbles, but if the Gentiles want to beat up the Jews because they are mad that the Jews mistreated Paul, I am not going to resolve that issue either." So he lets this whole miniature riot take place. It is a very strange account that goes on here. Acts 18:17 says,

"And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things" (Acts 18:17).

That ends Paul's ministry in Corinth. It is a strange way to end a ministry. Now Paul departs from Corinth (Acts 18:18). We have had his arrival in Corinth, his ministry in Corinth, and this whole ruling that takes place before Gallio, which is massive in terms of the precedent that it establishes for the freedom for Christianity to travel. Then the Corinthian ministry ends with Paul departing.

His departure is recorded in Acts 18:18. We see three things here: additional ministry, return to Jerusalem, and then something called the Nazirite vow. Notice Acts 18:18. It says,

"Paul, having remained many days longer,..." (Acts 18:18).

After these things ended, he continued on a few extra days, many days, during his ministry in Corinth. When that was over, he set his mind to return to Jerusalem. You see that in Acts 18:18:

"...[he] took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila...." (Acts 18:18).

Who are these brethren? These brethren are the beginnings of the Corinthian church. We know going back to Acts 18:8 that Paul had converts in Corinth.

"Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized" (Acts 18:8).

Paul has converts, so they are the brethren. This is how the whole church of Corinth started. You will get into the New Testament, and you will see these two big books, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, written to the church at Corinth. You might ask yourself, "How did that church ever get off the ground to begin with?"

Every church has a story, right? This church did not just miraculously get dropped out of the sky. There were church planting efforts going back in the early 1980s. Earl Doyle can tell you all about it. He is one of our founding fathers. I guess we can call you that, Earl. Do you mind if I call you that? He could tell you all the stories and how it started and how God provided and how God brought people.

Here we are in 2026, still enjoying good seed that went into the ground, back when Sugar Land didn't even have any paved roads—all dirt roads. So Earl had a stagecoach. You go into a church and you just think that it has always been here, but there is a story behind this church, just like there is a story behind any church.

This is Corinth's story. This is how it started. God is unique in how He starts different works and different areas. He uses different people, different circumstances, and different personalities. These are the brethren that are now sending Paul out. This is the Corinthian church.

Paul is here in Corinth, and he wants to go back to Syria. Why does he want to go back to Syria? Because Antioch is in Syria, which is the sending church. All three missionary journeys are going to be launched from what we would call Syrian Antioch. It is a little confusing because we have another Antioch up here in Pisidia, which is outside the land of Israel. You have to get your Antiochs straight. There is Pisidian Antioch that Paul traveled through on his first missionary journey. Then there is Syrian Antioch, at the northern tip of Israel, which is the main focus because the missionary journeys are launched from Pisidian Antioch.

Notice the geography here, how detailed this is. Acts 18:18 says,

"Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila...." (Acts 18:18).

So he grabs a couple of people named Priscilla and Aquila, a husband and wife team. As Paul is leaving and going back to the land of Israel on missionary journey number two, he is going to have a brief stop in Ephesus. This is the beginning of the church at Ephesus. He is going to drop off Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. Then Paul will leave them to complete missionary journey number two. He will come back to Ephesus on missionary journey number three.

So Priscilla and Aquila are in Ephesus before Paul starts missionary journey number three. Why is that? Because they are going to run into a guy named Apollos. His story is mentioned later on in Acts 18:24-28. He is a believer, but only understands Jesus up to the point of John the Baptist. He believed John the Baptist's message—

"The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29).

Apollos understood that John the Baptist was pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, but that was all he knew. He did not know anything about the crucifixion. He did not know anything about the resurrection. He did not know anything about the ascension. He did not know anything about the birth of the body of Christ in Acts 2. He probably knew nothing about Paul. Yet the guy was a very skillful debater and reasoned there in Ephesus with the unbelieving Jews. He was a man mighty in the Scriptures—with what he knew.

This is all recorded during missionary journey number three before Paul gets to Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila are going to be so overwhelmed by what Apollos is doing for the cause of Christ when he has so little, that they, as a husband and wife team, take him aside and explain the things of God to him more fully. They take his knowledge and they add to it—"Yes, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus, but do you know the rest of the story? Do you know about the crucifixion? Do you know about the resurrection? Do you know about the ascension? Do you know about the birth of the body of Christ on the Day of Pentecost?"

Once Apollos gets the full picture, it is like going out and trying to play basketball as Michael Jordan. You tell Michael Jordan, "You can play the game of basketball, but you cannot use your right hand." Michael Jordan is pretty good without his right hand, as was Larry Bird. By the way, Larry Bird went through a whole quarter playing with his left hand, and he told everybody ahead of time that was what he was going to do. He still trounced the other team with just using his left hand. But can you imagine a Michael Jordan with a right hand and a Larry Bird with a right hand and a left hand?

That is what Priscilla and Aquila did for Apollos as they took this man who was already mighty in the Scriptures, and they gave him the full picture. They are going to have a big ministry to this man Apollos a paragraph or two down the road here.

Notice that it is a husband and a wife team. A lot of people will say that women are not supposed to teach ever, under any circumstance, in the church. I concur that you should not have a woman as what we would call today the senior pastor. You really would not have a female as an elder because it says an elder must be the husband of one wife.

But sometimes we are so aggressive about that—no women preachers, no women elders—that we make it sound as though women can never teach. If I am reading my Bible right, women are teaching all of the time. Here is Priscilla alongside her husband, presumably under his authority, giving Apollos the big picture. It was not just the husband doing the teaching. She was doing the teaching as well.

You have Timothy, also. How did he learn the Scripture from infancy? He learned it from Grandma and Mom—Lois and Eunice. You have the Book of Titus where it talks about how the older women should teach the younger women. So can women teach other

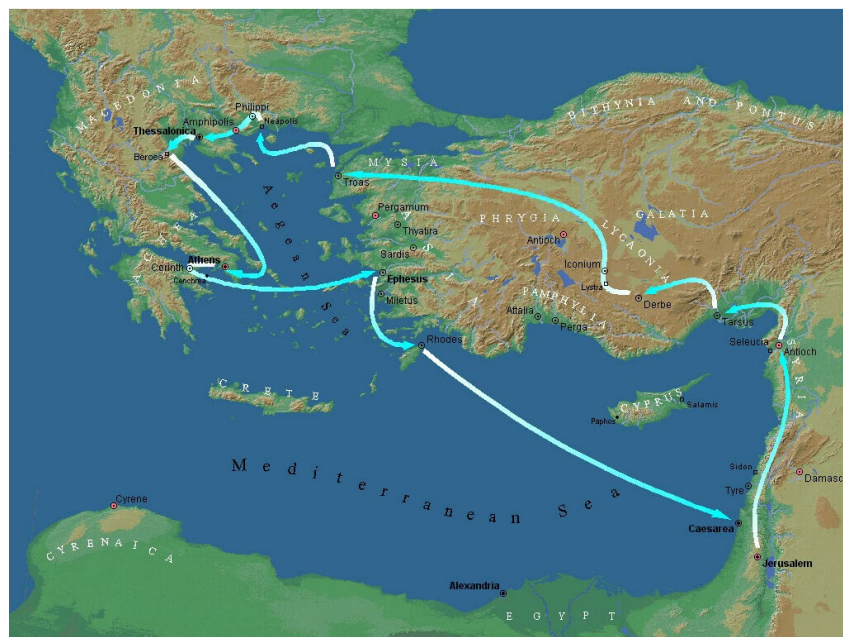
women? Of course. Can women teach children? Of course. Can women teach alongside their husband in what I would call a non-congregational pulpit atmosphere? Of course—it happens all the time. So, yes, let us hold to our conservative principles, biblical principles, but let us not overstate the case and make it sound as though women do not have spiritual gifts to teach God's Word. Clearly, under a lot of circumstances, they could.

When I was teaching at the college, I used to call this the one percent syndrome. There is about one percent of total ministry off-limits to women. Yet the one percent is what everybody wants to fight about, instead of focusing on the ninety-nine percent of the things they can do. Women are the backbone of the church. If you took every woman out of this church, do you realize that this place would collapse in seconds? Women have key roles to play in this church—and in any church, for that matter. That is by the design of God. One of these instrumental Christian women is Priscilla, and that is why Priscilla and Aquila are going to be dropped off there in Ephesus.

We are going to end here with Acts 18:18, but do not celebrate yet because something really heavy happens in Acts 18:18—Paul takes the Nazirite vow. You say, "What is that all about?" It is in Acts 18:18. The whole verse says:

"Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea—" (Acts 18:18).

Where is Cenchrea? Cenchrea is right here. It is near Corinth. Again, these are real places of geography.



So Paul leaves Corinth. He gets to Cenchrea, and he does something called the Nazirite vow. It does not say "the Nazirite vow," it just says "the vow." Acts 18:18 says,

"—In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow" (Acts 18:18).

This is something called the Nazirite vow. It is a vow that you could take as a devout Jew. There were certain things you had to do, such as the haircut, and other things, I think. When you took it, it was signifying that you were serving God in a very unique way. Everybody serves God, but this was something very unique. There was something very special about it.

It is called the Nazirite vow. The whole thing is described in Numbers 6:18:

""The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head of hair at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings"" (Numbers 6:18).

That is why Paul is now traveling to Jerusalem. He is bringing his hair to the centralized sanctuary, which was the temple. That is why it brings this whole thing up here. We read this and we say, "What is this? What is this Nazirite vow? I thought Paul said we weren't under the law. It looks to me like he is putting himself under the law." Here is our explanation from Arnold Fruchtenbaum:

"Freedom from the Mosaic Law means two things: First, it means believers are free from the obligation to obey any of the 613 commandments;..."⁶

So you, as a New Testament Christian, are not under the Mosaic Law. You are under the law of Christ, but not the Mosaic Law. You do not have to obey the 613 commandments given at Mount Sinai—the Ten Commandments and the 613 total commandments building around those ten. How did the Ten apply? The 613 commandments told you.

We are free from the Law, Paul tells us. We are not under Law, but we are under grace. What does that mean?

"Freedom from the Mosaic Law means two things: First, it means believers are free from the obligation to obey any of the 613 commandments; but second, freedom from the law also means that they are free to observe those things that they choose to observe as long as they do not contradict the laws of Messiah."⁷

So what are we under? We are under the law of the Spirit. Romans 8 uses that expression very early on in the chapter. We are also under the law of Christ. You will see that in Galatians 6. We are under a completely different system that looks similar to the Law of Moses at points, but is not the Law of Moses. What that means is that you do

⁶ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 374-75.

⁷ Ibid.

not have to obey the 613 commandments from the Law of Moses. Your focus is on the law of Christ.

But let us say you want to go back to the Law of Moses and obey certain things. Are you free to do that if you choose to? As long as you do not say that everybody has to do it, you are free to do it.

"...second, freedom from the law also means that they are free to observe those things that they choose to observe as long as they do not contradict the laws of Messiah. Paul [who talked about the end of the Law more than anyone else] saw no contradiction between keeping Jewish customs and living out his new faith...The difference between Paul and the Judaizers [those would be the Pharisees that were always demanding that people go back under the Law of Moses] was that the Judaizers tried to impose these things upon the Gentile believers. While choosing to practice many Jewish customs, Paul refused to impose them on the Gentiles."⁸

Why did Paul do this and go back to this part of the Mosaic Law called the Nazirite vow? Because he was Jewish. That was his heritage, and he wanted to take the Nazirite vow. He said, "I am just going to go ahead and follow through with that as part of the culture of Judaism. I am not saying everyone has to do it. I am not saying the Gentiles have to do it, but I am a Jew and I can do it, and I choose to do it."

That is what freedom from the Law means. You do not have to obey the 613 commandments from Mount Sinai, but if you volitionally choose to go back and celebrate or participate in some of those things, go for it. A lot of groups get together—Messianic congregations, they are sometimes called—and they want to go back and volitionally participate in some of the feasts that are given in Leviticus 23. Is there some big problem with doing that? Of course not. You can do that if you want. If you are Jewish, you might have a particular pull in that direction, but the problem is when you say that everyone has to do it, and that if they do not do it, they are outside of God's will. Then it is a problem because we are not under the Law anymore. We are under a different principle called grace.

That is what Paul is doing here. He had a very high opinion of the Nazirite vow. He wanted to keep his commitment. That is why he is getting his hair cut, and keeping the hair so that it can be burned there in the central sanctuary. He is volitionally fulfilling Numbers 6:18.

Now, there are other examples of Paul doing this. Paul keeps saying that we are not under the Law; we are free from the Law. But he will do this in Acts 16:3: he will circumcise Timothy. This is a guy who always said that the finished work of Christ puts to an end the animal sacrificial system. He said that over and over again. But in Acts 21:26, he participated in an animal sacrifice. Did you know that that is coming in Acts 21?

⁸ Ibid.

Why would he do this if we are not under the Law? For the reasons Arnold says: you can practice these things if you want to, as a Jew. He also did it, I believe, to avoid being an offense to the Jews. He would write this in 1 Corinthians 9:20:

"To the Jews I become as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;" (1 Corinthians 9:20).

Paul understood that if he was, as a Jew, flagrantly disregarding things in the Mosaic Law, like circumcision or animal sacrifices, they would not listen to a word that he had to say about Jesus. It is really hard to reach people whom you are offending. Did you know that? That is why Paul is always talking about the weaker conscience versus the stronger conscience—do not flaunt your freedom in Christ in the presence of someone with a weaker understanding, because you are tearing down your brother. That is what Paul gets at many times in his epistles. The gospel is already an offense (Galatians 5:11). It is hard to preach that message with another offense added to the already existing offense.

When Paul was around the Jews, to gain a hearing, he played by the rules if he might have an opportunity to get a hearing to preach Christ. That becomes another reason why sometimes in the Book of Acts, Paul put himself back under the Law. Are we justified by the Law? He would fight you to the death on that one. Are we sanctified by the Law? He would fight you to the death on that one. Do I have to go under the Law to join the church? He would fight you to the death on that one. But when it came to volitionally placing himself under the Law so as to not offend those he was trying to reach, he would do it.

It is like the church world. There are churches where, if you preach in the church and you do not have a suit and tie on, the people will not listen to a single word you say, because all they can focus on is that you are violating their tradition. I have been in those kinds of churches. There are other churches where, if you put a suit and tie on, they are offended because they are so casual. You can preach until the cows come home and all they can think about is how you are violating their tradition.

So what do you do? You just play by the rules. If you want me to wear a suit and tie, I will put it on, if that means I get an opportunity for you to hear me without being offended. I will put the suit and tie on. What if I am in a church where they do not want you to wear a suit and tie? I will leave my suit and tie at home. I will go casual. If I have to be casual so that you are not focusing on the offense and so that I can give to you the gospel, that is a small price to pay. I will accommodate you.

That is what Paul is doing here in these examples in the Book of Acts, where he seems to put himself back under the law. That ends our ministry in Corinth. That is what happened. Then we have a couple of Wednesdays left where we will cover his Ephesus ministry and then his return to Antioch.