

Friday

The Witness of Two

Aquila and Priscilla, the witness of fellow workers

Every movement needs leaders, and some of the most effective leaders are couples. James and Ellen White were married on August 30, 1846, and together became two of the most influential leaders in the movement that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They preached, taught, corrected, and counseled across North America. The publishing work that James initiated was a driving force in globalizing the Adventist message, and Ellen's writings brought vision and prophetic guidance to members and churches around the world.

We might call them the ultimate Adventist “power couple”—a pairing of two highly influential individuals that complement and strengthen one another. The early Christian church also had a power couple—Aquila and Priscilla—who, like James and Ellen, strengthened the church wherever they went.

EARLY CHRISTIAN POWER COUPLE

We first meet Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18 following Paul's journey from Athens to Corinth. Corinth was a major cultural, political, and economic center, and with two harbors providing an influx of travelers, it was a prime location for sharing the gospel.

Aquila and Priscilla were recent immigrants to Corinth. They, and all other Jews, had been forced to leave Rome by the edict of Claudius, likely as a result of conflict over the preaching of Jesus Christ.¹ It appears that the couple were already Christians before Paul arrived, and they welcomed him into their home and business.

Both Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers, and the trio worked closely together at their craft, likely in a workshop on the ground floor of their residence.² They probably used this space to speak with customers about the gospel, and perhaps small groups of believers met there.

Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth, and, following conflict with the Jews, the mission work expanded to the Gentiles. Priscilla and Aquila were likely also active in this ministry. Later Paul traveled with them to Ephesus and left them there to evangelize and form a company of believers (Acts 18:18, 19). In this way they functioned much like Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy, in that they worked with Paul as “missionary partners.”³

In Ephesus the couple worked with the believers and eventually established a church in their home (1 Cor. 16:19). They attended the synagogue and heard Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, speak about Jesus (Acts 18:24-26). Priscilla and Aquila had a more accurate and thorough understanding of the gospel than Apollos had, possibly because they had been Christians longer or because their theological understanding had been broadened and strengthened by their time with Paul. They recognized the talents with which God had blessed Apollos, so, rather than correct him publicly, they took him aside and “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (verse 26).⁴ Their hospitality, tact, and theological instruction were well received, and Apollos went to Achaia, the region Aquila and Priscilla had left, to continue his ministry.

At some point the couple moved back to Rome, and Paul sends greetings to them in Romans 16:3, 4, commending them as “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.” He also sends greetings to the church in their house, demonstrating that they continued the practice of operating a house church wherever they went (verse 5).

This brief but powerful greeting

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suggests that the Jewish couple had not simply focused their attention on ministering to Jews, but had aided Paul in evangelizing Gentiles as well, to the extent that “all the churches of the Gentiles” gave thanks for them.

The last reference to Priscilla and Aquila can be found in 2 Timothy 4:19, where Paul asks Timothy to greet the couple. They had moved back to Ephesus, where they likely worked with Timothy in strengthening and growing the church.⁵ This migrant couple, equipped with the tools of their trade and a love of the gospel, opened their homes in three different cities to Paul and other believers and furthered the gospel wherever they went. They were not paid ministers; rather, they worked

their trade and used what resources, time, and knowledge they had to educate and evangelize those in their communities.

THE WITNESS OF HOME

We live in an age of globalization; today travel is infinitely easier than the long voyages undertaken by Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila. We can communicate swiftly via texts, emails, or phone calls. Yet for all our connectivity, many of us long for the relational connectiveness evident in the early Christian church.

The power of Aquila and Priscilla's witness lies not in their theological knowledge or balance between trade and ministry, but in the relationships they forged with Paul, Apollos, and other believers. Their home provided Paul with lodging and a means to provide for himself while he carried on his ministry. It provided the setting for offering further theological education to Apollos. And their home, in each place they lived, became a house church, a place of worship and refuge for believers.

A husband and wife, working together to share the gospel and opening their home to those thirsty for relationship and connection, offer to the world a glimpse of the image of God. In a world of broken relationships and unsafe homes, the refuge of a healthy Christian household offers spiritual and emotional healing.

It is important to note that team ministry is not limited to married couples. God can use any manner of partnerships, whether teams of friends, such as Paul, Silas, and Timothy (Acts 18:5), or other family members. Each offers unique benefits for furthering the gospel.

Ellen White wrote, “The work to which we are called does not require wealth or social position or great ability. It requires a kindly,

self-sacrificing spirit and a steadfast purpose. . . . Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes. If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life, we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life, and beauty, and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth.”⁶

We do not have to be paid ministers in order to be effective witnesses. We do not have to be wealthy. We must only be willing to do God's work, to follow His call wherever it may lead us, and to unite with other believers to proclaim the gospel to the world. ©

¹ David W. Pao, “Acts,” in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), p. 1201.

² Marie Noël Keller, *Priscilla and Aquila: Paul's Coworkers in Christ Jesus* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2010), pp. 17-20.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴ Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁵ Nguyen vanThanh, “Migrants as Missionaries: The Case of Priscilla and Aquila,” *Mission Studies* 30 (2013): 204.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 32.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How can you provide hospitality either in your own home or by partnering with other believers?
2. What are some ways you can further equip yourself to teach others “the way of God”?
3. If you are married, how can you and your spouse work together to share the gospel? How can your marriage be a witness?