

# Title: Acts 18, Paul Comes to Corinth

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## Keywords

Corinth, Aquila, Priscilla, Claudius' expulsion, leatherworking, Gallio, Bema, house church

## Abstract

This lecture focuses on Acts 18 and Paul's arrival in Corinth, where he experiences a period of reprieve and establishes a long-term ministry. Dr. Craig Keener explores the historical context of the city, including the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Emperor Claudius in 49 AD, which brought Aquila and Priscilla to Corinth. He provides rich details on the ancient trade of leatherworking and tentmaking, illustrating how Paul supported himself through manual labor and used his workshop as an organic space for evangelistic conversations. Finally, the lecture introduces the Roman legal setting of Corinth, detailing Paul's appearance before the proconsul Gallio at the city's prominent Bema.

## Outline

### I. Introduction to Acts 18: Paul's Arrival in Corinth

- A. Reprieve after rough experiences in Macedonia**
- B. Encouragement through night visions and quiet period**
- C. Status of Corinth: Capital of Achaia, strategic hub for spreading the gospel**

### II. Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca) and the Roman Expulsion

#### **A. Expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius (c. 49 AD)**

1. Attested independently by Suetonius and Luke
2. Misspelling of Christ as 'Crestus' (a common slave name/Greek word for 'kind')
3. Roman sensitivity to disputes regarding a 'King' (Christ)
4. Extent of expulsion: likely focused on instigators rather than a total eviction of all 40,000-50,000 Jews

#### **B. Identity and Status of Aquila and Priscilla**

1. Naming order: Priscilla often named first (suggesting higher social status, e.g., freeborn wife, slaveborn husband)

2. Background: Aquila from Pontus (freedman of Gens Achillea); Priscilla possibly a citizen of Gens Prisca
3. House church leaders with high geographic mobility (Pontus, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and back to Rome)

### **III. Socio-Economic Context of Artisans and Manual Labor in Corinth**

#### **A. Wealth disparity and housing in Corinth**

1. Lower floor apartments vs. tiny upper floor rooms (rickety tenements, fire hazards, poor sanitation)
2. Large homes with atrium/triclinium accommodating larger house churches (30-50 people)

#### **B. Philosophical attitudes toward manual labor**

1. Despised by ancient elites and philosophers (Cicero: 'no workshop befits a free person')
2. Sages' ways of earning wages: tuition, patronage (household sages), begging (Cynics), and manual labor (most despised)
3. Cynic philosophical methods vs. Paul's dignified work ethic

#### **C. Jewish attitudes toward manual labor**

1. Praised in early rabbinic sources (e.g., Shemaiah: 'Love labor'; Gamaliel ben Judah: Torah study with work)
2. Preferred Jewish trades: carpenters, sandallers, leatherworkers, scribes

### **IV. The Trade of Tentmaking and Leatherworking**

#### **A. Paul's trade: 'Tentmaker' (skenopoios) widely applied to leatherworking**

1. Making and repairing tents, awnings for the Isthmian games (April-May 51 AD), sunshades, and leather goods
2. Portability of tools: awls, knives, sharpening stones, oil, and blacking (as researched by Ronald Hawk)

#### **B. Workshop as a space for missionary evangelism**

1. Quietness of leatherworking allowed for continuous conversations
2. Reaching travelers, merchants, and clients in the workshop
3. Overwhelming pagan environment in the Corinthian Agora (temples to Apollo, Aphrodite, Hermes, Octavia)

### **V. Silas and Timothy's Arrival and Financial Support**

#### **A. Arrival with positive news from Thessalonica and a financial gift from Philippi**

#### **B. Paul stops full-time manual labor to devote himself fully to preaching**

#### **C. Rejection of Corinthian patronage: Paul maintains independence to avoid becoming a dependent client**

## **VI. The Synagogue Division and House of Titius Justus**

- A. Split in the synagogue: Paul moves next door to the house of Titius Justus**
- B. Identity of Titius Justus: Gentile God-fearer, Roman citizen (nomen Titius Justus), potentially Gaius (Romans 16:23)**
- C. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, converted and baptized along with many Corinthians**

## **VII. Legal Setting and the Proconsul Gallio**

### **A. Paul's 18-month stay in Corinth (capital of Achaia)**

### **B. The Proconsul Gallio (Marcus Aeneas Novatus)**

1. Brother of the famous philosopher Seneca the Younger; son of Seneca the Elder
2. Known for his charm, wit, and intellect
3. Tenure dated: arrived in Corinth c. April 51 AD, taking office July 1st, 51 AD (provides a key anchor for New Testament chronology)
4. Term cut short before July 52 AD due to illness

### **C. The Bema (Judgment Seat) in Corinth Forum**

1. Largest tribunal in the Roman Empire, nearly 500 feet long
2. Overlooking the lower terrace of the forum
3. Law courts noted for loud, chaotic, and angry shouting, setting up the trial scene