

The Salvation of Apollos

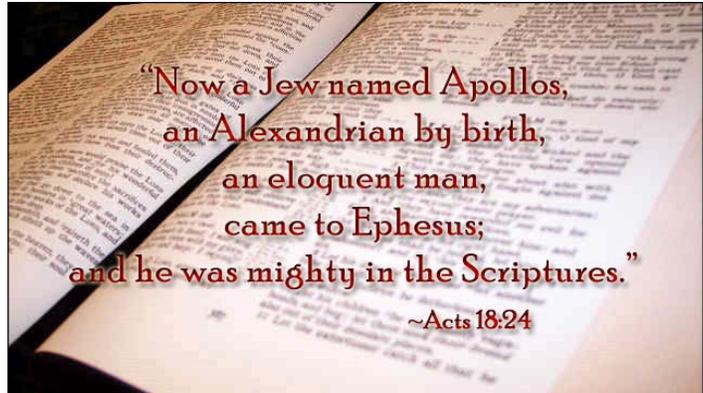
Acts 18:18-28



It has been over a month since we've been in the book of Acts, so we need to review a little this morning. In our last study we saw Paul in the city of Corinth. Corinth had gained a reputation throughout the whole Roman world as the center of sensuality.

But Corinth became one of the greatest centers of Christianity in the ancient world. Remember that we said Paul was alone when he arrived in the City of Corinth. And he was discouraged. We saw that God came to Paul in a vision and encouraged him:

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10 NASB)



Apart from Luke's account of this vision, and especially of our Lord's words, we would never have dreamed that Paul would have been afraid at this point. All too often we look at Paul as though he were not really human, not like us. We therefore find it difficult to believe that this hero of the faith could ever suffer from the same kinds of fear which hinders us, but he did. Paul knew his ups and downs, just as you and I know our ups and downs.



Paul was afraid, because of the past and an awareness that the Jews who rejected the Gospel all wanted to see him dead, at best, and hurt badly, at least. Jesus promised that this would not happen. It did not happen in Corinth, and, by and large, it did not happen anywhere else, from this point in time onward.

The Jews, as usual, rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat trying to accuse him of breaking their law. But this time things were different, Paul wasn't beaten or thrown in jail. The Lord had promised Paul that He would be with Paul and that no one would harm him. The instrument through which the promise of the Lord would be fulfilled was none other than a pagan Roman ruler, Gallio.

But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; ¹⁵ but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters." ¹⁶ And he drove them away from the judgment seat. (Acts 18:14-16 NASB)

That was a very important decision! It meant that Paul was now free to preach the Gospel everywhere throughout the Roman Empire without being charged with breaking the Roman law. Up to this point in time, Rome had been no friend to Christianity.

But now a great change was about to occur, thanks to the decision rendered by Gallio. The very power that had once persecuted Christianity would now become a means of protecting it.

Gallio had ruled that Christianity was a sect of Judaism, which was protected by the state. The Lord fulfilled His promise to Paul by means of a pagan Roman ruler from A.D.51 until the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64 (for which Nero blamed the Christians) by protecting followers of Christ from undergoing political persecution.

We begin our study this morning with verse 18:

And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. (Acts 18:18 NASB)

What is very different here about this scenario? Paul leaves Corinth because he wanted to. No reason is given for Paul's departure from Corinth. He seems to have left on his own initiative, not because of persecution. He wasn't driven from the city. As we said things have changed since Gallio's ruling.

"Put out to sea for Syria"—not into, but toward Syria. Syria is where Palestine is, where Jerusalem is. He's in Greece so he's got to go on a 1,500-mile boat trip, and boats didn't go real fast in that day. That's a long trip. He's going all the way back to Palestine/Syria area. We see that Priscilla and Aquila are traveling with him.



"In Cenchrea he had his hair cut"—Cenchrea is Corinth's eastern port city, about seven miles southeast. Here Paul cuts his hair. Why? Why does he cut his hair?

Our text says, ***"for he was keeping a vow"***—this hair cut seems to be signaling the beginning of the end of a [Nazirite vow](#). This vow has nothing to do with the town of Nazareth. And it has nothing to do with a person who lives in Nazareth, a Nazarene.

The two are spelled differently.

and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene." (Matthew 2:23 NASB)

Jesus was a Nazarene because he lived in Nazareth, not because he took a Nazirite vow.

We don't know for sure what kind of vow it was or exactly why Paul took it, since the text does not say. But it appears to have been a Nazirite vow. Numbers chapter 6 gives us the details of this vow.

'All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin. ⁵ All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long. (Numbers 6:4-5 NASB)

This vow was completely voluntary. A person taking this vow would abstain from anything from the vine and not cut their hair. If the vow of the Nazirite was not for life, as it was not in Paul's case (The Mishna proscribed that a Nazirite vow could be 30 days, 60 days, or 100 days.) it could be abandoned only in Jerusalem at the Temple, where the person who had taken the vow could be relieved of its obligations.

Some Scholars argue, based upon the grammar, that it is Aquila who shaved his head. Orthodox tradition holds that it was Paul. Bible scholars run the gamut on the question of whether Paul was right or wrong to make a vow. Most say that Paul was free in Christ to make or not to make a vow, even though they admit that it was a carryover from Judaism. Some explain it as Paul's strategy of being all things to all men ([1 Cor. 9:19-23](#)). But Donald Grey Barnhouse states dogmatically, ***"Here, Paul was definitely out of the will of the Lord. He had no right to take this vow.... This was deliberate sin on his part"*** (Acts [Zondervan], pp. 168-169).

Was he in sin for taking this vow? No, Paul was a Jew.

For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴ and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. (Galatians 1:13-14 NASB)

Paul says in a sense, *"I was a Jew in every sense, even beyond the normal pattern of my fellows."* Paul didn't stop being Jewish when he became a Christian. He abandoned Judaism as a means of earning God's favor, as a means of becoming righteous, but as a Christian he was free to take or not take a vow.

Some say that because Paul preached that we are not under Law but we are under grace, he should not have made a vow. But anyone who says that Paul can't take a vow is actually making a little law for Paul. Such people are saying that Paul is to do things their way. Under grace, friend, if you want to make a vow, you can make it. And if you do not want to make a vow, you don't have to. Paul didn't force anyone else to make a vow. In fact, he said emphatically that no one has to do that. But if Paul wants to make a vow, that is his business.

Why would Paul take a Jewish vow? The Nazirite vow was often taken to show gratitude to God for special deliverance or special blessing. Had Paul had special deliverance in Corinth? Yes. Had he had special blessing? Absolutely. Because of God's promise and Gallio's decision, Paul would now be protected by Rome instead of persecuted by it. He wanted to thank God in the most extreme way that a Jew could do that, and that was to take a Nazirite vow.

He vowed that for thirty days he would not cut his hair but would give thanks to God and worship him. He also probably fasted during this period, refraining from certain foods. At the end of the thirty days he cut his hair, having fulfilled his vow. It was simply a Jewish way of giving thanks.

In the Mediterranean Basin in the time of Moses as well as in the time of Paul (and to this day), grapes were everywhere. Grapes in some form or wine were served with almost every meal. Wine vinegar was used as a preservative. As you passed through the countryside you regularly encountered vineyards. So in order to carry out this vow, you couldn't go through the day on autopilot, so to speak. You had to be aware of your circumstances.

The point was that by paying attention to what life brought you, you would be reminded of the Lord. Keeping the vow would give you repeated opportunities in the discipline you undertook to be reminded of the Lord, to attend to him, and to thank him.

And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, (Acts 18:19-20 NASB)

Their voyage brought them to Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia. Paul, you remember, earlier, had been forbidden by the Spirit to preach the word of the Lord in Asia, but now he arrives at Ephesus.

Politically and economically Ephesus was the leading city in the province of Asia— in fact it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of over 250,000. We'll talk more about this city next week.

It says, *"He left them there"*—this is referring to Priscilla and Aquila.

And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, (Acts 18:20 NASB)

For the first time in his experience as an apostle, he went into a synagogue, and they wanted him there. They asked him to stay longer. There was a wide-open door for ministry in Ephesus. But notice what the verse says, *"He did not consent."* That's a switch. Usually, they wanted him to leave, and he stayed. This time, they want him to stay, and he left.

Why did he leave when they are asking him to stay and teach them? I think the answer is in the next verse:

but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus. (Acts 18:21 NASB)

We don't see Paul's reason for leaving in the NASV but we may in the Western text,



But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. (Acts 18:21 KJV)

The statement, ***"I must by all means keep the feast in that cometh in Jerusalem,"*** may or may not be in the original manuscript. It's in some. It's not in others. It's a debate whether it's in or out. Some say it was added by a scribe to clarify. If it isn't in, it seems to be a fair statement, because it does appear that that is the reason he left Ephesus, because he was going to Jerusalem for the feast.

"I will return to you again if God wills,"— Paul was so conscious of the will of God that it pops up all over the place in his conversations.

always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. (Romans 1:10 NASB)

He says, ***"I want to come to you if that's God's will. I don't want to come if it isn't, just if it is."***

so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. (Romans 15:32 NASB)

But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. (1 Corinthians 4:19 NASB)

Paul wanted to come back to Ephesus and he said he would if it was God's will.

Now let's be honest, when circumstances don't go the way we want them to, the way we've planned, we usually get upset. Would you say that that was true? If we believe that God controls every event in time, if we believe that nothing happens apart from His sovereign plan, then why do circumstances upset us? The answer to that question is this; we get upset by circumstances because our will conflicts with God's will. We don't like God's plan. We want it our way. Listen believer, it is not only important that we live in obedience to God's moral will, it is also important that we live in submission to his providential will.

It was God's will and Paul returned and remained in Ephesus for three years, Acts 20:31.

And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch. (Acts 18:22 NASB)



Caesarea is the Mediterranean seaport right opposite Jerusalem, directly west and a little bit north. It says he went up and greeted the church and went down to Antioch.

What church? Since Paul left Ephesus in order to reach Jerusalem in time to keep the feast and since he had taken a vow that he could be released from only in Jerusalem, we realize that Luke means Paul went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem to salute the mother church—the church of the apostles.

What is the one city in the Bible, that regardless of map direction, they always referred to going up to or down from? Jerusalem. If it isn't named, it doesn't need to be. The prepositions give it away. So he went up and greeted the church in Jerusalem and went back down to Antioch.

This concluded Paul's second missionary journey. He left from Antioch and now he is back in Antioch.



And having spent some time there, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. (Acts 18:23 NASB)

After he had spent some time in Antioch, he leaves again on his third journey. Do you know where he went on the third journey? He went to the same place he went on the second journey. You know where he went on the second journey? The same place he went on the first journey. His purpose is to strengthen the churches. Paul loved to venture into new territories, but he never forgot the need to strengthen those already won. So he devotes this third missionary journey to the training of the disciples.

A famous missionary said this: *"No man has the right to hear the Gospel twice until every man has heard it once."* Paul would totally disagree with that principle. Paul went back to the same group three times.

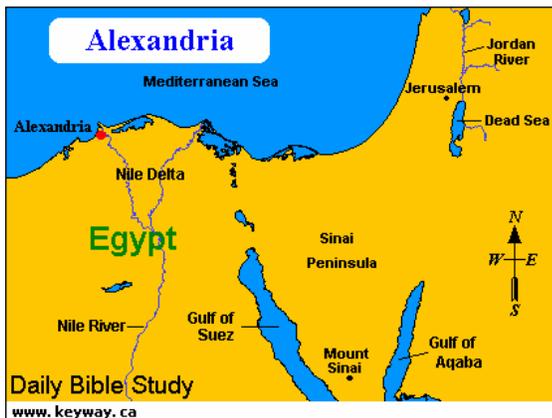
On his third missionary journey, the apostle starts out all alone. He has no Barnabas or Silas with him this time. But he is heading out to familiar ground, to minister among dear friends whom he personally had led to Christ.



Luke now catches us up on Apollos's ministry at Ephesus and Corinth in the interval between Paul's visits (Acts 18:24-28). After Paul leaves Ephesus Apollos arrives.

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. (Acts 18:24 NASB)

Luke now introduces us to Apollos. *"A certain Jew named Apollos"*—He was a Jewish man, and therefore we can understand that he was well instructed in the things of the Hebrew Scriptures. He was born at Alexandria, a very important center of learning in his day. And, as a matter of fact, at Alexandria, a city that was constructed by Alexander, there was probably the greatest library of the ancient world—over a half million volumes in it, which at that time was a remarkable thing.



The Jewish colony in Alexandria was a large one. It was so large, in fact, that the Hebrew scripture had been translated by and for that community of Jews into Greek, since it had become so Hellenized that many Alexandrine Jews had forgotten or never learned the Hebrew language. The translation made in Alexandria is the famous Septuagint. Alexandria later counted Philo the philosopher among their ranks.

Apollos was so well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures that Luke would refer to him as *"Mighty in the Scriptures"*—this is said of no one else in the entire Bible. Not Paul, not Peter, no one else. Apollos undoubtedly had unusual skills in the exposition of the truth and in communicating the things of the word of God. What we need today are people who are mighty in the Scriptures.

The word *Scriptures* is *graphe*, which always refers to the First Testament. He was not a Christian at this point, so consequently, did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit. He was a First Testament saint. This was not a natural ability because the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit.

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; (Acts 18:25 NASB)

The word *instructed* is from the Greek word *katecheo*. Does that sound like a familiar word? Catechism. The word *katechao* means: *"to teach orally by repetition."* You know what the catechism is? It's a line that you read and you read the answer. You read the next line, you read the answer. Repetition, repetition, repetition. Some of you, perhaps, sat in catechism classes in years gone by. Apollos got his information by being catechized. He was taught by oral repetition.

Apollos was instructed in *"the way of the Lord"*—this phrase is only found five times in the New Testament. It is found in our text and in each of the Gospels.

For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE

WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" (Matthew 3:3 NASB)

It is also found in [Mark 1:3](#), [Luke 3:4](#) and [John 1:23](#). It is not often that every one of the four Gospels includes an account of the same event. The ministry of John the Baptist is one such event. All four Gospel accounts are parallel, referring to the same event and the same reference to the prophecy of [Isaiah 40:3](#). On the basis of this Hebrew text, John rests his calling and ministry as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The key to understanding Isaiah's prophecy is the word "**Lord**." The meaning and significance of this term can be seen by this remark, found in the preface of the NASB, which explains the way the word Lord is rendered:

The Proper Name for God: To professing Christians, whether of conservative or liberal persuasion, the name of God is most significant and understandably so. It is inconceivable to think of spiritual matters without a proper designation for the Supreme Deity. Thus the most common name for deity is God, a translation of the original Elohim. The normal word for Master is Lord, a rendering of Adonai. There is yet another name which is particularly assigned to God as His special or proper name, that is, the four letters YHWH. See Exodus 3 and Isaiah 42:8. The name has not been pronounced by the Jews because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name. Therefore, it was consistently pronounced and translated LORD.

When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek language (Septuagint) the Hebrew word for Yahweh was rendered by the Greek term **KURIOS**. This is the same term which all four gospel writers used in their account of John the Baptist's citation of Isaiah 40:3, cited above. It is also the term which is found in Acts 18:25. Thus, when Luke tells us that Apollos was "**instructed in the way of the Lord**" he meant that he was instructed in the First Testament, in those Scriptures pertaining to Yahweh, and in particular the text of Isaiah 40:3, which indicated that the Messiah was not only the "**Servant of Yahweh**," but Yahweh in person. Apollos therefore knew about the coming of the LORD, based upon his instruction in and from the First Testament. His knowledge was confirmed by and consistent with the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist, who was appointed to prepare the way of Messiah by calling upon the nation Israel to repent.

The end of the verse says, "**being acquainted only with the baptism of John**"—John the Baptist was the ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, and came in fulfillment of Scripture, to announce His coming.

A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3 NASB)

This is the verse used with reference to John the Baptist's ministry in the gospel accounts. So, it was John the Baptist's ministry to be the ambassador of the Lord Jesus, and to prepare the way of the Lord, and there was a great stress on the fact that the kingdom of the heavens is at hand – that was John's message – still, he lived in the old covenant age.

So Apollos was a man who knew the baptism of John the Baptist, and he knew the truth as John had proclaimed it. Apollos stands where John stood and, he accepted all the way of the Lord in the First Testament, accepted the ministry of John the Baptist, saw that John pointed to Jesus and said, "**Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world**," and he believed that Jesus was the Messiah. But he didn't know what happened in the death, resurrection and Pentecost that followed the life of Jesus. He was pre-cross. He was an Old Covenant Saint just like John the Baptist.

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; (Acts 18:25 NASB)

Notice what else Luke tells us about Apollos. He was "**fervent in spirit**"—the Greek term **zeo** has the idea of: "**boiling**". This is referring to the human spirit. He was a fervent preacher of the truth, as he understood it. This word zeo is only used one other time in and that is in:

not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; (Romans 12:11 NASB)

Christians like Apollos are to be "**fervent in spirit**."

Luke also says that Apollos was "**speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus**"—the word "accurately is the Greek word *akribos* which means: "with exactness". Apollos taught with exactness the things of Jesus. Apollos not only had eloquence and a boiling spirit, but on top of that, when he taught, he was careful to teach with exactness.

God went to tremendous expense to get His revelation down to this world, and to get it communicated, He wants to be sure that it's communicated in the way that He designed it to be. So we are also to teach God's Word with exactness.

and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. (Acts 18:26 NASB)

Apollos went to the services at the local synagogue and spoke boldly about Jesus being the Messiah. Obviously Priscilla and Aquila were in that synagogue service. So we see that believers were still attending the synagogue service looking for opportunities to preach the gospel. As they heard Apollos speak, they realized that he was missing something. His theology was outdated. The baptism of John was no longer valid after Pentecost. Apollos was missing Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Notice what Priscilla and Aquila did, they didn't write letters to the editor about him, or reject him, or criticize him, but instead they invite him home, and, lovingly and wisely, expounded to him the more accurate presentation of Christ. They may have said, Apollos, we have a few things we'd like to share with you. You know what happened after you finished your sermon? Jesus went to the cross, rose again, sent the Holy Spirit, and the new age has been born. That means that they went back into the Hebrew Scriptures. They showed how the First Testament indicated the death and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Listen to me believers. All of us who understand the truth of fulfilled eschatology are to be like Priscilla and Aquila. We are to share the truth with those who have an outdated message. A theology of waiting for the Lord's return. That message, just like John's baptism, was valid for a time, but since A.D. 70 that message is wrong. We are not to be waiting expectantly for something that has already happened. We are to be rejoicing in the fact that the Lord kept his word to the first century Church and came back soon, quickly, shortly, to that generation. Today in the Church there are many, many people like Apollos. Their theology is outdated. We, the Church, are waiting for nothing!

They explained the way unto him more accurately. The word "accurately" is again the Greek word *akribos*, "with exactness".

Notice that Priscilla is mentioned before her husband, which is unusual in that culture. It may indicate that she was the more knowledgeable or articulate of the two. Maybe she had been a believer longer than her husband had. While Scripture plainly limits the public teaching in the Church of men to men ([1 Tim. 2:11-15](#)), there is nothing wrong with a godly woman privately helping a young man understand the things of God more clearly.

How did Apollos respond to their teaching? Was he proud and arrogant and say, "They cannot teach me anything, especially a woman, I'm "mighty in the Scriptures." Well the next verse says that he "***helped greatly those who had believed through grace***". If he is helping believers he must have believed. And we know he did because when Paul wrote to the Corinthians he said,

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.¹² Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:11-12 NASB)

In Corinth Apollos ranked right up there with Paul and Peter in terms of the esteem of people. This tells us that he was a very influential and powerful man.

Further in 1 Corinthians, we'd find some other interesting notes about him:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:6 NASB)

So in Corinth Apollos was building on the foundation that Paul had laid.

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. (1 Corinthians 4:6 NASB)

The reason I know he got saved between the time he arrived at Ephesus and the time he arrived at Corinth is this. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have been able to help the church. He believed the gospel, he got saved and he helped the church much.

And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 18:27-28 NASB)

Having been instructed in the whole counsel of God, Apollos then traveled on to Southern Greece. The brethren sent a letter exhorting the disciples to receive him, that he was a bona fide teacher of the gospel.

“He powerfully refuted the Jews”—the Greek word *“powerfully”* here is [eutonos](#). It means: *“vehemently”*. It's translated in a passage in the Septuagint as “loudly.” He loudly and vehemently convinced the Jews publicly showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Messiah. He took the Hebrew Scriptures and just proved that Jesus was Messiah.

I think a major explanation for the introduction of Apollos' ministry is that it was in order to confirm that once Paul was prevented from engaging in further missionary journeys there was another who would take his place.

Another thing I see here is that Luke is indicating, once again, but in a very different way, the fact that time is running out for Israel and for the Jews to repent and to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Notice again verse:

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. (Acts 18:24 NASB)

Alexandria was where? Egypt! God calls him out of Egypt, teaches him about Messiah and finally he comes to know Messiah as Jesus. This could be a picture of true Israel, and her maturity.

We could also compare Apollos with Moses, the Hebrew prophet who led the Israelites out of Egypt. They were both Born in Egypt. It was said of Moses, *“he was a man of power in words and deeds”* (Acts 7:22), and of Apollos, *“an eloquent man...mighty in the Scriptures”* (Acts 18:24). They both led Israel out of Egypt.

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