

Acts 18:1-8

“Paul Reasoning in the Synagogue on the Sabbath”

“After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Yeshua was the Messiah. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood *be* on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.”

18:1¹ Having crossed over to Europe (16:9), the Apostle Paul has traveled to Philippi (16:6-40), Thessalonica and Berea (17:1-17), and Athens (17:18-34). The city of Corinth was some 50 miles or 80 kilometers across the isthmus connecting the Peloponnesus to the mainland, with him traveling presumably on foot, and was a quite different city from Athens. Athens was an old city noted in Greek history for culture and learning, while Corinth was a new city known for its commerce and progressiveness, as well as its deplorable morality.

Corinth had been rebuilt during the Roman era, in 46 B.C.E., by Julius Caesar, and was heavily Romanized, even though possessing significant diversity. First Century Corinthian population estimates range from 150,000 to 200,000.² Corinth was located in an important place, being the capital of Achaia, and was religiously diverse, with not only classical Greco-Roman deities worshipped, but also many Eastern religions present, which probably bears some importance for how Paul would note to the Corinthians, “For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords” (1 Corinthians 8:5). While a relatively newer city, Corinth was a strategic location to establish a community of Messiah followers, as well as encounter travelers who could spread the good news when embracing it. Ben Witherington III appropriately summarizes,

“The city was in many regards the best place possible in Greece for making contacts with all sorts of people and for founding a new religious group. Corinth was at the crossroads between the eastern and western portions of the Mediterranean....Here Paul was likely to meet people of varying social statuses and religious orientations who if converted could help establish a significant congregation in this place, not to mention many itinerant businessmen and businesswomen who if converted could help spread the word elsewhere in the Empire.”³

Spiritually and socially, however, it needs to be recognized that Corinth’s place in the Mediterranean as a newer and growing city, meant that there would be unique challenges that those in the Lord’s service would encounter, in seeing people presented with the message of Yeshua and being disciplined in faith. This would particularly concern, among others, the presumed wise or knowledgeable persons whom Paul must chastise in 1 Corinthians. John R.W. Stott directs readers’ attention,

“[T]he Corinthians were a proud people. Their intellectual arrogance emerges clearly in Paul’s correspondence with them. They were also proud of their city, which Julius Caesar had beautifully rebuilt in 46 B.C. They boasted of its wealth and culture, of the world-famous Isthmian games which it hosted every other year, and of its political prestige as the capital of provincial Achaia, taking precedence even over Athens. But the cross undermines human pride. It insists that we sinners have absolutely nothing with which to buy, or indeed contribute to, our salvation. No

¹ This section has been adapted from the commentary *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic* (2015) by J.K. McKee.

² Cf. Longenecker, in *EXP*, 9:480; Bock, 577.

³ Witherington, *Acts*, 538.

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wonder that not many wise, influential or upper-class Corinthians responded to the gospel [1 Corinthians 1:26ff]!"⁴

While there was religious diversity in Corinth, ranging from the traditional Greco-Roman fare to Eastern practices to a Jewish presence in the city, the worship of Aphrodite or the goddess of love, was especially notable. This would have presented challenges, if for any other reason, how it would facilitate a wide degree of prostitution in the city. Richard N. Longenecker describes some of the major worship in Corinth:

"Corinth was the center for the worship of the goddess Aphrodite, whose temple with its thousand sacred prostitutes crowned the Acrocorinth. At the foot of the Acrocorinth stood the temple of Melicertes (the Gr. form of Melkart, the principal god of Tyre), the god of sailors. Temples to Apollo and to Asclepius, the god of healing, have also been found in the ruins of the first-century city, and there were undoubtedly many more such pagan shrines there."⁵

Commentators⁶ are often prone to note the classical usage of the verb *Korinthiazomai* (Κορινθιάζομαι), technically meaning "to be a Corinthian," more often meaning "practise fornication, because Corinth was famous for its courtesans," and how the related *Korinthiastēs* (Κορινθιαστής) meant "whoremonger" (Liddell-Scott-Jones).⁷ The problems of sexual immorality, in many diverse forms, are surely encountered in Paul's Corinthian correspondence. Stott draws attention to how "the gospel of Christ crucified summoned the Corinthians to repentance and holiness, and warned them that the sexually immoral would not inherit the kingdom of God [1 Corinthians 6:9ff]."⁸ Recognizing the high levels of debauchery in a city like Corinth is important, as it is hard to imagine that the Believers, when Paul was present with them *and certainly when he left*, were totally immune to the depravity around them. In the view of Darrell L. Bock, "It had a reputation for prosperity and licentiousness. Horace (*Ep.* 1.17.36) calls it a town where only the tough survive. It was the Las Vegas of its time."⁹ As Horace had said,

"To achieve great deeds and to display captive foemen to one's fellow-citizens is to touch the throne of Jove and to scale the skies. Yet to have won favour with the foremost men is not the lowest glory. It is not every man's lot to get to Corinth. He who feared he might not win sat still" (*Epistles* 1.17).¹⁰

In his Messianic Jewish work, *The Acts of the Emissaries*, Joel Liberman correctly recognizes, "It would be nice to think that the believing assemblies at Corinth would have been isolated from its environment. Unfortunately, they were also affected by the immorality around them."¹¹ Even though the Believers being ejected from the local synagogue certainly affected them (vs. 6-8), being present in the city of Corinth, with its diversity of pagan religion, sexual promiscuity, and overall progressivism, **was doubtlessly the most negative factor contributing to the problems Paul would later address in 1&2 Corinthians.**

18:2 Upon arriving in Corinth, Luke narrates how Paul meets a Jewish couple, who will become strategic partners of his throughout his ministry: "he met a Jewish man named Aquila, originally from Pontus but having recently come with his wife Priscilla from Italy, because Claudius had issued a decree expelling all the Jews from Rome. Sha'ul went to see them" (CJB). Both Aquila and Priscilla were Roman Jews, who were forced to leave the city because of the Edict of Claudius. Aquila is actually noted to be a native of Pontus, in northeastern Asia Minor, whose trade likely took him to

⁴ Stott, *Acts*, 295.

⁵ Longenecker, in *EXP*, 9:480.

⁶ Bruce, *Acts*, 367 fn#4; Stott, *Acts*, 296.

⁷ *BibleWorks 9.0: LSJM Lexicon (Unabridged)*.

⁸ Stott, *Acts*, 296.

⁹ Bock, 577.

¹⁰ Horace: *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Ruston Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 863.

¹¹ Liberman, 258.

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Rome. The Jewess Priscilla, however, was probably a Roman native. The Jews of the First Century Diaspora were evidently highly mobile.

The record of both the Book of Acts and Paul's letters indicates how these two figures would prove highly important to the Apostle (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). They eventually did make it back to Rome, after a tenure with him in Corinth and in Ephesus (18:18-19). It cannot go unnoticed, though, how more frequently than not, Priscilla is mentioned before her husband Aquila. Much of the time, it is thought that this is because Priscilla became a Believer before her husband. Yet, other reasons considered by examiners is that Priscilla had a higher social status. Longenecker speculates,

"Since Priscilla is often listed before her husband (18:18-19, 26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19), we may conclude that she came from a higher social class than her husband or was in some way considered more important. Perhaps Aquila was a former Jewish slave who became a freedman in Rome and married a Jewess connected with the Roman family Prisca (*gens Prisca*), which possessed citizenship rights. Together, perhaps through Aquila's craftsmanship and Priscilla's money and contacts, they owned a tentmaking and leather-working firm, with branches of the business at Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus (cf. 18:2, 18-19, 26; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19)."¹²

It might go too far to think that Priscilla and Aquila had a multi-city business, but it does not go too far to think that Priscilla had a slightly higher social status than her husband. What is most important, to be sure, is that this Jewish couple were fellow Believers and fellow workers together, with the Apostle Paul. F. Scott Spencer interjects the important, "Taken as a whole, it simply reinforces the mutuality of the couple's relationship: they are interchangeable, collegial partners. On the other hand, taken as a progression, reversing the customary husband-and-wife sequence may signal Priscilla's rising importance in the Pauline mission."¹³ What should never be assumed, is that Priscilla did not have any sort of role in the leadership and teaching among the First Century Believers, as it is clear, later from the record of what transpired in Ephesus, that she did.

Luke's mention of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, is important not only theologically, but also historically for dating the time of Paul's visit to Corinth. The expulsion of the Jews from Rome was likely due to how the gospel message of Yeshua had divided the Roman Jewish community, and caused a wide degree of social upheaval. The historian Suetonius would record, "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city" (*Claudius* 25.4),¹⁴ and examiners are often agreed that "Chrestus" is actually a corruption of "Christ." Priscilla and Aquila were likely among the Roman Jews who had come to faith in Yeshua, by those who returned to Rome from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at *Shavuot*/Pentecost. The Edict of Claudius is usually dated to around 49 C.E., making Paul's visit to Corinth sometime around 50-51 C.E.

18:3 Readers of Acts are here informed how the Apostle Paul actually did have skills beyond being a religious scholar and Pharisee trained by Gamaliel (22:3); the Apostle Paul actually has some tactile skills in a trade: "and being of the same occupation, [he] stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade" (HCSB). It was commonly held among the Jewish Rabbis that it was not proper for teachers to receive payment for religious services, as noted in the Mishnah, an ethos seemingly also followed by Paul:

"Fitting is learning in Torah along with a craft, for the labor put into the two of them makes one forget sin. And all learning of Torah which is not joined with labor is destined to be null and cause sin. And all who work with the community—let them work with them for the sake of Heaven" (m.*Avot* 2:2).¹⁵

¹² Longenecker, in *EXP*, 9:481.

¹³ Spencer, 188.

¹⁴ Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 202.

¹⁵ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 675.

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While it is appropriately recognized, to some degree, how Luke is communicating to his patron Theophilus (1:1) on the virtues of the First Century *ekklēsia*, it cannot be ignored, as noted by David G. Peterson, how “Greek culture...tended to despise manual labour, which makes Luke’s matter-of-fact record of Paul’s practice here unusual.”¹⁶ Paul is willing to work with his hands, and in a field which was dirty at times. Elsewhere, however, it is true that Paul did say that leaders in the Body of Messiah should be financially supported (Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 9:4; 1 Timothy 5:17), yet Paul himself preferred to support his own ministry finances (20:34; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

Why did Paul choose to support himself? There were likely some personal matters of preference involved, as he details (1 Corinthians 4:9, 12; 9:19; 2 Corinthians 11:7). More pressing could have been some safeguarding reasons as well, as Paul would not want to have been perceived as some kind of a traveling charlatan, only interested in bantering around philosophy for gullible listeners. Witherington keenly summarizes the factors involved in Paul’s preference for self-support:

“For one thing, he did not want to give the impression of being a huckster, a traveling philosopher, peddling God’s word and then disappearing with people’s money or at least having abused privileges of hospitality (see 2 Cor. 2:17). Corinth, being the crossroads town it was, had more than its share of such people, including Sophists who came and offered impressive rhetorical discourses in the city for a fee. Paul also did not wish to get caught up in the social web of patronage, wherein he would be beholden to a person of high social status and obligated to locate in a specific place and teach in the house of his patron. A good degree of the anger of the high-status Corinthians with Paul seems to have come from his refusal of patronage because of the strings that would be attached to it. To accept patronage would place an obstacle in the way of the gospel of free grace, for it would mean that he was not offering it free of charge.”¹⁷

While Paul could have had the option of finding a rich benefactor for his ministry services, this could have prevented him from helping the wider population of Corinth, which needed to hear the good news. This would have been especially true in being a *skēnopoios* (σκηνοποιός), commonly viewed as being “a tentmaker” (*LS*).¹⁸ There is some disagreement, though, as to whether a *skēnopoios* really is a tentmaker, as “If the trade is that of making tents of goat’s hair, Paul is perhaps weaving fabric. But rabbinic scholars do not favor weaving, and it is thus more likely that Paul is a ‘leather worker,’ and that as such he is a ‘tent maker’” (*TDNT*).¹⁹ The Moffat New Testament actually does have, “They were workers in leather by trade,” for v. 3, and various examiners are agreed that Paul was more of a leatherworker than not, given how tents of the period were often made out of animal leather, and/or how the production of leather was associated with tentmaking.²⁰ The entry by P.W. Barnett on “Tentmaking,” appearing in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, astutely describes some of important aspects of this trade in relation to Paul the person, and Paul as the servant of Yeshua:

“Scholars are divided over the kind of material on which Paul worked. Many scholars from earlier generations suggested it was the rough cloth made of goats’ hair, known as *cilicium*, which took its name from Paul’s native province, Cilicia. Understandably, they have readily connected this local cloth with the Cilician Paul’s ‘tentmaking,’ suggesting he may have learned this trade as a youth in Tarsus.

“A majority today, however, noting that *cilicium* was used widely for purposes other than tentmaking, and that the patristic interpretations of *skēnopoios* point in the direction of leather goods, believe that tents were generally made of leather...It is now held that the material with which Paul worked was leather. ‘Tentmaking’ may have taken its name from its primary task but have included manufacture and repair of a range of leather and woven goods. A problem with this view, however, is that if the tanning of leather was a despised trade

¹⁶ Peterson, 508.

¹⁷ Witherington, *Acts*, 548.

¹⁸ *LS*, 733.

¹⁹ W. Michaelis, “pitching tents, Tabernacles,” in *TDNT*, 1044.

²⁰ Bruce, *Acts*, 367; Marshall, *Acts*, 293; Bock, 578; Schnabel, 756.

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among the Jews...would not any kind of leatherworking have shared the same reputation? Moreover, the staining of hands through this work may have rendered Paul unacceptable in the upper-class circles in which he sometimes moved (e.g., Acts 17:12, 19; 19:31; Rom 16:23; but cf. 'these hands' of Acts 20:34).

"Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers recently arrived in Corinth after Claudius' expulsion of the Jews from Rome, appear to have been entrepreneurial manufacturers and traders in tents and related goods, who moved from city to city. At least, so far as the meager evidence about them goes, we see them first in Rome, next in Corinth...then in Ephesus and finally again in Rome (Acts 18:1-3, 26; Rom 16:3-4). Each of the places Paul is known to have 'worked'—Thessalonica, Corinth or Ephesus—was a great urban center. Why would tents be needed in these well-developed cities? The many travelers to these great cities may have purchased, as well as sought the repair of, tents and similar items as they passed through. Sailors in these port cities would also have lived in tents while on shore. It is possible that 'tentmakers' may have manufactured and repaired various kinds of booths, canopies and awnings for city use."²¹

Recognizing how tentmaking or leatherworking was both rigorous and dirty, some have noted the presence of Paul's later word of 1 Corinthians 9:22, "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some." While Paul's identification with various groups of First Century society was more hypothetical or mental than not, in him trying to understand the life circumstances and worldview of other groups, by having a job for ministry self-funding, Paul identified more with the poor laborers and slave class, than the richer merchants or upper class. Spencer is probably not too off the mark in suggesting,

"By lodging with an artisan couple and, beyond that, actually joining in their trade, Paul suddenly appears no longer as the rising star among noble ladies and gentlemen and lofty academicians. Rather, he restores his links with lowly cloth-handlers, like Lydia (cf. 16.13-15), and builds new ties with the rabble of the market laborers (*agoraioi*) who previously were turned against him (cf. 17.4-5)."²²

18:4 Having found two important allies in Priscilla and Aquila, Luke describes how "Sha'ul also began carrying on discussions every *Shabbat* in the synagogue, where he tried to convince both Jews and Greeks" (CJB). A Jewish presence in the city of Corinth was noted by the philosopher Philo:

"Concerning the holy city I must now say what is necessary. It, as I have already stated, is my native country, and the metropolis, not only of the one country of Judaea, but also of many, by reason of the colonies which it has sent out from time to time into the bordering districts of Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria in general, and especially that part of it which is called Coelo-Syria, and also with those more distant regions of Pamphylia, Cilicia, the greater part of Asia Minor as far as Bithynia, and the furthestmost corners of Pontus. And in the same manner into Europe, into Thessaly, and Boeotia, and Macedonia, and Aetolia, and Attica, and Argos, and Corinth and all the most fertile and wealthiest districts of Peloponnesus" (*Embassy to Gaius* 281).²³

That the Apostle Paul saw value in attending *Shabbat* services on Saturday, is detectable enough from a reading of the text. Ajith Fernando interjects how "In every new city Paul visited, he looked for a bridgehead from which he could launch his ministry. Here it was his trade and his contacts in the synagogue."²⁴ It is clear enough here how the Corinthian synagogue was a place he could effectively engage with people—both his fellow Jews, and various others from the nations drawn to Israel's God—who had knowledge of the Tanach Scriptures, and with whom he would have some spiritual commonality. The Sabbath would have probably been Paul's only day off from work, until Silas and Timothy arrived with some financial support (v. 5). However, surely during the work day, Paul also must have had various opportunities to speak, even in passing, with others

²¹ P.W. Barnett, "Tentmaking," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), pp 925-926.

The Power New Testament actually claims for v. 3, "they *all* were prayer shawl makers by trade." This does not seem to have any firm historical basis, as Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla would need to have made a substantial income from their trade. Consult the FAQ, "Paul, Tentmaker."

²² Spencer, 188.

²³ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, pp 782-783.

²⁴ Fernando, 491.

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about Yeshua. Robert W. Wall directs, "The text repeats the core content of his synagogue discussions to Jews and God-fearing Greeks every sabbath, which has become the central feature of his daily teaching in the city."²⁵

The action of Paul, whether principally on *Shabbat* or in the moments presented to him throughout the week, are represented by the imperfect verbs *dielegeto* (διελέγετο) and *epeithen* (ἐπειθέειν), "he was debating" and "he was convincing" (Brown and Comfort).²⁶ The verb *peithō* (πείθω), "to prevail upon, win over, persuade" (*LS*)²⁷ is of particular interest to a commentator like Bock, "The verb πείθω (*peithō*, persuade) is common in Acts, appearing seventeen times, but this is one of the few instances where it is used in an evangelistic context (17:4; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23-24). Both verbs are in the imperfect, and so the discussion is portrayed as ongoing."²⁸

The *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* by Philip W. Comfort notes the expanded reading of v. 4 in the Western Text, which while probably not authentic to Luke's writing, was nonetheless accurate historically as to what Paul was doing: "And **entering into** the synagogue each Sabbath, he would have a discussion, **introducing the name of the Lord Jesus**, and he was convincing **not only Jews but also** Greeks."²⁹ Recognizing this extended reading, F.F. Bruce describes, "Here, sabbath by sabbath, he held discourse with the Jews and God-fearers, showing how Jesus had fulfilled the OT prophecies by inserting His name as an interpretive expansion in those passages which—as the event proved—pointed forward to Him."³⁰ Also recognizing the extended reading of v. 4, Comfort draws the conclusion,

"The insertion in 18:4 suggests that Paul's method of debating was to use the OT Scriptures and insert (or put forward) the name of Jesus as being the one spoken about in the passage. By inserting the name of Jesus, Paul would read Isaiah 53:4-5 this way, 'Surely [Jesus] bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we ourselves esteemed [Jesus] stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But [Jesus] was pierced for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment for our well-being fell on [Jesus], and by [Jesus'] scourging we are healed.' This would be a convincing way to expound the Scriptures in presenting Jesus as the Messiah."³¹

18:5 "Now when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul became occupied with the message, urgently testifying to the Jewish people that *Yeshua* is the Messiah" (TLV). Silas and Timothy had remained behind in Berea, after Paul had been forced out and safely escorted as far as Athens, although his companions "receiv[ed] a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible" (17:15; cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Silas and Timothy are now reunited with Paul in Corinth, although in the meantime they had gone to Macedonia, and have brought some financial relief with them. As Paul would write to his dear Philippian friends, "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no [assembly] shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone" (Philippians 4:15). I. Howard Marshall is right to conclude, "It seems probable...that Silas and Timothy brought gifts of money which freed Paul from the need to work to support himself in Corinth; he could therefore carry out missionary work throughout the week and not merely on the Sabbath."³²

Paul's disposition changes when Silas and Timothy arrive, as he was "devoting himself completely" (NASU) or "devoted himself exclusively" (NIV) to the proclamation of the good news,

²⁵ Wall, in *NIB*, 10:254.

²⁶ Brown and Comfort, 484.

²⁷ *LS*, 615.

²⁸ Bock, 578; Liberman, pp 259-262 summarizes some of the contemporary issues of our day, in presenting Yeshua as the Messiah to Jewish people.

²⁹ Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 405.

³⁰ Bruce, *Acts*, 369.

Ibid. fn#15 makes light of Isaiah 42:1 and 52:13 from Targum Jonathan.

³¹ Comfort, 405.

³² Marshall, 294; also Witherington, *Acts*, pp 548-549; Schnabel, 758.

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the verb *sunechō* (συνέχω) involving “to occupy someone’s attention intensely” (BDAG).³³ Now being able to be “completely absorbed” (Phillips New Testament) or “engrossed in this preaching of the word” (Moffat New Testament), he “testified in depth to the Jews that Yeshua is the Messiah” (CJB). Here, while the source text communicates *einai ton Christon Iēsoun* (εἶναι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν) or “Jesus is the Messiah” (HCSB), most other versions include a more past tense “Yeshua was the Messiah” (HNV). While this does not subtract from Yeshua being the promised Redeemer, Yeshua is more than the Messiah in an historical sense, as His work was to bring deliverance and transformation to the people of Corinth!

18:6 Paul’s time in declaring the good news of Yeshua to those at the Corinthian synagogue, did not last indefinitely: “But they having resisted, and blaspheming, having shaken his garments, he said to them, Your blood be on your head. I am pure from it; from now on I will go to the nations” (LITV). Yeshua actually instructed shaking the dust off of one’s feet when leaving a city (Luke 9:5; 10:11; cf. Acts 13:51), so Paul’s shaking out of his garments would have served as an indicator that he was not leaving Corinth. What Paul did, in shaking out his garments, was consistent with the example present in Nehemiah 5:1-13:

“Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, ‘We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live.’ There were others who said, ‘We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.’ Also there were those who said, ‘We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards. Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.’ Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, ‘You are exacting usury, each from his brother!’ Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. I said to them, ‘We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?’ Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. Again I said, ‘The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury. Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.’ Then they said, ‘We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say.’ So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. I also shook out the front of my garment and said, ‘Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.’ And all the assembly said, ‘Amen!’ And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.”

In view of what happens later in Paul’s ministry service in Corinth, John T. Squires sees Paul’s shaking off his garments as not a negative action, but in view of Nehemiah, as an ultimately positive action intended to provoke repentance of an audience:

“Nehemiah reported how he warned the people to make restoration for all their unjust actions...This action immediately evoked a positive response: the people did as he had instructed them. Thus the action of shaking his clothes brings about repentance. For Paul, as for Nehemiah, it does not signify definitive, irreversible divine retribution.”³⁴

Paul’s word, “Your blood be upon your own heads—I am clean!” (TLV) to those in the Corinthian synagogue, while a disavowal of responsibility (20:26), is rooted within the language of Tanach:

“David said to him, ‘Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the LORD’s anointed’” (2 Samuel 1:16).

“So shall their blood return on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever; but to David and his descendants and his house and his throne, may there be peace from the LORD forever” (1 Kings 2:33).

³³ BDAG, 971.

³⁴ John T. Squires, “Acts,” in *ECB*, 1249.

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"[H]e lends *money* on interest and takes increase; will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head" (Ezekiel 18:13).³⁵

While many of those in the Corinthian synagogue, where Paul was regularly declaring the good news, will be responsible for rejecting it—an examiner like Squires,³⁶ referencing Ezekiel 18:30-32 which follows Ezekiel 18:13, draws attention to how the focus of Paul saying "You are responsible for your own fates!" (Common English Bible), is to stimulate a later want for repentance:

"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the Lord GOD. 'Therefore, repent and live'" (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Of course, while the truly repentant will always be welcomed and received by God, Paul's word, "from now on, I will go to the *Goyim!*" (CJB), has at times been read as a declaration that not only in Corinth, but in his ministry service, Paul considered his fellow Jews and Israel corporate rejected by God. Marshall's observations on v. 6 come very close to this:

"This kind of action was performed by Jews against Gentiles, and its present significance was to indicate that in the sight of the missionaries those who rejected the gospel were no better than the Gentiles, cut off from the true gospel of God. If the Jews found themselves ultimately rejected by God, the blame for this would rest entirely on themselves; Paul had preached faithfully to them, and bore no responsibility for what they did with the message. From this point onwards he was justified in bothering no more with them and turning instead to the Gentiles."³⁷

Bock is much fairer in his assessment, "This is not a complete abandonment of the Jews (18:19; 19:8; 28:17-24) but means that [Paul's] efforts in Corinth will concentrate elsewhere."³⁸

As a Messianic Jewish teacher, Liberman is much closer to the actual scene of what was transpiring in Corinth, as the Apostle Paul was acting in a mode similar to that of the Prophet Ezekiel. He concludes,

"I believe *Sha'ul* was meeting with so much success that he was forced out of the synagogue, and so here, at Corinth, was a turning point in his ministry. *Sha'ul* was not pronouncing a curse upon our Jewish people for setting themselves against him, but he was declaring that he had fulfilled his responsibility to them at this point. I believe *Sha'ul* was applying ADONAI's words to the prophet Ezekiel to himself (Ezek. 3:16-19). *Sha'ul* was left with no choice but to go to the Gentiles since the Jewish people had closed their eyes to the evidence he clearly presented."³⁹

While Paul has acted in line with previous figures in Israel's history, in presenting a message from God to his own people, there are examiners who are right to recognize how his words in Corinth, "henceforth to the nations I will go on" (YLT), is not the end of his reaching out to his fellow Jews. Squires is most keen to state, "Turning to the Gentiles does not imply abandonment of the Jews. Luke understands that Paul's statement applies only to his time in Corinth, where he leaves the synagogue and establishes the kind of inclusive assembly which is now imperative."⁴⁰ Here, a more neutral rendering of "to the nations" for *eis ta ethnē* (εἰς τὰ ἔθνη), is highly useful, because now Paul will focus his efforts on **everyone** out in the world. "To the nations" is not to the exclusion of his fellow Jews, but rather serves to include Greeks, Romans, and whoever else God will draw into His Kingdom. And, as C.K. Barrett points out, "For Paul's turning to the

³⁵ Also Joshua 2:19; Ezekiel 3:18, 20; 33:1-7.

³⁶ Squires, in *ECB*, 1250.

³⁷ Marshall, *Acts*, 294.

³⁸ Bock, 579.

³⁹ Liberman, 262.

⁴⁰ Squires, in *ECB*, 1250.

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Gentiles...Luke evidently thinks of it as a frequently repeated pattern rather than as a once-for-all event,"⁴¹ as the further record of the Book of Acts does not indicate that Paul ever stops reaching out to his fellow Jews at their local synagogue. With the Messiah followers establishing their fellowship immediately next to the Corinthian synagogue (v. 7), the outreach to the Corinthian Jews for Yeshua is hardly over.

18:7 After leaving the Corinthian synagogue, "Paul went into the house of a man named Titius Justus, a God-fearer whose house was next door to the synagogue" (TLV), as the venue changes for Paul to conduct his ministry activities in the city. The host, who opens up his home to the Messiah followers, is *Titiou Ioustou seboomenou ton Theon* (Τιτίου Ἰούστου σεβομένου τὸν θεόν), "Titius Justus worshipping – God" (Brown and Comfort).⁴² It is widely agreed that Titius Justus the same person who is called Gaius in Paul's letters (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14), meaning that his full name would have been Gaius Titius Justus. Longenecker interjects the sure possibility, "he was doubtless a Roman citizen and may have been from a family brought in by Julius Caesar to colonize Corinth."⁴³

Paul's Corinthian Jewish opponents were surely not pleased by the location where the Messiah followers would be meeting. Interpreters who read Paul's word of v. 6 as meaning an effective termination of Jewish outreach with the gospel, **have a real problem** with the Believers meeting right next to the Corinthian synagogue. Even though Marshall was one who asserted that Paul was not concerned with the Corinthian Jews any more, he still has to say how this "can hardly have made for good relations but was no doubt an effective location for influencing attendees at the synagogue."⁴⁴ Witherington is much fairer in his conclusion, "Besides showing Paul's boldness, this move may also reflect Paul's desire to continue to try and convert Jews, even though he would be outside the synagogue and would be concentrating his efforts on Gentiles."⁴⁵ What Bruce says, is probably more what was Paul's intention than anything else, as "people who had been accustomed to attend the synagogue did not have to leave their habitual route if they wished to continue hearing Paul; they made their way towards the synagogue as usual, but turned in next door."⁴⁶

Wall's summary on what has transpired, in the Believers moving right next to the Corinthian synagogue, cannot go unnoticed by Messianic readers. As a Christian commentator, he concludes that the intention of Paul moving into Titius' home—which had to have afforded some degree of space for the Believers for sure—was to mainly assure that the ties of the *ekklēsia* would not be broken from Judaism or Torah practices:

"Paul's departure from the synagogue for Titius's house may well indicate something of a solution in maintaining the fragile accommodation of his Christian beliefs with his Jewish practices, which is the hallmark of his mission in Acts 18 (cf. 1 Cor 9:16-23). Indeed, the participants in this new house congregation—Paul, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila (cf. 1 Cor 16:19), Titius, Crispus (cf. 1 Cor 1:14), Sosthenes (cf. 1 Cor 1:1)—are all former members of the Corinthian synagogue who follow Paul's example and would presumably want to preserve Jewish traditions in the new setting. Reading the text by the light of the Jerusalem Council adds an additional layer of meaning to this movement: Leaving the synagogue may afford the best chance of preserving what is Jewish for the future church."⁴⁷

The Corinthian Believers, as seen in Luke's record from Acts, were forced to leave the local synagogue. The tenor of the later Corinthian correspondence indicates that as the good news was declared, the demographics became overwhelmingly drawn from the pagan strata of the city several

⁴¹ Barrett, 867.

⁴² Brown and Comfort, 485.

⁴³ Longenecker, in *EXP*, 9:483.

⁴⁴ Marshall, *Acts*, 295.

⁴⁵ Witherington, *Acts*, 549; similarly Schnabel, 759.

⁴⁶ Bruce, *Acts*, 371.

⁴⁷ Wall, in *NIB*, 10:252.

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years later. While it indicates great success for the spread of the gospel, Paul's letters also indicate how some things got significantly out of control.

18:8 The Apostle Paul, as described by Luke, has had some considerable ministry success so far in Corinth. He details, "Crispus, the president of the synagogue, came to trust in the Lord, along with his whole household; also many of the Corinthians who heard trusted and were immersed" (CJB). Crispus was the *archisynagōgos* (ἀρχισυναγωγός), which *BDAG* describes as the "**leader/president of a synagogue**...an official whose duty it was esp. to take care of the physical arrangements for the worship services (Hebr. ראש הקניסה [*rosh ha'knesset*])."⁴⁸ Crispus is among "many of the Corinthians," *polloi tōn Korinthiōn* (πολλοὶ τῶν Κορινθίων), who have believed in Yeshua. Having been the leader of the Corinthian synagogue, Crispus finds himself moving next door to the developing assembly of Messiah followers.

Noting how Paul's previous word, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (v. 6), can be read as being anti-Jewish, various Christian commentators have expelled some effort to describe how moving next door to the Corinthian synagogue (v. 7), is more than anything else a venue change for the Believers. The Messiah followers are not a new and separate religion, but are operating as a sect of First Century Judaism. William H. Willimon is broadly correct in his remarks, mainly directing Christians of our present day,

"When Paul declares, 'From now on I will go to the Gentiles,' it does not mean that he no longer attempts to convert his fellow Jews or that he will cease going to the synagogue first. He is simply moving his base of operations in Corinth. Christianity is a sect within Judaism—as even Gallio knows. The new movement must not be severed from its roots, as Paul's vow in conformity with ancient tradition shows [v. 18]. The claims of Christians make sense for Luke (and for us?) only within the context of the hopes of Israel."⁴⁹

Squires' observations on what has happened, should actually ring widely true for what we see taking place in the contemporary Messianic movement:

"Although established independently of the synagogue, the assembly in Corinth nevertheless shares characteristics with messianic assemblies in many other places. What begins here is not a new movement, apart from Judaism; it is rather the manifestation of the kind of inclusive community which is now to characterize messianic believers."⁵⁰

Messianic congregations and fellowships today, frequently in the Western Diaspora, are often demographically diverse bodies of Jewish and non-Jewish people, with sure continuity with non-Messianic Judaism, but also welcoming whomever the Lord directs in.

For sure, the thought that the Apostle Paul has no further Jewish outreach in Corinth, is without textual basis. As Spencer puts it, "[he] ends up staying a long time...proclaiming God's message to 'many' receptive Jews as well as Gentiles who believe the word and are baptized (18.7, 11)...[H]e continues to evangelize members of the local Jewish synagogue, including one rather special member named *Crispus*."⁵¹ Wall probably goes the furthest among the Acts commentators we are considering, noting that the as-close-as-possible location for the Messiah followers next to the Corinthian synagogue, was to establish for the non-Jewish Believers, a need to recognize that their primary community was one where the God of Israel was acknowledged, and not the wider pagan community:

"This transition from synagogue to house must also be understood in terms of the concerns raised by James at the Jerusalem Council. Whatever confidence James has that a diaspora congregation of mixed constituency will retain its Jewish heritage is predicated on a mission that is synagogue-based, since Moses will be preached every Sabbath (see 15:21). God-fearing Gentiles,

⁴⁸ *BDAG*, 139.

⁴⁹ Willimon, 146.

⁵⁰ Squires, in *ECB*, 1250.

⁵¹ Spencer, pp 186, 189.

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who are attached to the synagogue and hear Moses preached, will more likely understand how they should live among their Jewish brothers and sisters. The relocation of Paul's mission from synagogue to house may well imperil the sabbath reading of Moses and thus make more likely the 'gentilizing' of Christian faith."⁵²

As will be noted by Paul's Corinthian correspondence, there were many internal divisions that arose among the Corinthian Believers (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 11:17-34; 12:1-14:40). While there had to have been some problems erupt from the Corinthian Believers being forced out of the local synagogue, more of the problems probably need to be placed at the feet of the overall paganism of the city.

⁵² Wall, in *NIB*, 10:254-255.

Wall's view corresponds widely to that of this writer, as the Apostolic decree of Acts 15:19-21, when followed, was to sever the new, non-Jewish Believers from their pagan spheres of social and religious influence, and see them attached to a community where Moses was being taught every Sabbath.