

**The Yale Divinity School Bible Study
New Canaan, Connecticut
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The Book of Acts

**VI: Co-Operative Ministry
Acts 18-20**

The next chapters of Acts conclude Paul's so-called "second missionary journey" and then report on the "third missionary journey," which largely focuses on Paul's ministry in Ephesus, on the western coast of Asia Minor, in the mid-fifties of the first century.

In the first episode after Paul's important speech on the Areopagus, he visits Corinth (18:1-17), a city on which he in fact lavished a good deal of attention. The account in Acts reports the first of Paul's many visits to the city. Later visits are mentioned in the two canonical letters to Corinthians, probably spent when Paul was headquartered at Ephesus. Luke reports that Paul, encouraged by a vision, stayed in Corinth for eighteen months (18:11), teaching in various locales. As usual in Acts, Paul began in the synagogue (18:4). The pattern encountered in Paul's earlier missionary activity repeats itself here. Opposition from the Jews leads Paul to relocate to the house of Titus Crispus, a god-fearer or Gentile attracted to Jewish ways, who lived next door to the synagogue (18:7). Despite the tension with the Jewish community, some, like Crispus, an official of the synagogue, believed and were baptized (18:8). Luke continues to balance his depiction of Jewish opposition to the Christian message with accounts of Jews who joined the movement.

Luke then records an episode important for establishing the chronology of Paul's ministry, his encounter with the Roman proconsul Gallio (18:12-17). Jewish opponents haul Paul before Gallio, but the proconsul dismisses the case on the grounds that Paul was not guilty of breaking any Roman law. His behavior was "about words and names and [the Jews'] own law" (18:15), not a matter that merited his attention.

However accurate or imaginative Luke's account of the appearance before Gallio, it is likely that he knows of the historical presence of Gallio as the Roman proconsul. Both Latin literary sources and inscriptional evidence provide information about him. He was born Marcus Annaeus Novatus, the oldest son of the orator Lucius Annaeus Seneca of Spain. His brother was the famous politician and philosopher, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who was the tutor and eventual chief minister

of the emperor Nero. Gallio had been adopted by another Roman household, of Junius Gallio, from whom he derived the name by which we know of him in Acts.

An inscription found at the Greek shrine of Delphi, the original fragments of which were uncovered in 1905, records a communication to Delphi from the emperor Claudius, which mentions his twenty-sixth acclamation as emperor, an event that we can date to the first half of the year 52. The emperor's communication refers to a report by the proconsul describing the depopulation of Delphi, which the emperor takes steps to reverse. Gallio was, therefore, in office probably at least in the year 51-52, with his term beginning the spring of 51. Proconsuls at this time usually served for terms of a single year. If that calculation is correct, and Luke's report has at least the basic facts correct, Paul encountered Gallio sometime during 51-52. To pin down exactly when in the eighteen months of stay Paul encountered Gallio is difficult to determine. Luke's subsequent reference to the "considerable time" (18:18) is too vague to be useful as a chronological indicator. A reasonable guess is that Paul was in Corinth late 50 to late 51 or early 52.

Locating Paul in Corinth in the early 50's is compatible with other chronological information that we can glean from his letters and from Acts. The report of his arrival in Corinth mentions that he there encountered a Jewish couple named Aquila and his wife Priscilla (or Prisca for short). They will continue to accompany Paul on his next missionary journey and be with him in Ephesus when he comes into contact with Apollos (18:26). At their first appearance (18:2) it is noted that they had been expelled from Rome along with other Jewish residents by the emperor Claudius. According to late Roman sources, this expulsion took place in the year 49. If, as most scholars suspect, that date is correct, it would make sense for this couple, who continue to play a role in Paul's life, to have met him at this time in the Greek east.

Paul next travels east to Jerusalem and Antioch (18:22) and then back to Ephesus, after visiting some of the churches he had founded in Asia Minor. Paul's own letters do not give any information about this visit to Jerusalem. From those letters we gather that after the apostolic council mentioned in Acts 15 and Galatians 2, Paul continued his missionary activity and engaged in a symbolic collection for the poor of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:10, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9). From his own account, it would appear that he did not return to Jerusalem until he was ready to deliver that collection (Romans 15:25) at the end of his ministry in Ephesus. Luke may have confused some of Paul's movements eastward with a visit to Jerusalem, or he may possibly know about a brief visit that Paul does not mention.

When he returns from the east, in Luke's account, he meets in Ephesus another apostle, Apollos, who, along with Prisca and Aquila, he instructs more fully in the faith (18:24-28). This eloquent native of Alexandria (18:24), sometimes thought to be the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, worked, along with Paul, in the mission field of Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:5-9) and was with Paul when he sent First Corinthians to that community (1 Corinthians 16:12), as were Aquila and Prisca (1 Corinthians 16:19). These interconnected references give us a small glimpse into the missionary team of which Paul was a part. Although in hindsight, he looms large above the rest, Paul always had a several important fellow workers in the task of spreading the good news.

The next chapter focuses on Paul's stay in Ephesus. His initial reception in Ephesus brings him into contact with disciples who only know the baptism of repentance taught by John the Baptist (19:3). Paul rectifies the situation, baptizes and lays his hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit (19:5). His preaching in the synagogue meets the customary negative response and he sets up shop in another venue, as he had in Corinth. His new venue, the "lecture hall of Tyrannus" (19:9) evokes the teaching milieu of an ancient orator or philosopher, and he stays there for two years, probably during 55-57.

Miracles continue to accompany Paul's ministry, including exorcisms that outdo the activities of Jewish rivals, the sons of Scaeva (19:11-18). Paul's success has the incidental benefit of driving down the price of magic books (19:19-20).

The climax of Paul's stay in Ephesus is a civil disturbance led by Demetrius, a silversmith whose idol-making business suffered because of Paul's preaching (19:21-41). His fellow silversmiths and their sympathizers raise a ruckus in support of the great goddess Artemis (19:27-28), who was worshipped in her renowned temple in the city. The venue for the tumult is the magnificent theater of Ephesus (19:29), preserved to this day, which could accommodate some 25,000 spectators. Luke probably wants us to envision such a crowd protesting Paul's activity, which is finally quieted by the reasoned appeal of the town clerk (19:35).

Having dodged the bullet of rioting Ephesians, and inspired by a vision commanding him to go to Jerusalem and eventually to Rome (19:21), Paul decamps from Ephesus. Luke certainly has Paul's itinerary generally correct this point, although he insists on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who directs Paul's way.

Paul visits some of his congregations for a final time, stopping in Macedonia and Greece before returning to Asia Minor (20:1-5). Two episodes complete the account of this period of his life. In Troas, Paul's lengthy sermon after a shared sacred meal puts one of the congregants to sleep. Ironically named "Lucky"

(Euthychus), he falls out a window and apparently dies, but Paul, sensing life still in him, revives him, to the amazement of all (20:7-12). The episode recalls a famous story in Homer's *Odyssey* about one of Odysseus's shipmates, Elpenor, whom he encounters in his trip to the underworld (*Odyssey* 11.59-78). As often Luke will dress whatever historical reminiscence he may have in an attractive literary garb.

After a brief voyage (20:13-16), Paul stops at Miletus, not far from Ephesus, whence he summons the elders of the community for a farewell address (20:18-35; cf. 14:23). Here Luke uses many of the conventions of the rhetoric of farewell discourses and testaments, declaring Paul's innocence (20:26), warning of future dangers (20:29), including doctrinal challenges from within (20:30). These warnings sound similar to those issued by some deuterio-Pauline letters (1 Tim 1:3-11; 2 Tim 3:1-9) and other later writings of the New Testament (2 Peter 2; Jude 5-16; 1 John 2:18-26). Luke also has Paul repeat some of the main themes of his own theology, the importance of repentance as the hallmark of faith (20:21) and the belief that Paul's life, and that of the Church, is firmly guided by the Holy Spirit (20:23). Luke evokes Paul's own hortatory style when he makes him offer himself as an example of behavior (20:34-35; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1), although he ends on what appears to be a jejune proverbial note, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (but cf. 2 Corinthians 9:7). With the elders left behind given their instructions, Paul is ready to travel to Jerusalem.

Questions for Reflection:

1. This section of Acts seems to have some significant historical data. How important is it for our understanding of early Christianity to uncover and confirm such data? How important is it to us to classify Acts as a work of history? Does our answer say more about us or about Acts?

2. The persecution of Christians in Ephesus because of the disturbance of the economic order fits into a more encompassing theme in Luke. Can you recall other texts in Luke or Acts that offer a similar perspective? What do you make of that perspective?
3. The account in Acts of the departure speech of Paul to the elders of Ephesus seems to presuppose a certain kind of church order. How does the organization of the church here compare with other accounts in the New Testament? How important or even normative for us is the model of the church implicit here.
4. Paul's speech to the elders of Ephesus warns against various threats to the Christian community. Are there analogies in the current situation of the Church to the challenges that the speech outlines?

For Further Study:

- Cheryl Exum and Charles Talbert, "The Structure of Paul's Speech to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20,18-35)," *CBQ* (1967) 233-36.
- Charles Kingsley Barrett, "Paul's Address to the Ephesian Elders," in Jacob Jervell and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 107-21.