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Many Respond to the Good News in Corinth

18: 1-17

51-52 AD

Many respond to the Good News in Corinth DIG: Claudius' order was given in 50 AD after a Jewish riot in Rome over the preaching of Christ there. What else shows the Roman attitude toward Christianity (verses 12-17)? Would this help or hinder Christian witness? What happened to Crispus' successor, Sosthenes (see First Corinthians 1:1)? What effect might these two conversions have on the Jewish community? How might Paul feel about the beginning of his ministry at Corinth (First Corinthians 2:3)? How might the vision from God in verses 9-10 and the gift from the Philippians encourage him?

REFLECT: What missionaries are you supporting? What difference would it make if they were not supported by other believers? How might you begin to encourage some missionaries in this way? How has God brought encouragement to you? What are some of the particular circumstances or temptations you are enduring right now, challenges that might require you to be more concentrated in your submission to Messiah? How can you keep yourself constantly reminded of His presence in your life and of your sold-out devotion to Him?

After these things (to see [link click Cb - An Unknown God in Athens](#)), Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, because Claudius had commanded all Jewish people to leave Rome in 49 AD (18:1-2b). The expulsion is usually connected with the remark of Suetonius, "Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome" (Claudius 25:4); and it is presumed that the pagan Suetonius was speaking not of some otherwise unknown Chrestus but of *Christos*, and misspelled the word. If so, Suetonius (75-160 AD) is one of the earliest writers outside the New Covenant to mention **Jesus Christ**, and his expression, "instigation of *Christos*," would refer to disputes between Messianic and non-Messianic **Jews**. And **the Romans**, not knowing what was going on within the **Jewish** community, simply expelled all of them.⁴²¹ But that was short lived, and later the **Jews** returned to **Rome**. By the time **Paul** arrives in Rome in **Chapter 28**, there was a **Jewish** community in **Rome**.



Corinth was fifty miles west of Athens with some 750,000 people. In Paul's day **Corinth** was the largest, most cosmopolitan city of Greece. It was the capital of **the Roman** province of Achaia. **Corinth** was famous for being "the Bridge of Greece." Situated on the Corinthian Isthmus, the narrow neck of land that keeps southern Greece from becoming an island, its geographical position made it a key commercial center. The only overland trade route between northern and southern Greece passed through **Corinth**. It had two seaports, one on the Aegean Sea and one on the Adriatic Sea. Small ships were carried from one port to the other across the isthmus on a tramway, saving two hundred miles of treacherous sea travel.

It seems to have been **Paul's** deliberate policy to move purposefully from one strategic city-center to the next. What drew **him** to cities was probably that they contained the **Jewish** synagogues, the larger populations and influential leaders. So on **his First Missionary Journey he** visited **Salamis** and **Paphos** in **Cyprus**, and **Antioch, Iconium, Lystra** and **Derbe** in **Galatia**; on **his Second Missionary Journey he** evangelized **Philippi, Thessalonica** and **Berea** in **Macedonia**, and **Athens** and **Corinth** in **Achaia**; while during the greater part of **his Third Missionary Journey he** concentrated on **Ephesus**.⁴²² Therefore, each strategic location gave **it** potential as a center from which news of **Yeshua** could spread in all directions.

The depravity of the city: As in Athens, the religion of the **Corinthians** seems to have been primarily that of the traditional Greek gods. Towering some 1,900 feet above **Corinth** was the Acropolis, on top of which was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Each evening the temple's one thousand priestesses, who were ritual prostitutes, would descend from the temple to the town to engage its male citizens and visitors in "worship" of the goddess. In stark contrast to the sedate (by comparison) intellectual and cultural center of Athens, **Corinth** was city where none but the tough could survive. **Corinth** was the center of immorality, in fact, it was the most depraved city of the ancient world, characterized by drunkenness, dishonesty and debauchery. In the first-century world, to be called a

“Corinthian” did not mean you were from **Corinth** - it meant you were hooked on pleasure and sexual excess.⁴²³ So the name of **the city** became a verb. This was the kind of **city** that **Paul** came walked into.

The discouragement of Paul: When **Paul** arrived in **Corinth**, **he** was discouraged. The combination of loneliness, and the prospect of facing the depravity of **the city**, with its commerce and vice, accounts for the weakness and fear that gripped **the apostle** as **he** arrived to begin **his** ministry. Reflecting on **his** state of mind when **he** first arrived in **their city**, **Paul** later wrote to **the Corinthians**, “**I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling**” (**First Corinthians 2:3**). **Paul** also spoke of **his** trial in **his** first letter to **the Thessalonians**, writing from **Corinth**, **he** wrote: **Because of this, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and trouble, we were comforted about you by your faithfulness (First Thessalonians 3:7)**. **Their** faith was a beacon of hope in the darkness. Besides discouragement, **Paul** may have been physically ill, perhaps from the lingering effects of the flogging **he** received in **Philippi (16:22-24)**. Physical weakness often makes discouragement even worse.⁴²⁴

The companionship of friends: There **he** found a Jewish man named **Aquila** - a native of **Pontus**. **He** had been a resident of **Rome**, but had been compelled to leave **Italy** by an edict of **the Emperor Claudius** (see above). **He** came with **his wife Priscilla (18:2a)**. **She** is more frequently mentioned before **her husband (Acts 18:18 and 26; Romans 16:3; Second Timothy 4:19)**, which suggests that **she** was the more important figure from our perspective.⁴²⁵ **Luke** presents **five cameos** of important believing women in a variety of roles they assumed (see **Bd - Signs and Miracles Follow Peter: A closer look at Luke, Women and Ministry**). By this time both **Aquila** and **Priscilla** were believers, but we are not told how **they** were saved. Once again, **Luke** introduces two important characters in the story in a very casual way.

Paul went to see them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and began working, for by trade they were tent-makers (18:2c-3). **Paul** earned **his** own living (**First Corinthians 9:1-19**), even though **he** taught that those who proclaim the Good News are entitled to be supported by their fellow believers (**First Corinthians 9:14**). In observing **the Oral Law’s admonition, “Do not make the Torah . . . a spade with which to dig (which means, don’t use your knowledge of spiritual things as a means of getting rich)**, **he** went beyond the call of duty.

And because it was **his** pattern to do so, **Paul** was debating every **Shabbat** in the synagogue (**Romans 1:16**), trying to persuade both Jewish and God-fearing Greeks

(18:4). So **Paul** was able to reside with **Aquila** and **Priscilla**, support **himself** by sharing in **their** work, and enjoy **their** fellowship. Now began a period of evangelism in which **Aquila** and **Priscilla** no doubt assisted **Paul**, who was successful in **his** evangelism among both **Jews and God-fearing Gentiles** who attended **the synagogue**.⁴²⁶

The blessing of converts: Now when **Silas** and **Timothy** arrived from **Macedonia** they came to report on the condition of the church at **Thessalonica (First Thessalonians 3:6)**, to give **Paul** comfort (**First Thessalonians 3:7-10**), and to give **Paul** financial support from the **Philippian** church (**Second Corinthians 11:9** and **Philippians 4:14-17**). They also reported some malicious rumors that were being said about **Paul** in **First Thessalonians 2:3-6** and they had some unanswered questions concerning the return of **Christ** according to **First Thessalonians 4:13**. So it was at this point that **Paul** wrote **First Thessalonians**. A few weeks later **he** probably wrote **Second Thessalonians**.

The financial support given to **Paul** by the **Philippian** church allowed **him** to stop making a living by making tents and to be free to preach **the message** of the gospel during the week, **urgently testifying to the Jewish people that Yeshua is the Messiah. But when they resisted and reviled him, he shook out his garments** (in the traditional, dramatic **Jewish** gesture of rejection) and said: **Your blood be upon your own heads; for my part - I am clean!** In **Ezeki'el 3:16-19**, **ADONAI** tells **the prophet** that **he** will be guilty if **he** fails to warn the wicked person to leave **his** wicked ways, but if **he** does warn **him** **he** will be guiltless. **Paul** is, in effect, applying the passage to **himself** and saying, "I have done what I could to bring you the message of salvation; **you** choose to reject it at **your** peril. **From now on, I will go to the Gentiles**, which I would not do if **you** were responsive, but you give **me** no other choice. The gospel is especially for **you (Romans 1:16)**, but it will also save them" (**18:5-6**). This was a turning point for **Corinth**, now **Paul** would turn away from **the Jews** and emphasize **Gentile** evangelism.⁴²⁷

After leaving there, Paul went into the house of a man named Titius Justus, a God-fearer whose house was next door to the synagogue as an additional base for teaching. This was definitely a confrontational tactic. **Paul** had no intention of being intimidated or dropping out of sight. **He** continued to preach the gospel and to be very visible in the **Jewish** community. Believers today should consider following **his** example and making the saving message of **Yeshua** perfectly clear to **the Jewish people**. The wisdom of **Paul's** policy was evident when **Crispus, the synagogue leader, put his faith in the Lord, along with his whole household**. In fact, **Paul himself** immersed **Crispus (First Corinthians 1:14)**.⁴²⁸ That astounding conversion must have sent shock waves through **Corinth's Jewish** community, which watched in mounting fear as **many of the Gentile**

Corinthians, upon hearing, were believing and being immersed in a mikveh (18:7-8). Desperate to halt the rising tide of faith in **Yeshua** as **Messiah**, the **Jewish leaders** would soon haul **Paul** before the **Roman** authorities. Before that ordeal, however, the **Lord** provided the **apostle** with the most encouraging comfort - **He** came to **Paul Himself**.

Now the **Lord** said to **Paul** through a vision in the night (see **Bf - Peter's Vision: A closer look at visions or dreams**). This is the second of four times that **Paul** saw the **Lord** in a vision (9:5-6; here; 22:17-21 and 23:11). **Yeshua's** message was one of encouragement in light of the opposition both present and future. **ADONAI** said: **Do not be afraid, but continue speaking and do not be silent! For I am with you when two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst (Matthew 18:20) and no one shall attack you to harm you - many [of the elect] in this city are for Me.** So after the vision he stayed in Corinth a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them and establishing a church there (18:9-11).

The frustration of his enemies: But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia between 51 and 53 AD, according to an inscription from Delphi, there was an important factual landmark discovered that was very important in establishing the chronology of **Paul's** travels (Galatians 1:17-2:2). Desperate to halt the rising tide of faith in **Yeshua** as **Messiah**, the **Jewish leaders** made a united attack against **Paul** and brought him before the judgment seat. This was intended to be a trial. Their charge was: **This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law (18:12-13)**. It is obvious that in this appeal to the **proconsul** the **Jews** must have meant, not the Torah, but the **law of Rome**. Their contention was that though **Jews** had been banished from **Rome** as a measure of policy, **Judaism** as such was still a *religio licita*, tolerated and recognized by the **State**. **Rome** said that there could be one religion per recognized unit of people. Because **Judaism** was the recognized religion for the Jewish people, their claim was that the gospel was against the Torah and therefore was a new religion.⁴²⁹

Unlike the annually elected magistrates of the ancient **Roman** Republic, whose courts functioned with a formal jury, the **proconsul** was not bound by any specific criminal laws. **Gallio** was free to follow the rules of **Roman** law, he was not obligated to do so. It seems that he was given no general instructions from the central government about this matter. Therefore, for all those crimes not covered by **Roman** law, he was able to fall back on local custom or his own judgment.⁴³⁰

But when Paul was about to open his mouth and defend himself, **Gallio** interrupted and said to the **Jewish people**, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or a vicious crime,

there would be a reason to put up with you, O Jews. Gallio clearly had anti-Semitic overtones. **But since it is issues about words, names** (should **Yeshua** be called **the Messiah**), **and your own Jewish law, see to it yourselves. I do not wish to be a judge of these.**" This dispute was strictly **Jewish** and had nothing to do with **Roman law**. As far as **Gallio** was concerned the Good News was not distinct from **Judaism and he drove the Jews from the judgment seat**. Then **all the** anti-Semitic **Gentile** bystanders, seeing that **Gallio** was not interfering, **grabbed Sosthenes, the new synagogue leader, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat**. As **they** indulged in their anti-Semitic feelings, **Gallio paid no attention to these things (18:14-17).**⁴³¹ **Gallio's** refusal to take the **Jewish** case against **Paul** seriously or to prosecute **him** was extremely important for the future of the gospel. In effect, **he** passed a favorable verdict on the Christian faith and therefore established a significant precedent. From that point on, the gospel could not be charged with being an illegal religion, for its freedom to be practiced freely had been secured as the imperial policy.⁴³²

ADONAI provides in strange and wonderful ways! The Jews tried to force the **Roman** proconsul to declare the Christian faith illegal, but **Gallio** ended up doing just the opposite. By refusing to try the case, **Gallio** made it clear that Rome would not get involved in cases involving Jewish religious disputes. As far as **he** was concerned, **Paul** and **his** disciples had as much right as **the Jews** to practice **their** religion and share it with others.

In the book of **Acts**, **Luke** emphasizes the relationship between the **Roman** government and the Church. While it was true that the Great Sanhedrin (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lg - The Great Sanhedrin**) had forbid the apostles to preach (**4:17-21** and **5:40**), there is no evidence in **Acts** that **Rome** ever did so. In fact, in **Philippi (Acts 16:35-40)**, **Corinth** and **Ephesians (19:31)**, the **Roman** officials were not only tolerant but also cooperative. **Paul** knew how to use **his Roman** citizenship wisely so that the government worked for **him** and not against **him**, and he was careful not to accuse the government or try to escape its authority (**25:10-12**).⁴³³