

1st Corinthians

December 1, 2004

Importance of Corinth

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.



Geographical Points

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.

Geographical Points

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.

Geographical Points

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.

Geographical Points

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.

The history of Corinth:

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.

The history of 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 Beroea. He also had little success in Athens.

Paul initial Corinthian visit.

Paul was probably alone when he came to Corinth because his 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.

The outcomes...

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).

Paul's subsequent contacts with Corinth:

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).

Paul's subsequent contacts with Corinth:

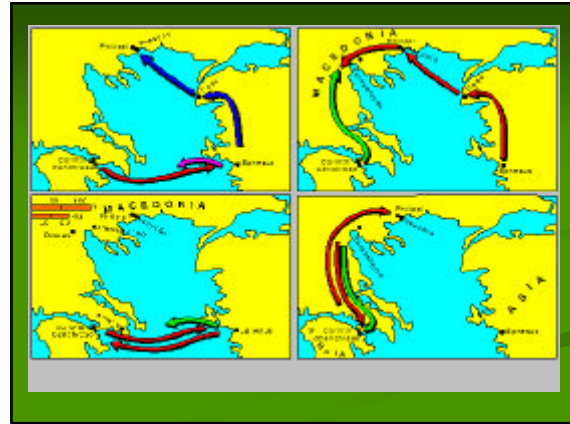
1st Corinthians was written (really it's the 2nd letter but we don't have the first) to address some cliques in the church (see 1:11). The church wrote a letter to Paul (7:1). Paul responds to the church's letter with what we know as 1st Corinthians.

The Problem in Corinth:

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



Paul's Corinthian Chronology

See your notes for details on this chronology.

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.

Summary of Paul's reason for writing:

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.

Summary of Paul's reason for writing:

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