

Diaspora Couple Priscilla and Aquila: A Model Family in Action for Missions

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Introduction

Christian family can be a cradle for Christian missions where the couple is united in the spirit of missions, children are raised and nurtured within an ethos of missions then the entire family can be mobilized for Christian missions. The diaspora couple Priscilla and Aquila of Acts 18 is a model family in action for missions.

In this study, the family of Priscilla and Aquila is taken as a case study of “diaspora missiology.” The “case study method” is a type of qualitative research in which the researcher “explores a single entity or phenomenon (‘the case’) bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time” (Creswell 1994, 12).

Paul G. Hiebert pointed out that the case-study form is an important missiological research method. He said:

How does a church learn to become a hermeneutical community, and how can we help people learn to apply biblical principles to their own lives? One means is the case-study method, by which a real-life problem is presented to a class or group for discussion (Hiebert 1987, 18).

The term “diaspora” is etymologically derived from the Greek word *diaspora* or *diaspeirein* (dispersion) and historically has been used to refer to the scattering and dispersion of Jews in the OT & Christians in the NT. Priscilla and Aquila is a Jewish couple on the move: Pontus → Rome → Corinth → Ephesus → Rome. (see the references below)

“And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.” (Acts 18:2)

“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.” (Acts 18:19)

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles... Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” (Romans 16:3-5)

In this study, “diaspora missiology” is understood to be “the systematic and academic study of the phenomenon of diaspora in the fulfillment of God’s mission.” The purpose of this study is to describe the diaspora couple Priscilla and Aquila to be a model family in action for missions

Hosting Paul the missionary for 18 months in Corinth

Priscilla and Aquila took up residence in the city of Corinth after being forced to leave Rome due to the government decision of Claudius on the basis them being Jews (Acts 18:1-2). They were forced to leave their place of origin (Pontus) and became tent-makers in Corinth. In contemporary term, they were victims of anti-Semitism or racial prejudice.

During the second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul came to Corinth and was hosted by Priscilla and Aquila for 18 months when all three were engaged in the same trade. The opposition against Paul was so severe that he wanted to leave Corinth. He eventually stayed on for more than a year after receiving special divine direction (Acts 18: 4-11).

Accompanied Paul the Missionary to Ephesus for church planting

Later Priscilla and Aquila accompanied Paul to Ephesus where Paul left them for Antioch (Acts 18:18-22) so they stayed in Ephesus where eventually a church emerged and they served as founding members.

Again opened their home to privately coach Apollos the evangelist in Ephesus

In Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to receive another diaspora Jew from Alexandria – Apollos, “an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures... being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord” (Acts 18:24-25). At their home, they provided personal coaching privately to Apollos “the way of God more perfectly” because his teaching was limited to “the baptism of John.”

Risking their lives for Paul, the Apostle to the gentiles

In a string of personal greetings (approximately 30) in Romans 16, the apostle Paul made reference to Priscilla and Aquila (only after Phebe) as “my helpers in Christ Jesus.” (Ro 16: 3) The commendation is very strong (“Who have for my life laid down their own necks”) and remarkably outstanding (“...unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”) (Ro 16:3-4)

Starting a house church in Rome

In addition to their labor with apostle Paul in the founding of the churches in Corinth and Ephesus, they started another house church at their home upon their return to Rome (Ro 16:5). This is the consistent pattern of their faithful Gospel ministry and church planting effort in various circumstances and multiple locations.

Conclusion

In this case study of “diaspora missiology,” Priscilla and Aquila, as a couple in diaspora, have been described to be a model family in action for missions with the following characteristics:

- Ready to be mobile for the sake of the Gospel while on the move:
Pontus → Rome → Corinth → Ephesus → Rome.
- Being adaptable to circumstances and willing to play multiple roles for the Gospel:
 - in Corinth: tent-making and hosting missionary Paul for eighteen months; even risking their lives for the Gospel;
 - in Ephesus: being left behind by Paul and providing personal coaching to Apollos;
 - in Rome: forced to leave the capital and suffered prejudice for being Jewish; yet they were hospitable to apostle Paul during his second missionary itinerary.
- With a spirit of unity, the husband-wife team opened their home to host Paul the missionary in Corinth for eighteen months, coached Apollos the evangelist in Ephesus, and started a house church in Rome.
- The two served consistently together for a long period of time and in multiple occasions engaging in church planting effort: Corinth, Ephesus and Rome.
- They served faithfully and sacrificially with the apostle Paul; even in challenging and life-threatening circumstances.
- They earned the commendations of the apostle Paul in the following manner:
 - “my helpers in Christ Jesus.” (Ro 16: 3)
 - “Who have for my life laid down their own necks...” (Ro 16: 4)
 - “...unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”) (Ro 16:4)

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