

Establishing the Brethren at Corinth

“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”
—Acts 18:9,10

PAUL WAS FORCED TO hurriedly leave Macedonia because of persecution. After departing, he sent a message to his two traveling companions, Silas and Timothy, that they should join him in Athens, where they would resume their journey together. As circumstances changed, both brethren were considerably delayed, and when Paul could wait no longer he went on alone to Corinth. Soon after he reached that city he began working at his trade of tent-making in order to secure a living for a while. This led him to become acquainted with fellow tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla. This Jewish couple were new arrivals in Corinth, as a result of the edict to expel all Jews from Rome enacted by Emperor Claudius.—Acts 18:1-3

No doubt these circumstances were directed by God, who desired that these two devoted brethren should come to a better knowledge of his plan, and gain an understanding of his calling through association with the apostle. Paul was invited to live in their home, and stayed with them for nearly two years. (vss. 11,18) There, they labored together in their common trade and enjoyed the wonderful fellowship of the Gospel. It is likely that Aquila and Priscilla were the first brethren in Corinth to learn of God's plan, and to be baptized into the body of Christ.

They also were of great assistance to Paul in his ministry there. The Scriptures tell of their devotion and zeal for the Truth. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house." (Rom. 16:3-5) This salutation is a fitting tribute to their characters, and an evidence of readiness to lay down their lives for Paul, their brother in Christ. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Those early Christians were severely put to the test, and have left a legacy of their brotherly love in action.

FAITHFUL BRETHREN

These faithful friends were also addressed by Paul in his final letter to Timothy: "Salute Prisca and Aquila." (II Tim. 4:19) Later, when Paul went to Ephesus, he stayed again with Aquila and Priscilla, who had evidently moved to that city from Corinth. From their home, he wrote to the brethren

in Corinth saying, “The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” (I Cor. 16:19) From this we note that Aquila and Priscilla’s home was one of the places where the brethren held meetings. They served willingly in every way and indeed were true brethren in Christ.

The importance of such brethren cannot be over-emphasized. The work being done by God during this Gospel Age does not rest solely upon the shoulders of more prominent individuals. This lesson is emphasized in the *Daily Heavenly Manna* for March 8, which brings to our attention the text, “Now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him.”—I Cor. 12:18

The comments on this Scripture read: “No member of the body of Christ can say that he has no need for another member, and no member may say that there is nothing whatever that he can do in the service of the body. Under the guidance of our glorious Head each member who is filled with His Spirit, and desirous of serving Him, may do so. When the time for rewards shall have come, who knows how much of the usefulness of Paul and Apollos may be accredited to some of the humble ones, such as Aquila and Priscilla, who in various ways ministered to and encouraged and supported their abler brethren in the Lord’s work.”—Reprints, page 3152

PAUL GOES TO THE SYNAGOGUE

Going back to Paul’s arrival in Corinth, we read in Acts 18:4 of his initial ministry in the synagogue. His reasoning on the Scriptures apparently was

forceful, but not controversial, and he was able to persuade both Jews and Gentiles who heard his message. It appears from this that Paul was very careful in his presentation of the Gospel of Christ at the outset of his work in Corinth. The memory of experiences during his first journey when over-zealous Jews incited riots against him, and stoned him nearly to the point of death, as well as his recent experiences in Thessalonica and Berea, caused him to be more subdued and cautious when preaching the Truth.

Silas and Timothy finally arrived in Corinth from Macedonia with a good report for Paul. The brethren in that region, particularly in Thessalonica, were suffering severe persecution at the hands of both Jews and Gentiles. However, they were receiving these experiences well, and were growing in grace and knowledge. Paul later told of the comfort he received from this report. "Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, [was sent] to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you. Therefore, brethren, we

were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith.”—I Thess. 3:2-7

This report was so encouraging to Paul that it inspired him to speak more boldly to the Jews in the synagogue at Corinth concerning Jesus. The account states, “When Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” (Acts 18:5) This more straightforward message had an immediate and expected effect. Many Jews began to ridicule and oppose Paul, blaspheming him violently. He sternly denounced them, and said that he would no longer preach to them, but from that time forward his message would go to the Gentiles.—vs. 6

However, some had already accepted Paul’s Gospel message. Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue, and his family, were among these. They believed that Jesus was Christ, the Messiah, and were baptized. Paul no longer used the synagogue, but instead accepted the offer of a home adjoining the synagogue for a meeting place. It was the home of a man named Justus, a sincere worshipper of God. There Paul continued to preach to all who would listen, and “many of the Corinthians . . . believed” the Gospel.—vss. 7,8

PAUL ENCOURAGED BY THE LORD

It is evident that the constant verbal abuse and life-threatening experiences which accompanied Paul’s missionary work up to this time was taking its toll on the apostle. Paul needed some encouragement, and God overruled circumstances for its accomplishment. Our opening Scripture states that the Lord spoke to Paul at night by a vision. He encouraged him not to be afraid, but to continue

speaking the message. The Lord further assured Paul that he would be with him, and no hurt would come to him. The Lord knew Paul was concerned that his speaking out boldly would result in a potentially hazardous situation. However, Paul was given assurance that in Corinth God would overrule the opposition. His preaching would have its desired effect, because the search for God's people in that city was to be very fruitful, resulting in many who would be called into the body of Christ.

We find that God was true to his promise. No one hurt Paul during his stay in Corinth, although his preaching continued to make enemies, especially among the Jews. By the Lord's overruling, protection was given to Paul through the magistrates and civil rulers of Corinth. As he continued his preaching, certain Jews, including Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, decided they should take action against Paul. They brought him before Gallio, a Romans officer, and said, "This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law." (Acts 18:12,13) Paul was set to defend himself, but to his surprise, there was no need for him to do so. Gallio spoke up and said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters." (vss. 14,15) Gallio must have had some previous acquaintance with the Jews and their law. He would not be deceived into believing that Paul was violating any civil law, and he sent them away.

Generally, when accusations of this sort were leveled against Paul, he would bear the brunt of a

beating or imprisonment, being considered the cause of the turmoil or riot. However, on this occasion things were different. It was Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, who was seized and summarily beaten, while Paul went unhurt. Indeed, God did keep his promise, and in this instance allowed the accusers and attackers to suffer.—Acts 18:17

When some take courses contrary to God's will, corrective lessons may come to them as a result. These measures are to help them realize the error of their ways. Sosthenes must have soon realized that the protection given to Paul by the Roman officers was directed by God. It is very possible that he talked with Crispus, the former ruler of the synagogue, who had been converted and was aware that Paul had been assured of God's special protection. Sosthenes, pondering upon this experience, and no doubt receiving earnest sympathy from Paul, evidently began to attend the meetings, and soon was converted. Several years later, while at Ephesus, Paul mentioned Sosthenes when writing to the brethren at Corinth. His opening greeting reads: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother." (I Cor. 1:1) This dear brother and beloved member of the class in Corinth had by that time come to Ephesus to assist Paul in the work.

SATAN UNSUCCESSFUL

This obvious attempt by the Adversary to disrupt Paul's work was unsuccessful. Not only had he been protected by the overruling power of God, but the very one who had brought accusation against him was converted and became a helper in the Gospel.

Encouraged, Paul continued his witnessing efforts in Corinth, during which he also established a congregation in Cenchrea, a port city just to the east. We do not know much about the brethren from that city, except for a sister named Phebe, who lived in Cenchrea, but later traveled to Rome. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul wrote: “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”—Rom. 16:1,2

Sometime before his brief stay in Cenchrea, Paul had evidently taken a Nazarite vow. Now, however, while in Cenchrea, the period of his vow had come to an end, and in accordance with the law of the Nazarites, he shaved his head. (Acts 18:18; Num. 6:18-21) We do not know conclusively the reason for the vow, or how long a period Paul placed himself under it. We might speculate that it involved his awareness of the upcoming difficult and hazardous trip to Jerusalem, nearly all of which would be by sea, and cover a distance of nearly 1,000 miles.

BRIEF STOP IN EPHEBUS

Finally, Paul left the brethren of these new congregations in Corinth and Cenchrea, and set sail for Syria. Aquila and Priscilla sailed with Paul, their destination being Ephesus, which was a port of call along the way. Paul took advantage of the ship’s layover in Ephesus to go to the synagogue and reason with the Jews. They desired that he stay longer, but he could not do so at that time. He “bade

them farewell,” but promised, “I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.” (Acts 18:19-21) Paul did indeed return to Ephesus on his third missionary tour, and spent the better part of three years there.—Acts 19:1,8,10

As Paul was completing this second journey and preparing for his third, another servant of the Lord, named Apollos, came through Ephesus. He was a Jew from Alexandria, well versed in the Scriptures and a gifted orator. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and preached this message with boldness in the synagogues of the Jews. He was fervent in spirit and understood many scriptures as having had their fulfillment in Jesus. However, his knowledge was incomplete as he only knew of the baptism of John. When he went to the synagogue at Ephesus and spoke about Jesus being the Messiah, he became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla. They had taken up residence in Ephesus following Paul’s departure, and continued to expound the Truth as opportunity afforded. They befriended Apollos, taking him aside and explaining more accurately God’s plan, in particular the baptism of Christ.—Acts 18:24-26

After coming to a more complete understanding of the doctrine of baptism, Apollos told Aquila and Priscilla of his desire to go to Corinth, in the province of Achaia. They wrote to the brethren at Corinth and exhorted them to receive him, which they did. Apollos was a welcome addition to their congregation. With his talent for speaking, and enthusiasm for the Truth, he helped fill the void left by Paul’s departure. (vss. 27,28) Once again, we see how the Lord amply provided various servants to continue the search for his people.

PAUL'S JOURNEY CONCLUDES

Meanwhile, when Paul arrived at Caesarea, and had “gone up” to Jerusalem, he “saluted the church” there. Then, leaving Jerusalem, Paul finally came to his journey’s end, arriving at his home class at Antioch, in Syria. (Acts 18:22) We can be certain that the brethren were happy to see him, as it had been more than three years since he had left Antioch with Silas as a fellow traveler. Later, Timothy had joined them in Derbe, Luke in Troas, and Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. Now Paul returned alone. Timothy and Silas had stayed in Corinth to help the brethren there. Luke was in Philippi, and Aquila and Priscilla remained at Ephesus.

For what length of time Silas remained at Corinth, we do not know. He may have returned to Jerusalem after a short while, as he is no longer mentioned as Paul’s traveling companion or helper. Silas, also called Silvanus, was later mentioned by the Apostle Peter, and apparently became his assistant until Peter finished his earthly sojourn.—I Pet. 5:12

During his third journey, Paul wrote to the brethren in Corinth on two occasions. In his second letter, written from Macedonia, he reminded the brethren of the preaching done in their midst by himself, Timothy and Silas. (II Cor. 1:19) These three brethren had done a remarkable work in Corinth. God had used them to search out the people for his name whom he had known were in that city. A large congregation of brethren in Christ was firmly established there because of their faithful, courageous, and tireless efforts in proclaiming the Gospel message. ■