

“We really enjoyed reading this book and were pleased about two things in particular. The content of the book is informative and is so in plain, understandable, and non-challenging language; and Priscilla and Aquila are shown to be warm, admirable, and true-to-life people, not implausible artificial types. Noël Keller has made them a couple with whom it would be a delight to share hospitality, a privilege to have available for guidance, and a blessing to be ceaselessly certain of their friendship and love.”

—Ed and Mary Flood  
Married Lay Ministers  
Wheaton, Maryland

“If anyone still thinks that history is boring, they should read Marie Noël Keller’s book. By drawing out the historical implications of clues found in six short passages, she has reconstructed the history within which Priscilla and Aquila lived and enabled that couple to come alive. Though she reinforces her careful exegetical work with the insights of other scholars in the field, she has produced a work that even the non-scholarly will find imminently readable. By the end of the book, Priscilla and Aquila have become people you want to know and model your life after.”

—Dianne Bergant  
Author of *Scripture: History and Interpretation* (Liturgical Press)

“While teaching Paul over a twenty-year span I often called attention to the importance of Paul’s missionary co-workers, Priscilla and Aquila, but with little follow up. Noël Keller offers a superb close reading of all New Testament references, making this couple come alive, while offering great insights into Early Christian communities. Carefully researched, with ample bibliography and evocative suggestions about how their lives challenge the church today, this book should be a *vade mecum* for anyone interested in Pauline Christianity.”

—John R. Donahue, SJ  
Research Professor in Theology  
Loyola University Maryland

“Dr. Keller has achieved a perfect example of that rare book which is both rigorously scholarly and completely readable. Without polemic, she illuminates Priscilla’s prominence in this ministerial couple whom Paul commended as fellow workers and upon whom he depended. She leads the reader through the Priscilla and Aquila material in the New Testament, filling in the context in ways that make their ministry and house churches come alive and their relevance for contemporary church practice clear.

“Highly recommended reading for anyone interested in early Christianity, the history of missions, the authority and ministry of women in the church and paradigms for new forms of mutual ministry.”

—Bonnie B. Thurston, PhD  
Author of *The Spiritual Landscape  
of Mark* (Liturgical Press)

“Noël Keller produces a surprising, fascinating interpretation of Priscilla and Aquila as missionaries for Christ, ‘advance workers’ for Paul in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome, playing a unique role among Paul’s social network. The household was the primary setting for their activity, combining as it did work space, retail shop, and living quarters, interpreting this from the social world of the Eastern Roman empire. They prepared for and enabled Paul’s evangelistic activity in these major urban centers of the Greek east, thus making clear that Paul was not a loner, but the center of a lively group of people who supported and enabled his missionary activity. Active long before there was an ‘ordained clergy’ in the Christian community, Priscilla and Aquila model how ordinary Christians impact mightily the proclamation of Jesus Christ.”

—Edgar Krentz  
Christ Seminary–Seminex Professor  
of New Testament, Emeritus  
Lutheran School of Theology,  
Chicago

Paul's Social Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith

Bruce J. Malina, Series Editor

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*Priscilla  
and Aquila*

Paul's Coworkers in Christ Jesus

*Marie Noël Keller*



A Michael Glazier Book

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In gratitude for mercies given and received



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## PREFACE

**H**uman beings are embedded in a set of social relations. A social network is one way of conceiving that set of social relations in terms of a number of persons connected to one another by varying degrees of relatedness. In the early Jesus group documents featuring Paul and coworkers, it takes little effort to envision the apostle's collection of friends and friends of friends that is the Pauline network.

This set of brief books consists of a description of some of the significant persons who constituted the Pauline network. For Christians of the Western tradition, these persons are significant ancestors in faith. While each of them is worth knowing by themselves, it is largely because of their standing within that web of social relations woven about and around Paul that they are of lasting interest. Through this series we hope to come to know those persons in ways befitting their first-century Mediterranean culture.

Bruce J. Malina  
Creighton University  
Series Editor

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If there is one thing I have learned in my studies over the years, it is this: text without context is pretext. Accordingly, three aspects of my life give flesh to the words I have written:

- the privilege of shepherding an Institute on Sacred Scripture at Misericordia University, Dallas, Pennsylvania, for over thirty years. Besides hearing wonderful presentations, it has afforded me the opportunity of seeing firsthand the incredible hunger people have for the Word of God and the extent to which they will sacrifice to hear it.
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*You are a presence that strengthens.*

## INTRODUCTION: A PRESENCE TO STRENGTHEN

**D**uring a trip to Innsbruck, Austria, I visited the Cathedral of St. James where I learned from the docent that in the past statues were placed on the facades of churches as a reminder to their parishioners that the saints they represented would stand guard outside to protect them.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it was thought one proceeded from the chaos of the outer world (west, back door of the church) toward the light of the eastern part of the church, where the Blessed Sacrament and altar were situated. Similarly, Eastern Christians revered and still revere icons, since they believed and yet believe an image can make a holy person a real presence in their home or church and that a faithful representation of an icon achieves this. Western Christians use pictures and illustrations that they hang on their walls, use as bookmarks, or carry in their wallets. Such practices are in the hope that the reminder of the person or persons depicted on them (whether alive or dead) will strengthen, protect, and inspire them.

The ancients used their own or other people's example as concrete models in their rhetoric to imitate or learn from. Positive examples were employed to show listeners how they were to act while negative examples illustrated behaviors people were to avoid. Plutarch, for example, wrote his *Lives* in part to provide his readers with models for conduct. The advice Seneca offers his friend Lucilius (*Ep.* 11:8-10) epitomizes with what importance the use of example was held in the ancient world:

Hear and take to heart this useful and wholesome motto: “Cherish some man of high character, and keep him ever before your eyes, living as if he were watching you, and ordering all your actions as if he beheld them.” Such my dear Lucilius, is the counsel of Epicurus; he has quite properly given us a guardian and an attendant. We can get rid of most sins, if we have a witness who stands near us when we are likely to go wrong. The soul should have someone whom it can respect,—one by whose authority it may make even its inner shrine more hallowed. Happy is the man who can make others better, not merely when he is in their company, but even when he is in their thoughts! And happy also is he who can so revere a man as to calm and regulate himself by calling him to mind! One who can so revere another, will soon be himself worthy of reverence. . . . Choose a master whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector or your pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our characters; you can never straighten that which is crooked unless you use a ruler.<sup>2</sup>

Paul uses examples in his letters (Jesus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself in Philippians, etc.), as Luke does in his gospel and Acts (e.g., Acts 4:36–5:11). This book is concerned with one of Luke’s examples, that of Priscilla and Aquila, a couple who are associated with Paul. They are the second couple in Acts to be given significant narrative development. The first, Ananias and Sapphira are a negative example (Acts 5:1-11), while this artisan duo, who are in more scenes than many other second-tiered people in the New Testament, are an extremely positive one.

Priscilla and Aquila make six appearances in the New Testament and their importance is highlighted by three different authors. Twice they are mentioned in Paul (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3); three times by Luke in Acts (18:1-3, 18-19, 26-27); and once in a Deutero-Pauline letter (2 Tim 4:19). Later, John Chrysostom (347–407 CE) comments on them in several of his homilies (Homily 40 on the Acts of the Apostles [18:18], Homily 44 on

First Corinthians [see 16:19], Homily 30 on Romans [16:3-5], and Homily 10 on Second Timothy [4:9-13]). And he elaborates on them in his First Homily on the Greeting to Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3-4) which is also known as “Salutate Priscillam et Aquilam. Most recently, they were the focus of one of Pope Benedict XVI’s reflections (cf. General Audience, February 7, 2007). Today churches celebrate Sts. Priscilla and Aquila, evidencing that Luke’s nomenclature was adopted.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Luke refers to Paul’s Prisca, her more formal name, by its affectionate diminutive Priscilla, as he does in his references to Silvanus (Silas) and Sosipatros (Sopatros).<sup>4</sup> Unless I am quoting Paul, I will use the name Priscilla.

### Nomenclature and Status

---

Priscilla and Aquila have good Roman names in a Graecized form. *Priskilla* is a form of the feminine Latin adjective *prisca*, which means “primitive or ancient,” while *Akylas* is a form of the Latin cognomen (nickname) *Aquila*, which means “eagle.” As it was quite common for Judean, Greek, or Latin-speaking people to have Roman names in Rome,<sup>5</sup> this custom was probably also held in the Roman provinces. Such would be the case in Pontus, which is the birthplace of Aquila. Most Judeans of the Diaspora, however they adapted themselves to their surroundings, were Greek-speaking, and their names would be Graecized.<sup>6</sup>

Much ink has been spent on the placement of Priscilla and Aquila’s names in the texts; for in four of the six places in which their names occur (Rom 16:3; Acts 18:18, 26; 2 Tim 4:19) Priscilla’s name comes before her husband’s. Such precedence was an unconventional occurrence; in fact, women were hardly mentioned at all. Yet there is no consensus as to why her name appears first. For some scholars, Priscilla’s wealth and status gives her precedence, as her name indicates she belonged by birth or manumission to the *gens Acilia*, who were an influential family among the Roman nobility.<sup>7</sup> Jerome Murphy-O’Connor disagrees,

for to him, the fact that Priscilla worked manually with her husband (Acts 18:3) indicates she neither outranked Aquila in social class nor had independent wealth. Besides, had she been a woman of noble birth, she would not have known how to do the heavy needle-and-palm work of tentmakers, nor would her hands be adapted to it, since women of independent means did not need to work.<sup>8</sup> And surely, had she had elevated status, Luke would have mentioned it, as he did other distinguished women in his work (Luke 8:3; Acts 16:14; 17:4, 12, 34).

Instead, Murphy-O'Connor and other scholars think the priority of Priscilla's name was achieved by her greater prominence in the life of the church.<sup>9</sup> As Linda L. Belleville avers:

When New Testament writers refer to their occupation of tentmakers and to "their house," the order is "Aquila and Priscilla" (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor 16:19). But when ministry is in view, the order is "Priscilla and Aquila" (Acts 18:18; Rom 16:3; cf. 2 Tim 4:19). This is also the case with the introduction of Apollos (Acts 18:26), suggesting that Priscilla possessed the dominant ministry and leadership skills of the duo.<sup>10</sup>

To further her claim, Belleville points to Luke's usual way of ordering the names of the ministry teams in Acts, for when the famous missionaries are commissioned by the church in Antioch, the order is "Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2-7); but when Saul takes the lead, the order becomes "Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13: 9-12, 43; 14:12, 20; 15:2, 22, 35). Acts 15:12 and 15:25 are two exceptions. Here, political diplomacy and expediency dictate his order.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, in Paul's long list of greetings to and from people in Romans 16, Gaius with his spacious dwelling, and Erastus, the city treasurer, appear last (Rom 16:21-23). As such, it appears Paul esteemed a person's work for the church (Rom 16:3b, 4, 5a, 21) more than their status in the wider society (Gal 3:28).

Whatever the case, whether Priscilla's primacy is the result of her status, or her place in the church—as John Chrysostom,

hardly an affirmer of women, recognizes (cf. Homily 10 on Second Timothy [v. 19, see pp. 54–55] or First Homily on the Greeting to Priscilla and Aquila [Rom 16:3-4, see p. 25])—or, for that matter, the result of both reasons,<sup>12</sup> for today’s church, F. Scott Spencer’s insight cannot be lost. He maintains the alternating order of their names simply reinforces the mutuality of this couple’s relationship. They are interchangeable collegial partners,<sup>13</sup> which is exactly what Meinrad Craighead’s illustration of Priscilla and Aquila depicts.<sup>14</sup>



Priscilla and Aquila are a positive example of a team ministry, to the point that both in Luke and Paul, except for Luke’s notice of Aquila’s beginnings, they are never mentioned apart from one another! Moreover, their prominence in and among the nascent Jesus groups is evidenced by the fact they are the first persons Paul lists in his long set of greetings in Romans 16.

### **Journeying Forth**

---

It is often argued that all of Acts is Luke’s literary composition and that the sequences within his work merely serve to promote his agenda. I think this is so. But what is his agenda? Perhaps,

we need to remember that Luke, and the other evangelists, are essentially “pastors.” As such, I imagine each of them coming to the table on which all of the material that was known about Jesus and his early followers could be found, that is, parables, stories, sayings, vignettes, etc., and taking from it those pieces that would be most helpful to the life and needs of their respective communities. Because of the single-mindedness of their focus, none of them had any compunction about changing the details, for they were just making sure that what they were proclaiming was clearly understood. A serious look at any page of “Gospel Parallels” affirms this assertion.

In Luke’s case, the first four sentences of his gospel, which are really one sentence (Luke 1:1-4), also function as an introduction to his second volume, Acts (1:1). Moreover, they tell us what he is about. Clearly, he announces that his work(s) will give the people for whom he writes “assurance,” because through them, he will demonstrate the reliability of “the things of which they have been informed.” In fact, Luke underscores this point by putting the Greek term *asphaleia* (reliability/assurance) at the end of his sentence. It is in the emphatic position! Thereafter, whatever he chooses to report in either volume has importance, which includes the things he will assert about Priscilla and Aquila. Indeed, each sequence in Luke-Acts is a narrative depiction of how God works and continues to work through Jesus and those who follow him.

I too want to approach the texts regarding Priscilla and Aquila, Paul’s coworkers in Christ Jesus, in the same manner Luke did. In some instances Luke’s details can be cross-referenced, while in others, he will give us singular information. In either case, the combined material will help us to see the big picture. It will also bring us to the point of learning. For this reason, I will use the canonical text as my reference and when necessary, point out the variants, i.e., the additions and deletions that are available.<sup>15</sup>

As we embark on this study, let us use Craighead’s illustration of Priscilla and Aquila to call them into our personal space, to strengthen and inspire us.<sup>16</sup> Let us also ask the right question.

The question is not, “Is every element of their story true?” But rather, “What does God want us to learn from their story?” Finally, let us employ the methodology known as “passing over and coming back.” Here, one “passes over” from their own life or standpoint to that of another or others’ lives and, through dialogue, enters into a sympathetic understanding of their life or standpoint. Then, finding resonances, or perhaps even a challenge, between themselves and the other, one “comes back” once again to one’s own life having learned something.<sup>17</sup> It is a dangerous adventure and not for the faint of heart, since you could be changed!

### **Before We Start: A Word about Anachronistic Language**

---

It is important to recognize that during the Second Temple and New Testament periods, the words “Jew” (*Ioudaios*) and “Judaism” (*Ioudaismos*) did not mean what contemporary society means by them. For today, these terms refer to the liturgy and customs, etc., of the Jewish religion that were made normative by the Babylonian Talmud in the fifth to sixth century CE and to the people who practice them. In the time of Jesus, however, Greek words ending in *-aios* meant “of or pertaining to the place named.” As such, people of the Mediterranean called all members of the house of Israel “Judeans” after the region in which the temple, the central place of worship was located—Jerusalem in Judea.<sup>18</sup> Concomitantly, *Ioudaismos* described the behavior of Judeans or the people in Judea.

The term “Christian,” as it is used today, did not exist in Jesus’ time either, despite the modern translation of Acts 11:26. Instead, in using the term *Christianos*, peoples of the Mediterranean would be referring to those persons who belonged to the political faction of *Christos* (Messiah) and who they considered were members of the Messianist party. Today, “Christian” refers to anyone who embraces the religion that was formalized through the doctrines of the Councils of Nicea (325 CE) and Chalcedon

(451 CE). Men and women who proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah of God in both Luke's and Paul's time, however, would never have thought of themselves as *Christianos* in either of the senses that have already been listed. Instead, they saw themselves as "Jesus followers" or "Christ believers," and they would have referred to themselves, or talked about other early believers as members of a specific Jesus group such as the one at Corinth. We will use "Jew" and "Christian" in the same way the early believers used these terms throughout this study.

# CHAPTER 1

---

## *Luke's Narration* *(Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, 26-27)*

Luke introduces Priscilla and Aquila in the second half of his narrative, which he devotes to the achievements of Paul. Accordingly, they are, as any other person Luke identifies, “supporting players” to his hero and star. That this couple appear at all, in spite of his focus, accentuates their importance and the enormous influence they had on many people in those early years. We meet them here in the context of Paul’s second missionary journey and, at first, within the framework of his mission to Corinth. Indeed, they will appear three times in chapter 18. We will examine each scene to see how Priscilla and Aquila interface with Paul and then suggest how they impacted the lives and faith of the early believers.

### *Interfacing with Paul*

#### **Scene One: Acts 18:1-3**

---

*After this [Paul] left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a [Judean] named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with*

*his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the [Judeans] to leave Rome. And he went to see them; and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers.*

### *Context*

Paul has just left Athens where his message about Jesus received a mixed hearing from the Athenians (see p. 16). From there he traveled a little more than forty miles west to the Roman colony of Corinth, which was an important port city located at the principal juncture in the best sea route between Rome and Italy in the west and what is now called Greece and other areas to the east. Its position on a narrow four- and one-half mile isthmus enabled ships to transfer their cargoes by way of a paved road (*diolkos*) that connected both the Corinthian and Saronic Gulfs. In so doing, the dangerous 187-mile, six-day trip around the rocky southern tip of the Peloponnese was no longer necessary. For such reasons, Corinth became the most important trade route between the eastern and western parts of the empire. All traffic, land or sea, east-, west-, north- or southbound, passed through it.

Besides tradespeople, Corinth attracted visitors for other reasons. Pilgrims came for healing at the city's Asclepeion and drama enthusiasts, to enjoy plays, music, and oratory in its large theater. Likewise, it was a stone's throw from the site of the Isthmian Games, which were a biennial spring celebration of Poseidon and the second most important competition of the four great Panhellenic festivals. Indeed, as Corinth was a city bustling with life, it attracted people of all kinds, particularly those interested in being part of "a new thing." Accordingly, it was the type of place Paul's strategic eye discerned as a promising center for making contacts with all sorts of people. As such, it was an ideal site to spread the message about Jesus. With so many transients, it was also a space where he could earn a living.

The emperor Claudius restored Achaia as a senatorial province in 44 CE with its capital at Corinth. Thereafter

the Senate was represented by an annually appointed proconsul (governor). An inscription mentioning Gallio as proconsul from July 51 to June 52 is virtually the only ascertainable basis for a chronology of Paul's mission in general (see Acts 18:12-16). Reckoning with this date, most scholars have concluded that the eighteen months Paul spent in Corinth ran from the beginning of 50 to the early summer of 51.<sup>1</sup>

Most likely, the first thing Paul did when he arrived in Corinth was to find the location of the synagogue (Acts 18:5, 14; cf. 14:1; 16:3; etc.). Paul never mentions this detail, but his zeal for God lets us know Luke's notice is more than a possibility. Here, among other things, he could locate the section where the guild of "tentmakers" sat. It is also here that "*he found a [Judean] named Aquila*" (Acts 18:2; emphasis added) and, to be sure, Priscilla with him (cf. Acts 18:26).

### *First Things*

Luke tells us four things about Aquila and Priscilla when he introduces them in Acts 18:2. They are (1) a married couple (2) recently expelled from Rome (3) who relocate in Corinth as tentmakers and/or leatherworkers and (4) with whom Paul lives and works. By examining each piece, we will discover there is more in these statements than is first evident.

#### (1) AQUILA AND PRISCILLA ARE A MARRIED COUPLE

Luke conveys two formative things about Aquila: he is a Judean (*ioudaios*) and he hails from Pontus; i.e., he is a "man of Pontus" by race/nation, which means he was originally a Diaspora Judean.<sup>2</sup> How he got to Rome is a matter of speculation. Scholarly possibilities range from Aquila being an independent businessman-adventurer looking for greener pastures<sup>3</sup> to his being a free man, slave, or freed slave of the Roman Acilian family, within whose house he met Priscilla, who was herself a

free woman, slave, or daughter of a freedman of the same family.<sup>4</sup> Most recently, Peter Lampe presents a new and intriguing possibility; for in using epigraphical material, he shows that both Priscilla's and Aquila's names were not slave names and thereby asserts that they must have been born free persons.<sup>5</sup> No matter how they started their lives though, by the time we meet them, most interpreters think they are already married.

Some scholars caution against immediately jumping to this conclusion, arguing that since Luke alone explicitly identifies this couple as married, it may be his way of demonstrating the respectability of the Jesus believers.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as legal marriages were only possible between free people in the Roman Empire, slaves and freed persons had no guarantee they could enjoy stable relationships. Therefore, as nascent Jesus believers came from the various strata, there had to be an alternative way of understanding missionary pairing. "Spiritual Marriage," that is, couples living together without a physical union, provided a solution whereby people who were unable to be married legally could be together on mission.<sup>7</sup> Scholars who hold this position, then, point to the question Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 9:5, which they translate "Do we not have the right to have a sister with us as a wife?" in a "spiritual marriage" sense.<sup>8</sup> Let us attend to their two objections.

First, there is no reason why Paul would have to state "Prisca" and Aquila are married, as in the instances he mentions them (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3), the communities to whom Paul writes and to whom they send their greetings already knew they were. Luke's audience, on the other hand, may not have known this detail, which is why he mentions it. Indeed, Paul never asserts that any of the pairs in Romans 16 are married, as Wayne A. Meeks contends they all are.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps some of them had immigrated to Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila and Paul knew them, but he may never have met some of the others on the list. Instead, Priscilla and Aquila probably told him about them. Moreover, Luke uses the term *gynē* as "wife" in the Ananias/Sapphira narrative: "Ananias with his wife [*gynaiki*] Sapphira" (5:1); "and with his wife's knowledge" (*gynaikos*; 5:2); "After an

interval of about three hours his wife [*gynē*] came in" (5:7). Clearly, Luke depicts this couple as anything but respectable. So to say he uses the term merely to demonstrate the respectability of Jesus believers dies on the vine. Married is married!

Second, let us examine Paul's use of *gynē* in 1 Corinthians 9:5. At the outset, the question (really, example) Paul asks (gives) must be seen in its larger context. It is part of an answer to one of the questions the community asked him and that he begins answering in chapter 7. Here he addresses the issue of buying and eating meat previously offered to idols (8:1–11:1) since some members in the community believe they can partake of the meat and in the banquets within which it is served while others do not. In response, while Paul recognizes one's freedom to buy and eat the meat (1 Cor 8:9), he grounds this or any choice a Corinthian believer makes within the framework of what is best for everyone involved (1 Cor 8:10–12). He will repeat this advice later in his letter: "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his[/her] own good, but the good of his[/her] neighbor" (1 Cor 10:23f.). Then, as any good teacher, Paul gives his own example (1 Cor 8:13), which was a common device used by ancient authors. More persuasive than mere words, it provided a concrete example to imitate. As Seneca advises Lucilius in *Ep* 6:5–6:

. . . the living voice and the intimacy of a common life will help you more than the written word. You must go to the scene of action, first, because men put more faith in their eyes than in their ears, and second, because the way is long if one follows precepts, but short and helpful, if one follows patterns. Cleanthes could not have been the express image of Zeno, if he had merely heard his lectures; he shared in his life, saw into his hidden purposes, and watched him to see whether he lived according to his own rules.<sup>10</sup>

First Corinthians 9:1–27 is another illustration of Paul's giving up his rights and freedom for the benefit of others. Having a "wife" alongside him as a partner is one of his examples (1 Cor 9:5).<sup>11</sup>

Earlier in his letter Paul uses the term *gynē* as “wife” or “woman.” In the instances he uses *gynē*, the term stands alone. For example: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman [*gynai-kos*]” (1 Cor 7:1); “each man should have his own wife [*gynaika*]” (7:2); “the wife [*gynaika*] should not separate from her husband” (7:10); “Are you bound to a wife? [*gynaikos*] . . . Are you free from a wife [*gynaika*]?” (7:27); or “Let those who have wives [*gynaikas*] live as though they had none” (7:29). When *gynē* appears again in 1 Corinthians 9:5, however, it is partnered with *adelphēn* (*adelphēn gynaika*), which is a word that means “sister” and that Hans Conzelmann, as others, translates as “Have we not the right to have a sister with us as a wife” in the spiritual marriage sense. Yet Conzelmann also notes that “sister” can mean she is a “believer.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the references he cites from Paul—1 Corinthians 7:15 (concerning mixed marriages); Romans 16:1 (concerning Phoebe); and Philemon 2 (concerning Apphia)—all imply variant uses of the translation “sister” as either “believer” or “co-missionary.” Moreover, earlier in his work, Conzelmann translates 1 Corinthians 7:15 as, “But if the unbelieving partner is for separating, then let him [or her] separate. In such cases the brother or *the sister* is not bound,”<sup>13</sup> which, according to context, I read as “But if the unbelieving partner [in the marriage] is for separating, let him [or her] separate. In such case [the one who is] the believer is not bound.” Here “sister” clearly means a believing wife, which is how scholars such as Gordon Fee, Richard Horsley, and Marion Soards translate *adelphēn gynaika* in 1 Corinthians 9:5.<sup>14</sup>

One further piece needs to be examined and that is Paul’s use of *adelphos* (brother) and *adelphē* (sister) in other texts. He calls Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1), Apollos (1 Cor 16:12), Timothy (Phlm 1), Quartus (Rom 16:23), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25) “brother,” and Phoebe (Rom 16:1) and Apphia (Phlm 2) “sister.” From these instances it appears Paul has taken an everyday familial relationship term and used it in a heightened sense. Whereas in secular society siblings come from the “womb” (*delphus*) of the mother, in Paul’s use, “brothers” and “sisters” are part of a family that come from a Godly womb! Is it not possible that Paul partnered

*adelphēn* with *gynaika* in 1 Corinthians 9:5 to accentuate the richness of the gift he is willing to forgo for the benefit of others? And, remember, he has already experienced the gift of a good marriage while he lived with Priscilla and Aquila. It is a gift that the Corinthians to whom he writes had also witnessed.

Writing at the end of the second century CE, Clement of Alexandria understood 1 Corinthians 9:5 as a reference to spiritual marriage, so he embellished the text: "and they took their wives with them not as women with whom they had marriage relations but as sisters that they might be their co-missionaries in dealing with housewives" (*Miscellanies* 3.6.53.3). By then, his reading was appropriate; but it was not in the time of Paul.<sup>15</sup> Besides, Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald think it is difficult to harmonize the "spiritual marriage" interpretation of 1 Corinthians 9:5 with Paul's strong rejection of perpetual celibacy within marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5.<sup>16</sup> Having said all this, the translators of the RSV best capture Paul's statement, within the context of giving up rights and freedoms for the benefit of others: "Do [I] not have the right to be accompanied by a wife?" Of particular interest to me is the rest of this verse: "as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas," for surely Mark 1:30 tells us Peter had a mother-in-law.

In sum, since the legal capacity for marriage in the Roman Empire existed between two free citizens and was ruled out completely for slaves, it must mean Priscilla and Aquila are two free people who married.

## (2) RECENTLY EXPELLED FROM ROME

*Dating Claudius' expulsion.* Aquila and Priscilla travel to Corinth because "as Judeans" they were among the people Claudius deported from Rome on account of riots, which he would have viewed as an egregious "disorder." The Latin historian Suetonius refers to this event in his *Life of Claudius*, which he wrote in the first third of the second century. But while he says, "Claudius expelled Judeans from Rome who were constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus"

(25.4), he does not give us a date for the expulsion edict. A later fifth-century Christian historian does, placing Claudius' expulsion edict in the ninth year of his reign (January 25, 49 CE–January 24, 50 CE; cf. Paulus Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos* 7.6.15-16). It is the date with which most scholars agree.

Those who differ with this date point to a second text that they think also records an imperial expulsion. This one happened in 41 CE. Their suggestion is based on a remark Dio Cassius makes in his *Roman History* 60.6.6. For here in reporting an action Claudius took against the Judeans in Rome at the beginning of his principate, Dio says: "As for the Judeans who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings." It is an unsustainable reference since no Judeans were expelled at this time. Instead, they were merely forbidden from gathering for meetings since Claudius thought they could be a source of unrest.<sup>17</sup> The fact that Dio Cassius makes no mention of Chrestos is a further obstacle to identifying 41 CE as the date for Luke's reference.<sup>18</sup> Both dates are linked, however, for surely, after Claudius saw that his prior leniency had done nothing to create order in 41 CE, he reacted more severely in 49 CE. This time, he expelled people.

Placing the expulsion at 49 CE also coheres with Paul's visit to Corinth (50/51 CE), which would have happened soon after Priscilla and Aquila arrived there. In fact, Luke's use of *prophetōs* (recently; cf. Acts 18:2) sets up a chronological relationship between the couple's arrival and that of Paul, so neatly that both Ernst Haenchen and Luke Timothy Johnson claim Paul's meeting up with them provides a fixed point of reference for a very uncertain Pauline chronology.<sup>19</sup> This year also fits well with the generally accepted dating of Gallio's proconsulship of Achaia before whom Paul appears in Acts 18:12 (51/52 CE, see n. 1 above). It also fits into the period within which Claudius engaged in a campaign to restore the old Roman rites and, at the same time, check the growth of foreign cults (47–52 CE).<sup>20</sup>

*How many people were expelled?* Several details of Luke's account of Claudius' expulsion need to be addressed. The first is the question of numbers, since Luke claims Claudius commanded *all the Judeans* to leave Rome. As it is estimated there were between forty to fifty thousand Judeans living in Rome by the time of Augustus, his assertion is astonishing.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, had numbers such as these been deported, both Suetonius and Josephus would have noted it. Besides, one must take into account Luke's penchant for using rhetorical hyperbole in both his gospel and Acts, since it is his way of underlining the importance of something. As such, Harry J. Leon is correct when he asserts that "although some trouble-making groups were banished from the city under Tiberius and Claudius, there was never any general expulsion of Judeans from Rome."<sup>22</sup> Instead, only the chief leaders in the dispute that arose in 49 CE were banned, which is a manageable and less reportable number. In truth, Claudius probably didn't even know that among those he expelled there were some Judean Christ believers, for at this point no one in authority knew the difference (cf. Acts 16:20). Yet there were, for as Tertullian later observed, until the time of Nero the church grew under the shadow of the synagogue (cf. *Apol.* 21).

*Chrestos: Person or point of faith?* Undoubtedly, the Judeans Claudius expelled were the leaders of contending factions within the synagogue. They were, as Suetonius relates, rioting "at the instigation of Chrestus" (*impulsore Chresto*). It is a behavior Luke will recount many times in his narrative. But who or what is *Chrestus* (pronounced "Christos")? Is he an otherwise unknown agitator who was active in Judean circles in the 40s in Rome? Hardly, since among the 550 names Leon lists as used by Judeans in Rome in the first century, *Chrestus* is not among them.<sup>23</sup> Or, is Suetonius referring to the trouble that arose in the Judean community as a result of Judean Christ followers preaching that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah/*Christos* of God, the anointed one in their synagogues?

F. F. Bruce does not think *Chrestus* refers to an unknown agitator since if he were, Suetonius would have called him "a certain"

*Chrestus*, as he would be singling him out as an individual.<sup>24</sup> Instead, what we have is the careless spelling of the name *Christus*, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew title “Messiah.” In fact, there is evidence that *Chrestus/Chrēstos* and *Chrestiani* were misspellings for *Christus/Christos* and *Christiani/Christianoi*, in both Latin and Greek for the first few centuries. Tacitus, for example, knew the *Chrestianoi* and that their name came from the word *Christus* (*Ann* 15.44.4), and Tertullian tells us that even in the early third century the common pronunciation for *Christus* and *Christianos* was *Chrestus* and *Chrestianos* (*Apol* 3). Thus, Suetonius was probably referring to Jesus Christ, but he had misunderstood his sources. For although Tacitus knew that Christ was executed under Tiberius, Suetonius did not have the same concern for historical precision. So, if his sources told him that the rioting among Judeans in Rome was caused by disagreement about the claims of Christ, it was natural, if mistaken, for him to believe that Christ was in Rome at that time.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the riots (disorder) Suetonius reports, “at the instigation of Chrestus,” were the result of Judean Christ believers’ preaching the Messiahship of Jesus in one or more of the synagogues of the city. Disorder ensued. Such a scenario

is no different from what is attested for synagogues in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9-15), Antioch in Pisidia (13:45, 50), Iconia (14:2, 5), Lystra (14:19), and Corinth (18:12-17). Followers of the Christ message were therefore involved in synagogal conflicts. They—as members of synagogues—were the first urban Roman Christians.<sup>26</sup>

Priscilla and Aquila were among them. Furthermore, since banishment seems to have applied only to the leaders and activists, it is safe to assume that both Priscilla and Aquila were particularly active on the Judean Christ believers side. As Wolfgang Wiefel notes:

Since Rome had no supervising body which could forbid any form of Christian propaganda in the city, it was pos-

sible to missionize in various synagogues concurrently or to go successively from one to another. It is likely that the existence of newly converted Christians alongside the traditional members of the synagogue may have led to increased factions and even to tumultuous disputes.<sup>27</sup>

These eruptions occurred because the preaching of these Judean Christ believers would have been viewed as blasphemous by some of the mainstream Judeans; as the person they preached as God's Messiah had been crucified. Accordingly, their assertion was impossible, for the law of Moses stated that anyone who was put to death by hanging (which would include crucifixion) would be cursed by God (cf. Deut 21:22-23). Rioting followed. Such conflict spelled disorder. It was something the Romans sought to avoid at all costs.

*Has Luke shown us that Aquila and Priscilla were Christ believers before they met Paul?* Luke never mentions that Aquila and Priscilla were believers in Christ before they arrived in Corinth. We could never expect that he would, since by mentioning this detail he would have to admit there was an active following of Jesus in Corinth before Paul arrived there. Yet, internal evidence within his text supports the assertion that Priscilla and Aquila were already believers in Christ before they left Rome.

While the later appearances of this couple in Acts clearly show they are believers (18:18, 26), Luke never refers to their baptism. Such an omission is odd since he usually mentions the conversion and baptism of prominent persons (cf. 2:41; 9:18; 8:36-39; 10:48; 16:15; etc.). His failure to do so in this instance must mean he knew they were baptized but saw no need to mention it.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Paul doesn't include an account of baptizing them either. Instead, he tells us that in Corinth he baptized only Gaius, Cripsus, and the household of Stephanus (1 Cor 1:14-16), and that Stephanus and his household were the "first converts of Achaëa" (1 Cor 16:15). Surely, had Priscilla and Aquila needed to be baptized, he would have mentioned it; and especially since he both lived and worked with them (Acts 18:3). It is also more

improbable that a Judean couple expelled because of the conflict with Judeans in Rome deliberately gave a Christ-believing missionary work and shelter (as they will do and perhaps later do for Apollos; cf. Acts 18:16) than that Paul found lodgings with Judean Christ believers who were expelled from Rome.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, if they are already believers, one can see why Paul both took and left this couple at Ephesus to lay some foundations for his later evangelistic work there (Acts 18:19). Why, Luke even tells us they enhanced Apollos' understanding (v. 26). So while Luke is silent about much of what Priscilla and Aquila do as missionaries, a hint of what they actually did in Corinth may be detected in his treatment of the establishment of the church at Ephesus. For while Luke makes Paul preach the first sermon (Acts 18:19-21), he clearly shows that Priscilla and Aquila established a community there (vv. 26-27) before Paul returned to take up residence and assume responsibility for the church (19:1-10).<sup>30</sup>

Might it also be possible that when Luke says Aquila is a Judean, a native of Pontus, he is also telling us Aquila was a Judean Christ believer? Several facts support this claim. First, *ioudaioi* from the Pontus area were among those who gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Later, Christ believers from Pontus were addressed by the author of 1 Peter (cf. 1:1; "To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus . . ."). From these two references it would appear that the Judeans from Pontus who were among those who gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost must have returned home to spread the faith; and that they were successful. Perhaps Aquila may even have been one of their converts?

Second, Luke often uses the term *ioudaioi* when he is referring to Judean Christ believers. For example, when Paul and Silas are brought before the magistrates in Philippi, they are called *ioudaioi*, and we surely know they are Judean Christ believers (cf. Acts 16:20). Finally, Luke introduces Apollos in the same way he introduces Aquila only a few lines further: "Now a [Judean; *ioudaios*] named Apollos, a native of Alexandria" (Acts 18:24). That Apollos is "well versed in the scriptures . . . instructed in the way of the Lord . . . [and] spoke and taught accurately the

things concerning Jesus" (Acts 18:24b-25) bespeaks of his being a Judean Christ believer. Besides, there is nowhere else in Acts that we find a Judean who is said to have been instructed in the things of the Lord and who is teaching accurately the things about Jesus who is *not* also a believer.<sup>31</sup>

Keeping all of this in mind, Claudius' edict may be our earliest evidence for the presence of the Messianic movement in Rome by the middle of the first century.<sup>32</sup> It may even tell us more about Aquila and Priscilla than Paul or Luke does; for we have already seen they were independent and original missionaries among their fellow Judeans even before they met Paul. Likewise, one can justifiably posit that their readiness to offer hospitality to Paul and a room for worship in their house both in Corinth and Ephesus is but a continuation of what they had already done in Rome before they were banished. Indeed, from the beginning, and in every way possible, Priscilla and Aquila were leaders and activists for the cause of Christ and the gospel.

### (3) WHO RELOCATE IN CORINTH AS TENTMAKERS AND/OR LEATHERWORKERS

During the New Testament era, residents of the Roman Empire traveled the Mediterranean region by both land and sea with an ease that would not appear again until the nineteenth century. Good travel conditions were the result of two things: an artery of roads that connected all the provinces and cities of the empire, making troop relocations easier, and a peace that was brought about and maintained by the Romans. This *Pax Romana*, among other things, curbed piracy.

Sea travel was faster and cheaper than travel by land but it was locked into a time frame that extended from late March to October.<sup>33</sup> Afterward, ships were taken out of service and remained docked until the following spring to avoid winter storms. It is likely Priscilla and Aquila walked the Appian Way to Brindisi. From there they went to Corinth by boat (late spring–early fall) and arrived at the port of Lechaeon. Perhaps other expelled Judean Christ believers (such as some of those

mentioned in Rom 16) traveled with them, for they would all be looking for a place to live and practice their faith until they could go back to Rome. Besides, Corinth was an ideal place for both Priscilla and Aquila to ply their trade. It was a very populous place, and, as such, there would be constant needs for awnings for private houses and for shops in the forum, as well as for tents used for market booths. Furthermore, as the Isthmian Games were celebrated in the spring of 49 CE there would be a need for temporary lodgings for its visitors. Consequently, if Priscilla and Aquila arrived beforehand, they would be employed making tents; but if they arrived afterward there was still plenty to do, since repairs on used tents would be necessary. New tents would also need to be made as the next games were only fifteen months away.<sup>34</sup>

*Tentmakers/Leatherworkers.* *Skēnopoios* is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, which means it is a word that is used only once in the texts. In its basic sense *skēnopoios* describes a person who makes tents, but in a wider sense, it also denotes an artisan who worked with either linen, canvas, or leather.<sup>35</sup> Early interpreters, such as John Chrysostom and Origen, believed that Paul, who refers to his labor but never to a specific trade (cf. 1 Thess 2:9; 1 Cor 4:12), worked with leather, as Priscilla and Aquila did. Later scholars thought they worked with linen and canvas.<sup>36</sup> Ivoni Richter Reimer disputes their claim since she thinks it is based on a faulty premise. Its theorists thought that as Paul came from Tarsus in Cilicia and the rough cloth woven of goats' hair (*cilicium*) was also made there, he must have both made and used this product since he learned how to weave in Tarsus. Indeed, local Bedouins, called "Skenites," used goat hair for making tents as well. Reimer counters their theory, arguing the following: (1) *cilicium* is not synonymous with *skēne*, and (2) as it stems only from Paul's home country, Aquila and Priscilla could not have used it. Yet, according to Acts 18:3, Paul not only carried on this trade, but Priscilla and Aquila did so with him.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, as Brian M. Rapske suggests:

If Paul's overland journeys were generally undertaken by foot, the recently popular explanation of Acts 18:3 that Paul was a weaver of tentcloth made from goat's hair or linen, whatever its other problems, is rendered even less probable. Such an occupation, requiring tools and equipment inconvenient in size, weight and shape, is hardly in keeping with the impression in Acts of a highly mobile Paul—even less so a pedestrian Paul. The maker/repairer of tents and other leather products, carrying his bag of cutting tools, awls, sharpening stone and such, presents a more consistent and more credible picture.<sup>38</sup>

Today most scholars think all three missionaries worked with leather, and they picture the three of them working for long hours, bent forward on a stool by a workbench.<sup>39</sup> All that was needed was a set of basic tools, which included round-edge and straight-edge knives to cut the leather and awls, needles, and thread to sew it. So little was necessary, it made "tenting" a portable thriving trade. Indeed, Acts 28:30 may even imply Paul worked when he was in custody in Rome. More onerous was the abundance of strength and patience that were also needed, for as Paul later comments, "We grow weary from the work of our own hands" (1 Cor 4:12; NRSV). Yet he was willing to work "night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God" (1 Thess 2:9). It is a price he was willing to pay from the very beginning of his ministry. For when he asks in 1 Corinthians 9:6, "Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?" one must remember that the only time these two men traveled together was on his first missionary journey.

Murphy-O'Connor spells out "tentings" endless as well as destructive potential:

Tentmakers were equally at home in sewing together strips of leather or different weights of canvas. There is little difference in technique in joining two thicknesses of leather or layers of heavy canvas. It takes an awl to make the hole in a rolled-over canvas seam just as it does in leather, and

in both cases the needle must be slipped through before the hole closes. It is but a short step to sewing leather cloaks, belts and gourds, all equipment of the traveler. Since skill was more important than strength, women could sew as well as men. Inevitably, a tentmaker developed muscular shoulders and strong, calloused hands. The stitch was set by a sudden outward jerk of both hands into which the thread bit.<sup>40</sup>

Surprisingly, although *skēnopoios* performed a necessary task, they were despised as a trade since what they did was considered a demeaning manual labor. Paul mentions this fact himself: “You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless” (1 Cor 4:10c-12). In Priscilla and Aquila’s case, however, their occupation was a sweet endeavor; for at first, with both strength and skill, these refugees practiced their art together. *But not for long!*

#### (4) WITH WHOM PAUL LIVED AND WORKED

*A triad of workers, a triad of workings.* Paul’s preaching in Athens brings mixed results. For while some people like Dionysius, a member of the court of the Areopagus, became a believer, “as did Damaris and the others with them” (Acts 17:34), other listeners did not. In fact, some of them scoffed at him, while others postponed a decision which is a response according to Acts that is equivalent to unbelief (cf. Acts 24:25). As such, Paul may have left Athens a disheartened missionary. Yet in the plan of God a surprise awaited him. For in Corinth, he met a couple who shared not only the same trade with him but their home and their faith as well. It was an unbeatable triad and part of the hundredfold the gospel promises (cf. Mark 10:30). Moreover, Luke tells us Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul worked together. So despite the fact that some commentators, like the Western Text (D),<sup>41</sup> W. Michaelis,<sup>42</sup> Ronald F. Hock,<sup>43</sup> and Peter Lampe,<sup>44</sup> have eliminated Priscilla, the construction, continuity, and the grammatical structure of Luke’s text tell us they

were a trio. "He [Paul] stayed *with them* [Aquila and Priscilla], and *they* worked, for by trade *they* were tentmakers" (Acts 18:3; emphasis added). As such, there is no good reason to exclude Priscilla from the "they/them" team. Moreover, the portrayal of Paul as "working" with Aquila and Priscilla can reasonably be inferred from 1 Corinthians 4:12a. As here in using the same verb that appears in Acts 18:3, Paul speaks of "working with our own hands," and its plural forms suggest that he engaged in such work in collaboration with one or more people.

*Aquila and Priscilla's dwelling and economic status.* The remains of a vaulted shop in Corinth's *agora* stir my imagination. I envisage it as the workshop/home of Priscilla and Aquila. This particular two-storied edifice conforms to the type of place artisans rented at that time. Its lower level provided space to practice trade (storage space for different weights and widths of leather and linen and a narrow bench for each worker, plus access to the street), while its upper story, created by a wooden platform halfway up to divide the room into two levels, afforded living quarters.<sup>45</sup>



The shop pictured above is centrally located; but wherever theirs was, little shops like this were scattered all over the city.

A workshop could be located almost anywhere. A room in an artisan's house could serve as a workshop, as could a ground floor room in an apartment building, with the artisan living in an upstairs room, in a back room, or even in the back of the shop itself. Or a workshop could be located in a separate building.<sup>46</sup>

Most often, however, shops were located on busy streets and in places in or near the *agora*, or marketplace, for these were places that would attract business.

That two independent artisans were able to extend hospitality to Paul suggests Priscilla and Aquila did not operate at a subsistence level; but this scarcely places them among the elite. In fact, John Chrysostom, the first great commentator of Acts, depicts them as "poor and living by the work of their hands," as do other early church writers.<sup>47</sup> Paul's own testimony confirms this picture: "And when I was with you [in Corinth] and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia" (2 Cor 11:9). It is a need Paul finds humiliating (2 Cor 11:7; cf. 1 Cor 4:11-13). It is also why Priscilla worked, since wives were often required to assist their husbands in difficult manual trades, simply to make ends meet.<sup>48</sup> Not everyone agrees with this picture, as scholars like Ernst Haenchen, Gerd Theissen, Rudolf Pesch, and Hans-Josef Klauck think Priscilla and Aquila are a well-to-do couple.<sup>49</sup> Meeks does as well.<sup>50</sup> Reimer disagrees, contending (a) inscriptional, (b) archaeological, and (c) Pauline material (such as has been indicated throughout this chapter) challenge their "well-to-do entrepreneur" thesis.<sup>51</sup>

Inscriptional material indicates that in comparison to the actual percentage of the population, artisans of Aquila's stamp are underrepresented in the inscriptions. This is because their trade enjoyed so little prestige.<sup>52</sup> As Lampe observes:

In Roman epitaphs, for example, relatively few handworkers are mentioned who are in the private sector, that is, those who exercise their trade apart from the "familia Caesaris" or the state. Among the 10,892 persons mentioned in the inscriptions, only 72 are recognizable as some kind

of craftsman of the private sector. That is less than one percent. In comparison to their actual proportion in the population (presumably considerably more than double as many), handworkers of Aquila's kind are under-represented in the inscriptions.<sup>53</sup>

Excavations at Corinth also shed light on the size of work-room/shops or workshop/houses of artisans. Lampe claims these excavations confirm that smaller individual shops were a little more than three meters wide and their length a little less than four meters, while larger shops were four and a half meters wide and six meters long.<sup>54</sup> In American terms this means shop rooms were generally eight to fourteen feet wide and twelve to twenty-four feet deep. As such, Priscilla and Aquila probably lived in the loft, lit by an unglazed window centered above the shop's entrance, while Paul slept below amid the tool-strewn workbenches and rolls of leather and canvas.<sup>55</sup>

This arrangement worked for Paul at the beginning of his time in Corinth, since he could work while holding important conversations with customers or with others who dropped by. No doubt Priscilla and Aquila assisted him. Yet their efforts are no more recounted than are the missionary efforts of Silas and Timothy; but that is not to deny them.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, their home was probably the place where believers met, as they probably did before Paul arrived. Murphy-O'Connor envisions the downstairs room where they gathered:

It was not luxurious, but it was clean, and the leather and canvas stacked against the wall served as improvised couches. Others sat on the benches or stools. Children were ranged on the ladder. Depending on the size of the room, the assembly numbered between 10 and 20 believers. In winter it must have been rather cozy. The shutters were closed against the biting wind, and the brazier gave both light and warmth. In summer it was a different matter. The shutters could not be left open without attracting the unwelcome attention of the street. The flickering flames of oil lamps intensified the heat of the airless crowded room.

Such discomfort, however, mattered little to those whose sharing of bread and wine brought Christ into their midst.<sup>57</sup>

As time went on, the numbers increased. This was partly because, having received aid from Macedonia (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:14-15), Paul no longer needed to work and was able to give his entire attention to the mission (Acts 18:5) instead of only preaching on the Sabbath (v. 4). Consequently, he needed a larger space to evangelize, since the room the young couple provided could hold no more than twenty people. So, after he left the synagogue, he moved his preaching activities into the house of Titius Justus, a “god-fearer” (i.e., a non-Judean synagogue adherent) who had presumably become a believer. Besides, his house was located next to the synagogue (Acts 18:7). Notice it is never said that Aquila and Priscilla owned a house. In fact, Lampe claims, their move from Corinth after eighteen months (Acts 18:11) indicates they did not possess real estate in Corinth, since it would have held them back.<sup>58</sup> Instead they rented a workshop-residence that was available for just such craftspeople. Indeed, that Priscilla and Aquila’s home, in Corinth as well as in Ephesus, does not come into question as the place for a great gathering of listeners further supports the picture of average craftspeople of lower social status.

In sum, Priscilla and Aquila belong to that very populous lower order of minor craftspeople in Corinth who earned their living with their own hands. What they earned was not extravagant but it must have been more than sufficient since they were able to extend help to those who were less well-off than themselves.

### **Scene Two: Acts 18:18-19**

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*After this [these things] Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he cut his hair, for he had a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there.*

*"After This [These Things]" Context*

Eighteen months lie between verses 1-3 and 18-19 of Acts 18. In between, Paul lived and worked with Priscilla and Aquila (18:1-3), and he preached in the synagogue every Sabbath (18:4), until he was no longer allowed in it (18:6). Like the Judean Christ preachers in the synagogues in Rome, Paul's message that Jesus was the Messiah of God resulted in intense opposition (cf. Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25.4). In response, he departed and moved his evangelistic outreach into the home of Titius Justus. At this point, the Western Text (D) proposes Paul moved out of Aquila's house (notice how Priscilla was dropped), but this is unlikely since the ties that developed between them were too deep to sever. More likely, he only moved his venue for preaching from the synagogue to a larger private house. Not everyone appreciated Paul's efforts, and he was brought before Gallio, the Roman governor (vv. 12-17), to the *bema*, a raised area in the marketplace which was used for rendering judgments. Surely Priscilla and Aquila were nearby to support him.



Understandably, members of the synagogue were his critics since they were threatened by his words and the effect they

seemed to have on their leaders such as Crispus (1 Cor 1:14). They charged that Paul was persuading people to worship God contrary to the law, i.e., he was preaching a faith that was not recognized “by Rome” and hence was a threat to her best interests. But Gallio, realizing their charge was an internal matter, brought the proceedings to an end. In effect, he granted Paul and his fledgling group the same protection that Roman law granted to the practice of Judaism.<sup>59</sup> Might Luke have told this story as an example of the truth of the words he reported just before this (Acts 18:9-10): “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak [go on speaking, as the Greek tense suggests] and do not be silent; *for I am with you*, and no [one] shall attack you to harm you’” (emphasis added)? And so “after these things” and with renewed assurance (which is a very big concept in Luke-Acts [cf. *asphelia* in Luke 1:1-4]), “Paul stayed many days longer [in partnership ministry with Priscilla and Aquila]” (Acts 18:18).

*“And They Came to Ephesus, and He Left Them There”*

It would appear that Paul was ready to move from Corinth when he thought others within the Corinthian Christ believers could continue what he, Priscilla, and Aquila had begun. We learn later from 1 Corinthians, however, that although this community lasted they divided into smaller groups (cf. 1 Cor 1–4) and that they needed his pastoral hand from afar. Indeed, at the end of the letter he wrote to them, Paul singled out Stephanas who put his house and household (which presumably includes women) at their service, and he urged this fractured community to be subject to them and to every fellow worker and laborer (1 Cor 16:15f.). Surely this is because as “fellow workers” of Paul their concern would not have been for themselves but for others.

Murphy-O’Connor suggests Paul’s move to Ephesus was part of his missionary strategy:

His churches arched from Galatia in the east to Corinth in the west; Ephesus lay at the center. It was the obvious choice

and his next missionary target, and the fact that it was roughly equidistant from all his other communities meant that he could stay in touch with them easily. Paul's experience at Corinth had made him aware of the advantage of having a base already prepared when he arrived.<sup>60</sup>

And so, it would seem when he wanted to go to Antioch, where he began his second missionary journey with Silas (Acts 15:40), he asked Priscilla and Aquila to accompany him and to do there (which they will do, cf. 1 Cor 16:19) what they had already done in Corinth before he arrived there. Later he would return to them (Acts 19:1). Were Priscilla and Aquila to agree to his plan it would be a sacrifice because they would lose whatever trade they had managed to build up in Corinth. But, committed to God and the gospel, they left everything and accompanied him 250 miles across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus. While Corinth was large, Ephesus was huge, with a population of a quarter of a million people.<sup>61</sup> It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire (behind Rome and Alexandria) and the capital and greatest commercial city of the Roman province of Asia. It was also the largest city Paul visited during his missionary activity, excluding Rome. In addition, the renowned Temple of Artemis was located there, and as it was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, it attracted many pilgrims. It was also home to a significant Judean population (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.225-27; 16.162-68, 172-73).

Luke again positions Paul as the initiator of a new mission. So, before he leaves Ephesus he records that Paul went to the synagogue and argued with the Judeans (Acts 18:19), after which he leaves (18:18-23) and doesn't return until chapter 19, when he probably lived again with Priscilla and Aquila. For later when he writes to the Corinthian church from Ephesus, he will include their greetings in his letter (1 Cor 16:19). While he is gone, Priscilla and Aquila evangelize (Acts 18:26) and are functioning much like Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, and other Pauline missionary partners.<sup>62</sup>

### Scene Three: Acts 18:26-27

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*He [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him.*

The only activity Luke reports about Priscilla and Aquila's evangelistic endeavors is that they taught Apollos, a Judean native of Alexandria, whom he depicts as an "eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures" (18:24). It is a description that comports with Apollos' having come from Alexandria; since it was a place that was known for its learning and philosophical reflection. Part of his instruction had been "in the way of the Lord" (18:25a). By saying this, Luke means Apollos had received formal instruction about Jesus; for here, as elsewhere in Acts, "Lord" refers to Jesus. The phrase "in the way of the Lord" then explains the verse that follows it, which indicates how Apollos could accurately teach the things about Jesus. Since:

V. 28 likely makes clear at least part of what is meant by this latter phrase, namely that he was able to show from the Hebrew Scriptures that the Messiah was Jesus. This is partly confirmed by the fact that already in v. 24, before he ever met Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos is said to be "powerful in the writings of Scripture," which from Luke's Christian point of view means precisely that he was able to use them Christologically in an effective manner (cf. Lk 24: 44-49).<sup>63</sup>

At this point, Luke's positive assessment ends, as he tells us (with regret) that Apollos "knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25c). As such, there was a deficiency in his understanding of the gospel. It is a lacuna Priscilla and Aquila catch upon hearing him boldly speak in the synagogue and they respond as good missionaries would, since "they took him [aside] and ex-

pounded to him the way of God more accurately" (v. 26b). In fact, they shared Paul's theological outlook with Apollos, which is an assertion Paul implies later in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

That Priscilla is named first may suggest she is Apollos' main tutor as John Chrysostom puts forward in his First Homily on the Greeting to Priscilla and Aquila:

Paul has placed Priscilla before her husband. For he does not say, "Greet Aquila and Priscilla," but "Priscilla and Aquila." He does not do this without a reason, but he seems to acknowledge a greater godliness for her than for her husband. What I said is not guess-work, because, it is possible to learn this from the Book of Acts. She took Apollos, an eloquent man and powerful in the Scriptures, but knowing only the baptism of John; and she instructed him in the way of the Lord and made him a teacher brought to completion (Acts 18:24-25).<sup>64</sup>

The Western Text, however, followed by other writers, changed the order from "Priscilla and Aquila" to "Aquila and Priscilla." Whatever the case, that Apollos was not just any convert to the faith but as Luke says a man "well versed in the scriptures" (Acts 18:24) demonstrates that both of these people were knowledgeable enough to teach this teacher, and their competence is confirmed by his later success in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 3:6). In fact, when reflecting on this scene, John Chrysostom says, "He sailed to Syria . . . and with him Priscilla—Lo, a woman also—and Aquila. But he left these at Ephesus. With good reason, namely that they should teach" (Homily 40 on the Acts of the Apostles [18:18]).

Priscilla and Aquila also show their diplomatic and pastoral sense in that, instead of challenging him publicly, they took him aside privately, perhaps to their home. Obviously, their teaching was effective, for when Apollos wished to move on to Achaia,<sup>65</sup> "the brethren [i.e., those converted by the brief appearance of Paul, or more likely from the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila, for as we learn in 1 Cor 16:19 they met as a house church in their home] encouraged him and wrote [a letter] to the disciples [in Corinth]

to receive him" (Acts 18:27). Surely, the names of Priscilla and Aquila in this letter spoke volumes, for letters were a form of presence, and the Corinthians already knew and trusted this couple.<sup>66</sup>

### **Priscilla and Aquila's Impact on the Lives and Faith of the Early Believers according to Acts**

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It would appear that having spent some time with this couple we have discovered there is more to Priscilla and Aquila than Luke's introduction of them first suggested. For here we merely learned they were: (1) a married couple (2) recently expelled from Rome (3) who relocated in Corinth as tentmakers and/or leatherworkers and (4) with whom Paul lived and worked (Acts 18:2). If we were to ask someone to describe them based on this description, we would end up with something like this: This is a hospitable, artisan couple, who, despite adversity, was able to move on and share their home, faith, and trade with Paul.

Having explored Luke's words, and their surrounding context, and supported by his other snippets concerning them, let us now consider a new way to think about them. (1) Priscilla and Aquila were *active Judean Christ believers and leaders* in Rome and Corinth before they met Paul. Indeed, their initial work in Corinth made it easier for his missionary activity when he arrived there; however, Luke chooses to be silent about it. (2) Paul trusted them and they supported each other not only financially but spiritually as well, for surely through the eighteen months they were together their many conversations and prayer times enabled them all to stay focused despite the growing opposition. (3) Later Paul included them in his plans to further the mission when he left Corinth, and they, as *missionaries* (a term Luke never applies to them), left everything to be part of it. (4) From the start, this "triad" were *coworkers in Christ Jesus*. In truth, Paul left them "in charge" in Ephesus when he moved on to Antioch, Galatia, and Phrygia, and to do there what they had already done in Corinth. If we were to ask someone to describe Priscilla and Aquila based on this description, we would end up with

something like this: Priscilla and Aquila were (1) a missionary couple (2) who as active Judean Christ believers (3) and leaders and teachers in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus (4) were coworkers, founders, and leaders with Paul of various Jesus groups for the cause of Christ. And although Paul emphatically states he planted the seed (1 Cor 3:6), "laid a foundation" (1 Cor 3:10), and begot the Corinthians in Christ Jesus through his preaching of the gospel (1 Cor 4:15b), which are all part of the argument he makes later in an attempt to unify the community (cf. 1 Cor 1:10-4:21) after he (and Priscilla and Aquila) had left them, I am convinced that the "origins" of the Corinthian group began in a small way with Priscilla and Aquila, along with the other Judean Christ believers who were expelled from Rome and who relocated with them in Corinth. These nascent believers must have frequently gathered together to nurture their faith and in so doing provided an example to their neighbors that piqued their interest and encouraged them to give Paul a hearing when he arrived there. *They were a presence that strengthened!*