

64. The Return of Paul to Antioch

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how the Lord developed the church in the city of Corinth. We saw that the Lord is the One who calls people to Himself and the Lord assured Paul that He had many people in the city of Corinth. That encouraged Paul and He was faithful to share the Word of God in the city of Corinth for the next year and a half. During that time, the Lord drew many people to Himself. In this topic, we are going to see how the Lord protected Paul and then led him to return to Antioch.

The Jews had not been able to stop Paul. However, Acts 18:12-16 says, “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.’ 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.” The total time that Gallio served as proconsul was less than a year. As a result, when he became proconsul the Jews saw their opportunity to try and stop Paul.

The Jews who had not become Christians rose up against Paul. They brought him to the judgment seat to Gallio and accused him saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” The judgment seat was a large stone platform in front of the house where the proconsul lived. It was in the marketplace so it was the place where they would try public cases. Here, we see that the Jews accused Paul of persuading people to worship God in a way that was against the law. The Romans allowed the Jews to follow the Jewish law and so this claim of the Jews meant that Paul was not following the Jewish law and should be stopped from teaching. Apparently, Gallio did not even want to get involved in listening.

As Paul started to open his mouth to speak, Gallio told the Jews that it would be necessary for him to listen if the Jews had accused of Paul doing something evil. He said he would have had to listen if they accused Paul of wicked crimes. However, he said that since they were only bringing a question about words or names in their law, he did not plan to listen to them. They had not spoken of any crime Paul had committed. Instead, they only had a disagreement about words. When it says that he drove them from the judgment seat, Gallio made it clear that he had dismissed the case and was not going to listen to the Jews any further.

The Greeks then saw the opportunity to show their prejudice against the Jews. Acts 18:17 says, “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.” In Acts 18:8, we saw that Crispus had been the ruler of the synagogue. That verse says, “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.” After Crispus became a Christian, the Jews appointed another man as the ruler of the synagogue. Here, we see that Sosthenes was the one who had become the ruler of the synagogue. He was the one who would have led the other Jews to accuse Paul before Gallio.

Since Gallio dismissed the case and made it clear that he was not going to get involved in their charges against Paul, other Greeks saw this as an opportunity to act out their prejudice against the Jews. Once Gallio dismissed the charges, the Greeks made an attack on Sosthenes and beat him right in front of the judgment seat. Gallio may have also felt prejudice against the Jews, because he did not stop this beating of Sosthenes. The name “Sosthenes” is used one other time in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 1:1, we read, “Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother.” Since this man was sending greetings with Paul to the church in Corinth, it means the Corinthians knew him. It is possible that sometime after this beating, by the Greeks, the Sosthenes mentioned here in Acts later became a Christian.

Acts 18:18-22 says, “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. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 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. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.” Since Gallio had stopped the Jewish opposition to Paul, he was able to stay in Corinth for an additional period of time.

Several weeks or months later, Paul left the city of Corinth and prepared to return to Syria and particularly to the city of Antioch. We see that Priscilla and Aquila also left Corinth to travel with Paul. We see that Paul left this couple in Ephesus so that they could begin to share the Gospel with people in that region. This means that the church in Corinth, as well as the other churches Paul had helped to establish in the surrounding area, had developed the leadership needed so that the people who had been involved in the establishment of the church at Corinth with Paul could also leave that area.

We also see why Paul left Corinth at this time. We see that Paul had taken a vow. This was probably a vow to show his thanks to the Lord for the protection that the Lord had given him in Corinth. As a result of that vow, Paul had let his hair grow. This probably means that this was a Nazirite vow. Numbers 6:5 says, ““All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. *Then* he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.”” Here, we see that those with a Nazirite vow did not cut their hair until the vow was complete. We see that Paul had his hair cut off at Cenchrea. Cenchrea was the harbor on the west of Corinth and was nine miles from Corinth.

Numbers 6:18 tells us what a Jew was to do when he cut off his hair following a Nazirite vow. That verse says, ““Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.” Here, we see that the hair was to be burned on the altar at the tabernacle. When the temple was built, the altar was then at the temple. When a person finished his vow away from Jerusalem, he was to take the hair to Jerusalem within thirty days to burn it.

As a result, this explains why Paul did not spend a period of time in Ephesus when he stopped at that city on the way to Jerusalem.

When Paul, Aquila and Priscilla reached Ephesus, Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus to begin to share the Gospel with others in that city. Ephesus was one of the five largest cities in the Roman Empire. Paul also went into the synagogue at Ephesus and reasoned with the Jews. In this city, Paul received a positive initial response from the Jews, because they wanted him to stay with them longer. Since Paul had just shaved his head at Cenchrea a few days earlier, the Jews could see that he had just completed a vow. They understood why he wanted to get to Jerusalem in time for the next feast. In 1 Corinthians 9:20, Paul later wrote, “And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law.” This also gave him the opportunity to meet the Gentile proselytes that came to that synagogue to learn about the Old Testament.

Paul told the people in the synagogue goodbye and told them that he would return to them again if that was the will of God. Here, we see an important thing about all of the decisions that we make as Christians. We need to make it clear that we will do something if it is the will of God. In Acts 16:6, we saw that the Holy Spirit had forbidden Paul to go to Asia several years earlier. That verse says, “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” Since Ephesus was the capital of Asia, the Lord had shown him that it was not the will of the Lord to go to Ephesus at an earlier time. We saw that was the plan of God so that the Gospel would spread to Europe at that time.

Then, Paul sailed from Ephesus to the city of Caesarea. From there, he went to the city of Jerusalem and greeted the church in that city. This also allowed him to complete the last part of his vow as it made it possible for him to burn the hair that had been shaved off at Cenchrea at the time that his vow was completed. After this very short visit to the city of Jerusalem, Paul then returned to Antioch and spent a period of time in that city. Here, we see that Paul again returned to the church from which the Lord sent him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul realized the importance of keeping this church informed so that they could continue to pray for him. In the same way, we also need the prayers of others for us as we take the Gospel to other places.

Our physical and spiritual children learn from our example. Paul also gives us an example to follow in our own lives. He took every opportunity to share the Gospel with others. In Ephesus, he went to the synagogue and shared with the Jews even though he was on his way to Jerusalem and could not stay to share more. However, he told the people there that if was the will of the Lord that he would return. May the Lord richly bless you as you seek to do the will of the Lord in your own life.