

Second Apostolic Journey Part 4

Acts 18:18–19:7

After spending 18 months in Corinth, correcting, instructing, and encouraging them in things of the Lord, Paul leaves with Aquila and Priscilla to begin his journey back to his home base, Antioch. On his way home, they stopped in Cenchreae, a city within 10 miles of Corinth. From there they sailed to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla stayed in Ephesus while Paul continued on, desiring to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. He sailed from Ephesus to Caesarea and from there traveled 70 miles southeast to Jerusalem. After spending time with the Jewish believers at Jerusalem, Paul traveled 300 miles back to Antioch. In total, he traveled approximately 3,000 miles, the equivalent of us traveling from Boston, MA, to San Diego, CA. The entire trip took almost three years.

Paul's vow (verse 18:18)

While in Cenchrea, Paul shaved his head because he had taken a Nazarite vow. The vow was taken earlier and was coming to an end in the prescribed way according to the Mosaic Law (Numbers 6). Any Jew could make a Nazarite vow to separate themselves unto the Lord. Those who took this vow could not partake of strong drink or eat anything with grapes. They could not cut their hair during the vow. They were not to defile themselves by going near any dead person. Cutting their hair signaled the end of the vow. The hair was to be burned on the temple altar and animal and grain offerings were to be presented to the Lord. Samson was presented to God with a nazarite vow by his parents (Judges 13:5–7), and John the Baptist seemed to have received the nazarite vow at birth by his parents, there is, however, no mention of him not cutting his hair (Luke 1:13–17).

The big question is, “Why did Paul follow the Mosaic Law and take a Nazarite vow?” This is the same person who said that we were not under Law anymore (Romans 6:14). I believe the answer is found in 1 Corinthians 9:20 where Paul said to the Jews that he became a Jew to win the Jews. It helps to understand that he was being falsely accused of breaking the Mosaic Law (Acts 21:21). In order to be more effective in reaching out to the unbelieving Jews, he reached out to the believing Jews in Jerusalem to show his Jewish brothers that he loved the Jews. It is pretty obvious that he had a heart for reaching the nation of Israel with the Gospel of Grace (Romans 10:1). He demonstrated that love for his brethren by doing everything possible to reach out to them.

Apollos (verses 24–28)

Apollos was born in Alexandria, Egypt. He was well educated and eloquent of speech. One reason some of the Corinthians were enamored of him, was because he was so articulate (1 Corinthians 3:4). They evaluated Apollos on his speaking ability and not on the doctrine given to them by Paul.

Apollos was very knowledgeable in the Scripture, but only knew about Israel's program up to a certain point. He was very well acquainted with the baptism of John, and he knew about Jesus Christ as Messiah, but he knew nothing about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Israel (Ezekiel 36:24–27). He also would have been devoid of any knowledge about the Gospel of Grace, which was revealed to Paul by the risen and glorified Jesus Christ.

This changed when Apollos came to Ephesus and met up with Aquila and Priscilla. Apollos was teaching about Jesus Christ in the synagogue when Aquila and Priscilla heard him. What he said

was accurate, but he lacked knowledge about important changes that had taken place concerning Israel's prophetic program. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside to fill him in on how God halted Israel's program and began a new work through the Apostle Paul. Apollos embraced Paul's grace message and became a powerful helper to Paul. One place Apollos helped Paul in his ministry is in Corinth. There, Paul embraced Apollos as an important member of his team in presenting the gospel, and in encouraging them to grow (1 Corinthians 1:12–13). Apollos continued to be a co-laborer with Paul throughout his life (Titus 3:13).

It's important to note that Apollos, like many preachers and teachers today, are biblically accurate, but dispensationally incorrect. Many today preach the word as if Israel is still in the special position of God's chosen people. They preach the Bible, but don't preach it properly divided.

Paul giving the Holy Spirit (verses 19:1–7)

After spending 18 months in Corinth, Paul traveled to Ephesus. Remember that Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into the area of Asia as he was traveling west. Now he was allowed to go into Asia and visit the Ephesians as he returns to Antioch (Acts 16:6). Apollos had apparently traveled from Ephesus to Corinth so that he could help Paul in his ministry.

Paul was traveling inland in the area of Asia (Acts 19:1) until he stopped in Ephesus to fulfill a promise (Acts 18:21). In Ephesus, he found 12 followers of Christ. These 12 were like Apollos was in that they had not heard about the giving of the Holy Spirit or of the Gospel of Grace. When Paul learned that they had not even heard about the Holy Spirit, and that their knowledge had stopped with the baptism of John, Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They experienced the same thing as when the holy Spirit came upon the believers in Israel in Acts 2. (Note: many believe that these men were water baptized a second time. I believe the text is showing what they did after hearing John's message of repentance and baptism.)

Being able to impart the Holy Spirit was proof that Paul was a true apostle. Peter was previously shown doing this, but now Paul is in the forefront doing the same thing that Peter once was doing. During Acts, Paul is specially called to reach out to Israel with the Gospel of Grace (Acts 13:46). Once the gospel was presented to the Jews in a certain area, Paul moved on having fulfilled the necessity of him preaching the gospel to the Jews. All through Acts we see the manifestation of the spiritual gifts to show Israel that Paul was an apostle. Miraculous signs were used because the Jews were always looking for a sign to confirm if something came from God (Acts 2:22; Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 1:22).

The special powers given to Paul mimics those given to Peter. These spiritual gifts faded away and disappeared over Paul's lifetime. Paul was once able to heal many people, but by the end of his life he tells Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach (1 Timothy 5:23), and he left Trophimus sick at Miletum (2 Timothy 4:20). Clearly something had changed from when people were healed by just touching a handkerchief that Paul had previously handled (Acts 19:12).

There is no indication that Paul ever preached a message similar to what Jesus and His Disciples had preached about the Kingdom being at hand. Paul was temporarily given these miraculous abilities as part of the change over from law to grace. Once Paul was saved, he became the first member of the Body of Christ and all who were saved after him also became members of the Body of Christ (1 Timothy 1:16).

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