

ST MARKS PRESENTS:

# THE BOOK of Acts

Part 29

## INTRODUCTION

It is more than doubtful whether anything in the choicest oratory of the learned men of Greece could begin to match the dignity, majesty and grandeur of Paul's address before the Areopagites. The apostle had met paganism; now he faced the philosophical arguments with which it was defended. From beginning to end he showed perfect self-control, while at the same time his discourse was the outpouring of that which had filled his heart, surrounded as he was by idolatry. His intense earnestness stands out in sharp contrast to the flippancy of the Athenians as he makes his reply from "the midst" of the Areopagus.

Acts 17:22-34 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; (23) for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: (24) "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. (25) Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. (26) And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, (27) so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; (28) for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' (29) Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. (30) Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, (31) because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (32) And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." (33) So Paul departed from among them. (34) However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Paul's opening statement in verse 22-23 is most remarkable because, while eminently tactful, it was also the first blow in his argument against the philosophies of the Athenians. The Epicureans had admitted gods into their system as phantoms of popular imagination, while the Stoics had admitted them as minor developments of the great god, the universe. Both were, in practice, idolaters. Paul's discourse before the philosophers at Athens was in fact a masterpiece of God-given wisdom and spiritual power. The dignity and sincerity of his manner, his skillful use of local circumstances, his rare combination of prudence and boldness, the powerful way in which he met human philosophy with divine revelation, the tactful, yet telling manner in which he exposed his hearers as ignorant idolaters, searching their consciences, warning them of judgment and calling upon them to repent and turn to God; the superb manner in which he appealed to the testimony of creation citing some of their very own poets, even using the inscription on their altar as his text, answering atheism, polytheism, pantheism, agnosticism, materialism and fatalism, all in the course of a few moments before he was interrupted.

- Atheism** - Disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God or gods.
- Polytheism** - The belief in or worship of more than one god.
- Pantheism** - Belief which identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God.
- Agnosticism** - The view that the existence of God, of the divine or the supernatural is unknown or unknowable.
- Materialism** - A theory that denies the existence of spirit, and looks for physical explanations for all phenomena.
- Fatalism** - The belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable.

## ACTS CHAPTER 18

Acts 18:1-8 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. (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. (3) So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. (4) And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. (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. (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." (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. (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.

Corinth boasted extraordinary commercial advantages. It was a vital seaport and because of its advantageous location Corinth became one of the world's leading centres of athletic entertainment. Furthermore, Corinth was also a very wicked city. The most appalling aspect of Corinthian life was its "religion." In Corinth lasciviousness was not merely condoned but encouraged and actually "consecrated" as worship to Aphrodite, the "goddess of love." The very name Corinthian in Paul's day was synonymous with immorality. Those who wonder how Paul could call the failing Corinthian believers "saints" should bear in mind that the church at Corinth, with all its faults, was one of the wonders of church history and one of the triumphs of God's grace.

Even before Paul had "departed from Athens" to come to Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla, refugees from Italy, were already on the scene, waiting, as it were, for Paul to call on them, and were able to supply him with both lodging and employment. Aquila and Priscilla came to understand the glorious truths committed to Paul and became faithful co-workers with him. As Paul laboured during the week, he used the sabbath days to take advantage of the synagogue services, where he "reasoned... and persuaded the Jews and Greeks." With the coming of Silas and Timothy we find Paul preaching Christ with new fervor. Heavy burdens had been lifted from his heart. Financial needs had been supplied. Trusted co-workers would now be at his side. However, Paul's testimony to the Jews at Corinth was not merely rejected; it was opposed and blasphemed. Once more the favoured people were rejecting the Word of God and judging themselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). Paul's act in shaking his raiment out against them had deep symbolic significance. It was the indignant protest of one who had found appeals to the Scriptures, to reason and to conscience fruitless. He would cease trying to persuade them. This is an evident allusion to Ezekiel 3:18,19. If they perished in their sin they could never complain that he had not warned them. Here he declares: "From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." From this point on he will be in a fuller sense "the apostle of the Gentiles."

Here at Corinth, rejected in the synagogue, the apostle is invited by a man named Justus, to conduct his ministry in his home, and it was evidently while using this home as a base of operations that so great a work was done for God in Corinth. The apostle was now taking a bold and aggressive step, moving into the house of a Gentile "worshipper" who lived right next door to the synagogue. The conversion of the "chief ruler" of the synagogue and his household must have made a profound impression upon the community and given great impetus to the cause of Christ in Corinth. It is in this connection that we read that "many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Ver. 8). Thus God already placed His stamp of approval on the bold step Paul had taken.

Acts 18:9-11 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; (10) for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." (11) And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

How this gracious intervention must have encouraged the heart of the faithful warrior! How it must have stimulated his zeal for his beloved Lord, to hear His voice, encouraging him to speak out boldly and assuring him not only of the fellowship of His presence, but also of physical protection and - many souls! Tomorrow he could begin the work anew, assured in advance of the outcome.

Acts 18:12-17 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, (13) saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." (14) 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. (15) 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." (16) And he drove them from the judgment seat. (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.

When Gallio was made a Roman proconsul of Achaia, the Jews were quick to take advantage of the change in administration to stir up a tumult and bring Paul before the "judgment seat." From what follows it appears that Gallio must have questioned the plaintiffs further about their charge, noting that it was wholly a dispute between Jews. Thus, when Paul was about to speak in his own defense, Gallio interrupted to explain that the case was entirely out of his jurisdiction. While the Roman government permitted and protected almost all religions, its magistrates were instructed to keep out of religious controversies if possible. In addition, the Jews had already stirred up much trouble and consequently had only lately been expelled from Rome. To the Greeks standing by, who already hated the Jews, this was an opening to give Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue (and doubtless Paul's chief accuser) a sound beating. That Sosthenes also was eventually saved seems probable from the fact that Paul later mentions Sosthenes as a co-worker with him in a letter to the Corinthian church (I Cor. 1:1). This would make two former persecutors now preaching Christ!

Acts 18:18-23 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. (19) And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. (20) When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, (21) 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. (22) And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. (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.

After Paul had completed a full year and six months at Corinth he bade them farewell, and sailed to Syria. With him on part of this journey were Priscilla and Aquila who were subsequently used to impart spiritual light to the great Apollos (Ver. 26). Why had Paul cut his hair off? There were various vows under the Mosaic law (Deut. 23:21, 22) but the one which involved letting the hair grow during the term of the vow and shaving it off again at its expiration was the Nazarite vow, in which the subject consecrated himself to the Lord in a special way for a week, a month, a year or any designated period of time (Num. 6:1-21). This appears to be the vow which Paul had taken and which expired at Cenchrea, but needed to be consummated at "the door of the tabernacle" at Jerusalem to which he pressed on to fulfill. (The taking of a Nazarite vow was a wholly voluntary matter and not one commanded by law.)

Acts 18:24-28 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. (25) 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. (26) 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. (27) 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; (28) for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

Here we meet one of Paul's great fellow servants and an inspiration to many, Apollos. He was a great preacher and servant of Christ. The Scriptures tell us first that he was a Jew from Alexandria. This background already gave him a spiritual advantage over others. The Jews at Alexandria placed more emphasis on the Scriptures than on "the traditions of the fathers," as witnessed by their world-famed library and school of Biblical interpretation, and especially by the fact that the first Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Septuagint, was produced there. There are two aspects to

Apollos' character that can inspire us, firstly his fervent spirit and secondly, his Godly humility. When Aquila and Priscilla first heard Apollos preach they, of course, recognized him as a truly great teacher of the Word, but as he continued teaching they noticed that he got no further than the baptism of John and the teachings of Christ on earth. In hearing this, they showed their fine Christian character and did not take him to task for his limitations or criticize him to others. Instead "they took him aside," perhaps inviting him to dine or visit with them, and then they "explained the way of God more accurately." (Ver. 26). Here Apollos had found a couple who could lead him further into the truth with the same painstaking exactness which he had himself exhibited, and therefore could appreciate. It should be noted that whereas he had been instructed in "the way of the Lord," Aquila and Priscilla now led him further into "the way of God." [Greek - Theos]. They could now tell Apollos the great basic truths of the mystery as they had learned them from Paul in his "gospel of the grace of God." They could show him the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension in the light of that grace - all of it harmonizing perfectly with the Old Testament Scriptures, though not taught there. It is noteworthy that Apollos received his advanced theological training, not at a seminary or from any of the great leaders of the day, but from two humble tentmakers and one of them a woman. Aquila and Priscilla were used by God to shed light on the Word and guide Apollos to see the full truth.



## ST MARKS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

info@stmarks.org.za | www.stmarks.org.za | 041-3606060