Acts 18:1-23 - Williams

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Preacher: Tad Williams

[0:00] Good morning. Please keep your Bibles open to Acts 18.

! We're preaching through the whole book of Acts. We're picking up on this story of the Apostle Paul! in the middle of what is called Paul's second missionary journey. Paul is about in the middle of his second missionary journey.
If you remember, he had received this vision in the night from the man of Macedonia to go over into Macedonia. That's in Europe, what we now call Europe. So the second journey had taken Paul into Europe.
He'd been traveling with Timothy and Silas. He had left those gentlemen in Berea to help with these churches in the Macedonian region.
Paul had gone on to Athens. It seems by himself he'd gone to Athens. And this is what we read last week. He had delivered a powerful speech in Mars Hill in this sort of famous setting, in this famous old city of Athens.
[1:12] Maybe the speech had not gone that well, actually. Maybe it had not been received. There had been some good reception.

Maybe not as much as Paul had wanted. That might be why he decided to leave Athens. We don't know for sure. But you look in verse 1, it says, After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.
He went to Corinth, the city of about 55 miles away from Athens. It's an overland journey. Paul walked, it seems, by himself to Corinth.
And goes there. And as he does, he goes to the synagogue and begins meeting the Jews in the synagogue. It's interesting, I think, to wonder about Paul's frame of mind. What's he thinking? What's going on? He says in, well, let me say, he remains in the city of Corinth for 18 months. This is a long time for the Apostle Paul to be in one place.
[2:12] 18 months. And after he leaves down the road in a few years, he will write a series of letters back to these people. First and second Corinthians we have. And while he is here in Corinth for these 18 months, he writes first and second Thessalonians back to the cities where Timothy and Silas are at right now.

So if you read all those letters, you can really put things together with what Paul is thinking and how this time goes for him in Corinth. But he's here for 18 months.
He begins by getting to know the people in the synagogue. Like I said, it seems he's out of money because he starts working as a tent maker, which was his trade.
This is the first time in the Bible we hear anything about the Apostle Paul having a trade. A tent maker can also be translated a leather worker, someone who would sew maybe heavy canvas cloth to make a tent or leather to make a tent or some other things.
But it's a manual labor type of job. And Paul had been trained in this. I was interested in this this week. I read up on it. Paul is a rabbi.
[3:29] He'd been trained as a rabbi, which means he's an expert in the Old Testament scriptures, the Torah and the Jewish scriptures. But in the first century, rabbis were not paid.

They were what we might call bivocational ministers assigned to synagogues. They worked without pay from the synagogue to provide leadership and expertise in the law.
And so and there's actually clear instructions that the rabbis should not be paid. And so Paul is of this tradition.
And he knows as he comes into this town of Corinth that the Jews in the synagogue there would expect that. It's like, oh, a visiting rabbi from Jerusalem or from Antioch.
Okay. Well, what does this guy do? That would be a very normal question. Oh, he's a tent maker. Okay. Paul also knows that at this time in the Roman Empire, especially in Roman cities, there are

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traveling orators, men who go around and they deliver speeches.
[4:35] And they do this for a fee, for money. They make money by delivering speeches. And this has made at least some people cynical. These people are cynical of the traveling speech makers. And so Paul doesn't want people to think he's one of these.

And so he meets this couple, Aquila and Priscilla, it says. And they are tent makers. And it seems quite natural that he would live with them and work in their business with them and make money as a tent maker.
So that's what he's doing. But while he's doing that, he's pouring out his life, he says later, in ministry in the synagogue in Corinth, and he's trying to persuade them that Jesus is the Christ.
I work day and night, he says, as a tent maker, working with his hands, but then in the synagogue. Every Sabbath, he's reasoning, he's arguing, he's trying to persuade the Jews.
It's not going super well. Doesn't go super well. But in verse 5, Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia. These, where they had been, they had remained.
[5:50] They arrive. It seems they bring good encouragement of what's happening in these regions, the churches where they had stayed. So Paul says later on, he's encouraged by their report.

It also seems they bring him money. And this seems to free him up then to work full time as a minister or as a rabbi in this synagogue.
And so he does that. Testifying to the Jews. But, verse 6, they oppose and revile him.
And this seems to heat up to such a point where the Apostle Paul, in verse 6, shakes out his garments and says to them, Your blood be on your own heads. I am innocent.
From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. If you want to raise the temperature in the room, this is a free tip, a free tip for you. If you want to, maybe in a class, some of you are in college class, if you want to just raise the temperature in the debate, refer to your blood being on your own head, okay?
[6:53] Just throw that down. And that'll get the temperature up. Life and death matters here. That's what he does.

Very dramatic. Shakes out his garments. It's sort of an Old Testament prophet thing to do. I'm done with you people. Die!
You know what I mean? Okay. Wow. And that's what he does. And then to further cool down the temperature, verse 7, he left there and went to the house of a man named Titus Justice, a worshiper of God.
His house was next door to the synagogue. And Paul plants a house church next door to the synagogue. Yeah, right.
One scholar said it might have been a shared wall structure. Might have shared a wall. Oh, you're going to plant a church next door to the synagogue?
[7:59] And oh, look, in verse 8, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized right next door to the synagogue.

We can well imagine that the temperature is boiling here. I mean, the blood pressure is high amongst the Jewish population.
The synagogue population in Corinth would have been a minority population. We're not talking the whole city. The Jewish population in this Greek city would have been a minority. But amongst this population, this would have been big news, a big deal.
What we would call a church split. A synagogue split. The leader of the synagogue defects and goes with the new rabbi.
That's a big deal. This reminded me of a fascinating story of local history. I would like to tell you a story of local history now, okay?
[8:59] We ready? It's a true story. It was about 100 years ago that the congregation of College Church in Wheaton became embroiled in controversy and debate.

And they had many difficult congregational meetings. And after one of these meetings, 116 members of College Church resigned their membership, including the senior pastor and including J. Oliver Buswell, who at that time was the president of Wheaton College.
The president of Wheaton College was going to College Church 100 years ago. Some things never change. And this debate spilled over. And this group, which was about 40% of the congregation at that time, resigned their memberships en masse.

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And then three days later, they took out an ad in the local newspaper, the Wheaton Daily Journal, I think it was called. You can find this. It's in archives. And in this big ad in the paper, they announced the formation of a new church, the Wheaton Interdenominational Church, which will be meeting starting next Sunday at Pierce Chapel on the campus of Wheaton College, which is about 300 yards away from the front doors of College Church, maybe 200 yards, something like that.
The new church will meet at Pierce Chapel, and the former senior pastor of College Church will preside as the new pastor of the new church, and the president of Wheaton College will be in joyful attendance.
[10:28] Oh boy. And at our service on Sunday, we will proclaim the pure gospel. This is what the ad says. Oh yeah. Something like that is what's happening in Corinth right here.

The Wheaton Interdenominational Church, four years after they started, renamed themselves as the Wheaton Bible Church. And that's the story of how the Wheaton Bible Church began in this community as a split from College Church.
A little bit of local history for us, okay? These things happen, and when they do, they are emotional and intense. And I think we can well imagine this is what's happening in Corinth.
This is a very taxing ordeal on anyone involved in leadership. And it seems it has been taxing for the Apostle Paul, because look in verse 9, And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, A word from the Lord.
All Scripture is a word of the Lord. Scripture is the word of the Lord. In our passage today, in the middle of our passage, in the middle of the word of the Lord, we have a word from the Lord.
[12:13] A direct quote from God to the Apostle Paul. Anytime you see something like that, you should slow down and look at it real carefully. A word from the Lord in the middle of the word of the Lord.

The Lord speaks to Paul in a vision of the night. Paul who is afraid, who's undoubtedly tired, who has been through this intense church split type thing.
Do not be afraid, but go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.
I want to suggest to you, this is the theological center of our passage today. If you want to circle it in your journal or your Bible, or put a little star next to it, this is the theological center.
Because God comes to the Apostle Paul, and he says, I have many in this city who are my people, but they're not yet my people.
[13:23] They're going to become my people through your preaching and teaching. That's what God is saying to Paul. He's encouraging Paul to keep preaching and teaching, because God has appointed and elected and predestined many in the city of Corinth to become my people, and the means by which they will become God's people is the preaching and teaching of the Apostle Paul and the other Christians.

The doctrine of election, of God's sovereignty in salvation, and God's election in salvation, is often criticized, because people say, well, it just will lead you to some sort of fatalism.
Fatalism, you know, you'll just resign yourself to fatalism, or it'll lead you to some sort of complacency, in which you'll just stop doing stuff.
You'll just sort of give up, because it is what it is. Fatalism or complacency, it is so fascinating that God speaks to the Apostle Paul, and he upholds his divine sovereignty in salvation, and his election of many in this city, as the motivation for Paul to continue preaching.
So God's sovereignty in salvation is the motivation for preaching and teaching and perseverance in Christian ministry.
[15:04] Doesn't have the opposite effect. God certainly doesn't think it does, because he upholds his own sovereignty in salvation, his election, to motivate the Apostle Paul and encourage him to keep going.

I want to linger on this for a minute. It's the theological center of our passage. I want to encourage any of us who are tired or exhausted or in the midst of struggle or wanting to give up, thinking about giving up.
I want to encourage you with this word of the Lord to not give up. Keep going. Keep being faithful. Keep speaking up.
Keep sharing the good news of Jesus as you are able. We all are in different places, different positions, but don't give up.

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I appreciated a comment from a commentator named Brian Vickers. He said, we quote, we also see the necessary means of salvation are not separated from the divine grounds of salvation.
[16:24] God's sovereignty in salvation is realized through the spoken word of the gospel. God does not separate the divine grounds of our salvation, his election, from his appointed divine means of salvation.

Preaching, proclamation, Christians, sharing the good news of Jesus. So let's do that. Our neighbors, and our families, and students, in your classes, whatever the case may be, our children, so that God may continue to build his kingdom and his church in this world.
Before I move on from this section, this sort of middle section, let me just point out one thing sort of in passing. What we're seeing here is a separation between the Christian assembly and the Jewish synagogue assembly.
Think about the progression in the book of Acts. The early Christians leave the temple in Jerusalem. They move out away from the temple, but they focus on synagogues.
Now here is a fascinating example of where the Christian leaders move out of a synagogue. Not very far. Right next door, shared wall. But it's the first time in the New Testament where we see a Christian assembly meeting right next to a Jewish synagogue assembly.
[17:51] And so the idea here, and it's a radical idea, is that you can be faithful to the God of the Bible and worship Jesus and not be in the Jewish assembly.

That's actually a big move. It's an important moment in the book of Acts. So just take note of that. Let's move to this next section.
Let's look at verses 12 to 17 where there is a sort of trial between a Roman, verse 12, but when Galio was pro-council of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal saying, this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.
So the Jews of the synagogue, they certainly don't like this next door and their leader defected and okay, the temperature is still boiling. They make a united attack.
They bring Paul before Galio. Let me say three things about Galio. Okay. Galio is possibly the most famous person the Apostle Paul interacts with in the entire book of Acts.
[19:07] He's a Roman senator. He's had a distinguished career up to this point as a Roman senator. And he'd been given a one-year assignment to be the governor of this province where the city of Corinth is located.

This is what the Romans would do. They divided their whole empire into provinces or governant regions. And if it was a frontier region or a militarily dangerous region, they would typically assign a general to be the governor just for one year, a one-year term.
A military general would serve as the pro-council. If it was a peaceful region or province, they would typically assign a senator for one year, just a one-year term. These were sometimes, at this point in history, they were sort of viewed as like an extended vacation.
These pro-councils would move their family, typically from Rome, to their place of assignment and maybe they'd apply themselves to the work of governance. Maybe they would just enjoy the local sights and sounds.
Julius Caesar is a Roman general who was assigned to a one-year term in the region of Judea and he oversees the trial of one Jesus Christ. Galio is a Roman senator assigned to this region on a one-year gig.
[20:29] But he is a famous Roman senator. He's the older brother of Seneca the Younger. Seneca, famous Roman stoic philosopher and playwright.

Seneca is, right now, at this point in our story, Seneca, his brother, is serving as a senator in Rome and is the private tutor of a 13-year-old boy named Nero. And in three years, that 13-year-old boy Nero will become the emperor of Rome at the age of 16.
Okay, so Galio is as connected as you can be to Roman elite, politics, government, emperors.
And so these Jews bring Paul before this Galio to try him on this charge and before Paul can make any kind of defense, Galio dismisses it.
Get out of here. And he refuses to even entertain the idea, this is what's so important about this story. You read the story and you think, well, what is the point of this?
[21:39] What's so important about this story is that this very prominent Roman senator refuses to even enter in the complaint that this dispute amongst the Jews represents any sort of threat to the Roman politics or military or the empire or this is not a criminal matter, a vicious crime, he says.

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It's an intramural squabble, a theological squabble amongst the Jews. This is kind of what Galio pronounces on the matter and he just dismisses it. And this actually becomes very important Roman legal precedent for the next 200 years.
That, okay, this Christian movement is not a threat to the Roman government or laws or civil society. We'll see an example of this next week with a Roman town clerk in Ephesus, very similar kind of thing.
And so, early Christianity is protected by pagan Roman government officials. That's actually what's happening here. And given the room to continue to grow, and this is exactly what happens, look in our passage, after they are dismissed, verse 18, after this, Paul stayed many days longer.
Up in verse 11, we had already learned that he stayed a year and six months. We don't know if many days longer are a part of year and six months. It's at least 18 months. It might be more. It might be two, even three years Paul's in Corinth.
[23:25] But this pronouncement by Galio protects the apostle Paul and allows him to continue ministering and allows the Christian church to continue to flourish.

It's important to see that. God uses government officials, pagan government officials, actually to protect the Christian church.
a side note here, Galio's pro-council term in Corinth, his one-year term, is very well attested in history and in archaeology.
And so this actually becomes the key date in the whole timeline of the apostle Paul. When church historians try to lay out the timeline and the dates of the story of the book of Acts and of the apostle Paul, really the immovable object is this little trial before Galio because that's so fixed.
He was there for one year and so during that time Paul was in Corinth and so it's an important moment in the story, easy to miss. Well, let's move on from the little trial.
[24:38] Oh, another thing. Too many good things here to move on. This Seneca, the Roman, famous Roman writer, dedicates two of his books to his older brother, Galio, and he appreciates his older brother and he praises him for his patience and his gentle tolerance.

And I think you see that as Galio just apparently stands here and watches the Jews beat their leader right in front of him. See that?
Verse 17, they all see Sothenes, apparently this is the new ruler of the synagogue, and they beat him in front of the tribunal. Galio apparently is peacefully content to sort of watch this play out and tolerant.
Okay. I don't know, that amuses me. That's what happens after this. Paul stayed many days and then he took leave of the brothers, verse 18, and set sail for Syria and with him Priscilla and Aquila. As they leave the city of Corinth, they pass through Sincrea, which is the eastern port of the city of Corinth, but a separate town.
[25:50] And apparently as they pass through the separate town, Paul cuts his hair or gets a haircut where it says he was under a vow. Been huge debate about this. So much discussion about Paul's haircut.

It's amazing. Might be the most famous haircut in history. I don't know. What does this mean? Why does he do this? Under what kind of vow? No one really knows is the answer for sure.
Might be a Nazarite vow, which was a thing. You remember Samson in the Old Testament took a Nazarite vow and never cut his hair. There's record that people would take these sorts of vows for a set amount of time.
They'd let their hair grow as part of that. And then they would, at the end of their set time of vow, they would have a haircut. And in some cases, they would collect their cut hair and travel to Jerusalem and offer their cut hair as a burnt offering at the temple in Jerusalem.
This is a thing. This may be what's happening here. Not sure, but it could be. Because Paul is now traveling back to Jerusalem.
[26:59] So he gets on a ship with Aquila and Priscilla and they travel first to the city of Ephesus. This is the first time Paul is ever in Ephesus. He will come back and spend a lot of time here.

We're going to hear about that next week. Verse 19, And they came to Ephesus and he left them there. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there. But he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.
When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you if God wills. And he set sail from Ephesus. So, he goes into the synagogue in

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Ephesus and he reasons with them as he does.
So, important to note, Paul hasn't given up on synagogues. He did move out of the synagogue in Corinth. But, he goes to Ephesus and first thing, he goes to the synagogue. And he reasons with them.
And he apparently is well-received here in the synagogue. You wonder, why is he well-received some places and others? I really appreciated the commentator who said, he was probably well-received because of his sharp new haircut.
[28:14] I read that in a commentary. That's good stuff. It's probably well-received because of his sharp new haircut.

Really. Now, in this commentator's defense, he went on and actually, that's where he talked about these vows, these Nazarite vows. And, if Paul comes into Ephesus and he's introduced as a rabbi who's just completed a Nazarite vow and is on his way to Jerusalem to offer his hair as a burnt offering, well, that plays real well with the Jewish synagogue crowd.
So, that could be what's going on here. Again, not sure, but his sharp new haircut. Okay. But, Paul leaves Aquila and Priscilla.
If the Lord wills, I'll come back, he says. He gets on a ship and he sets sail from Ephesus. Verse 22, when he had landed in Caesarea, that's about 650 miles.
That's a journey that takes several months on probably a small ship on the Mediterranean. Caesarea is a port city.
[29:27] We've heard about this before in the book of Acts on the Mediterranean coast, about 60 miles away from Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And it says in verse 22, Paul went up and greeted the church.

That phrase almost always means he traveled to Jerusalem. He went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church in Jerusalem. And then he went down to Antioch.
It's so difficult when we're not familiar with this geography. To go up to Jerusalem, like I said, is about 60 miles. To go down to Antioch is a 350-mile journey over road from Jerusalem.
So he goes back to Antioch, which has sort of been his home base of late, where there's a church that loves him and supports him and is sort of his home church. And this actually concludes Paul's second missionary journey when church historians, how they date this.
They say when he goes back to Antioch, that's the end of the second missionary journey. And then verse 23, after spending some time there, he departed and started his third missionary journey. He went on from one place to the next to the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.
[30:44] It's a whirlwind. In these 23 verses, the Apostle Paul covers something like 1,400 miles. And the time frame here is something like three years probably.

So all that gets condensed into this. Church planting in Corinth with some fireworks.
We can be well sure. And then an important interaction with a very prominent Roman governor. Later on in Acts, when Paul appeals appeals to Caesar, he's appealing to Nero.
And this Seneca at that time is a famous advisor and confidant of the young emperor Nero. It could be that Paul is feeling, okay, I know that guy's brother a little bit.
Maybe I'll get a good reception there. There. There. There. There. Well, that's our passage.
[31:58] Fascinating. With a word from the Lord in the middle. Do not give up. Do not be afraid. Go on speaking and do not be silent for I am with you.

That's a word we need to hear. We need to remember that God loves you. I can say that in the sense that John 3.16 says that because God so loves the whole world.
And I can also say that with confidence that if you are in Christ, God loves you with a special election-type love where he has made you his child and he is with you.
and he will be with you. And because of that we do not be afraid. We do not need to be afraid. Let's pray.
Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Thank you for your presence, your protection, your election, your election, your divine love that is the basis of our salvation that we can rest in and be at peace.
[33:23] Help us to do that and I pray you would fill us with your power that we would go on proclaiming your word and bearing witness to Jesus Christ and doing all the things you want us to do as your sons and daughter.

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We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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