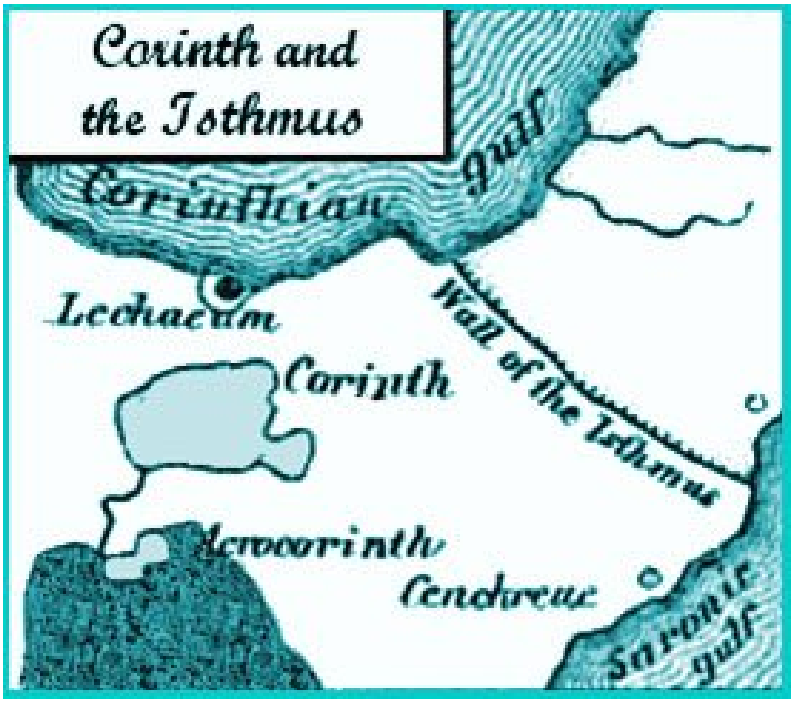
Commercial Hub Becomes Epicenter for Christianity!

V 1 **After these things Paul departed from Athens, and went to Corinth.**

"Paul… went to Corinth." **Corinth lay on a 4-mile wide isthmus that separated the eastern Aegean Sea from the western Adriatic Sea and connected mainland Greece in the north to its southern peninsula. It was the leading political and commercial center in Greece, capital of the Roman province of Achaia, which included even Athens.**

Corinth had become a hub of commerce in those days because so much north-south traffic had to pass through from the mainland to the peninsula. Even east-west traffic passed through Corinth: ships would actually beach there and go on rollers or skids across the isthmus rather than make the long and treacherous journey around the Peloponessian peninsula of southern Greece. Through history different rulers thought to build a canal across the isthmus, but that never actually happened until the late 19th century. A defensive wall was built in the early 400's A.D. because of the fear of invasion by northern barbarian tribes.

Because of being a trade center with many travelers passing through, the inhabitants of Corinth were known to be a rather unsettled bunch, somewhat wild and wooly in their ways. The temple of Aphrodite* (Greek goddess of love, desire, beauty, fertility, known as Venus by the Romans) was situated here, and each evening a multitude of priestesses (ritual prostitutes) would come into the city to practice their trade and solicit for the temple.



∗Who was Aphrodite? A good guess would be, she was a spirit who appeared to certain people way back in an ancient time. The next question might be, was she a good or evil spirit? Judging by how she was worshiped in Corinth, one would conclude she must have been an evil spirit. But then if she was known as a goddess of love, one might wonder if she wasn't actually a good spirit from God.

Here is an interesting thought to ponder – just a possibility of what may have taken place:

It is the way of the Devil to usurp and steal what really belongs to God – to imitate or pervert what God originated and turn it into something quite different and use it for his evil purposes.

For example, consider Japheth, the founder of the European races. Japheth was a godly man, the son of Noah, who helped him build the Ark and survive the Flood. As time passed, and the stories of the Flood became less and less accurate, Japheth became, of all things, Jupiter in Roman mythology, the chief of the pagan pantheon of gods. Because of man's tendency to revere and worship his ancestors, and with the Devil's encouragement, mankind slipped into worshiping Japheth in the place of God, something Japheth himself surely never would have dreamed or

approved of.

In the same way, could it be that the veneration for Aphrodite, possibly a good spirit from God, whose presence the ancients had sensed from time to time, distorted itself over time and transformed into something quite different to what was originally intended? As with "Japheth", perhaps the Devil just borrowed the well-known, legendary name and used it to sidetrack mankind away from the true worship of God. Whether or not this is true is impossible to prove, of course… but it is some food for thought.

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…He [the Devil] is not really a creator at all, he's only an imitator and destroyer, a fake god! In fact, the Devil can't do anything, he doesn't know what to do, except to imitate God!–Because he knows what God does works! And so in everything he does he is trying to imitate the Lord. [from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1977]

(*Jesus:*) …Satan cannot create; he only imitates, falsifies and forges in his attempts to mimic the vast and limitless power of My Spirit and the awesome and intricate inner workings of My universe. For this reason his false system and fraudulent ways will come to destruction, as his evil deeds will come back on him not a hundred times, but a hundred times a hundred over as he reaps what he has sown. [inspired by the *Jesus Revolution* – February, 1998]

V 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

"Aquila, born in Pontus… with his wife Priscilla."* Aquila and Priscilla became close friends with Paul, who in Romans 16:3-4 stated that they *"risked their own necks for my life".* Aquila originally came from the region of Bithynia (*"Pontus"*) in northern Turkey where Paul and team had thought at one time to go but had been re-directed by the Holy Spirit to go to Greece. Aquila and Priscilla, who were living in Rome, happened to be in Corinth because *"Claudius* [the Roman emperor] *had commanded all

Jews to depart from Rome" **in 49A.D. According to the historian Suetonius, the emperor made the decree because of the influence of "Chrestus" (Roman name for "Christ").**

The historical facts are not too well known. We can be fairly sure though that the Gospel had already travelled to Rome after the Day of Pentecost, and that Christians in Rome had been active in their witnessing. This may have caused some big stir amongst the Jews. Perhaps, in trying to bring their case before the emperor, they only ended up annoying him – with the result that all Jews, whether Christian or non-Christian, were driven from Rome, at least until Claudius' death in 54 A.D.

V 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.

"They were tentmakers." **Tents were used much more in ancient times for housing and were normally made of leather, a waterproof material. Now and then Paul's skill in the tent-making trade proved useful. In this case, it gave him the opportunity to meet Aquila and Priscilla, as well as provide some needed income. It is said that physical work can be therapeutic, and after his demanding and stressful tour of the previous Greek cities, this break from the action may have been what Paul needed before moving on into the next big challenge.**

V 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

"Greeks." **Gentile worshipers in the synagogue.**

V 5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

"Compelled by the Spirit." **The return of Silas and Timothy gave Paul the extra boost in the spirit, even physical protection, he needed to come out more boldly in his witnessing. Perhaps by now, knowing all too well the predictable, hostile reaction of the synagogue Jews, Paul had been hesitant to proclaim the whole counsel of God, but now, with the support of his colleagues, he got down to business and *"testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ".* Regarding Silas and Timothy, later on as the**

Corinthian church became established, it seems they were sent from Corinth to help with other churches in Macedonia.

V 6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

"When they opposed him." **Or, "When they set themselves in battle array". These Jews outright rejected and fought against Paul's clear presentation of the Gospel.** ***"And blasphemed."*** **It is not likely they had any reasonable explanation of their own to give, so their blasphemy may have come in the form of crude, vulgar remarks of denial of Christ and of what Paul was teaching.**

"He shook his garments." **This action belongs in the same category as the shaking off of the dust of the feet. (Acts 13:51, Nehemiah 5:13, Matthew 10:14) It served as an expression of righteous indignation and a warning to the disbelievers of divine displeasure over their lack of receptivity. Paul then said,** ***"Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean."***

The Lord had said once in Ezekiel 3:18-19 that if you don't speak ***"to warn the wicked from his wicked way"*****, then** ***"his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked. . . you have delivered your soul."*** **Paul was faithful to deliver them the truth, so whatever divine displeasure they might encounter later because of their rebellion against the truth, they would only have themselves to blame.**

By this time Paul was quite fed up with trying to reach out to his unreceptive Jewish brethren and declared his preference to go now to those who would gladly receive the Word: ***"From now on I will go to the Gentiles."***

Regarding these confrontations of the Early Church with the established religious system, this was not unique to the Early Church. Such confrontations have occurred at different times in history.

The Reformation, for example, got its kickstart when Martin Luther posted his *95 Theses* on a church door in Wittenberg in 1517. Although his

challenge to the established system was not at all welcomed, eventually the Catholic Church made some needed changes. Luther's challenge brought purification from the corruption that had overrun the Church of his day and resulted also in groups of dedicated believers who founded the various Protestant churches that we see today. As a result of this renewal, the Church's activities could move from an inward to an outward focus; and she was better prepared for the global missionary ventures that followed in the years after the Reformation.

Now some 500 years later, the Church again is in need of challenge and purification. In our modern day an important step in this direction happened when the *Jesus Revolution* got underway in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was spearheaded by David Berg, who took a strong stance against the established system of his day. Like the Laodicean church of Revelation 3:14-22, many of the mainstream churches, especially in western countries, had become self-satisfied – *"rich, and increased with goods"*, having *"need of nothing"* – but in God's eyes *"wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."* (Revelation 3:17 – KJV)

There was a great need for change then, just as there was for Catholicism in the time of Luther, or for Judaism back in the time of Christ and the Early Church. And in recent times it was the *Jesus Revolution* that provided the "kickstart" needed to prod the modern Church into making positive changes over the last few decades.

David Berg's ministry in the late 60's and early 70's, besides reaching the generation of hippie youth, served as a wake-up call to the churches – just as Paul's ministry, besides reaching the Gentiles, also served as a wake-up call to the self-satisfied Jewish religionists of his day. Like Paul and his Jews, David Berg had gotten fed up with his former church colleagues. *"It was a time to refrain from embracing."* (Ecclesiastes 3:5) And like Paul and his Gentile followers, Mr. Berg often expressed his desire to go to the hippie youth of the day who were more open to God's radical truths and new methods, and more willing to offer themselves in full dedication to God's service than were the majority of people in the church.

It should be understood though that, since those early days, mainstream churches have changed a lot, having adopted many of the

ideas and methods that David Berg had pioneered. The Church has grown more passionate and dedicated in the face of the ever-increasing anti-Christ darkness that is sweeping through the world. Many Protestant denominations and groups are casting off old methods and mindsets that were stifling growth and spiritual maturity. The Catholic church too is experiencing great re-vitalization. And the Orthodox church is showing signs of wanting to build bridges with its ancient rival, the Catholic church.

And certainly, when the forces of anti-Christ darkness arrive in full power, all branches of Christendom will find themselves under the same threat of organized persecution. Times have changed since the days of the *Jesus Revolution*. Instead of the confrontational approach against internal corruption that was the order of the day then, now is the day for cooperation and collaboration amongst the different branches of God's people – *"a time to embrace."* (Ecclesiastes 3:5)

That does not mean to say that re-vitalization in the Church is no longer necessary. Certain compromises are undermining the Church's relevance to the world at large; the commentary for Acts 20 (verses 29-30) and Post 3 in the *Ezekiel 38-39* series address some of these. In preparation for the dark days ahead in this End of the Age era, certain Scriptures (Daniel 11:35, 12:10) foretell this purification of the Church. Hopefully, much of that re-vitalization will be realized ahead of time as Christian groups work together more.

For the battle lines are shifting. As the Church purifies herself and as the forces of Darkness grow stronger, she will have to focus more on outside threats of godlessness and persecution and on the need to reach out to a world desperate for the Light and Truth that is fast being extinguished in these modern times.

V 7 And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.

***"Justus."* A Roman believer who had been associated with the synagogue next door.**

V 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

"Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord." **The conversion of this respected leader was a major breakthrough for the fledgling church… and a big setback to the unbelieving Jews. As a result *"many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed."***

V 9-11 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent;
"for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."
And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

To encourage Paul to continue in Corinth, the Lord not only had raised up an influential new believer, Crispus, but also *"spoke… to Paul in the night by a vision".* The Lord was faithful to encourage Paul against whatever fears and obstacles he was worried about: *"Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent… no one will attack you to hurt you."* After his most recent confrontation with the Corinthian Jews, Paul, likely, was anticipating another attack, the predictable persecution that always came after such incidents.

This disagreement with the unbelieving Jews, it seems, was more strident than usual, and Paul may have felt a good deal of apprehension about what might soon happen. Unlike Athens, Corinth was a major commercial center, and the Jewish population there may have been larger, and more aggressive and influential than in other cities. However, the Lord was faithful and spoke to Paul *"by a vision"* that he could rest assured, that his protection was guaranteed, especially since he was in the place where God wanted him to be: *"for I have many people in this city."*

"And he continued there a year and six months." **During Paul's missionary journeys so far, this was the first time when, after a bout of persecution, he was able to continue afterwards in a city; and before he came to Ephesus and Rome, this also turned out to be his longest sojourn**

in a city.

V 12-13 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat,
saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

"When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia." **Gallio was the Roman proconsul over the area of southern Greece from July, A.D. 51, to June, A.D. 52.**

"The Jews with one accord rose up against Paul." **This was certainly a major attack from the enemies of the Gospel.**

"Judgment seat." **A large, raised stone platform in the marketplace, situated in front of the proconsul's residence where he could try public cases.**

"Contrary to the law." **While Judaism was not an official Roman religion, it was officially tolerated in the Roman world, and Christianity was still viewed as just another branch of Judaism. The Jews in Corinth claimed that Paul's teaching did not belong to Judaism, and therefore, should be banned. This case was vitally important at the time, for had Gallio ruled in the Jews' favor, Christianity could have been outlawed throughout the Roman empire.**

V 14-16 And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you.
"But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters."
And he drove them from the judgment seat.

"I do not want to be a judge of such matters." **Gallio was no fool and could see through the Jews' plan. He refused to get caught in what he realized was just an internal squabble within Judaism and told them this case was not *"a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes"* but just *"a question of words and names and your own law".* He rendered what is known in legal circles as a "summary judgment" – that is, a judgment made by the court prior to a verdict or trial because no factual issues**

existed. No crime had been committed, since the dispute was merely over semantics.

"And he drove them from the judgment seat." **Gallio threw the case out – a great victory for the Church at that time. It established an important legal precedent that Christians were innocent of transgressing Roman law merely for teaching and following Christian doctrine. A similar judgment was given by governor Festus (in Acts 25:19).**

V 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

"The Greeks took Sosthenes… and beat him." **It is difficult to determine what exactly happened here. Sosthenes is mentioned in 1Corinthians 1:1 as Paul's co-worker, but whether he was converted at this time or not, we don't know. Like Crispus he was *"the chief ruler of the synagogue"*, perhaps a co-ruler or his successor.**

Whatever the case, since Gallio had said, *"Look to it yourselves"*, the Jews in their anger at being defeated took this as license to beat Sosthenes. They engaged some *"Greeks"* to do the dirty work for them (probably because it looked better if non-Jews were doing it). It could be that Sosthenes was Paul's protector at the time and so wound up the unfortunate victim of the Jews' anger.



V 18 So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

"So Paul still remained a good while." **The court case victory made it safe for Paul to continue in Corinth.**

"Then he took leave… and Priscilla and Aquila were with him." **Aquila and Priscilla were initial pillars in the church at Corinth, but now, with new leadership emerging – Sosthenes, Justus, Stephanas (1Corinthians 16:15), Crispus – they could afford to leave town and accompany Paul.**

"Shorn his head in Cenchrea." **To show God his gratitude for helping him through a difficult time in Corinth (as it appears from verses 9-10), Paul had taken a Nazirite vow – a special pledge of separation and devotion to God. (Numbers 6:2-5,13-21) The vow generally lasted a**

specific period of time (although Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were Nazirites for life). In Paul's day, if someone made the vow while away from Jerusalem, at the end of it he would shave his head, as Paul did, and afterwards present the hair at the temple within 30 days.

***"Cenchrea."* The eastern port of Corinth.**



Map of Second Missionary Journey

V 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

***"He came to Ephesus."* This was a stopover on his way to Jerusalem. However, Ephesus was the most important city of Asia Minor (Turkey).**

Aquila and Priscilla stayed there while Paul continued his journey. But before going, he *"entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews".* Although Paul had sworn in Corinth, *"from now on I will go to the Gentiles"*, perhaps because of the strong leaders who had dropped out of the Corinth synagogues, he felt it was still worth his while to visit the synagogues.

V 20-21 When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent,
but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

***"I must by all means keep this coming feast."* Although Paul had preached so much that keeping the laws of Moses was not necessary for salvation, his Jewish heritage was still very much a part of him. What *"feast"* he is referring to, we are not told, but likely it would have been either the Passover or the Pentecost feast.**

***"They asked him to stay a longer time."* Paul left the fledgling Ephesian church for the sake of keeping his vow. (He had a 30-day time limit to get to Jerusalem.) It is difficult for us in modern times to understand this sort of thing, but in those days vows were taken very seriously; so this was something perhaps the Lord just had to wink at. Anyway, after two or three years on this missionary journey, likely Paul was more than ready to return to his home base (Antioch) for a time of rest and recuperation. True to his word, Paul did return to Ephesus later. (19:1)**

V 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.

***"And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up."* Although it is not mentioned, Paul likely went *"up"* from the coastal city of Caesarea to the more highly elevated city of Jerusalem and there *"greeted the church".* He would have made this trip to Jerusalem in order to fulfill his vow. After that *"he went down to Antioch",* the home base from where he had started. This marked the end of what is known as Paul's second missionary journey.**

V 23 After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

"Some time there." **Possibly the summer of A.D. 52 to the spring of A.D. 53 was spent in Antioch.** ***"He departed."*** **His departure for** ***"Galatia and Phrygia"*** **marked the beginning of his third missionary journey.**

"Strengthening all the disciples." **Follow-up and consolidating the gains made in previous journeys was an important aspect of Paul's missionary work.**

> **In Antioch** ***"it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people"*****, and at Iconium** ***"Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord"*****. In Corinth,** ***"he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God"*****, and also at Ephesus** ***"disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus… by the space of two years"*****. (Acts 11:26, 14:3, 18:11, 19:10)**
>
> **Jesus, Paul, and the early apostles put their major emphasis on big cities and had their greatest successes in the major centers of population like the ones named above, from which their converts there reached the surrounding territory themselves! As you can see by Acts 19:10, Paul spent only two years teaching in Ephesus, apparently without even leaving the school of Tyrannus, but the verse continues to say that** ***"all Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."*** **(Acts 19:10)**
>
> **The procedure the apostle Paul practised, which resulted in the evangelising of all Asia [meaning Asia Minor, or Turkey]… before his death, by means of his own single-handed effort and that of a few of his friends, was by training his converts to witness and carry on after he was gone.**
>
> **During his first missionary venture (Acts 13-14), it says after winning many converts in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra that, instead of deciding to gain more territory, Paul and Barnabas** ***"returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith,*** **(and)** ***ordained elders in every church."*** **(Acts 14:21-23)**

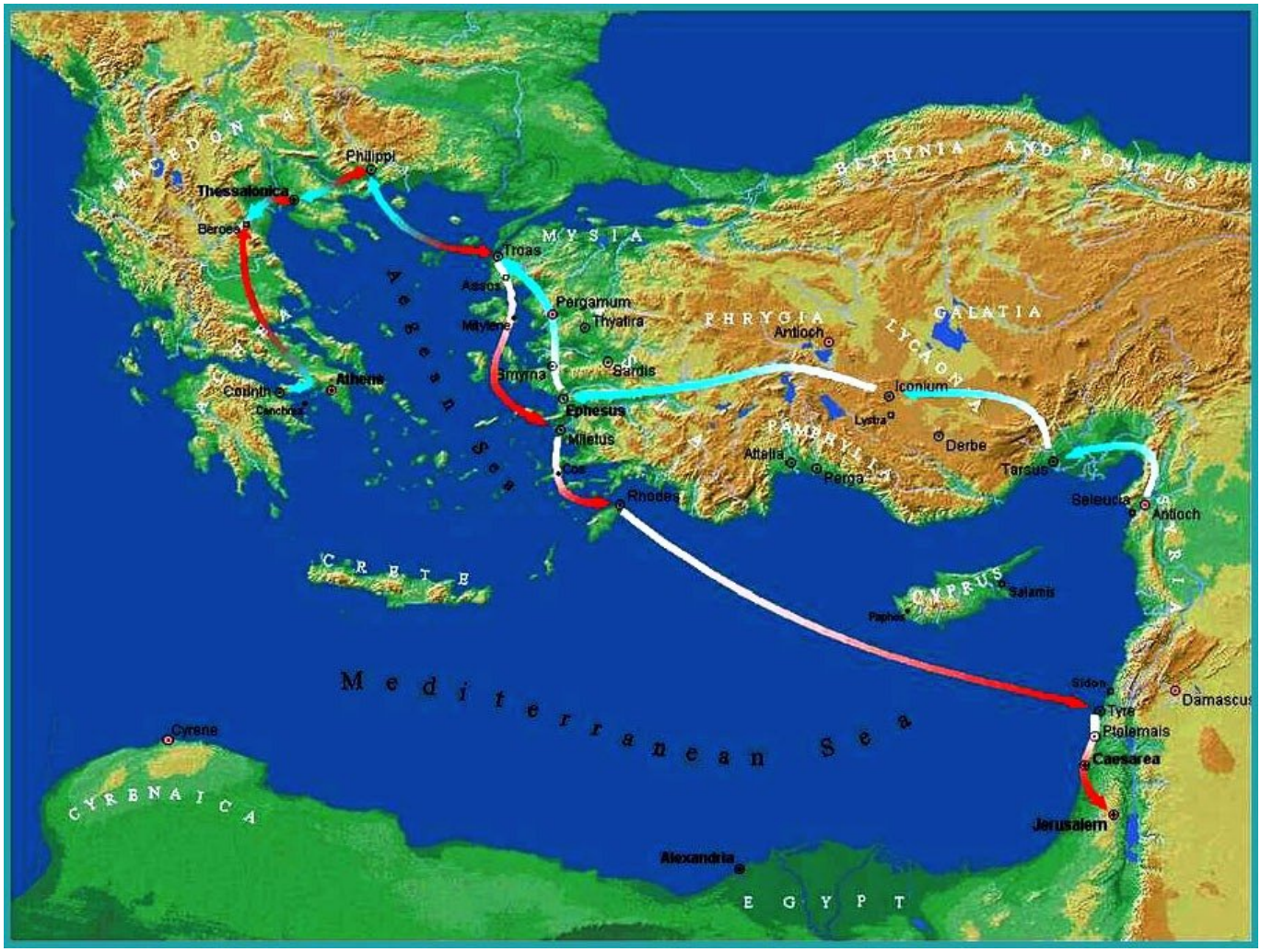
Then, *"some days after",* at the start of his second pioneering endeavor (Acts 15:40, 18:22), *"Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they do."* (Acts 15:36)

Then again it says, *"after he had spent some time there* (in Antioch)" resting up for a third journey (Acts 18:23, 21:17), *"he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples."* (Acts 18:23)

***…*Paul's method is best summed up in his counsel to Timothy: *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."* (2Timothy 2:2)**

[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1974]

Paul did not get so busy gaining territory to the neglect of consolidating his gains by establishing the churches, appointing elders, instructing and training them until they could stand on their own. Only then did he leave them, knowing they could survive and carry on. And even after he was gone and in prison, Paul kept at it, writing them letters to help them stay on track.



Map of Third Missionary Journey

V 24-25 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.

"A certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria." **Alexandria, Egypt, was a major center of learning and of Jewish people; the Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, was written there about 250 B.C. This would have been an ideal spot outside of Jerusalem to receive a good education in the Old Testament Scriptures.**

Apollos was *"an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures. . . fervent in spirit",* and *"taught accurately the things of the Lord",* even though he knew *"only the baptism of John",* and at this point all his teaching was based on the Old Testament.

V26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Apollos came to the attention of Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus when *"he began to speak boldly in the synagogue".* They *"explained to him the way of God more accurately."* Probably they explained to him such things as the events and meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the responsibility to witness.

V 27-28 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;
for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

***"He* [Apollos] desired *to cross to Achaia* [Greece]*."* Apollos left with letters of commendation from the Ephesian church and *"greatly helped those who believed through grace".* His knowledge of the Word would have strengthened the new believers' foundation of faith.**

Much of that strengthening had to do with countering any lingering doubts that the Jews were still propagating: *"For he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ."* To believe the awesome truth that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, was a struggle then for Jews and Gentiles both, and it still is.

But a good understanding of the Word can greatly strengthen faith that is weak or wavering. From Apollos' example we learn how helpful it is for believers to arm themselves with a good working knowledge of the Word.

(Continue to ACTS, chapter 19)