

Through The Bible

Session #45 – 1st Corinthians

December 1, 2004

Corinth has an important geographical position which led to its prominence.

- First, note its position in relation to Jerusalem and the rest of the biblical world and its prominent cities.



On the larger diagram below, note these features about Corinth's geography:

- It is located on the narrow neck of land between the Corinthian Gulf and the Saronic Gulf. Just the location of the city almost guaranteed prosperity. It's about 40 miles south-southwest of Athens.
- Merchants and sailors would cross the isthmus instead of risking the dangerous voyage around the cape to the south. Sometimes small vessels would be hauled across the isthmus by a ship tramway that had wooden rails. Larger ships had to off load cargo onto land transportation.
- Trade routes from the east and west intersected north / south trade routes in Corinth.
- The city was populous and wealthy. Some have guessed between 500,000-700,000 people.
- It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.



The history of Corinth:

- The city was destroyed by the Roman, L. Mummius Achaicus in 146 BCE. Julius Caesar re-established it about 44 BCE.
- Many races came to live and work in Corinth...including Jews which formed a synagogue (Acts 18:4). It was said to be a city where Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians, and Jews all co-existed.
- In Old Corinth, prostitution was everywhere. There were said to be more than 1000 prostitutes connected with the temple of Aphrodite. Some say that Corinth was no worse than other Eastern Mediterranean cities but the sexual industry thrived in Corinth.
- An expression, "...to Corinthianize..." meant, "go to the devil."
- Despite moral corruption, it was a very important city. Fertile soil nearby produced ample grapes for wines. It was intellectually current because ideas would naturally flow through the city.

Paul initial Corinthian visit

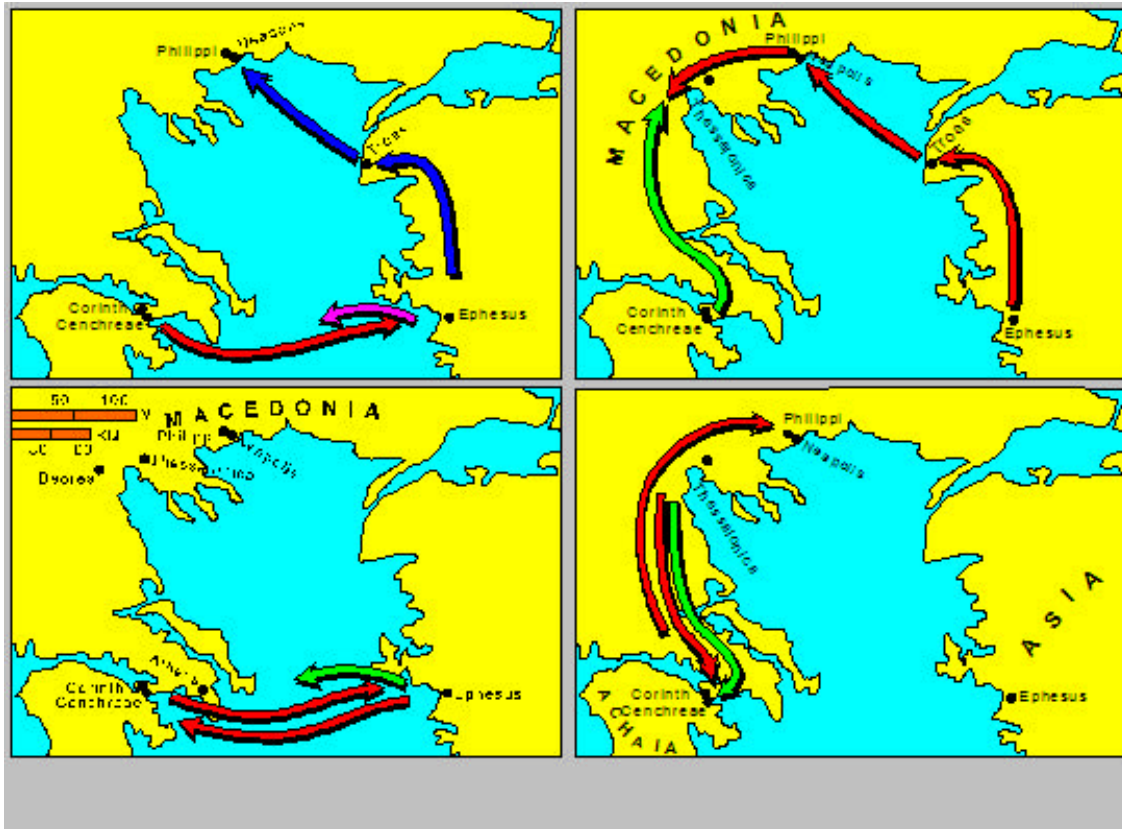
- When Paul came to Corinth, he was discouraged (see 1st Corinthians 2:3). He came to Corinth after being smashed by fanatical Jews in Philippi. The same thing happened at Thessalonica and Berea. He also had little success in Athens.

- Paul was probably alone when he came to Corinth because he companions (Silas and Timothy) were probably still in Macedonia.
- Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquila who were expelled from Rome by a decree from Claudius (probably CE 49).
- Paul's preaching in Corinth did not begin well (see Acts 18).
 - The Jews kicked him out of the synagogue.
 - So Paul, not very tactfully so, set up shop right next door at the house of Justus.
- Paul persisted and many gentile Corinthians (not many Jews) were converted.
- Paul stays in Corinth preaching for about 18 months.

Paul's subsequent contacts with Corinth:

- A man named Apollos shows up after Paul left. He had been in Ephesus teaching the ways of Christianity but he knew only of John's baptism. Priscilla and Aquila told Apollos about Jesus and he began preaching in Corinth about Jesus. His preaching was different from Paul's (Paul was more straightforward and Apollos had a more rhetorical style).
- People began to show favor with either Paul or Apollos despite the fact they were essentially preaching the same message.
- There's a lost letter to Corinth we don't have (1st Corinthians 5:9).
- 1st Corinthians was written (really it's the 2nd letter but we don't have the first) to address some cliques in the church (see 1:11). The church wrote a letter to Paul (7:1). Paul responds to the church's letter with what we know as 1st Corinthians.
 - The situation is very serious. So serious that Paul intends to send Timothy to Corinth (4:17; 16:10-11). Timothy apparently is not able to do much.
 - We don't know the exact nature of the problems but it seems they were quite serious. It could be one of the matters addressed in 1st Corinthians but we just don't know which.

Paul's Corinthian Chronology



- 1 Paul makes Ephesus the base for his mission work for the next 3 years. Disciples of Apollos receive the Holy Spirit and a church is founded (Acts 19:1-7). The gospel spreads in Asia (Acts 19:8-20).
- 2 Paul plans to go to Macedonia. He sends Timothy and Erastus ahead (Acts 19:21-22). They may also visit Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:10-11). Paul is worried about immorality at the church there.
- 3 Three members of the Corinthian church bring a letter to Paul (1 Corinthians 16:17-18). It is full of questions that reveal the problems to be far greater than Paul had thought.
- 4 Paul writes and sends 1 Corinthians, tackling the problems.
- 5 Paul hears bad news about the church in Corinth, possibly from Timothy.
- 6 He hurries to Corinth (implied by the intended *third* visit of (2 Corinthians 12:14). The visit is extremely painful for everyone. Paul has to be severe.
- 7 He returns to Ephesus. Here he writes a 'painful letter' to them (2 Corinthians 2:4). Titus takes the letter to Corinth. Paul arranges to meet Titus again at Troas urgently, to get news of the situation.

- 8 Paul is the centre of a riot in Ephesus. His message threatens the sale of statues of the Ephesian goddess (Acts 19:23-41).
- 9 Paul goes to Troas. The work goes well, but Paul is worried about his 'painful letter.' Was it too harsh? Titus does not appear as arranged (2 Corinthians 2:12-13).
- 10 Paul enters Macedonia in search of Titus. By doing this he breaks an arrangement he made with the Corinthians—he was going to go to them by sea before visiting Macedonia. He apologizes in 2 Corinthians 1:15— He didn't want another painful visit.
- 11 He encourages the churches (Acts 20:1-2) and collects money for the Jerusalem church (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).
- 12 Paul and Titus finally meet. Titus brings good news—the 'painful letter' has been taken as Paul intended (2 Corinthians 7:5-16).
- 13 Paul writes 2 Corinthians—full of joy. He encourages them to complete their promised giving for the Jerusalem church (2 Corinthians 8:10-15).
- 14 Titus takes the letter ahead of Paul to prepare the church for Paul's third visit (2 Corinthians 8:16-24).
- 15 Paul stays in Achaia 3 months, probably in Corinth. Here he writes the letter to the Romans.
- 16 He plans to travel to Jerusalem by sea via Syria. A plot by his enemies forces him to return through Macedonia (Acts 20:2-6).

Summary of Paul's reason for writing:

- First and foremost, Paul is trying to reform people's conduct.
- He received a letter (the lost letter) and Paul is replying.
- Paul also received some independent news...serious concerns...and he felt a need to write.
- Paul was troubled with the divisions within the church. See above comments concerning the Apollos / Paul attachments some had made.
- There's a quarrelsome spirit in the church.
- Concerning the culture of Corinth, there seems to be some sexual impurity in the people's conduct and Paul writes to address this.

Where did Paul write 1st Corinthians from?

- He's in Ephesus (16:8).
- We don't know the date. The Harper-Collins Bible dates this letter at CE 54.

Outline of 1st Corinthians

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
- II. Divisions in the Church (1:10-4:21)
- III. Moral Laxity in the Church (5:1-6:20)
- IV. Marriage (7:1-40)
- V. Meat Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1)
- VI. Disorders in Public Worship (11:2-14:40)
- VII. The Resurrection (15:1-58)
- VIII. Conclusion (16:1-24)