

# PRC Community Groups

Providence Road Church



Sermon Series: Acts: To the Ends of the Earth

Message:

Passage: Acts 18:18-28

Date Preached: April 16, 2013

## Going Deeper

1. Describe the relationship Paul had with the churches he had planted during his first and second missionary journey. Why was it important for Paul to re-visit the same churches during his third missionary journey?
2. Why was Paul under a vow that required him to shave his head? [*See attached commentary on verse 18. Discuss for further clarification but do not spend quality group time trying to figure out what may never be clearly understood*]
2. What did we learn about Apollos in verses 18-24?
3. Verse 25, says Apollos taught accurately the things concerning Jesus but was limited in his gospel information. Was Apollos already a Christian? If so, how?
4. What was the baptism of John? How was it different from the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
5. How is Aquila and Priscilla's response to Apollos an example to us?

## Application

1. In verse 21, Paul tells his beloved disciple that he will return to them if "the Lord wills." This is an expression we commonly use as well. What does God's will for your life mean to you?
2. How can you make yourself more available for those who are spiritually younger than you? Is this an area of struggle for you? Why or why not?
3. Describe a time when someone called you out/corrected you? Do you consider they corrected you with humility? Did you receive the correction with humility? What did you learn about yourself

## Continued Mission Prayer Requests

**Nicaragua:** Pray for the local church planter Pedro. Ask God that will give Pedro standing in the community and that the people may be receptive to the gospel message. The village of Santa Marta is currently experiencing a rough growing season, ask that God will use this to call the people of the village to trust in the Lord.

**Cuba:** For our upcoming trip this July.

**North Africa:** Pray for Jeff and Jamie Kelly. They are a young married couple living in a densely-populated highly volatile muslim city. Pray that God will give them boldness and opportunities to share the Good News with the people living in the city.

**Central Asia:** Pray for Chuck and Andie Wade serving in an influential city in the central asia region. Pray for boldness and opportunities with people in the city. Yesterday was Chuck's Birthday. Go on Facebook and congratulate 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.<sup>1</sup>

**had a vow**—That it was the Nazirite vow (Nu 6:1–27) is not likely. It was probably one made in one of his seasons of difficulty or danger, in prosecution of which he cuts off his hair and hastens to Jerusalem to offer the requisite sacrifice within the prescribed thirty days [Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.15.1]. This explains the haste with which he leaves Ephesus (Ac 18:21), and the subsequent observance, on the recommendation of the brethren, of a similar vow (Ac 21:24). This one at Corinth was voluntary, and shows that even in heathen countries he systematically studied the prejudices of his Jewish brethren.<sup>2</sup>

**Paul** then **left** Corinth, heading for his sending church, Antioch on the Orontes River in **Syria**. But **before he left he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea**, Corinth's southeastern port, **because of a vow he had taken**. When Paul made this vow is unstated. He may have made it when he left Troas for Macedonia, or at the beginning of his ministry at Corinth, or more likely, before the Lord gave him the vision (vv. 9–10). During the vow Paul would have let his hair grow. Now the time of the Nazirite vow was over (after about a year and a half), and Paul got a haircut at Cenchrea (cf. Num. 6:1–21).

Josephus wrote about some Jews who immediately after a misfortune, shaved their heads and refused to offer sacrifices for 30 days (*Jewish Wars* 2. 15. 1). If this is the case Paul would have cut his hair at the beginning of his vow. But this

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1994). *Acts*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (326). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ac 18:18). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

is somewhat improbable because there is no mention of an illness or other affliction (unless 2 Cor. 12:7–9 fits in here).<sup>3</sup>

**18:18 “Cenchrea”** This was one of two seaports of Corinth. It was located on the Aegean Sea, on the east side of the narrow isthmus on which Corinth was located. It is mentioned again as the site of a church in Rom. 16:1.

**“keeping a vow”** This refers to a chronologically limited Nazarite vow described in Num. 6:1–21 (cf. F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 52). Paul does this again in Acts 21:24 (see note there). The cutting or shaving of the head would denote the end of the vow.

Both A. T. Robertson and M. R. Vincent think this was not a Nazarite vow because it could only be terminated in Jerusalem according to Jewish custom. Paul did become all things to all men to win some (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19–23). We can be sure this vow was for evangelism, not legalism! And, of course, there is always the possibility that it was Aquilla who shaved his head.<sup>4</sup>

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* (Num. 6:9; 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 Co. 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* (Lam. 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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Ac 18:18). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>4</sup> Utley, R. J. (2003). *Vol. Volume 3B: Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*. Study Guide Commentary Series (216). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

<sup>5</sup> Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ac 18:18–23). Peabody: Hendrickson.