

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 19,

Acts 18

6-Min. Video Overview

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Alright, today we are diving deep into the 1st-century Roman Empire. I mean, think bustling trade routes, raw imperial power, and ideas that were about to change the world. We're going to track how one man, Paul, part artisan, part intellectual, ends up in the wild city of Corinth, and how a series of events that seem almost random, well, they spark the birth of a brand new and seriously influential community.

So here's the big question that frames our whole story. How on earth does a political decision made by an emperor in Rome connect to the start of a tiny religious movement in a Greek port city hundreds of miles away? It's a fantastic story of politics, migration, and, you know, just being in the right place at the right time. So you might think our story starts in Corinth, right? Well, actually, it kicks off way over in the capital city, Rome.

It all begins with something pretty dramatic: a forced expulsion that basically puts our main characters on a collision course with history. OK, this timeline right here, this is our historical anchor. Thanks to the historian Suetonius, we know that in 49 AD, Emperor Claudius kicked the entire Jewish community out of Rome.

That one act is the domino that starts it all. It forces a couple named Aquila and Priscilla to pack up and move, and where do they land? Corinth. Right around the same time, Paul gets there in about 50 AD.

And then just one year later, a really important Roman official, Gallio, shows up. The stage is officially set. So why the expulsion? Why kick everybody out? Well, Suetonius tells us it was because of constant disturbances over someone named Chrestus.

Now Chrestus was a pretty common slave name, but almost all scholars agree it's just a Roman misspelling of Christus, you know, Christ. It looks like the arguments over who Jesus was were getting so heated in Rome's Jewish community that the emperor's response was basically, all right, that's it. Everybody out.

So a theological debate in the capital has this massive real-world consequence. So where do Aquila and Priscilla and Paul end up? Not just any old city, but Corinth. And let me tell you, Corinth was a place.

It was a true crossroads of the ancient world, a city just pulsing with money, ambition, and a serious clash of cultures. Corinth's real power came from its location. See, it sat on this super narrow strip of land.

If you were a ship captain back then, the last thing you wanted to do was sail all the way around the dangerous Southern tip of Greece. So instead you dock at Corinth; your cargo, or sometimes even your whole ship, would get dragged across a paved road called the

Diolchos to the sea on the other side. This made Corinth an absolutely vital and incredibly rich hub for world trade.

And its history really shaped its personality. You see, Corinth was basically a new city. It had been refounded by none other than Julius Caesar as a Roman colony, and he settled it with army veterans and former slaves.

This created a city with a very Roman feel, and it also created this powerful class of new money, people who had recently become wealthy and were very, very eager to show it off. Now, as you can probably guess, any busy port city full of sailors, merchants, and a ton of cash is going to get a reputation. In fact, the phrase, to Corinthianize, was actual ancient slang for, let's say, living a morally loose lifestyle.

And while some of the really wild stories might have been exaggerated, the Corinth of Paul's day was definitely known as a place where the moral boundaries were, shall we say, pretty flexible. The big takeaway here is that Paul was walking into an incredible melting pot. I mean, you had the powerful Roman colonists, the local Greeks, a really large Jewish community, and then this constant flood of foreigners from every corner of the empire.

Just try to imagine introducing a new, radical idea to a crowd that diverse and that dynamic. So how does a newcomer like Paul even survive, let alone get his message heard, in a city like this? The answer, surprisingly, is in his hands. His whole strategy was built around his day job, a profession that was way more strategic than he might think.

And this is where we see a huge culture clash. For the Roman elites, working with your hands was totally demeaning. It was for slaves.

It was absolutely unfit for an educated person, a philosopher. But in Jewish tradition, it was the exact opposite. Working with your hands was honorable.

There was even a famous teaching that said, love labor, because it keeps you out of trouble. So Paul's willingness to work immediately made him different from all the other traveling teachers who were either begging or charging high fees. The Greek word for his trade is *skenopoyos*.

Now it's often translated as tent maker, but it's much more likely just meant leather worker. And think about it. It makes perfect sense.

Making tents requires huge, heavy looms. You can't just carry those around. But leatherworking? All you need is a portable bag of tools.

It's the perfect job for a traveling artisan. And this choice of trade was just a brilliant strategy. His workshop would have been near the central marketplace, the Agora.

And it wouldn't have been a loud clanging blacksmith shop. It would have been a relatively quiet space, perfect for having long conversations while he worked. It would have naturally attracted a diverse crowd: merchants needing a new strap, travelers needing repairs, locals.

And maybe most importantly, it gave him financial independence. He didn't need a wealthy patron calling the shots. His workshop was his home base for ministry.

Okay, so with his workshop as his base, Paul gets to work. And what happens next is this rapid-fire series of events that leads directly to a brand new community being born, right there in the heart of this chaotic city. The way this unfolds is pure drama.

Paul starts where he always does, in the local synagogue. But his message about Jesus creates a massive rift. The community splits.

When things get too heated, he makes this incredibly bold move. He just walks out and sets up his new base right next door, in the house of a guy named Titius Justus. And then, and you have to imagine the shock this caused, Crispus, the leader of the very synagogue Paul just left, converts and joins him.

This move, from the synagogue to the house next door, is a fundamental shift. We're going from the formal, public setting of the synagogue to the intimate, personal, family-like vibe of a house church. This wasn't just a change of address.

It was a change in the whole DNA of the community. And don't picture some giant cathedral. We're talking about a typical spacious Roman home.

You could maybe fit 30 or 40 people in the main atrium or courtyard. This small group feel was absolutely essential. It meant people built deep relationships.

It was personal. It was face-to-face. But a movement like this couldn't stay small and quiet forever.

The conflict that started inside the synagogue, well, it eventually spilled out into the public square. And that leads to this dramatic, historically documented showdown with the full power of Roman law. The Book of Acts sets the scene for us perfectly.

It says the opposition from the synagogue got together, made a united attack, and literally dragged Paul before the official Roman tribunal to be judged. Okay, let's meet the main players in this historical drama. You've got Paul.

He's the one on trial. The accuser is Sosthenes, the guy who took over as leader of the synagogue. And the judge, sitting in the big chair, is Lucius Junius Gallio, the Roman proconsul who, fun fact, was the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca.

And where does all this go down? At the bema. Now, this was not just some little local courthouse. The bema in Corinth was this massive, raised platform that dominated the city's form.

It was the ultimate symbol of Roman power and authority in the region. And this is where Paul is brought to face the music. So the accusers make their case, but Gallio, the experienced Roman politician, he's just not having it.

He basically sees this whole thing not as a crime against Rome, but as an internal squabble among Jews about words and names and their own law. So he dismisses the case, throws it out. And this is so crucial.

By refusing to get involved, Gallio basically set an informal precedent. He treated this new Christian movement as if it were still a protected part of Judaism. That decision gave the church critical breathing room to grow all across the empire.

And that leaves us with this one last incredible question to think about. For Gallio, the powerful Roman governor, this was just another boring Tuesday, another annoying local dispute. But in that one moment, by just waving it away, did he accidentally make a decision that helped secure the future of a faith that would one day redefine the entire Roman Empire? It's just a powerful reminder of how a single, seemingly small moment can change the course of history forever.