

Acts

Lesson #14

2nd Missionary Journey, Part 2

(17: 1 – 18: 23)

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Review

In A.D. 50—after the Council at Jerusalem—St. Paul left Antioch and set out to retrace the 1st missionary journey in reverse order to see how the churches were faring. Because of a heated argument, Paul and Barnabas separated, and Paul took Silas with him on the journey. Along the way, Timothy joined the group in Lystra and the three continued on to Pisidian Antioch. From there, they had planned to head south to Perge, but the Holy Spirit intervened and sent them north through Galatia and west to Troas, where they met Luke, who joined them. From Troas, Paul and company sailed north to Neapolis, setting foot on the continent of Europe for the first time, and from Neapolis they traveled to Philippi, where they met Lydia and her friends . . . and Paul and Silas were flogged and thrown in jail!

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Preview

Leaving Philippi, Paul & company continue westward to Thessalonica and Berea. After trouble in Berea, Paul's companions put him on board a ship and send him to Athens for safety, while they stay and finish up the work in Thessalonica and Berea. After a brief stay in Athens, Paul continues south to Corinth, and there he remains for 18 months, heading back home toward the end of A.D. 52. Corinth was a double-seaport town on the isthmus that links mainland Greece to the Peloponnesian Peninsula, with the Gulf of Corinth feeding into the Ionian Sea on the west and the Saronic Gulf feeding into the Aegean Sea on the east. Corinth had been destroyed by war in 146 B.C. In St. Paul's day, however, it was a modern, prosperous city, newly constructed by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C., a little over 100 years earlier. A sophisticated, very wealthy pagan city, Corinth was St. Paul's most difficult and troublesome church, both in its founding and in its ongoing operation. While in Corinth, Paul writes 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Galatians, his first epistles.



After being invited politely and with great decorum by Philippi's magistrates to leave the city, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke continue westward to Thessalonica, the largest city on the northern Aegean coast.

King Cassander of Macedon founded Thessalonica in 315 B.C, naming it after his wife, Thessalonike, a half-sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica became a free city under Mark Antony in 41 B.C. and it grew to be an important commercial center on the east-west *Via Egnatia*; it also lay at the southern end of the north-south trade route, linking the Balkans to Greece.





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“When they took the road through Amphipolis and Apolonia, they reached Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Following his usual custom, Paul joined them, and for three sabbaths he entered into discussions with them from the scriptures, expounding and demonstrating that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that ‘This is the Messiah, Jesus, whom I proclaim to you.’ Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas; so, too, a great number of Greeks who were worshippers; and not a few of the prominent women. But the Jews became jealous and recruited some worthless men loitering in the public square, formed a mob, and set the city in a turmoil. They marched on the house of Jason, intending to bring them before the people’s assembly . . .

“When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city magistrates, shouting, ‘These people who have been creating a disturbance all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them. They all act in opposition to the decrees of Caesar and claim instead that there is another king, Jesus.’ They stirred up the crowd and the city magistrates who, upon hearing these charges, took a surety payment from Jason and the others before releasing them.”

(17: 1-9)

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• Notice that St. Paul spends only three Sabbaths in Thessalonica; that is, a mere 3 weeks. Yet, about 6 months later, when Paul writes from Corinth to the newly-formed church in Thessalonica, he says:

“Our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the holy Spirit and [with] much conviction . . . so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and [in] Achaia.”

(1 Thessalonians 1: 5, 7)

• In the synagogue some Jews were convinced by Paul’s message, but *“a great number of Greeks who were worshippers”* became believers, as did *“a few of the prominent women.”* Once again, the Jews are reluctant, but the Gentiles respond in great numbers.

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A cartoon illustration of a man with brown hair, wearing a white shirt, a red tie, and blue pants. He is leaning against a vertical line on the left, with his hand to his chin in a thinking pose.

And once again, St. Paul's message triggers fierce opposition, with a mob attacking Jason's house and the brothers being hauled into court! For the Jews, the issue was the Gentiles; for the Romans, the issue was "another king."

A cartoon illustration of a grey dog sitting down, looking thoughtful. A small fly is flying near its head.

Paul should have had me with him. I'd have chased those guys away!

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On the road to Thessalonica (“Thessaloniki” today), past sunflower fields and a marble quarry.

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Thessaloniki's harbor is the busiest in the northern Aegean Sea.

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Strolling along the Promenade toward the White Tower, once a notorious prison during the Ottoman period (like the Tower of London); today it's a museum.

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Walking past the whimsical “umbrellas” sculpture of the Thessalonian artist, Svoronos.

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And, of course, the monumental bronze sculpture of Alexander the Great astride his horse, Bucephalus.

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“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas to Beroea during the night. Upon arrival they went to the synagogue of the Jews. These Jews were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all willingness and examined the scriptures daily to determine whether these things were so. Many of them became believers, as did not a few of the influential Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had now been proclaimed by Paul in Beroea also, they came there too to cause a commotion and stir up the crowds. So the brothers at once sent Paul on his way to the seacoast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind. After Paul’s escorts had taken him to Athens, they came away with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

(17: 10-15)

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• Paul & company receive a better hearing in Berea than they do in Thessalonica, for the Jews in Berea are *“more fair-minded”* for . . .

“they received the word with all willingness and examined the scriptures daily to determine whether these things were so.”

(17: 11)

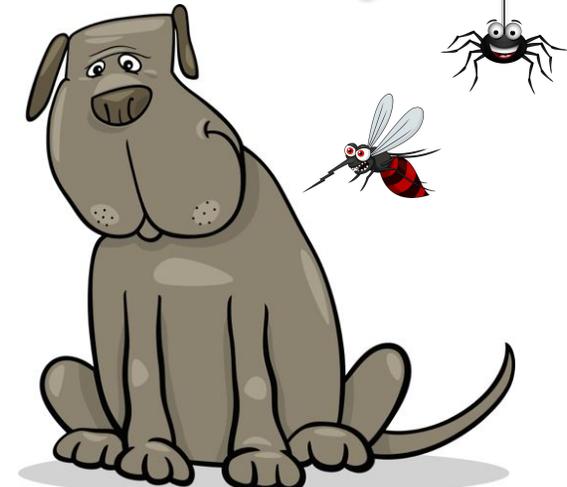
• But things turn bad quickly as a mob from Thessalonica arrive and stir up fierce opposition against Paul and his gospel message. This seems like a replay of Paul’s experience on the 1st missionary journey in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra!

• The opposition is so fierce in Berea that the brothers spirit Paul out of town, put him on a ship and send him to Athens, with escorts to protect him.

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A cartoon illustration of a man with brown hair, wearing a white shirt, a red tie, and blue pants. He is leaning against a vertical line on the left, with his hand on his chin in a thinking pose.

The Berean's were more fair minded, for they "examined the scriptures daily to determine whether these things were so." That's a good lesson: Scripture is the benchmark of truth, not authority or opinion.

A cartoon illustration of a grey dog sitting down. To its right, there are two insects: a fly and a spider. The spider is hanging from a thin vertical line that extends upwards to a thought bubble.

Well said!

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On the road to Berea (“Verea” of today).

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Entering the modern city of Verea. Mentioned by Thucydides in 432 B.C., Verea nestles against the base of the Olympus mountain range. A small city, it's population today is around 66,000.

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St. Paul Square sits at the center of town, remembering St. Paul's visit.

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In 1977, just outside of town, the Greek archaeologist Manolis Andronikos discovered the tomb of Philip II, Alexander the Great's father. Today it is a state-of-the-art museum.

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“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he grew exasperated at the sight of the city full of idols. So he debated in the synagogue with the Jews and with the worshipers, and daily in the public square with whoever happened to be there. Even some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers engaged him in discussion. Some asked, ‘What is this scavenger trying to say?’ Others said, ‘He sounds like a promoter of foreign deities,’ because he was preaching about ‘Jesus’ and ‘Resurrection.’ They took him and led him to the Areopagus and said, ‘May we learn what this new teaching is that you speak of? For you bring some strange notions to our ears; we should like to know what these things mean.’ Now all the Athenians as well as the foreigners residing there used their time for nothing else but telling or hearing something new.”

(17: 16-21)

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- Although Athens was long past its glory days, it still retained the patina of learning and culture, and it basked in the dim reflection of its past intellectual achievements.
- Seeing the plethora of temples and the countless artistic representations of the Greek gods, Paul was less “exasperated,” than *overwhelmed* at the prospect of introducing the gospel in a city like Athens.
- But he gets started, nonetheless, engaging people at every opportunity, only to be called by the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers a σπερμολόγος [“spermo-LOG-os”]; literally, a “seed-picker,” a foreigner squawking, head bobbing and gesticulating with his finger!





So, Paul is invited to speak at the Areopagus. In mythology, the Areopagus is where the gods try Mars, the god of war, for slaying Poseidon's son; today it is often called "Mars Hill."

The Areopagus is 100 yards or so northwest of the Acropolis in Athens. It originally served as the place where a council of elders would meet, and later as a court of appeals for legal cases; in Paul's day it was rather like the "faculty club" of Athens, a place where "intellectuals" gathered to discuss and debate the issues of the day.

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The Areopagus—or “Mars Hill”—where St. Paul spoke to the “intellectuals” of Athens.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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St. Paul's extemporaneous speech at the Areopagus is a simple, 4-part argument:

- 1. A clever "hook" (22b-23);**
- 2. Acknowledgement of one God as creator (24-30);**
- 3. Proposal of one God as judge (25-31).**

But . . . part 4, Paul's call to action, is interrupted by the scoffing and jeering of his audience!



**Raphael. *St. Paul Preaching in Athens* (cartoon on paper, mounted on canvas), 1515.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London.**

[This is one of 10 cartoons (only 7 survive) that Raphael made for the Sistine Chapel tapestries commissioned by Pope Leo X.]

“Then Paul stood up at the Areopagus and said: You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious. For as I walked around looking carefully at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God.’ What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands because he needs anything. Rather it is he who gives to everyone life and breath and everything. He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us . . .

“For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your poets have said, ‘for we too are his offspring.’ Since therefore we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divinity is like an image fashioned from gold, silver, or stone by human art and imagination. God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now he demands that all people everywhere repent because he has established a day on which he will judge the world with justice through a man he has appointed, and he has provided confirmation for all by raising him from the dead.”

(17: 22-31)

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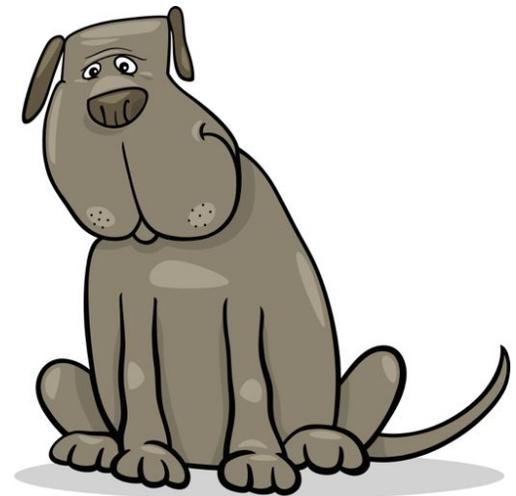
- St. Paul had explored the temples of Athens in some detail, and he had noticed (and remembered) the inscription on an altar: “To an Unknown God.” This serves as Paul’s “hook,” a clever device to relate to his audience’s experience what he is about to say.
- Next, Paul contrasts the one God he preaches to the many gods, whose images are “made by human hands,” and he can simply gesture toward the Acropolis to illustrate his point.
- Paul’s God has made himself known to all of humanity through his creation, so there is no excuse for ignorance. Paul cleverly supports this position by quoting from the 6th-century B.C. Cretan pagan poet Epimenides.
- Paul’s God will judge all the earth through Jesus Christ, as is proven by Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

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Paul is doing extremely well! I'm really impressed with his ability to quote from a 6th century B.C. Cretan poet, off the top of his head! It's when he mentions "resurrection" that he loses his audience.

I think this is one of Paul's best speeches.

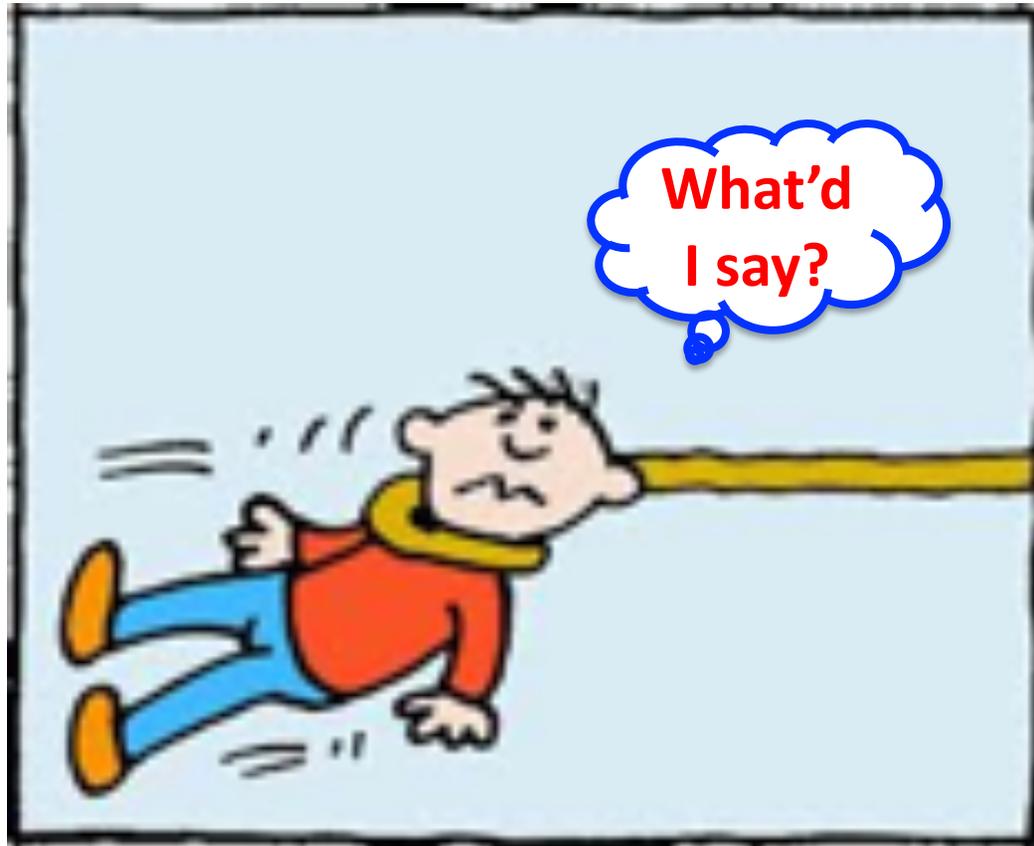


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“When they heard about resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, ‘We should like to hear you on this some other time.’ And so Paul left them. But some did join him, and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, and member of the Court of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and others among them.”

(17: 32-34)

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“After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. He went to visit them and, because he practiced the same trade, stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. Every sabbath, he entered into discussions in the synagogue, attempting to convince both Jews and Greeks.

(18: 1-4)

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Archaeological site of Corinth. The temple of Aphrodite sat atop the acropolis.

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Temple of Apollo in Corinth.

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Harbor on the Gulf of Corinth, leading out to the Ionian Sea.

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- When St. Paul arrived in Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who had been expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. Over time, Paul will become intimate friends with them.
- Aquila and Priscilla were σκηνοποιοί, tentmakers. Their trade could involve either weaving cloth from goat hair, or cutting and stitching leather with waterproof seams. Although Paul was a world-class scholar and teacher, he also learned a trade, as every Jewish boy did. Every Jew knows that a nice home and a successful business can disappear overnight, as Aquila and Priscilla learned all too well, and as many Jews learned throughout the centuries.
- For Paul, working with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth was not the means to an income, but the means to access the Corinthian community.

“When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began to occupy himself totally with preaching the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. When they opposed him and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ So he left there and went to a house belonging to a man named Titus Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to a synagogue. Crispus, the synagogue official, came to believe in the Lord along with his entire household, and many of the Corinthians who heard and were baptized . . .

“One night in a vision the Lord said to Paul, ‘Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack and harm you, for I have many people in this city.’ He settled there for a year and a half and taught the word of God among them.”

(18: 5-11)

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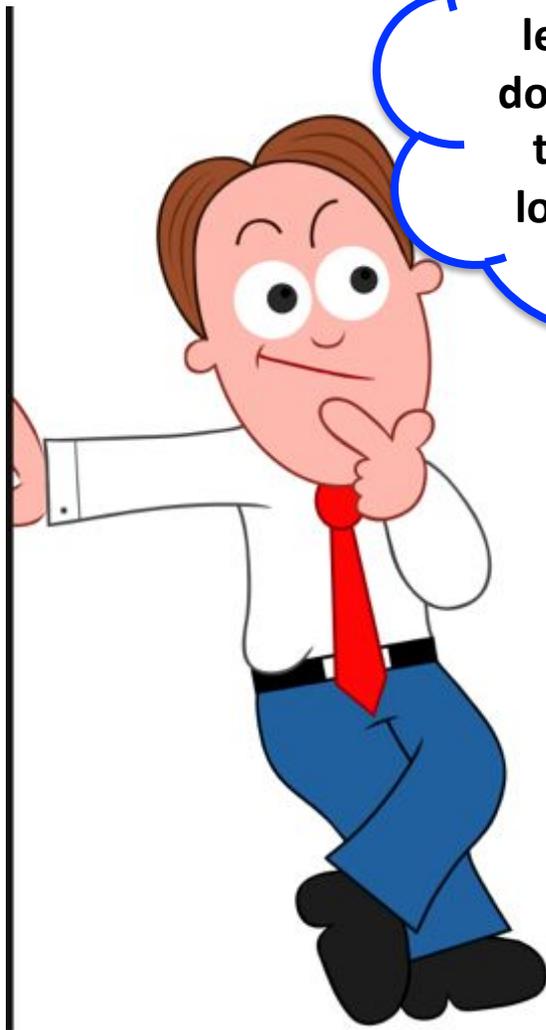
- Once Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia, Paul leaves the tent-making shop and teaches full time.
- Of course, his teaching becomes contentious, and the Jews strongly oppose him. Rather than “shaking the dust from his feet” and leaving Corinth as he did in Pisidian Antioch, Paul announces that he will be addressing Gentiles exclusively, and he moves next door to the house of Titus Justus!
- Paul had been in danger before. In his 2nd epistle to the church at Corinth he writes:

“Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep . . .”

(11: 24-25)

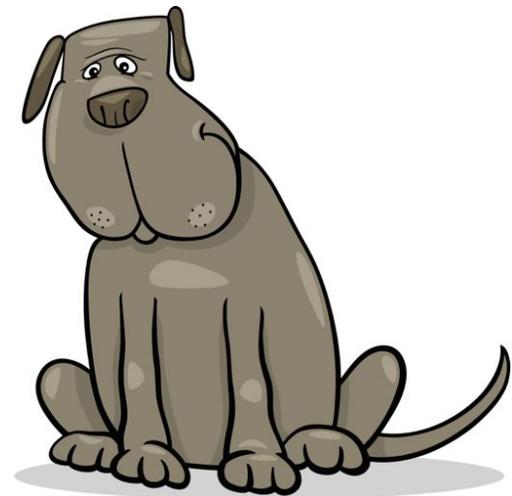
But this time in Corinth Paul is genuinely afraid, and while under God’s protection he takes a Nazirite vow.

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That is so like Paul to convert the synagogue leader, Crispus, move next door to the synagogue, open the windows, and preach loudly. That's really funny!

I bet he'll get sued for that!



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“But when Gallio was procounsul of Achaia, the Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him to the tribunal, saying, ‘This man is inducing people to worship God contrary to the law.’ When Paul was about to reply, Gallio spoke to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of some crime or malicious fraud, I should with reason hear the complaint of you Jews; but since it is a question of arguments over doctrine and titles and your own law, see to it yourselves. I do not wish to be a judge of such matters. And he drove them away from the tribunal. They all seized Sosthenes, the synagogue official, and beat him in full view of the tribunal. But none of this was of concern to Gallio.”

(18: 12-17)

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The “Bema” in Corinth, where Paul was brought before Gallio, the Roman proconsul.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

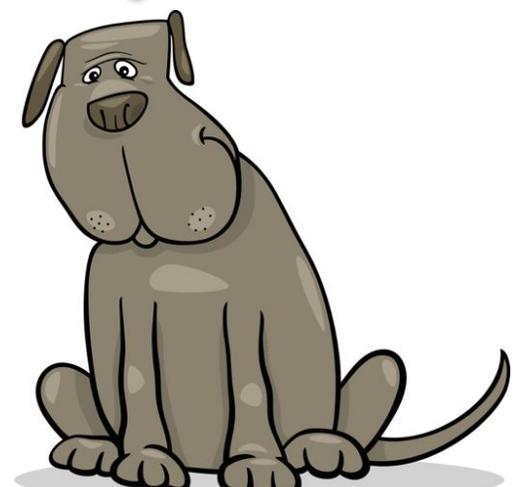
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- Sure enough, the synagogue hauls Paul into court, sued for “hate speech” (as we’d call it today) and being a general nuisance!
- Gallio was appointed proconsul of Achaia by the emperor Claudius; he was the son of Seneca the Elder and brother of Seneca the Younger. Gallio rightly refuses to hear the case against Paul brought by the synagogue and its new leader, Sosthenes, since the Roman Empire recognized freedom of religion, and the accusation did not involve a criminal misdemeanor or a felony.
- Publically humiliated, the Jews from the synagogue seized Sosthenes outside the court and beat him!

A cartoon illustration of a man with brown hair, wearing a white shirt, a red tie, and blue pants. He is leaning against a vertical line on the left, with his hand on his chin in a thinking pose. A large blue thought bubble is connected to his head.

I wonder what happened
when Paul left the court?
Did he kick Sosthenes,
step over him, or help
him out?

A cartoon illustration of a grey dog sitting and looking up. A blue thought bubble is connected to its head.

You can find out by
watching the “Silly
Sosthenes” video at
the end of this
lesson!

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“Paul remained for quite some time, and after saying farewell to the brothers he sailed for Syria, together with Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had his hair cut off because he had taken a vow. When they reached Ephesus, he left them there, while he entered the synagogue and held discussions with the Jews. Although they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but as he said farewell he promised, ‘I shall come back to you again, God willing.’ Then he set sail from Ephesus. Upon landing at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. After staying there some time, he left and traveled in orderly sequence through the Galatian country and Phrygia, bringing strength to all the disciples.”

(18: 18-23)

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•Notice that “Aquila and Priscilla” have now become “Priscilla and Aquila.” “Aquila and Priscilla” are mentioned 2 times (Acts 18: 2 and 1 Corinthians 16: 19); “Priscilla and Aquila” are mentioned 5 times, from Acts 18: 18 onward. Priscilla has become the lead in this couple!

•Paul had his hair cut at Cenchreae because he had ended the Nazirite vow he had taken in Corinth. Numbers 6: 1-21 speaks of the Nazirite vow which anyone can take, a temporary vow of separation to God. During the vow a person does not cut his or her hair, doesn’t drink wine or alcoholic beverages and does not touch a dead body; when the vow ends, the person cuts the hair that grew during the vow as a symbol of the time spent with God, and he offers the proper sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem.

•Paul will offer the sacrifices in Jerusalem in Acts 21: 15-26 . . . which triggers a riot and Paul’s arrest!





The harbor at Cenchree where Paul had his hair cut before sailing for Ephesus.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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SILLY SOSTHENES

The Video!

Questions for discussion and thought

1. How did St. Paul feel when he toured Athens?
2. Why was his talk at the Areopagus not successful?
3. When Paul arrived in Corinth why did he go to work with Aquila and Priscilla?
4. Why do you think antagonism toward Paul was so intense in Corinth?
5. When and why did Paul take his Nazirite vow?

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