

# **Apollos: Mighty in the Scriptures** **(Acts 18)**

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

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## **I. Background and Introduction**

- a. We saw how Paul and Barnabas embarked from Antioch on Paul's first missionary trip, and they returned there at the end (**Acts 13-14**).
  - i. I encourage everyone to follow his route on a map that lays this out, as typically found in study type Bibles.
- b. After the Council in Jerusalem (**Acts 15**), Paul embarked on his second missionary journey. He and Silas traveled via inland route to revisit some of the churches planted on Paul's first missionary journey. They visited the churches in Lystra (where they were joined by Timothy), Derby and Iconium, then continued westward, to the end of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).
  - i. Paul had a vision to take the gospel even further west, into Europe. He sailed west to Macedonia (region in northern Greece) and preached there in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.
  - ii. Paul then is sent south to Achaia and preaches to a philosophical audience at the Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Athens.
- c. In the current lesson, we continue with Paul's second missionary journey, where he continues south in Achaia to Corinth and then stops in Ephesus on his way back to Antioch.
  - i. After returning to Antioch, Paul embarks on his third missionary journey, where he will return to Ephesus.
- d. Reasons why this part of Paul's journey is important to us include:
  - i. Paul spent quite a bit of time in those two places.
    1. He spent one and a half years in Corinth on his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:11**), and then three more months on his third missionary journey (**Acts 20:3**)
    2. He was in Ephesus for three years (**Acts 20:31**).
  - ii. Being familiar with Paul's time in these places will help us to better appreciate other parts of the New Testament, including:
    1. Paul's important 'farewell address' to the Ephesian elders, in **Acts 20**.

2. Three of Paul's letters, written to the Christians left behind in these places (**Ephesians, 1 & 2 Corinthians**). People and events are referred to in those letters that are mentioned here in **Acts**.
  3. Decades later, Jesus will address the church in Ephesus, one of the seven churches of Asia Minor, in **Revelation 2**.
  4. Paul is in Corinth when writing his letter to the **Romans**, as we can tell from the names he mentions in **Romans 16**.
- iii. In this chapter, we are introduced to Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos.
  - iv. Paul's interaction with Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, in **Acts 18** gives us a clear chronological anchor for Paul's missionary journeys, and for when the first epistle of Paul in New Testament was written (**1 Thessalonians**), based on records from secular history.

## II. Paul Preaches in Corinth

### a. Read **Acts 18:1-4**.

#### i. Storyline:

1. Paul (without Silas and Timothy, who are still in Macedonia in the north) departs Athens and goes to Corinth.
2. There he meets the husband-and-wife team, Aquila and Priscilla. Like Paul, they are tentmakers by trade.
  - a. Aquila was a Jew. He and his wife had been expelled recently from Rome by the emperor Claudius (along with the other Jews).
3. Paul follows the pattern we have seen before: preaching first in the synagogue and converting both Jews and Gentiles (here, devout Greeks).

#### ii. **Question:** Is there any historical evidence of Jews being expelled from Rome at this time?

1. From Roman historian Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (who lived c. 69-122 AD):
  - a. "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [*Claudius*] expelled them from Rome."

- b. (Source: Suetonius, *Lives of the 12 Caesars*, chapter 25; translated by J.C. Rolfe)
          2. Keep in mind that Claudius reigned as Caesar c. AD 41-54.
          3. The words “chrestus” and “christos / χριστός” (Greek word we transliterate as Christ) are so similar that many scholars have thought that Suetonius was likely referring to Christ.
  - iii. Note here and elsewhere throughout the Book of Acts that Luke (the author) provides quite a bit of detail regarding names of people and geographic locations.
    1. He gives an accurate historical account, including plenty of details.
- b. Read **Acts 18:5-11**.
  - i. Storyline:
    1. Paul is rejoined in Corinth by Silas and Timothy from Macedonia.
    2. Paul is persecuted by the Jews and tells them he will now continue preaching to the Gentiles.
    3. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and all his household come to faith.
    4. Paul is encouraged by a vision of the Lord to not fear, to keep preaching in that city. The Lord will protect him from injury, “for I have many people in this city.”
    5. He continues there for 18 months.
  - ii. Although I don’t tend to think of Paul as being someone who was fearful, here he needs to be strengthened and encouraged to continue to speak fearlessly.
    1. The encouraging statement he received in the vision, “I will be with you” reminds me of what Jesus told the apostles at the time the Great Commission was given in **Matthew 28** and also what Joshua was told by the Lord in **Joshua 1**.
      - a. If the presence of the Lord goes with us, as we follow Him and His commands, we should have nothing to fear!
  - iii. About “Crispus, the synagogue ruler”.

1. **Question:** Is this man mentioned anywhere else in New Testament?
2. **Answer:** Yes. Read **1 Corinthians 1:1-2** and **1:10-14**.
  - a. Paul recalled that he was the one who personally had baptized *Crispus*, in the beginning.
3. **1 Corinthians 1:17** is often taken out of context to suggest that Paul did not think baptism to be very important.
  - a. “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel....” (**1 Corinthians 1:17**, NKJV)
  - b. Yet, consider how the response to the gospel being preached in Corinth is first described, in **Acts 18:8**.
    - i. “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” (**Acts 18:8**, NKJV)
  - c. Also, consider the point Paul makes to the Corinthians regarding Christian baptism being foreshadowed in the escape from slavery in Egypt.
    - i. “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea....” (**1 Corinthians 10:1-2**, NKJV)
  - d. The ‘Bottom line’ regarding Paul’s statement in **1 Corinthians 1:17** regarding baptism:
    - i. The normal response to the gospel being preached in Corinth, as we have seen elsewhere in **Acts** from **Acts 2** onward, is belief and baptism.
    - ii. Paul was focused on preaching. He personally baptized a few of the people in Corinth (including Crispus), but the rest were baptized by others.
    - iii. The issue being addressed by Paul in **1 Corinthians 1** is a tendency toward a sectarian spirit: identifying more with a human leader or

group rather than simply identifying with Christ and the one church.

1. One of the things I appreciate about the upcoming generation of Christians is that they strike me as having a greater interest in a more unified, *non-sectarian* approach to the Christian faith (versus my own generation and the prior one).
2. Let us all strive to identify ourselves as simply Christians, rather than as members of some particular group, sect or denomination.

c. Read **Acts 18:12-17**.

- i. Paul is brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia.
- ii. Gallio, of course, has no interest in getting involved in a religious dispute between Jews.
  1. As we discussed in the prior lesson, from historical records, the time of Gallio corresponds to 50-51 AD. Therefore, **Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians** which was written from Corinth, would have been written around that same time (c. 50 A.D.). Consequently, Paul's first New Testament epistle would have been written about 17 years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
    - a. This has obvious implications in refuting the claims of liberal scholars and Bible skeptics who claim that the Christian message was changed over time and not written down until many decades after the time of Jesus.
  2. [**Correction:** When recording the audio lesson, I had assumed from reading **1 Thessalonians 3:1** that Paul was in Athens when he wrote **1 Thessalonians**. Since recording that message, I noticed in **1 Thessalonians 3:6** Paul speaks of Timothy having rejoined him (by the time he was writing this letter). However, in **Acts 18:5** it indicates that Timothy and Silas did not rejoin Paul until Paul was in Corinth, after he had departed from Athens. Therefore, it appears that Paul wrote **1 Thessalonians** *from Corinth*, after he had departed from Athens, on his second missionary journey.]

d. Read **Acts 18:18-23**.

- i. Paul continues “a good while” in Corinth.
- ii. He starts to head back toward Antioch in Syria.
  1. He stops to take a vow and cut off his hair in Cenchrea, in Achaia (near Corinth).
    - a. This sounds like it is some kind of Jewish vow of separation to the Lord, similar to what it says in **Numbers 6**, where someone cuts off their hair at the end of the set-aside period of the vow.
- iii. Priscilla and Aquila sail with Paul. They stop at Ephesus.
  1. Paul preaches in the synagogue there.
  2. Priscilla and Aquila remain in Ephesus, while Paul continues on to Antioch. He wants to go to Jerusalem for the ‘feast’, and departs, but promises to return.
- iv. Paul sails back to Caesarea, presumably visits Jerusalem, then he continues on to Antioch.
  1. **Acts 18:22** marks the end of Paul’s second missionary journey.
  2. **Acts 18:23** starts his third missionary journey, going the inland route again back through Asia Minor to strengthen the disciples there.
  3. While people like to break down Paul’s travels into three distinct missionary journeys, it almost seems as if the second and third trips run together (separated only by a brief stop-over in Antioch).

### III. Apollos

- a. Read **Acts 18:24-28**.
- b. What we learn about Apollos:
  - i. He was Jewish, from Alexandria in Egypt (a noted center of Greek learning).
  - ii. He came to Ephesus, where Priscilla and Aquilla were left, after Paul’s departure.
  - iii. He was “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures”.

- iv. He believed in Jesus, yet only knew of the baptism of John the Baptist. He did not know of the baptism that is in the name of Jesus, the one introduced by Peter in **Acts 2:38**.
  - v. He spoke boldly in the synagogue about Jesus.
  - vi. He had the humility to learn the faith more accurately from Priscilla and Aquila.
  - vii. After departing Ephesus (in Asia Minor), he crossed over to Achaia (Greece).
- c. The humility of Apollos.
- i. Although a gifted speaker and a man “mighty in the Scriptures”, he was willing to learn from others, to fill in the gaps he had in his understanding.
  - ii. This is a test of who is a truth-seeker versus just a stubborn religious person.
  - iii. Unfortunately, many are open to learning early in their journey, but after a certain point get hardened in terms of what they have been taught and are not willing to consider things they may have missed.
    - 1. Most of us are taught a combination of the original, historic faith handed down by the apostles, plus the innovations or interpretations that popped up later. These things may have been introduced centuries ago or, in some cases, were introduced only recently by the group we are now associated with.
    - 2. I have heard **2 Timothy 3:14** taken out of context to imply that I need to hold on to what I was originally taught.
      - a. “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them....” (**2 Timothy 3:14**, NKJV)
      - b. However, Paul is speaking to Timothy, telling him to hold onto the things HE was taught (the original faith, handed down by Paul and the other apostles).
        - i. Thank God that Apollos did not stubbornly hang on to what he had been taught at first, but instead was willing to learn.
      - c. “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it

necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for *the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*" (**Jude 3**, NKJV)

3. It has been a journey to be open to rediscovering what I might have missed along the way. Many here have had to reconsider things we were taught in the past regarding things like:
  - a. What happens after we die?
  - b. What was the original gospel message?
  - c. Can someone who is 'saved', later lose his or her salvation?
  - d. Does God want me to be happy and prosperous in this life?
  - e. The importance of baptism.
  - f. The permanence of marriage. Can someone who is divorced get remarried while their spouse is still living?
  - g. Head covering (and uncovering).
  - h. The role and importance of the Holy Spirit.
  - i. The relationship between what we do (our actions/works) and our salvation.
  - j. What does it mean, *practically*, to live a holy life and to be separate from the world?
4. A common 'spiritual disease' for those who have been Christians for many years is what I refer to as 'spiritual hardening of the arteries'. Over time, people can lose their flexibility, their willingness to reexamine what they have been taught, even when they receive more information.
  - a. **Challenge:** If you are someone who has been willing to reconsider what you have been taught in light of all the Scriptures and the historic faith, please *do not lose that truth-seeking spirit* as you get older!
5. Someone who was a good example to me of this spirit of being willing to learn things that I might have missed: King Josiah. In the process of restoring the temple, the workers discover a long-lost copy of 'the Book of the Law'. Rather than ignoring



what it says or making excuses, Josiah calls the nation to repent and embarks on a sweeping restoration, to comply with the things God commanded (but the nation had forgotten) as found in this Book of the Law.

- a. Read **2 Kings 22:1-13**
- b. Read **2 Kings 22:18-19**
- c. Read **2 Kings 23**
  - i. In restoring the temple, he finds a copy of the Law of Moses.
  - ii. He recognizes there are many things God's people are not doing.
  - iii. He humbles himself, repents, and calls the whole nation to repent!
  - iv. He renewed the covenant with all his heart and soul.
  - v. Josiah brought an end to idolatry and ritual prostitution, and restored proper observance of the Passover.
- d. We need to have a restoration attitude: if we find that we have missed something of spiritual significance, we will *change and embrace what God desires*.

6. **Challenge:** Are you eager to learn what you might have missed or misunderstood? Or are you just going to stubbornly hang on to whatever someone taught you at first?

- a. Let's have the truth-seeking, humble hearts of Apollos and Josiah!
- d. Apollos was an eloquent speaker.
  - i. We need more men who preach and teach the word of God who are eloquent and well-spoken.
  - ii. Unfortunately, there are a lot of false teachers in the Christian world who are very polished, professional speakers, far more skilled and disciplined in rhetorical style than I ever will be!
    1. However, all of us can strive to be "mighty in the Scriptures" as Apollos was.

- e. Apollos was “mighty in the Scriptures”.
  - i. He knew the Scriptures extremely well and used them to convince others that Jesus is the Christ.
    - 1. “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.” (**Acts 18:24**, NKJV)
    - 2. “...for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, *showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.*” (**Acts 18:28**, NKJV)
  - ii. **Questions:**
    - 1. Are you a person who is “mighty in the Scriptures”?
    - 2. Can you clearly demonstrate to an unbeliever from the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
    - 3. If the answer is “not yet”, are you striving to get there as soon as possible?
  - iii. The kingdom of God is in desperate need of men who can preach and teach as Apollos did. We need thousands of them. Also, we need sisters who know the Scriptures well enough to lead other women to the faith.
    - 1. “...For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (**Luke 12:48**, NKJV)
    - 2. **Challenge:** If God has given you a good mind and great opportunities to learn the Scriptures, what are you doing with what you have been given?
    - 3. Consider also the Parable of the Talents in **Matthew 25**, also (regarding the Lord expecting greater returns from those who have been given more).
  - iv. Apollos has been an inspiration and an upward call for me. He was able to show from the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus was the Christ who was foretold long ago. Therefore, this can be done, including by us!
    - 1. I was similarly inspired and challenged when I first read Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*.
      - a. He was able to masterfully prove the faith to Trypho, a Jew, using the Old Testament prophecies.

- b. I had never seen anyone do this in such a powerful way, and thereafter I wanted to become like Justin Martyr in terms of being able to prove the Christian faith from the Old Testament.
2. Example of the '*Prove It*' teaching series.
    - a. Several years ago, I was in a church where they were going through the **Book of Acts** on Sundays, and the preacher asked me for ideas about what we might do in our Wednesday evening meetings that might compliment that.
    - b. I had been reading the **Book of Acts**, the Old Testament prophecies, and early Christian apologists like Justin Martyr. Therefore, I suggested, "Why don't we show how the early Christians used the prophecies (in **Acts** and elsewhere) to prove the faith to unbelievers?"
    - c. The preacher asked me to put that together and gave me five sessions to do that. What came from that was the '*Prove It*' series, which has since been adapted to YouTube format and is posted on the Historic Faith teaching website.
      - i. There are segments in that series on:
        1. Prophecies about the Kingdom of God;
        2. Prophecies about the suffering and death of Jesus; and
        3. Prophecies about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the third day.
      - ii. The goal of the series is to prove the Christian faith beyond reasonable doubt by using the Old Testament prophecies.
      - iii. Although that approach is very different from way the gospel is generally presented today, that is how the apostles and Apollos did it!
  3. I want to become like Apollos, Peter, Paul, Stephen, Philip and Justin Martyr: able to prove the faith to unbelievers using the evidence of the Old Testament prophecies, written centuries before the time of Christ and fulfilled in detail by Jesus.

- f. How different is the man who devotes himself to knowing the Word of God.
- i. **Wisdom of Sirach** (sometimes this book is called **Ecclesiasticus**) is in the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. It was in the original King James Version (but was removed from most editions of the KJV just over 100 years ago).
    1. The additional Old Testament books included in the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles that are not included in modern Protestant versions are sometimes referred to as 'the Apocrypha' (meaning 'hidden') or 'the Deuterocanonical Books' (meaning of the second canon).
    2. When Christians encounter these books for the first, I often hear them say that their favorite is **Wisdom of Sirach**. It contains a lot of practical and wise sayings, similar to the **Proverbs**.
    3. Right before the passage, which we are about to read, at the end of **Wisdom of Sirach 38** is a moving statement regarding craftsmen, men who work with their hands with great skill. They are held up for blessing the world with what they do and for making things much more livable for all the rest of us. It also says that their prayer is in the skilled work that they do. (I think of our departed friend and brother Chris Traganos, who was a true professional craftsman.)
    4. After that, the subject shifts to the man who is devoted to studying the Law of the Lord; how different he is!
  - ii. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 39:1-11**.
    1. This passage presents a tremendous picture of one devoted to the Word of God.
    2. Being a person devoted to the Word of God is a high calling. It requires study, meditation, and discipline.
    3. This is not about becoming a bookworm or a religious hypocrite.
      - a. The man devoted to studying the Word of God also must be putting it into practice.
      - b. He will be especially mindful of his own sins, rather than becoming arrogant and looking down on others.

4. I encourage all of us to strive to be like the man held up in this inspiring passage.
  - a. The great enemy of this is the sin of laziness.
    - i. “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise....” (**Proverbs 6:6**, NKJV)
  - b. Another enemy is being caught up in the busyness of this world, leaving no time or space in our minds for the Word of God.
    - i. [*Regarding the third soil, in the Parable of the Sower*] “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the *cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*” (**Mark 4:18–19**, NKJV)
  - c. Those instructing others in the Word of God will be called to a higher standard.
    - i. “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” (**James 3:1**, NKJV)
- iii. I realize this way of life can be very challenging, especially for those who are responsible for taking care of small children. However, we need to press on and figure out how to do this to the best of our ability. Passages of Scripture that inspire me to persevere in devotion to the Word of God include:
  1. **Psalm 1**, where the man devoted to meditating on the Word of God day and night is said to be like a tree planted by streams of water. He will thrive under all circumstances.
  2. **Deuteronomy 8:3**, where it says, “...man shall not live by bread alone; but... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”
    - a. For us, the Word of God is to be like the manna that sustained the people of Israel every day on their journey through the Wilderness.
  3. **Matthew 4:4-7**, where Jesus, when tempted by Satan, responds three times by saying, “it is written...”, then proceeds to quote from the Scriptures.

- a. This is a great example of how we can defeat Satan by using the “sword of the Spirit, the Word of God” (**Ephesians 6:17**) when we are being tempted.
4. **Psalm 119:8-11** (designated **Psalm 118** in the LXX), where the young man can keep his way pure by hiding the word in his heart (memorizing Scripture) and keeping God’s instructions.
- g. **Closing Challenges:** Take inventory of your devotion to the Word of God. Where are you today? Are you becoming “mighty in the Scriptures”? Do you know how to effectively use the sword of the spirit to assault the strongholds of Satan?
    - i. Is laziness or distraction getting in the way?
    - ii. Do what you are able, and if married (especially with small children), step up and support your spouse in the challenges of life so that you both can be strong in the Word.
    - iii. Take stock of where you are, repent where you need to, and strive to walk in the path of Apollos: a man “mighty in the Scriptures”.