
Paul in Corinth

When St. Paul went from Athens to Corinth, he entered on a scene very different from that which he had left. It is not merely that his residence was transferred from a free Greek city to a Roman colony; as would have been the case had he been moving from Thessalonica to Philippi. His present journey took him from a quiet provincial town to the busy metropolis of a province, and from the seclusion of an ancient university to the seat of government and trade.

¹ Once there had been a time, in the flourishing age of the Greek republics, when Athens had been politically greater than Corinth; but now that the little territories of the Levantine cities were fused into the larger political divisions of the empire, Athens had only the memory of its pre-eminence, while Corinth held the keys of commerce and swarmed with a crowded population. Both cities had recently experienced severe vicissitudes, but a spell was on the fortunes of the former, and its character remained more entirely Greek than that of any other place, while the latter rose from its ruins, a new and splendid city, on the Isthmus between its two seas, where a multitude of Greeks and Jews gradually united themselves with the military colonists sent by Julius Caesar from Italy, ² and were kept in order by the presence of a Roman proconsul.

The connection of Corinth with the life of St. Paul and the early progress of Christianity, is so close and eventful, that no student of Holy Writ ought to be satisfied without obtaining as correct and clear an idea as possible of its social condition, and its relation to other parts of the Empire. This subject will be considered in the

¹ A journey in the first century from Athens to Corinth might almost be compared to a journey, in the eighteenth, from Oxford to London.

² At the close of the Republic Corinth was entirely destroyed. Thus we find Cicero travelling, not by Corinth, but by Athens. But Julius Caesar established the city on the Isthmus, in the form of a colony; and the mercantile population flocked back to their old place; so that Corinth rose with great rapidity, till it was a city of the second rank in the Empire. The historical details will be given in the next chapter.

succeeding chapter. At present another topic demands our chief attention. We are now arrived at that point in the life of St. Paul when his first Epistles were written. This fact is ascertained, not by any direct statements either in the Acts or the Epistles themselves, but by circumstantial evidence derived from a comparison of these documents with one another.

Such a comparison enables us to perceive that the Apostle's mind, on his arrival at Corinth, was still turning with affection and anxiety towards his converts at Thessalonica. In the midst of all his labors at the Isthmus, his thoughts were continually with those whom he had left in Macedonia; and though the narrative tells us only of his tent making and preaching in the metropolis of Achaia, we discover, on a closer inquiry, that the Letters to the Thessalonians were written at this particular crisis.

It would be interesting, in the case of any man whose biography has been thought worth preserving, to find that letters full of love and wisdom had been written at a time when no traces would have been discoverable, except in the letters themselves, of the thoughts which had been occupying the writer's mind. Such unexpected association of the actions done in one place with affection retained towards another, always seems to add to our personal knowledge of the man whose history we may be studying, and to our interest in the pursuits which were the occupation of his life. This is peculiarly true in the case of the first Christian correspondence, which has been preserved to the Church. Such has ever been the influence of letter writing, its power in bringing those who are distant near to one another, and reconciling those who are in danger of being estranged; such especially has been the influence of Christian letters in developing the growth of faith and love, and binding together the dislocated members of the body of Our Lord, and in making each generation in succession the teacher of the next, that we have good reason to take these Epistles to the Thessalonians as the one chief subject of the present chapter. The earliest occurrences which

took place at Corinth must first be mentioned: but for this a few pages will suffice.

The reasons which determined St. Paul to come to Corinth (over and above the discouragement he seems to have met with in Athens) were, probably, twofold. In the first place, it was a large mercantile city, in immediate connection with Rome and the West of the Mediterranean, with Thessalonica and Ephesus in the Aegean, and with Antioch and Alexandria in the East. The Gospel once established in Corinth, would rapidly spread everywhere. And, again, from the very nature of the city, the Jews established there were numerous. Communities of scattered Israelites were found in various parts of the province of Achaia, in Athens, as we have recently seen, in Argos, as we learn from Philo, in Boeotia and Euboea. But their chief settlement must necessarily have been in that city, which not only gave opportunities of trade by land along the Isthmus between the Morea and the Continent, but received in its two harbors the ships of the Eastern and Western seas. A religion which was first to be planted in the synagogue, and was thence intended to scatter its seeds over all parts of the earth, could nowhere find a more favorable soil than among the Hebrew families at Corinth.

At this particular time there was a greater number of Jews in the city than usual; for they had lately been banished from Rome by command of the Emperor Claudius.³ The history of this edict is involved in some obscurity. But there are abundant passages in the cotemporary Heathen writers which show the suspicion and dislike with which the Jews were regarded. Notwithstanding the general toleration, they were violently persecuted by three successive Emperors⁴ and there is good reason for identifying the edict mentioned by St. Luke with that alluded to by Suetonius, who says that Claudius drove the Jews from Rome because they were incessantly raising tumults

³ Acts 18:2

⁴ Four thousand Jews, or Jewish proselytes, were sent as convicts by Tiberius to the Island of Sardinia. The more directly religious persecution of Caligula has been mentioned in Chapter 4.

at the instigation of a certain Chrestus.

Much has been written concerning this sentence of the biographer of the Caesars. Some have held that there was really a Jew called Chrestus, who had excited political disturbances, others that the name is used by mistake for Christus, and that the disturbances had arisen from the Jewish expectations concerning the Messiah, or Christ. It seems to us that the last opinion is partially true; but that we must trace this movement not merely to the vague Messianic idea entertained by the Jews, but to the events which followed the actual appearance of the Christ.

We have seen how the first progress of Christianity had been the occasion of tumult among the Jewish communities in the provinces⁵; and there is no reason why the same might not have happened in the capital itself.⁶ Nor need we be surprised at the inaccurate form in which the name occurs, when we remember how loosely more careful writers than Suetonius express themselves concerning the affairs of the Jews. Chrestus was a common name; Christus was not: and we have a distinct statement by Tertullian and Lactantius⁷ that in their day the former was often used for the latter.

Among the Jews who had been banished from Rome by Claudius and had settled for a time at Corinth, were two natives of Pontus, whose names were Aquila and Priscilla.⁸ We have seen before (Chapter 8) that Pontus denoted a province of Asia Minor on the shores of the Euxine, and we have noticed some political facts

⁵ In Asia Minor (Chapter 6) and more especially in Thessalonica and Berea (Chapter 9).

⁶ Christianity must have been more or less known in Rome since the return of the Italian Jews from Pentecost (Acts 2).

⁷ See the passages quoted by Dean Milman (Hist. of Christianity, I, p. 430), who remarks that these tumults at Rome, excited by the mutual hostility of Jews and Christians, imply that Christianity must already have made considerable progress there.

⁸ Acts 18:2

which tended to bring this province into relations with Judea. Though, indeed, it is hardly necessary to allude to this: for there were Jewish colonies over every part of Asia Minor, and we are expressly told that Jews from Pontus heard St. Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:9) and read his first Epistle.⁹ Aquila and Priscilla were, perhaps, of that number. Their names have a Roman form;¹⁰ and we may conjecture that they were brought into some connection with a Roman family, similar to that which we have supposed to have existed in the case of St. Paul himself. We find they were on the present occasion forced to leave Rome; and we notice that they are afterwards addressed (Rom. 16:3) as residing there again; so that it is reasonable to suppose that the metropolis was their stated residence. Yet we observe that they frequently traveled; and we trace them on the Asiatic coast on two distinct occasions, separated by a wide interval of time. First, before their return to Italy (Acts 18:18, 26 ; 1 Cor. 16:19), and again, shortly before the martyrdom of St. Paul (2 Tim. 4:19), we find them at Ephesus. From the manner in which they are referred to as having Christian meetings in their houses, both at Ephesus and Rome, we should be inclined to conclude that they were possessed of some considerable wealth. The trade at which they labored, or which at least they superintended, was the manufacture of tents,¹¹ the demand for

⁹ 1 Peter 1:1

¹⁰ From the mention of Priscilla as St. Paul's 'fellow-laborer,' and as one of the instructors of Apollos, we might naturally infer that she was a woman of good education. Her name appears in 2 Tim. 4:19 (also, according to the best MSS., in Rom. 16:3), under the form 'Prisca.' So, in Latin authors, 'Livia' and 'Livilla,' 'Drusa' and 'Drusilla,' are used of the same person. Prisca is well known as a Roman name. It is well worthy of notice that in both cases St. Paul mentions the name of Priscilla before that of Aquila. This conveys the impression that she was the more energetic character of the two.

¹¹ Many meanings have been given by the commentators to the word – weavers of tapestry, saddlers, mathematical instrument makers, rope makers. But nothing is so probable as that they were simply makers of those hair-cloth tents, which are

which must have been continual in that age of traveling, while the *cilicium*, or hair cloth, of which they were made, could easily be procured at every large town in the Levant.

A question has been raised as to whether Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians, when they met with St. Paul. Though it is certainly possible that they may have been converted at Rome, we think, on the whole, that this was probably not the case. They are simply classed with the other Jews who were expelled by Claudius ; and we are told that the reason why St. Paul came and attached himself to them (Acts 18:2) was not because they had a common religion, but because they had a common trade. There is no doubt, however, that the connection soon resulted in their

conversion to Christianity.¹² The trade which St. Paul's father had taught him in his youth was thus the means of procuring him invaluable associates in the noblest work in which man was ever engaged. No higher example can be found of the possibility of combining diligent labor in the common things of life with the utmost spirituality of mind. Those who might have visited Aquila at Corinth in the working hours, would have found St. Paul quietly occupied with the same task as his fellow laborers. Though he knew the Gospel to be a matter of life and death to the soul, he gave himself to an ordinary trade with as much zeal as though he had no other occupation. It is the duty of every man to maintain an honorable independence; and this, he felt, was peculiarly incumbent on him, for the sake of the Gospel he came to proclaim.

He knew the obloquy to which he was likely to be exposed, and he prudently prepared for it. The highest motives instigated his diligence in the commonest manual toil. And this toil. was no hindrance to that communion with God, which was his greatest joy, and the source of all his peace. While he" labored, working with his

still in constant use in the Levant [19th Century. wd]. That they were manufacturers of the cloth itself is less likely.

¹² They were Christians, and able to instruct others, when Paul left them at Ephesus on his voyage from Corinth to Syria.

own hands," among the Corinthians, as he afterwards reminded them, in his heart he was praying continually, with thanksgiving, on behalf of the Thessalonians, as he says to them himself (1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:11) in the letters which he dictated in the intervals of his labor.

This was the first scene of St. Paul's life at Corinth. For the second scene we must turn to the synagogue. The Sabbath was a day of rest. On that day the Jews laid aside their tent making and their other trades, and, amid the derision of their Gentile neighbors, assembled in the house of prayer to worship the God of their ancestors. There St. Paul spoke to them of the "mercy promised to their forefathers," and of the "oath sworn to Abraham," being performed." There his countrymen listened with incredulity or conviction; and the tent maker of Tarsus" reasoned" with them and" endeavored to persuade both the Jews and the Gentiles who were present, to believe in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and the Savior of the World.

While these two employments were proceeding, the daily labor in the workshop, and the weekly discussions in the synagogue, Timothy and Silas returned from Macedonia.¹³ The effect produced by their arrival seems to have been an instantaneous increase of the zeal and energy with which St. Paul resisted the opposition, which was even now beginning to hem in the progress of the truth.¹⁴

¹³ Acts 18:5. We may remark here that Silas and Timothy were probably the "brethren" who brought the collection mentioned, 2 Cor. 11:9, cf. Phil. 4:15.

¹⁴ There are some difficulties and differences of opinion, with regard to the movements of Silas and Timothy, between the time when St. Paul left them in Macedonia and their rejoining him in Achaia.

The facts which are distinctly stated are as follows.

(1.) Silas and Timothy were left at Berea (Acts 17:14) when St. Paul went to Athens. We are not told why they were left there, or what commissions they received; but the Apostle sent a message from Athens (Acts 17:15) that they should follow him with all speed, and (Acts 17:16) he waited for them there.

(2.) The Apostle was rejoined by them when at Corinth (Acts 18:5). We are not informed how they had been employed in the interval, but they came from Macedonia. It is not distinctly said that they came together, but the impression at first sight is that they did.

(3.) St. Paul informs us (1 Thess. 3:1), that he was 'left in Athens alone,' and that this solitude was in consequence of Timothy having been sent to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2). Though it is not expressly stated that Timothy was sent from Athens, the first impression is that he was.

Thus there is a seeming discrepancy between the Acts and Epistles; a journey of Timotheus to Athens, previous to his arrival with Silas at Corinth, appearing to be mentioned by St. Paul, and to be quite unnoticed by St. Luke.

Paley, in the *Horae Paulinae*, says that the Epistle 'virtually asserts that Timothy came to the Apostle at Athens,' and assumes that it is 'necessary' to suppose this, in order to reconcile the history with the Epistle. And he points out three intimations in the history, which make the arrival, though not expressly mentioned, extremely probable: first, the message that they should come with all speed; secondly, the fact of his waiting for them; thirdly, the absence of any appearance of haste in his departure from Athens to Corinth. 'Paul had ordered Timothy to follow him without delay: he waited at Athens on purpose that Timothy might come up with him, and he stayed there as long as his own choice led him to continue.'

This explanation is satisfactory. But two others might be suggested, which would equally remove the difficulty. It is not expressly said that Timothy was sent from Athens to Thessalonica. St. Paul was anxious, as we have seen, to revisit the Thessalonians; but since he was hindered from doing so, it is highly probable that he may have sent Timothy to them from Berea. Silas might be sent on some similar commission, and this would explain why the two companions were left behind in Macedonia. This would necessarily cause St. Paul to be 'left alone in Athens.'

Such solitude was doubtless painful to him; but the spiritual good of the new converts was at stake. The two companions, after finishing the work entrusted to them, finally rejoined the Apostle at Corinth. [We should observe that the phrase is "from Macedonia," not "from Berea." That he 'waited for them' at Athens need cause us no difficulty, for in those days the arrival of travelers could not confidently be known beforehand. When he left Athens and

The remarkable word which is used to describe the "pleasure" which he experienced at this moment in the course of his teaching at Corinth, is the same which is employed of our Lord Himself in a solemn passage of the Gospels, (Luke 12:50) when He says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." He who felt our human difficulties has given us human help to aid us in

proceeded to Corinth, he knew that Silas and Timothy could easily ascertain his movements, and follow his steps, by help of information obtained at the synagogue.

But, again, we may reasonably suppose, that in the course of St. Paul's stay at Corinth, he may have paid a second visit to Athens, after the first arrival of Timothy and Silas from Macedonia; and that during some such visit he may have sent Timothy to Thessalonica. This view may be taken without our supposing that the First Epistle to the Thessalonians was written at Athens. Schrader and others imagine a visit to that city at a later period of his life; but this view cannot be admitted without deranging the arguments for the date of 1 Thess., which was evidently written soon after leaving Macedonia.

Two further remarks may be added:

(1.) If Timothy did rejoin St. Paul at Athens, we need not infer that Silas was not with him, from the fact that the name of Silas is not mentioned. It is usually taken for granted that the second arrival of Timothy (1 Thess. 3:6) is identical with the coming of Silas and Timothy to Corinth (Acts 18:5); but here we see that only Timothy is mentioned, doubtless because he was most recently and familiarly known at Thessalonica, and perhaps, also, because the mission of Silas was to some other place.

(2.) On the other hand, it is not necessary to assume, because Silas and Timothy are mentioned together that they came together. All conditions are satisfied if they came about the same time. If they were sent on missions to two different places, the times of their return would not necessarily coincide. [Something may be implied in the form of the Greek phrase, 'Silas as well as Timothy.']

In considering all these journeys, it is very needful to take into account that they would be modified by the settled or unsettled state of the country with regard to banditti, and by the various opportunities of travelling, which depend on the season and the weather, and the sailing of vessels. Hindrances connected with some such considerations may be referred to in Phil. 4:10.

what He requires us to do. When St. Paul's companions rejoined him, he was reinforced with new earnestness and vigor in combating the difficulties which met him. He acknowledges himself that he was at Corinth "in weakness, and in fear and much trembling (1 Cor. 2:3) but" God, who comforteth those that are cast down, comforted him by the arrival " (2 Cor. 7:6) of his friends. It was only one among many instances we shall be called to notice, in which, at a time of weakness," he saw the brethren and took courage." (Acts 28:15)

But this was not the only result of the arrival of St. Paul's companions. Timothy had been sent, while St. Paul was still at Athens, to revisit and establish the Church of Thessalonica. The news he brought on his return to St. Paul caused the latter to write to these beloved converts; and, as we have already observed, the letter which he sent them is the first of his Epistles which has been preserved to us. It seems to have been occasioned partly by his wish to express his earnest affection for the Thessalonian Christians, and to encourage them under their persecutions; but it was also called for by some errors into which they had fallen. Many of the new converts were uneasy about the state of their relatives or friends, who had died since their conversion. They feared that these departed Christians would lose the happiness of witnessing their Lord's second coming, which they expected soon to behold. In this expectation others had given themselves up to a religious excitement, under the influence of which they persuaded themselves that they need not continue to work at the business of their callings, but might claim support from the richer members of the Church. Others, again, had yielded to the same temptations which afterwards influenced the Corinthian Church, and despised the gift of prophesying (1 Thess. 5:20) in comparison with those other gifts which afforded more opportunity for display. These reasons, and others which will appear in the letter itself, led St. Paul to write to the Thessalonians.

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