

Acts 18:1-4

“After this, Paul 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. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.” (Ac 18:1-4 NIV)

From Athens Paul continued his journey in a southwesterly direction, until he reached Corinth.

Corinth, on the Isthmus of Corinth, the land-bridge connecting the Peloponnese with Central and Northern Greece, was in a really good position for a commercial city, because it was on the junction of sea routes to the west and east and of land routes to the north and south. Ships were towed by hand across the land bridge rather than making the long voyage around the isthmus (they tried to build a canal but failed).

Corinth was a political, commercial, and naval rival of Athens. In 146 B.C., in savage reprisal for an anti-Roman revolt, Corinth was leveled to the ground by the Romans and the site lay derelict for a century. Then in 44 B.C., the city was refounded by Julius Caesar and given the status of a Roman colony.

Corinth didn't take long to recover its old commercial prosperity. In earlier days Corinth had acquired a reputation for sexual license remarkable even in classical antiquity, and with the regaining of commercial prosperity Roman Corinth regained something of this old reputation: it is plain to readers of Paul's letters to the Corinthians that the Christian community which he founded in Corinth had difficulty in maintaining the standard of sexual conduct which the gospel required.

In spite of this, Corinth was the kind of city which Paul's strategic eye discerned as a promising center for intensive evangelism, and there he settled for a considerable time. Not long after, he met a married couple, recently come to Corinth from Italy, with whom he quickly formed a firm and lifelong friendship. These were Aquila and Priscilla, “tentmakers”—or perhaps, more generally, leatherworkers—by trade. It was this that first apparently brought Paul into contact with them, for he himself had been apprenticed to the same trade. This trade was closely connected with the principal product of Paul's native province, a cloth of goats' hair called *cilicium*, used for cloaks, curtains, and other fabrics designed to give protection against wet. In Judaism it was not considered proper for a scribe or rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, so many of them practised a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law. Paul, as a matter of policy, earned his living in this way during his missionary career.

Aquila and Priscilla, we are told, had come to Corinth because the Emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. This was not the only occasion on which the authorities at Rome saw fit to clean up the city by expelling undesirable groups of oriental incomers. Claudius's edict is usually connected with a statement by Suetonius, that he banished the Jews from Rome because they were “indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus.” This Chrestus may have been an otherwise unknown troublemaker who was active in Jewish circles in Rome about the middle of the first century, but in that case Suetonius would probably have called him “a certain Chrestus.” Most probably he had the Founder of Christianity in mind but, writing some seventy years after these events, he mistakenly

supposed that “Chrestus,” who was mentioned in one of his sources of information as the leader of one of the parties involved, was actually in Rome at the time, taking a prominent part in the contention. Suetonius’s statement, in fact, points to dissension and disorder within the Jewish community of Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the synagogues of the city.

It is difficult to say whether Aquila and Priscilla had any part in this dissension or were simply involuntary victims of the emperor’s expulsion order. In Paul’s references to them he does not suggest that they were converts of his; the greater likelihood is that they were Christians before they left Rome, founder-members, perhaps, of the Roman church. More often than not, Priscilla is named before her husband by both Luke and Paul; some have inferred from this that she belonged to a higher social class than he, but I think it indicates that her Christian work was more important and significant. We don’t know if, like Aquila, she was Jewish by birth. Anyway Priscilla and Aquila came to Corinth to pursue their trade there, and were joined before long by Paul as a fellow-tradesman

A great commercial city like Corinth inevitably had a considerable Jewish colony, and Paul was able immediately to follow his usual procedure and proclaim the Christian message in the local synagogue. Here, sabbath by sabbath, he held discourse with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, showing how Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies – like those of Isaiah chapters 52 and 53 for example (?read to them)