

# ***One Faith, One Family, One Focus***

Acts 18:18-22

December 13, 2015

***<sup>18</sup> Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria,*** (after a while Paul leaves Corinth, heading home)

***and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.***  
(team!)

***In Cenchrea he had his hair cut,*** (curious detail)

***for he was keeping a vow.*** (ditto....)

***<sup>19</sup> They came to Ephesus,*** (an important point that will be expounded upon later in Acts...)

***and***

***he left them there.*** (Aquila & Priscilla set up shop in Ephesus...)

***Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.*** (again & again & again...)

<sup>20</sup> *When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent,* (Paul did not stay long)

<sup>21</sup> *but*

*taking leave of them and saying,  
"I will return to you again if God wills,"*

(Paul promises to come back... later in Acts)

*he set sail from Ephesus.*

<sup>22</sup> *When he had landed at Caesarea,* (port)  
*he went up and greeted the church,* (NOTE:  
while not obvious, it is clear that "the church"  
referenced here is the Jerusalem church... cf. "went  
up")

*and*

*went down to Antioch.* (Paul's second missionary  
journey officially ends here, back where it began – at his  
home church in Antioch)

## **Paul Visits Jerusalem ([18:18-23](#))**

While Paul found he laboured not in vain, he continued labouring. **Our times are in God's hand; we purpose, but he disposes; therefore we must make all promises with submission to the will of God;** not only if providence permits, but if God does not otherwise direct our motions. A very good refreshment it is to a faithful minister, to have for awhile the society of his brethren.

**Disciples are compassed about with infirmity; ministers must do what they can to strengthen them, by directing them to Christ, who is their Strength.**

**Let us earnestly seek, in our several places, to promote the cause of Christ, forming plans that appear to us most proper, but relying on the Lord to bring them to pass if he sees good.**

**- Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary.**

**Verse 18.** *And sailed thence into Syria.* Or set sail for Syria. **His design was to go to Jerusalem to the festival which was soon to occur, [Acts 18:21](#).**

*Having shorn his head.* Many interpreters have supposed that this refers to Aquila, and not to Paul. But the connexion evidently requires us to understand it of Paul, though the Greek construction does not with certainty determine to which it refers. The Vulgate refers it to Aquila, the Syriac to Paul.

*In Cenchrea.* **Cenchrea was the eastern port of Corinth. A church was formed in that place, Romans 16:1.**

*For he had a vow.*

**A vow is a solemn promise made to God respecting anything.**

**The use of vows is observable throughout the Scripture.** Jacob, going into Mesopotamia, vowed the tenth of his estate, and promised to offer it at Bethel to the honour of God, [Genesis 28:22](#). Moses made many regulations in regard to vows. A man might devote himself or his children to the Lord. He might devote any part of his time or property to his service. **The vow they were required sacredly to observe, ([Deuteronomy 23:21,22](#)) except in certain specified cases they were permitted to redeem that which had been thus devoted.**

The most remarkable vow among the Jews was that of the Nazarite; by which a man made a solemn promise to God to abstain from wine and all intoxicating liquors, to let the hair grow, and not to enter any house polluted by having a dead body in it, or to attend any funeral. This vow generally lasted eight days, sometimes a month, sometimes during a definite period fixed by themselves, and sometimes during their whole lives. When the vow expired, the priest made an offering of a he-lamb for a burnt-offering, a she-lamb for an expiatory sacrifice, and a ram for a peace-offering. The priest then, or some other person, shaved the head of the Nazarite at the door of the tabernacle, and burnt the hair on the fire of the altar. Those who made the vow out of Palestine, and who could not come to the temple when the vow was expired, contented themselves with observing the abstinence required by the law, and cutting off the hair where they were. This I suppose to have been the case with Paul.

His hair he cut off at the expiration of the vow at Cenchrea, though he delayed to perfect the vow by the proper ceremonies until he reached Jerusalem, [Acts 21:23,24](#). **Why Paul made this vow, or on what occasion, the sacred historian has not informed us, and conjecture perhaps is useless.**

**We may observe, however:**

**(1.) that it was common for the Jews to make such vows to God, as an expression of gratitude or of devotedness to his service, when they had been raised up from sickness, or delivered from danger or calamity. See Josephus, b. i. 2, 15.** Vows of this nature were also made by the Gentiles on occasions of deliverance from any signal calamity. Juvenal Sat. 12, 81. It is *possible* that Paul may have made such a vow in consequence of signal deliverance from some of the numerous perils to which he was exposed. But,

**(2.) there is reason to think that it was mainly with a design to convince the Jews that he did not despise their law, and was not its enemy.** See [Acts 21:22-24](#). In accordance with the custom of the nation, and in compliance with the law which was not wrong in itself, **he might have made this vow, not for a time-serving purpose, but in order to conciliate them, and to mitigate their anger against the gospel.**

**But where nothing is recorded, conjecture is useless.** Those who wish to see the subject discussed, may consult Grotius and Kuinel in loco, and Spencer Deuteronomy Legibus Hebrae. p. 862, and Calmet's Dic. art. *Nazarite*.

[Numbers 6:18](#), [Acts 21:24](#)

(\*) "for he had a vow" [Romans 16:1](#)

**Verse 19. *And he came to [Ephesus](#). This was a celebrated city in Ionia, in Asia Minor, about forty miles south of Smyrna. It was chiefly famous for the temple of Diana, usually reckoned one of the seven wonders of the world.***

**Pliny styles this city the ornament of Asia.**

**In the times of the Romans Ephesus was the metropolis of Asia.**

This city is now under the dominion of the Turks, and is almost in a state of ruin. Dr. Chandler, in his travels in Asia Minor, says-"The inhabitants are a few Greek peasants, living in extreme wretchedness, dependence, and insensibility; the representatives of an illustrious people, and inhabiting the wreck of their greatness; some in the substructions of the glorious edifices which they raised; some beneath the vaults of the stadium, once the crowded scene of their diversions; and some in the sepulchres which received their ashes."-Travels, p. 131, Oxford, 1775.

**The Jews, according to Josephus, were very numerous in Ephesus, and had obtained the privilege of citizenship.**

*Left them there.* That is, Aquila and Priscilla, [Acts 18:24-26](#).

*Reasoned with the Jews.* [Acts 17:2](#).

(\*) "reasoned" "Discoursed"

(\*) "reasoned with the Jews" [Acts 17:2](#)

**Verse 20.** (\*) "tarry" "Abide"

**Verse 21.** *Keep this feast.* **Probably the Passover is here referred to.**

***Why he was so anxious to celebrate that feast at Jerusalem, the historian has not informed us. It is probable, however, that he wished to meet as many of his countrymen as possible, and to remove, if practicable, the prejudices which had everywhere been raised against him, [Acts 21:20,21.](#)***

Perhaps, also, he supposed that there would be many Christian converts present, whom he might meet also.

***But I will return, etc. This he did, [Acts 19:1](#), and remained there three years, [Acts 20:31.](#)***

(\*) "Jerusalem" [Acts 19:21](#), [20:16](#)

(\*) "if God will" [1 Corinthians 4:19](#), [James 4:15](#)

**Verse 22.** *Cæsarea.* [Acts 8:40.](#)

*And gone up. From the ship.*

*And saluted the church.*

Having expressed for them his tender regard and affection.

*To Antioch. In Syria. [Acts 11:19](#).*

**[Verse 23](#).** *The country of Galatia and Phrygia.*

**He had been over these regions before, preaching the gospel, [Acts 16:6](#)**

*Strengthening.* **Establishing then by exhortation and counsel. [1 Corinthians 1:12](#).**

(\* "Galatia" [Galatians 1:2](#)

(\* "strengthening" [Acts 14:22](#), [15:32,41](#)

**- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.**

## **Great Contextualization!**

Although the atoning work of Jesus Christ inaugurated the New Covenant, it took time for the early Jewish believers to fully abandon the ceremonial practices of the revered

and dutifully followed Old Covenant. The book of Hebrews contains the theology of that transition, showing Christ's superiority to everyone and everything connected with the Old Covenant. The book of Acts records the transition's historical outworking, as a new entity entered the stage of redemptive history. Clearly, God had temporarily set aside Israel (cf. [Matt. 21:33-43](#); [22:1-9](#); [23:37-38](#); [Rom. 10:19-21](#); [11:20-24](#)), whose long history of apostasy reached an appalling climax in the killing of its Messiah. God began working out His kingdom purposes through the church. Yet it took time for the new church to separate itself completely from its old religious habits (cf. [Acts 10](#), [11](#), [15](#)).

First-century Judaism was far more than a religion; it was a combination of divinely ordained laws covering many features of daily life, along with which developed a man-made national and cultural tradition. To be Jewish was not merely to embrace a biblical creed or affirm an Old Testament theology. Being Jewish also meant embracing a traditional interpretation of Scripture and an expansion of legal prescriptions into nearly every area of life. To be Jewish meant not only to *believe* differently from one's Gentile neighbors but also to *behave* differently. In fact, the purpose of many Old Covenant ceremonies and observances was to keep Israel separate from her Gentile neighbors.

The Jews were uniquely God's people, and He wanted them to stand apart from the corrupting influence of the rest of the world, that they might be a witness to the nations of the power and grace of the true God. This divine design was

compounded and even adulterated by the "traditions of men," which Jesus said substituted for the "commandment of God" (cf. [Matt. 15:3, 9](#)).

Not surprisingly, even the apostles had difficulty shedding the old demands and patterns and making the transition. [Acts 2:46](#) finds the church they led still meeting in the temple, and [3:1](#) shows that Peter and John were still observing the prescribed times of prayer. Peter strenuously and repeatedly resisted abandoning the dietary regulations ([10:9-16](#)). The Jewish believers, including the other apostles, were shocked that Peter violated Jewish custom by eating with Gentiles ([11:2-3](#)). Even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, twice took a Jewish vow ([18:18](#); [21:26](#)). It should be noted that the Lord was patient with this transition. He likewise urged believers to understand that those who still observed the Old Testament laws should not be hurried into some freedom that would violate their consciences or cause them to engage in self-condemnation. This is the subject of Paul's instruction in [Romans 14:1-15:6](#).

The church, even in the Gentile world, was usually associated with the synagogues. Paul's custom, when entering a city, was to preach the gospel first to the Jews gathered on the Sabbath. Jewish believers would often continue to operate within the framework of the synagogue for as long as possible (cf. [19:8-9](#)). So common was that association that the Romans initially viewed Christianity as nothing more than a sect within Judaism. For that reason, the proconsul Gallio refused to rule in the Corinthian Jews'

case against Paul, declaring it to be an internal dispute within Judaism (18:12-15).

The text of Acts 18:18-19:7 is linked together by three examples of those caught up in this transition from the Old to the New Covenant: Paul, Apollos, and twelve Old Testament saints.

Gallio's favorable ruling (18:14-15) allowed **Paul** to remain **many days longer** at Corinth. At last, however, he felt the need to return to Palestine. He **took leave of the brethren** at Corinth **and put out to sea for Syria**, taking with him **Priscilla and Aquila**, who had become two of Paul's closest friends. **That he felt the freedom to invite them to accompany him shows that other leaders had already emerged within the Corinthian church, such as Gaius, Sosthenes, Stephanus, and Crispus.** **And the fact that Priscilla and Aquila would leave their business to go with Paul indicates their loyalty and devotion to him.**

Arriving at **Cenchrea**, the eastern port of Corinth, where he could find a ship going east, Paul **had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.** **His action seems puzzling at first glance, since he was well aware that the Old Covenant and all its rituals had passed away.** Yet he had been reared according to the strictest standards of the Jewish faith. **In Galatians 1:13-14 Paul wrote:**

***For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God***

*beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.*

To the Philippians he described himself as:

*“...circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”* ([Phil. 3:5-6](#))

After he became a Christian, Paul realized the worthlessness of all the efforts at self-salvation by ritual, tradition, legalism, sincerity, and external goodness compared to the true righteousness and knowledge of God that came through knowing Christ ([Phil. 3:7-9](#)). But he had a genuine love for God's law in Scripture (cf. [Rom. 7:12, 14](#)) and was still influenced by his Jewish heritage. And when he wanted to show his deep thanks for God's marvelous encouragement during the difficult times in Corinth (cf. [chapter 11](#) of this volume), he naturally thought of a typically Jewish way of doing so.

**The vow Paul made was a Nazirite vow—a special pledge of separation and devotion to God (cf. [2 Cor. 6:17](#)). It was usually made in gratitude to the Almighty**

**for gracious blessing or deliverance. In Numbers 6, God Himself inaugurated the Nazirite vow, saying to Moses,**

*Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, "When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the Lord, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh or dried grapes. All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin. All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long." (Num. 6:2-5)*

**The vow was for a specific period** (usually a month, although Samson [Judg. 16:17], Samuel [1 Sam. 1:11], and John the Baptist [Luke 1:15] were Nazirites for life). **At the end of that time there was an elaborate ceremony:**

*Now this is the law of the Nazirite when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring the offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting. And he shall present his offering to the Lord: one male lamb a year old without defect for a burnt offering and one ewe-lamb a year old without defect for a sin offering and one ram without defect for a peace offering, and a basket of unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil and unleavened wafers spread with oil, along with their grain offering and their libations. Then the priest*

*shall present them before the Lord and shall offer his sin offering and his burnt offering. He shall also offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord, together with the basket of unleavened cakes; the priest shall likewise offer its grain offering and its libation. The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head of hair at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall take the ram's shoulder when it has been boiled, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them on the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his dedicated hair. Then the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the Lord. It is holy for the priest, together with the breast offered by waving and the thigh offered by lifting up; and afterward the Nazirite may drink wine. This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the Lord according to his separation, in addition to what else he can afford; according to his vow which he takes, so he shall do according to the law of his separation. ([Num. 6:13-21](#))*

**In Paul's day, provision was made for those away from Jerusalem at the termination of their vow to shave their heads, as Paul did, then within thirty days present the hair at the Temple (cf. Josephus Wars, 2.15.1).**

**The phrase he was keeping a vow indicates a process not yet completed. That required his arrival in Jerusalem.**

Having crossed the Aegean Sea as they sailed eastward, Paul and his party **came to Ephesus**, the most important city in Asia Minor.

**Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there to become settled and establish their business. They apparently remained in Ephesus for a few years, had a church meet in their home ([1 Cor. 16:19](#)), and eventually returned to Rome ([Rom. 16:3-5](#)).**

**Paul himself, as was his common strategy, entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. As in Berea, he was well received, so much so that the Jews asked him to stay for a longer time.**

**His response to this great opportunity gives a clear testimony to the seriousness of his vow.**

**He refused to stay!**

In a hurry to reach Jerusalem because of his vow, and (as some Greek manuscripts add) to reach the city before the Feast (probably Passover), **he did not consent**. Regretfully **taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills,"** he set sail from Ephesus.

**He did not leave the city without a Christian witness, however, since Priscilla and Aquila remained there.** And, as will be seen shortly, **they were soon to have help.**

Arriving in Palestine, **Paul landed at Caesarea, the Roman city and port of call for travelers bound for Jerusalem.**

From there he went on to fulfill his vow, and then greeted the church.

**That Paul did visit Jerusalem, although the city is not mentioned, is clear from the requirement of the vow, as well as from Luke's use of the terms went up and went down.**

One naturally **went up** from Caesarea, located on the coast, to Jerusalem, located on Mount Zion, then **went down** from Jerusalem to anywhere else.

**Paul, then, completed his second missionary journey in Antioch, from where it had begun (15:35-36).**

With those few short verses, focusing on the apostle in transition from the old ways, Luke sums up a long and arduous journey.

William Barclay observes:

*We may see very clearly here how much we do not know about Paul. Acts 18:23-19:1 describe a journey of no less than 1,500 miles and it is dismissed with barely a reference.* There are untold tales of heroism of Paul which we will never know. (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955], 150)

**Paul's burning desire to reach the lost world for Christ did not let him remain for long in his home church at Antioch.** After *having spent some time there, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.* With those words Luke begins the account of Paul's third missionary journey. But before continuing with the record of that mission, he returns to recount what took place at Ephesus after Paul's departure. He tells the story of a second individual in transition: Apollos.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Itinerating En Route to Antioch ([18:18-22](#))

**THANKS TO GALLIO'S favorable ruling, Paul was able to stay on in Corinth after he had been brought to trial.**

But after some time he set off for Antioch, taking Aquila and Priscilla with him ([vv. 18-19a](#)). Paul went into the

synagogue in Ephesus, reasoned with the Jews ([v. 19b](#)), and won an invitation to spend more time with them. He declined it with the promise that he would return if it was God's will ([vv. 20-21](#)). **It is interesting that earlier too he had "been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia" (16:6). Now for a second time he seemed to discern that the time was not ripe for a full-blown ministry in Ephesus.**

Paul left Aquila and Priscilla behind in Ephesus and set off for Caesarea, where he "greeted the church and then went down to Antioch" ([v. 22](#)). **One would not go "down" to an inland city from a coastal city. This has led scholars to assume that the church he greeted was the church in Jerusalem, from which we could then speak of Paul traveling "down" to Antioch. This ended Paul's second missionary journey.**

Luke adds a note about Paul's having his hair cut in connection with a vow he had taken before leaving Cenchrea, the eastern port of Corinth ([v. 18](#)). **Hair was cut (usually shaven) after completion of a vow. It would probably be taken to Jerusalem and offered to God.**

**Many have felt that Paul took this vow when he was in a discouraged state at the start of his ministry in Corinth, or perhaps in connection with the vision he received with the promise of God's blessing. If so, cutting his**

## hair was an act of thanksgiving for protection while in Corinth.

**God's encouragement.** Paul arrived in Corinth as a discouraged man. The reaction of the Jews to his message did not help improve this situation (cf. [v. 6](#)). But in this passage we have four clear instances of God's encouragement, which did much to enable him to persevere with his ministry there for eighteen months. (1) Paul established a friendship with fellow tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla, who became his partners in ministry ([vv. 2-3](#)). Few things encourage a lonely traveler as much as welcoming him or her into a loving Christian family. (2) As the synagogue doors were closing to Paul, God opened the door of the home next door ([v. 7](#)). (3) Although by and large the Jews rejected the gospel, the synagogue ruler, Crispus, and his entire family were converted ([v. 8](#)). (4) The greatest of encouragement was the Lord's vision to Paul ([vv. 9-10](#)). We have already seen how God reassures his troubled servants at crucial times ([4:31](#)). Here we see this comfort from the Lord with even greater clarity. Such comfort is an almost essential ingredient for persevering ministry in a fallen world.

**Are vows for us?** Many readers may be surprised to find Paul performing vows ([v. 18](#)), which they see as alien to the spirit of Christianity. **The New Testament, outside Acts, says little about vows except to warn about their misuse ([Matt. 5:34-37](#)).**

**Evangelicals and vows.** Most Protestants today have little place for vows. Why? (1) We have seen vows used in an unbiblical way by both Christians and non-Christians. People have used vows in a somewhat magical way: "We will do this so that we can get that." **The vow does not affect daily life or enhance commitment**; rather, it is a means of getting what we want. A Christian use of vows in a given situation should be different. Rather than being an act of bargaining with God, it is a means of affirming that we do not trust in ourselves but in him alone. Viewed in this way, vows will help us focus on God. We should always welcome that, given our tendency to focus on the things of the world rather than on God.

(2) We have neglected the symbolic in our understanding of Christianity, in part because we have spiritualized the Old Testament ritual. Now that the real thing has come in Christ, we feel these shadows are unnecessary. This is, to a great extent, true. Only people who do not experience the real thing—a heart-to-heart relationship with God—need symbols. But we know that even in this era of the new covenant with its intimate tie with God through the Spirit, we are at times prone to forget certain spiritual truths as we get engrossed in the affairs of life.

**This is one reason why we still need the Lord's Day—to remind us that every day belongs to the Lord. We still need the Lord's Supper to remind us of the significance of what Christ did for us. In**

**a similar way, we may still find vows helpful to bring to special focus spiritual realities that we are prone to forget. If the climax of Paul's vow focused on thanksgiving, then it touches on an area that we are often weak in. We pray earnestly for something, but neglect to thank God after he answers the prayer. Bringing in a structure like a vow can help us avoid this serious oversight. We will do well, then, to incorporate into our spiritual walk certain special spiritual exercises like vows to help us put first things first in life.**

**- NIV Application Commentary**

## **God's Will (Acts 18:18-22)**

**"If God will" (Acts 18:21) was more than a religious slogan with Paul; it was one of the strengths and encouragements of his life and ministry.**

**Knowing and doing God's will is one of the blessings of the Christian life (Acts 22:14).**

**In some of his letters, Paul identified himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1).**

**At a most critical time in his life and ministry, Paul found courage in affirming, "The will of the Lord be done!" (Acts 21:14)**

After eighteen months of ministry, Paul decided that it was God's will for him to leave Corinth and return to his home church in Antioch. His friends Priscilla and Aquila (note how Luke varies the order of their names) accompanied him to Ephesus and remained there when he departed for Caesarea. In [Acts 18:24](#), we will pick up the story of the church in Ephesus and the important part played by Aquila and Priscilla.

**Cenchraea was the seaport for Corinth, and there was a Christian congregation there (Rom. 16:1).**

Here Paul had his head shorn, "for he had a vow." This probably refers to the Nazarite vow described in [Numbers 6](#).

**Since the Nazarite vow was purely voluntary, Paul was not abandoning grace for law when he undertook it. The vow was not a matter of salvation but of personal devotion to the Lord. He allowed his hair to grow for a specific length of time and then cut it when the vow was completed.** He also abstained from using the fruit of the vine in any form.

**We are not told why Paul took this vow.** Perhaps it was a part of his special dedication to God during the difficult days of the early ministry in Corinth. Or perhaps the vow was an expression of gratitude to God for all that He had done for him and his associates. **According to Jewish law, the Nazarite vow had to be completed in Jerusalem with the offering of the proper sacrifices. The hair was shorn at the completion of the vow, not at the beginning; and it was not necessary for one to be in Jerusalem to make the vow.**

**Luke does not tell us how long Paul was in Ephesus, but the time was evidently very short.** The Jews there were much more receptive to the Gospel and wanted Paul to stay; but he wanted to get to Jerusalem to complete his vow, and then to Antioch to report to the church. However, he did promise to return, and he kept that promise ([Acts 19:1](#)).

**The statement "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem" ([Acts 18:21](#)) must not be interpreted to mean that Paul and the early Christians felt obligated to observe the Jewish feasts (see [Acts 20:16](#)). Being in Jerusalem during the important feasts (in this case, Passover) would give Paul opportunity to meet and witness to key Jewish leaders from throughout the Roman Empire. He would also be able to minister to Christian Jews who returned to their homeland.**

**Paul taught clearly that the observing of religious feasts was neither a means of salvation nor an essential for sanctification (Gal. 4:1-11).**

**Christians are at liberty to follow their own conscience so long as they do not judge others or cause others to stumble (Rom. 14:1-15:7).**

Also, **keep in mind Paul's personal policy with regard to these matters of Jewish practice (1 Cor. 9:19-23).**

Arriving at Caesarea, Paul went up to Jerusalem and greeted the believers there. **He then went to Antioch and reported to his home church all that God had done on this second missionary journey. He had been gone from Antioch perhaps two years or more**, and the saints were no doubt overjoyed to see him and hear about the work of God among the Gentiles.

There's no proof, but likely Paul kept reminding the believers in Antioch, "It's always too soon to quit!"

**- Bible Exposition Commentary**

**I. Paul's departure from Corinth, v. 18.**

**1. He did not go away till some time after the trouble he met with there; from other places he had departed when the storm arose, but not from Corinth**, because there it had no sooner risen than it fell again. Some tell us that Gallio did privately countenance Paul, and took him into his favour, and that this occasioned a correspondence between Paul and Seneca, Gallio's brother, which some of the ancients speak of. After this he tarried there yet a good while, some think, beyond the year and a half mentioned, [v. 11](#). While he found he laboured not in vain, he continued labouring.

**2. When he went, he took leave of the brethren solemnly, and with much affection**, with suitable comforts and counsels, and prayers at parting, commending what was good, reproofing what was otherwise, and giving them necessary cautions against the wiles of the false apostles; and his farewell sermon would leave impressions upon them.

**3. He took with him Priscilla and Aquila, because they had a mind to accompany him**; for they seemed disposed to remove, and not inclined to stay long at a place, a disposition which may arise from a good principle, and have good effects, and therefore ought not to be condemned in others, though it ought to be suspected in ourselves. There was a great friendship contracted between them and Paul, and therefore, when he went, they begged to go along with him.

**4. At Cenchrea, which was hard by Corinth, the port where those that went to sea from Corinth took ship, either Paul or Aquila (for the original does not**

**determine which) had his head shaved, to discharge himself from the vow of a Nazarite:** Having shorn his head at Cenchrea; for he had a vow. Those that lived in Judea were, in such a case, bound to do it at the temple: but those who lived in other countries might do it in other places. The Nazarite's head was to be shaved when either his consecration was accidentally polluted, in which case he must begin again, or when the days of his separation were fulfilled ([Numbers 6:9](#); [Numbers 13:18](#)), which, we suppose, was the case here. Some throw it upon Aquila, who was a Jew ([v. 2](#)), and retained perhaps more of his Judaism than was convenient; but I see no harm in admitting it concerning Paul, for concerning him we must admit the same thing ([ch. 21:24,26](#)), not only in compliance for a time with the Jews, to whom he became as a Jew ([1 Corinthians 9:20](#)), that he might win upon them, but because the vow of the Nazarites, though ceremonial, and as such ready to vanish away, had yet a great deal of moral and very pious significance, and therefore was fit to die the last of all the Jewish ceremonies. The Nazarites are joined with the prophets ([Amos 2:11](#)), and were very much the glory of Israel ([Lamentations 4:7](#)), and therefore it is not strange if Paul bound himself for some time with the vow of a Nazarite from wine and strong drink, and from being trimmed, to recommend himself to the Jews; and from this he now discharged himself.

## **II. Paul's calling at Ephesus, which was the metropolis of the Lesser Asia, and a sea-port.**

1. There he left Aquila and Priscilla; not only because they would be but burdensome to him in his journey, but because they might be serviceable to the interests of the gospel at Ephesus. **Paul intended shortly to settle there for some time, and he left Aquila and Priscilla there in the mean time, for the same end as Christ sent his disciple before to every place where he himself would come, to prepare his way.** **QUOTE:** **Aquila and Priscilla might, by private conversation, being very intelligent judicious Christians, dispose the minds of many to give Paul, when he should come among them, a favourable reception, and to understand his preaching; therefore he calls them his helpers in Christ Jesus, Romans 16:3.**

2. There he preached to the Jews in their synagogue; though he did but call there in his journey, yet he would not go without giving them a sermon. **He entered into the synagogue, not as a hearer, but as a preacher, for there he reasoned with the Jews.** Though he had abandoned the Jews at Corinth, who opposed themselves, and blasphemed, yet he did not, for their sakes, decline the synagogues of the Jews in other places, but still made the first offer of the gospel

to them. We must not condemn a whole body or denomination of men, for the sake of some that conduct themselves ill.

3. The Jews at Ephesus were so far from driving Paul away that they courted his stay with them (v. 20): They desired him to tarry longer with them, to instruct them, in the gospel of Christ. These were more noble, and better bred, than those Jews at Corinth, and other places, and it was a sign that God had not quite cast away his people, but had a remnant among them.

**4. Paul would not stay with them now:** He consented not; but bade them farewell. He had further to go; he must by all means keep this feast at Jerusalem; not that he thought himself bound in duty to it (he knew the laws of the feasts were no longer binding), but he had business at Jerusalem (whatever it was) which would be best done **at the time of the feast, when there was a general rendezvous of all the Jews from all parts; which of the feasts it was we are not told, probably it was the passover, which was the most eminent.**

5. He intimated his purpose, after this journey, to come and spend some time at Ephesus, being encouraged by their kind invitation to hope that he should do good among them. It is good to have opportunities in reserve, when one good work is over to have another to apply ourselves to: I will return again to you, but he inserts that necessary proviso, if God will. **QUOTE: Our times are in God's**

**hand; we purpose, but he disposes; and therefore we must make all our promises with submission to the will of God.** If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. I will return again to you, if the Spirit suffer me (ch. [16:7](#)); this was included in Paul's case; not only if providence permit, but if God do not otherwise direct my motions.

### **III. Paul's visit to Jerusalem; a short visit it was, but it served as a token of respect to that truly mother-church.**

1. He came by sea to the port that lay next to Jerusalem. **He sailed from Ephesus (v. 21), and landed at Caesarea, v. 22.** He chose to go by sea, for expedition and for safety, and that he might see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. Joppa had been the port for Jerusalem, but Herod having improved Caesarea, and the port at Joppa being dangerous, that was generally made use of.

2. He went up, and saluted the church, by which, I think, is plainly meant **the church at Jerusalem, which is emphatically called the church, because there the Christian church began, ch. 15:4.** Paul thought it requisite to show himself among them, that they might not think his success among them, **that they might not think his success among the Gentiles had made him think himself either above them or estranged from them, or that the**

honour God had put upon him made him unmindful of the honour he owed to them. **His going to salute the church at Jerusalem intimates,**

(1.) That it was a very friendly visit that he made them, in pure kindness, to enquire into their state, and to testify his hearty good-will to them.

**Quote:**

*The increase of our new friends should not make us forget our old ones, but it should be a pleasure to good men, and good ministers, to revive former acquaintance.*

The ministers at Jerusalem were constant residents, Paul was a constant itinerant; but he took care to keep up a good correspondence with them, that they might rejoice with him in his going out, and he might rejoice with them in their tents, and they might both congratulate and wish well to one another's comfort and success.

(2.) That it was but a short visit. He went up, and saluted them, perhaps with the holy kiss, and made no stay among them. It was designed but for a transient interview, and yet Paul undertook this long journey for that. This is not the world we are to be together in. **God's people are the salt of the earth, dispersed and scattered; yet it is good to see one another**

sometimes, if it be but to see one another, that we may confirm mutual love, may the better keep up our spiritual communion with one another at a distance, and may long the more for that heavenly Jerusalem in which we hope to be together for ever.

#### **IV. His return through those countries where he had formerly preached the gospel.**

**1. He went and spent some time in Antioch, among his old friends there, whence he was first sent out to preach among the Gentiles, ch. 13:1.** He went down to Antioch, to refresh himself with the sight and conversation of the ministers there; and a very good refreshment it is to a faithful minister to have for awhile the society of his brethren; **for, as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend.** Paul's coming to Antioch would bring to remembrance the former days, which would furnish him with matter for fresh thanksgiving.

**2. Thence he went over the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, where he had preached the gospel, and planted churches, which, though very briefly mentioned (ch. 16:6), was yet a glorious work, as appears by Galatians 4:14, 15, where Paul speaks of his preaching the gospel to the Galatians at the first, and their receiving him as an angel of God.**

These country churches (for such they were [Galatians 1:2], and we read not of any city in Galatia where a church was) Paul visited in order as they lay, watering what he had been instrumental to plant, and strengthening all the disciples.

His very coming among them, and owning them, were a great strengthening to them and their ministers.

Paul's countenancing them was encouraging them; but that was not all: he preached that to them which strengthened them, which confirmed their faith in Christ, their resolutions for Christ, and their pious affections to him. Disciples need to be strengthened, for they are compassed about with infirmity; ministers must do what they can to strengthen them, to strengthen them all, by directing them to Christ, and bringing them to live upon him, whose strength is perfected in their weakness, and who is himself their strength and song.

- Matthew Henry's Commentary

*Disciples need to be strengthened because they are saturated with sin.*

- (JDP paraphrase of Matthew Henry)

(18) “*Now Paul, having still remained for many days, bade the brethren farewell, and sailed into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having sheared his head in Cenchrea; for he had a vow.*” It is after the arraignment before Gallio, and previous to his departure from Corinth, that we best locate the date of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. That it was written in Corinth is determined chiefly by a comparison of its contents with those of the First Epistle. The congregation was still suffering from the same persecution mentioned in the First Epistle, and there was still among them some improper excitement in reference to the second coming of the Lord. Both these circumstances indicate that it was written shortly after the first; as soon, perhaps, as Paul could hear from them after their reception of the first. That it was after the arraignment before Gallio, is sufficiently evident, I think, from the absence of those indications of distress in the mind of the writer, which abound in the First Epistle. He did not enjoy this comparative peace of mind until after the persecutions of the Jews culminated and terminated in the scene before Gallio's judgment-seat.

**(Good grammatical context to keep in consideration)**

**Many eminent commentators have contended that it was Aquila, and not Paul, who sheared his head at Cenchrea. The argument by which they defend this position is based upon the fact that the name of Aquila is placed after that of his wife Priscilla, and next to the participle *keiramenos, having sheared*, for the very**

purpose of indicating that the act was performed by him. Others, who insist that it was Paul, reply that the order of the names is not conclusive, inasmuch as they occur in this order in three out of the five times that they are mentioned together in the New Testament. My own opinion is that it was Paul, and my chief reason for so thinking is this: the term *Paul* is the leading subject of the sentence, to which all the verbs and participles must be referred, unless there is some grammatical necessity for detaching one or more of them, and referring them to another subject. *Priscilla* and *Aquila* are subjects of the verb *sailed* (understood): “Paul sailed into Syria, and with him (*sailed*) Priscilla and Aquila.” But if it was intended also to refer the act of shearing to Aquila, the English would require the relative and verb instead of the participle: “with him Priscilla and Aquila *who had sheared* his head,” instead of “Priscilla and Aquila, *having sheared* his head.” The Greek, in order to express this idea, would also have required the *article* or *relative* after *Aquila*. In the absence of such a modification of the construction, we must refer the terms *keiramenos*, *having shaved*, and *eike*, *had*, to the leading subject of the sentence, with which agree all the other verbs, *prosmeinas*, *tarried*; *apotaxamenos*, *took leave of*; and *exepei*, *sailed away*. The objection that Paul could not have taken such a vow consistently with his position in reference to the law of Moses, is fallacious in two respects. *First*, It assumes a degree of freedom from legal observances on the part of Paul which his conduct on subsequent occasions shows that he had not attained. *Second*, It assumes,

**without authority, that this vow was one peculiar to the law, which it would be improper for Christians to observe. The vow of the Nazarite would certainly be improper now, because it required the offering of sacrifices at its termination. But this was not that vow, seeing the hair was sheared in Cenchrea; whereas the Nazarite's hair could be sheared only at the temple in Jerusalem. What the exact nature of the vow was, we have now no means of determining.**

The only practical value of this incident arises from its bearing upon present practice. But this is altogether independent of the question whether it was Paul or Aquila who had the vow. If we admit it was Aquila, the presence of Paul, and the approbation indicated by his silence, gives to it the apostolic sanction. We conclude, therefore, that disciples would be guilty of no impropriety in making vows, and allowing their hair to grow until the vow is performed. But it must not be inferred, from this conclusion, that we are at liberty to make *foolish* or *wicked* vows, which would be better broken than kept.

19–22. Embarking at Cenchrea, which was the eastern port of Corinth, on a voyage for Syria, the frequent commercial intercourse between Corinth and Ephesus very naturally caused the vessel to touch at the latter city, which was the destination of Priscilla and Aquila. (19) *“And he went to Ephesus, and left them there. He himself went into the synagogue and discoursed to the Jews. (20) They requested him to remain longer with them, but he did not consent, (21) but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means*

*keep the coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return to you, God willing. (22) And he set sail for Ephesus; and having gone down to Cæsarea, he went up and saluted the Church, and went down to Antioch.*” The context plainly implies that the Church which he “went up and saluted” was that in Jerusalem, and not, as some have supposed, that in Cæsarea; for it had just been said that he must reach Jerusalem, and the statement that he “went up,” especially as it occurs after reaching Cæsarea, implies that he went up where he had intended to go. The final termination of his journey, however, was not Jerusalem, but Antioch, whence he had started with Silas on his missionary tour. The two missionaries had gone through Syria and Cilicia; had revisited Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium; and had taken a circuit through Phrygia, Galatia, and Mysia, to Troas on the Archipelago. Thence they had sailed into Europe, and had made known the gospel throughout Macedonia and Achaia, planting Churches in the principal cities. Setting sail on their return, Paul had left an appointment in Ephesus, where he had formerly been forbidden by the Spirit to preach the Word; had revisited Jerusalem, and was now at the end of his circuit once more to gladden the hearts of the brethren who had “commended him to the favor of God,” by rehearsing all that God had done with him, and that he had opened still wider “the door of faith to the Gentiles.” Whether Silas had returned with him we are not informed. What changes had taken place in Antioch during his absence is equally unknown. The historian has his eye upon stirring events just ahead in Ephesus, and hastens all the movements of the narrative to bring us back to that city.

23. In accordance with this plan, he gives but a brief glance at the apostle's stay in Antioch, and the first part of his third missionary tour. (23) *“Having spent some time there, he departed, passing through the district of Galatia, and Phrygia, in order, confirming all the disciples.”* The historian now leaves Paul in the obscurity of this journey among the Churches, and anticipates his arrival in Ephesus, by noticing some events there, which were, in the providence of God, opening the way for his hitherto forbidden labors in that city.

### **- Commentary on Acts of Apostles**

Perspectives of “Going to Church” (cf. see Easter 2013)

Cave (ie. Home & Hermit)  
Grave (ie. “dead church” for “dead religious people”  
Rave