

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Acts 18:1-11, 18-21

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 29, 2015

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 29, 2015**, is from **Acts 18:1-11, 18-21**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **International Bible Lesson Forum**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Acts 18:1-11, 18-21

(Acts 18:1) After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

After Paul spoke in the Areopagus in Athens, some believed. Then Paul went to the port city of Corinth, the chief city in Achaia (in Greece), about 50 miles west of Athens. From Corinth, Paul wrote two letters to Thessalonica (that we have in the Bible). A few years later, he wrote his letter to Rome from Corinth. As we learn from history and First and Second Corinthians, Corinth was an immoral city and that immorality sometimes spread into the church and required church discipline and advice from Paul.

(Acts 18:2) There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,

Pontus is a region on the southern coast of the Black Sea (now located in modern Turkey). Paul called Priscilla “Prisca” in his letters. Paul may have led Aquila and Priscilla to faith in Jesus Christ after he met them: Luke did not say. Or they may have become Christians after Jewish Christians returned to Rome after their experience on the Day of Pentecost. The Roman Emperor Claudius ordered the Jews from Rome around 49 A.D. because they were making trouble, perhaps causing trouble with Jewish Christians in Rome—all Jews were ordered to leave Rome. Many Jews and Jewish Christians had returned by the time Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans about 57 A.D.

(Acts 18:3) and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers.

Customarily, rabbis did not take money for their teaching, so rabbis learned a trade. Paul's trade was tentmaker or leather worker. Today, those in Christian ministry who support themselves and their families primarily with a trade or profession are often called "in tent-making ministry." From his letters, we know that Paul was pleased that his "tent-making ministry" enabled some of his churches to grow without being burdened by his expenses.

(Acts 18:4) Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

Because Paul honored the Sabbath, he did not work at his trade of tent-making on the Sabbath but went to the synagogue to teach the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles about Jesus. As was his custom, Paul reasoned with them from the Scriptures to prove that Jesus had fulfilled their prophets' predictions and Jesus needed to die and rise again for the forgiveness of sins and to give eternal life to believers in Him.

(Acts 18:5) When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus.

From Paul's letters to the church in Thessalonica, we know Paul rejoiced over what Silas and Timothy reported about

the church. Paul wrote to the church: “And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:7). Silas and Timothy provided the financial support for Paul to focus daily on proclaiming the good news to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah the prophets had foretold would come.

(Acts 18:6) When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

From Paul’s response at being abused and reviled after he shared the good news, we see clearly that believers can be true to their faith in Christ by simply walking away and leaving such abusers completely alone. It is no sign of a lack of love or faith to tell someone, “I am innocent in what I have said and done; therefore, I am not responsible for what happens to you from this day forth. I will now spend my time with others.” Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet” (Matthew 10:4). Paul shook his clothes as he left the synagogue, a symbolic action and message the Jews in the synagogue would understand. In Paul’s case, as he turned to new people, primarily to the Gentiles in Corinth, his leaving led to more people coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

(Acts 18:7) Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a

worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue.

Titus (or Titius) was a worshiper of God (or a God-fearing Gentile) who Paul led to believe in Jesus. He had attended worship in the synagogue where he had heard Paul teach, and he lived next door to the synagogue. The Jews who had come to believe in Jesus could attend their synagogue services and also attend Christian teaching in the home of Titus as long as the synagogue leaders allowed them to attend the synagogue as believers in Jesus. Paul did not exclude the unbelieving Jews from his life and ministry, and Titus' nearby home left Paul accessible to them if they changed their minds about Jesus or him and they sought him and his teaching. But Paul refused to go to the unbelieving Jews in the synagogue and open himself to further abuse and rejection.

(Acts 18:8) Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.

Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his whole household became believers in the Lord Jesus. The good news of Jesus spread to both Jews and Gentiles in Corinth: they "believed and were baptized." Paul stayed long enough in Corinth that after he left the Church began to divide into groups or parties around different leaders; so, from his first letter to Corinth we learn that he had personally baptized Crispus: "I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius" (1 Corinthians 1:14).

Luke showed the good results of Paul's changing the focus of his ministry. By refusing to waste his time with those who had committed themselves to rejecting him and his teaching about Jesus, Paul was able to reach those God wanted him to reach with the time and strength he had for the Lord's service while in Corinth.

(Acts 18:9) One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent;

As a result of his preaching, Paul had suffered persecution from unbelievers in Ephesus and Thessalonica. He had suffered mental and spiritual abuse from the Jews in the synagogue. No wonder Paul might have been afraid as he continued his ministry in Corinth. Therefore, Jesus appeared to him and gave him good reasons not to be afraid but to keep speaking in His Name.

(Acts 18:10) for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people."

The Lord Jesus assured Paul that He was with him. In addition, the Lord had many sincere Jews and God-fearers in Corinth who would come to believe in Him as the Messiah as a result of Paul's preaching. In Corinth, Jesus assured Paul that he could do much good work for Him and others without being physically assaulted as a result. Paul might still need to argue with unbelievers about Jesus, but Jesus would not allow them to physically harm him if they rejected Jesus and the gospel.

(Acts 18:11) He stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Because of the Lord's encouragement, Paul stayed and labored in Corinth for 18 months rather than move on to a different city "shaking the dust off his feet." This length of time gave Paul the opportunity to organize the church and properly train elders and other church leaders in Corinth. Paul could become very familiar with church leaders and members—knowing their problems, strengths, and gifts for service. Paul would know what advice to write and how to approach those leaders and church members later when problems arose and they sent or wrote for advice. His letters of counsel and guidance would help subsequent churches and ministers with similar problems elsewhere for centuries in the future. [Skip from Acts 18:11 to Acts 18:18 in this International Lesson]

(Acts 18:18) After staying there for a considerable time, Paul said farewell to the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had his hair cut, for he was under a vow.

The "considerable time" or "some time" may or may not have been beyond the 18 months that Luke reported in Acts 18:11. Perhaps Luke meant that eighteen months was a considerable time for Paul to stay anyplace in his missionary journey. Paul left Corinth for a return trip to Jerusalem and Antioch to report on his second missionary journey. He could report that he had recruited two new missionaries during his journey: Aquila and Priscilla. Luke

did not explain Paul's vow, but we see that Paul had not abandoned his commitment to Jewish customs when they did not conflict with the New Covenant of Jesus (see Numbers 6:5).

(Acts 18:19) When they reached Ephesus, he left them there, but first he himself went into the synagogue and had a discussion with the Jews.

On the way back, Paul visited some of the churches he had founded. Whereas Paul stopped teaching in the synagogue in Corinth, because it had rejected him, Paul did teach in the synagogue in Ephesus on the way back, and perhaps he led more sincere Jews and God-fearing Gentiles to faith in Jesus. Having trained Aquila and Priscilla over 18 months' time in Corinth, he left them in Ephesus to build up the church using the principles Paul had taught them by word and example in Corinth.

(Acts 18:20) When they asked him to stay longer, he declined;

When the synagogue and church in Ephesus asked Paul to stay longer, he declined, and that may have been one reason he left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus to continue the work of evangelism and church development. Paul followed the Lord Jesus rather than be detained by others, even when others had good intentions and reasons for their requests.

(Acts 18:21) but on taking leave of them, he said, "I will return to you, if God wills." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

Paul left Ephesus and landed in Caesarea. Then he went immediately to the church in Jerusalem (perhaps to report on his work and take gifts from the churches he had visited). Then he went to Antioch and reported on his missionary journey. When Paul went on his third missionary journey, he did visit Ephesus again as he promised, because it was the Lord's will (see Acts 19:1 and the following verses).

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Can you think of three benefits of a tent-making ministry for churches and those in tent-making ministry?
2. What actions by Paul might make you think he honored the Sabbath by not making tents on that day?
3. What are some things Paul did when he was opposed, reviled, rejected, and abused?
4. What might you say to someone who said Paul was unloving to do what he did regarding those who opposed, reviled, rejected, and abused him?
5. Can you think of three benefits of Paul staying in Corinth 18 months?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly
International Bible Lesson.

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