

2 CORINTHIANS OVERVIEW

THE CITY OF CORINTH

Ancient Greece was divided into two principal areas: Macedonia on mainland Greece and Achaia on the Peloponnesus Peninsula. The Peninsula is almost completely severed from the mainland by a bay thrusting in from the Adriatic Sea on the west. Only a narrow isthmus, four to six miles wide connects the Peloponnesus to the remainder of Greece.

At the southern end of the isthmus is a range of mountains topped by the Acrocorinth peak at the foot of which lay the ancient city of Corinth. As the Roman capital of the province of Achaia which included much of Macedonia, Corinth was the fourth largest city in the Roman empire. With its two ports, one on each side of the isthmus, Corinth served as a bridge for seagoing traffic between the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. This strategic location made it one of the chief commercial centers of the Empire.



In 146 BC, the then ancient and thriving city of Greek Corinth was completely sacked and destroyed by the Romans. The city lay in ruins for a hundred years until Rome began to rebuild it in the reign of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. A colony of demobilized Roman soldiers, all of whom were freedmen, were used to rebuild the city.

Corinth quickly became the richest and most powerful city in Greece and the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Widely known for its wealth and culture, Corinth was also regarded as the most wicked and licentious of cities. The temple of the goddess Aphrodite was located in Corinth. This temple, boasted two thousand female slaves who were really “sacred” prostitutes, available to the city and to the numerous commercial travelers. The temple income was a major source of revenue for the city.

To live as a Corinthian meant, to the men of Paul’s day, to live in luxury and licentiousness. This wealthy, bustling, licentious city was also the home of numerous schools of philosophy. Running the gamut of Greek and Roman philosophy, these schools made disputing with words or “the wisdom of words” one of the main intellectual pursuits of the Corinthians.

The original population of Roman freedmen was quickly infused by native Greeks as well as the polyglot of people engaged in commerce. By Paul's time, the city contained a large Jewish element which had been created by the commerce associated with the city, and by the fact that the Emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome, many of whom found their way to Corinth. Approximately one half of the population consisted of slaves or craftsmen.

Rome	Washington, DC / New York!
Alexandria	Los Angeles / San Francisco!
Antioch	Chicago or Philadelphia!
Tarsus	Minneapolis!
Pisidian Antioch	Allentown!
Lystra	Reading!
Derbe	Easton!
Philippi	Scottsdale!
Thessalonica	Philadelphia!
Berea	Wilmington!
Athens	Boston!
Corinth	New Orleans!
Ephesus	San Francisco or Seattle!



THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

Paul spent some eighteen months in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17), which resulted in the establishment of a Church. Apollos later became the second great leader of the Corinthian Church (Acts 18:24,27; 19:1; 1Cor. 3:4-6). During his three years at Ephesus Paul apparently stayed in close touch with the Church at Corinth. There is the strong probability that he had a short visit with them during this period.

The Corinthian congregation was predominantly Gentile, although it did contain a noticeable number of Jews, including Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue when Paul first arrived. The main body of the Church came from slaves or the humbler social classes. However, there were others of prominence in the group. These included Titus Justus, the Roman citizen who gave refuge to Paul, and Erastus, the chamberlain, a treasurer or manager, of the city. The religious tolerance of the city, the zeal of the members of the church, and the leadership of Paul caused the Church to thrive.

In the 50's of the first century, when the Corinthian letters were written, it was a flourishing church, but beset by problems arising from the multiple leaders, various intellectual factions, and diversity within the congregation. These problems form the basis for Paul's two letters to the Corinthians.