

February 21, 2021

“Called to Explain”
Lesson 4 of Unit

Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26, Rom. 16:3-4

Intro

All four passages in today’s study feature Priscilla and Aquilla. Paul first meets them in Corinth about AD 51. They have moved to Corinth (southern Greece) from Rome (central western Italy). The reasons for the move will be developed in the lesson on Acts 18. This couple was highly influential to both individuals and the church overall in the early decades of the church’s growth following Jesus’ resurrection.

Read Acts 18:1-3

1. vs. 1: Paul left Athens

He has been talking with Greek philosophers about Jesus and the resurrection (ch.17)

He did develop believers in Athens (17:34), but did not establish a church

He is traveling by himself

He left Silas and Timothy in Berea (17:13-14)

He travels to Corinth, about 65 miles to the southwest

Corinth is the seat of the Roman government in the area

It is a place of much business

It has a religious background, of both pagan and Jewish believers

It has a synagogue (18:4)

Paul tries to find a synagogue to teach at in every city he comes to

2. vs. 2: Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla

Aquila means “eagle” in Latin; he is a Jew

He originally came from Pontus

Greek region on south shore of Black Sea

Roughly 500 miles from Pontus to Corinth

Many Jewish merchants lived there

Priscilla is a nickname for Prisca

Assumed but not known for sure if she came from a Jewish family

Not known if she was from Rome, or moved there from elsewhere

They are from Rome, but had to leave

Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave city in 49 AD

Some Jews in Rome were converted to Christianity

Some Jews had not converted

Control of synagogues was hotly contested

Growing tensions led to violence

Claudius banned all Jews, not just the violent ones

Paul meets these two about 2 years after they’ve left Rome

3. vs. 3: Paul stays with them and makes tents with them

First time we've seen Paul's job skills mentioned

First time we've seen him work at a trade for a living

Apparently, he did this also in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9, 2 Thess. 3:7-10)

All rabbis of this period also had a professional skill: carpentry, baking, etc

Income-producing skill is a benefit for Paul, Priscilla, and Aquilla

Allows them to be self-supporting

Freedom to relocate as needed

Tentmaking was hard work

Material was leather or woven goat hair

Very durable material, used in semi-permanent structures

Read Acts 18:18-21

1. vs. 18: Paul stays in Corinth for a time

He stayed about 18 months

He leaves Corinth and goes to Syria

Priscilla and Aquilla go with him

They are always mentioned together in Scripture

This would indicate they worked together always, in business and the gospel

Paul has his hair cut off before leaving

The verse says it is because of a vow

Nazarite vows require no cutting of the hair

Paul could be cutting it here because his vow has been completed

Sometimes cutting the hair indicates the taking up of a vow

The verse doesn't indicate which of these (or something else) was the reason

2. vs. 19: The sail from Corinth to Ephesus

Ephesus is on the southwest coast of Turkey

The trip is about 350 miles across part of the Mediterranean Sea

Ephesus is a significant city

Capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor

Third-largest city in Roman Empire (!)

In Paul's day, Ephesus has large Jewish population with an established synagogue

Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquilla in Ephesus

He goes to the synagogue alone (He himself went...)

Paul reasons with the Jews in the synagogue

3. vs. 20-21: Paul has a positive impact on the Ephesians in the synagogue

They ask him to stay longer

Paul declines, as he is on his way to Jerusalem

He appears to be trying to get there for Passover

He promises to return “if it is God’s will”

He does return to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 20)

Read Acts 18:24-26

1. vs. 24: Priscilla and Aquilla are still in Ephesus

Apollos comes to Ephesus from Alexandria

Alexandria’s library was famous

Alexandria was a leading center for Greek-thinking Judaism

The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) was translated in Alexandria

Apollos is called “learned”-- likely given where he is from

He possess a “thorough knowledge of the Scriptures”

This would likely include a systematic interpretation of Scriptures

He doesn’t just know of the Scriptures or know them casually

He is a student of Scripture

2. vs. 25: Apollos is speaking about Jesus “accurately”

This shows that the gospel has traveled to Alexandria (Egypt)

Apollos has obviously become a Christian

He speaks “with great fervor” about Jesus

He speaks “accurately” about Jesus

His knowledge of the full gospel is incomplete

He “knew only the baptism of John”

John’s baptism was one of repentance

It does not include the baptism or gift of the Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit is much deeper and life-changing than just knowing a great amount of information about Jesus and the OT Scriptures

3. vs. 26: Priscilla and Aquilla hear Apollos speaking “boldly” in the synagogue

Based on what he says, they understand his incomplete understanding of the gospel

They deal with him in the most kind and thoughtful manner

They invite him to their home—away from all other ears

They explain “the way of God more adequately”

This gives Apollos a chance to ask questions

This intervention on their part helps ensure the true / complete gospel is known/preached

Apollos obviously accepts the instruction

He is one of the foremost preachers of the gospel in the NT

How important it was that Priscilla and Aquilla did what they did

Read Romans 16:3-4

1. vs. 3: Priscilla and Aquilla have now apparently moved to Rome

Paul tells the church there to greet these two

He calls them “my co-workers in Christ Jesus”

He acknowledges both of them as people who worked with him in ministry

2. vs. 4: He commends the couple as ones who “risked their lives for me”

In Corinth he had to go before a proconsul

He avoided punishment, but the synagogue leader was beaten

Perhaps Paul narrowly avoided a beating because of Priscilla and Aquilla

In Ephesus, a riot took place led by silversmiths who made idols

Priscilla and Aquilla (and others) prevented Paul from trying to speak to the crowd

Possibly there were other dangerous situations that they helped Paul escape from

Paul acknowledges his gratitude to them for their help and service

He says the Gentile churches also are grateful to them

For helping and saving Paul

For their ministry to Gentiles (Corinth and Ephesus had Gentile members)

Application: Priscilla and Aquilla are mentioned repeatedly, showing their influence on the early church.

They are noteworthy first because they worked and ministered as a team. This is a great example of a Godly marriage. They were also willing to move where and when God directed them to, and had a skill that allowed them to move freely without financial concerns. They were obedient to God in fulfilling the Great Commission, working with Paul so closely he calls them his “co-workers”.

Whatever our relationship status (married or single), we are also God’s people, and therefore both connected to and responsible for each other.

Prayer: Father God, we ask for help to minister to each other, and those not yet a part of Your kingdom, in ways that will be fruitful. Help us to have wisdom in how we both encourage and correct another, and in how we respond to others’ encouragement and correction. In Jesus’ name, Amen.