

The Biblical City Of Corinth



The Temple of Apollo at Corinth

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:2-3)

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Introduction

- I. After preaching at Athens, the apostle Paul traveled to Corinth (Acts 18:1–18).
 - A. Corinth was the most important city Paul had visited since he left Antioch of Syria, and, with the exception of Ephesus, he stayed at Corinth longer than any other city we know of.
 - B. Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, two tentmakers from Rome, while in the city (Acts 18:2–3).
 - C. According to the Roman historian Suetonius, Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 A.D., because “the Jews were in a state of constant tumult at the instigation of one Chrestus” (i.e., Christ).
- II. Although the “golden age” of Corinth was five centuries before Paul’s visit, Corinth had enjoyed a return to prominence during the 1st century A.D.
 - A. The biennial Isthmian Games, second in importance to the Olympics, were held in honor of Poseidon on the Isthmus of Corinth.
 1. Recent discoveries include the starting gate for the races.
 2. It is possible that Paul was present at one of these events.
 3. The victor’s crown at the Isthmian Games was made of wilted celery.
 4. Notice Paul’s reference to a “corruptible crown” (1 Cor. 9:24–27).
 - B. Corinth also had light industry, manufacturing highly prized bronze works, including polished mirrors (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Discussion

I. The City Of Corinth

- A. Corinth is located in southern Greece about 50 miles from Athens, and about two miles south of the narrow isthmus that forms a land bridge between the main landmass of Greece and the Peloponnesus.
 1. The isthmus is less than four miles wide.
 2. Corinth controlled the two major harbors and thus command of the trade routes between Asia and Rome.
 3. In ancient days small ships were dragged across the isthmus on a paved road; larger ships unloaded their cargo, which was then carried across the isthmus and then reloaded onto other ships.
 4. “One of the most important factors drawing Paul to Corinth was its strategic location on the narrow isthmus connecting central Greece to the southern land mass of the Peloponnesus. Even more important than the land travel north and south, however, was the sea travel east and west through the Saronic Gulf and the Gulf of Corinth, lapping the eastern and western shores of the isthmus respectively. The Roman poet Horace wrote in praise of ‘twin-sea’d Corinth.’ Ship captains plying the northern Mediterranean sea route between Europe and the Aegean Sea much preferred to bring their vessels through the sheltered waters of these two gulfs rather than to add over 200 miles to their sea journey and to risk the more exposed seas off the southern coast of the Peloponnesus. Corinth stood, therefore, at a heavily traveled crossroads of the Roman empire. The idea for a canal had emerged as early as the 7th century B.C.” (*The Biblical World In Pictures*).

5. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Caligula all considered making a canal through the isthmus.
 - a) In 67 A.D., 15 years after Paul came here, Nero came to Corinth to turn over a spadeful of soil in a groundbreaking ceremony for a canal to be dug by Jewish prisoners, but the project was abandoned.
 - b) French engineers completed a canal in 1881–93.
- B. A brief history of the city.
 1. The city flourished from the 8th to the 5th centuries B.C.
 - a) Because of the leading role it had played against them as a member of the Achaean League, the Roman consul Lucius Mummius burned and destroyed the city in 146 B.C., and left her a heap of ruins..
 - b) All that remains of the old Greek city is a part of the old marketplace, the seven columns of the Temple of Apollo, and a fountain which was preserved by the Romans.
 2. Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth around 46–44 B.C. as a Roman colony and renamed it *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*, “Corinth the praise of Julius.”
 - a) The majority of the population was Greek, but a large number of Roman military veterans lived there as well, with a sprinkling of Phoenicians and Phrygians.
 - b) 200,000 free men and 500,000 slaves once populated Corinth.
 - c) The Roman character of the city is reflected by the many Latin names associated with it in the New Testament: Aquila, Priscilla Crispus, Lucius, Gaius, Tertius, Erastus, Quartus, Fortunatus, Achaicus.
 3. Corinth became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.
 - a) In Roman Corinth, old temples were restored and enlarged, new shops and markets built, new water supplies developed, and many public buildings added (including three governmental buildings and an amphitheater seating over 14,000).
 - b) In the 1st century Corinth’s public marketplace (agora, forum) was larger than any in Rome.
 - c) By 50 A.D., when Paul visited Corinth, it was the most beautiful, modern, and industrious city of its size in Greece.
 4. Corinth had a Jewish synagogue (Acts 18:4).
 - a) Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8), was baptized by Paul himself (1 Cor. 1:14).
 - b) Apparently Silas and Timothy baptized the other converts at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14–17).

II. The Religion Of The City

- A. In Corinth you could find the cults of the gods of Egypt, Rome and Greece.
- B. The Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, stood atop the Acrocorinth.
 1. “A famous temple to Aphrodite had stood on the summit of Acrocorinth in the Classical Age... It had fallen into ruins by Paul’s time, but successors to its 1,000 cult prostitutes continued to ply their profession in the city below. Many of them were no doubt housed in the lofts above the 33 wine shops uncovered in the modern excavations. Corinth was a city catering to sailors and traveling salesmen. Even by the Classical Age it had earned an unsavory reputation for its libertine atmosphere; to call someone ‘a Corinthian lass’ was to impugn her morals. It may well be that one of Corinth’s attractions for Paul was precisely this reputation of immorality.” (*The Biblical World In Pictures*).

2. The city was filled with sailors who gladly spent their money there.
 3. The name "Corinth" became a synonym for immorality.
 4. This temple gave Corinth its reputation for gross immorality of which Paul often spoke (1 Cor. 6:9–20; 2 Cor. 12:20–21).
 5. "She had a reputation for commercial prosperity, but she was also a byword for evil living. The very word *korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery ... Aelian, the late Greek writer, tells us that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play he was shown drunk. The very name Corinth was synonymous with debauchery and there was one source of evil in the city which was known all over the civilized world. Above the isthmus towered the hill of the Acropolis, and on it stood the great temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. To that temple there were attached one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and in the evenings they descended from the Acropolis and plied their trade upon the streets of Corinth, until it became a Greek proverb, 'It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth.' In addition to these cruder sins, there flourished far more recondite vices, which had come in with the traders and the sailors from the ends of the earth, until Corinth became not only a synonym for wealth and luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth." (William Barclay, *The Letters To The Corinthians*, p. 2–3).
- C. Of equal fame in Corinth was the temple of Poseidon, ruler of the sea (on which Corinth's commercial life depended) and maker of earthquakes (a frequent danger in the area).
1. Poseidon had a very large temple at a nearby village where the biennial Isthmian Games were held.
 2. Numerous other temples in Corinth include ones to Apollo, Hermes, Venus-Fortuna, Isis, and one dedicated to "All The Gods" (Pantheon).
 3. On the slopes of the Acrocorinth was the sanctuary of Demeter, which dates from the 6th and 7th centuries B.C.
- D. In Corinth, as often found in other parts of ancient Greece, there was a shrine dedicated to Asklepios, the god of healing, and his daughter, Hygieia.
1. In a room of the museum at Corinth are hundreds of terra-cotta votive offerings presented to Asklepios by pilgrims who sought a cure or who wanted to thank the god for a healing they attributed to him.
 2. Among these votives can be seen limbs, hands, feet, breasts and genitals.
 3. In a time-honored tradition, petitioners to Asklepios had dedicated replicas of the particular parts of the body in which they were afflicted.
 4. These clay copies of human body parts, which were hung around the temple by worshippers, might have given special power to Paul's image of the church as the "body" of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 15–17).
- E. The Temple of Apollo.
1. On the hill overlooking the Roman city's main forum stood the temple of Apollo which served as a reminder of Corinth's ancient splendor.
 2. It was 174 feet long and nearly 70 feet wide.
 3. This temple was 700 years old by Paul's time, but it was in ruins.
 4. At one time a bronze statue of Apollo stood in the temple.
 5. To Paul it would have served merely as a sermon illustration of the impotence of the Greek's pagan gods.
 6. There were several sanctuaries to Apollo inside the city.

III. The Ruins At Corinth

A. The Lechaion Road.

1. "The road was in use until the 10th century A.D. On the site of the excavations only a little more than 100 yards of Lechaion Street have been laid bare. The road was paved with slabs and was some 8 yards wide, with a pavement for pedestrians on both sides. Numerous bases for statues line either side of the road. Pausanias mentions a whole number of statues which he saw in his day (2nd century A.D.): a seated Hermes with a mountain goat, a Poseidon, a Leucothea, Palaemon on a dolphin and Artemis. On both sides of the road there was a Roman stoa with Corinthian columns; there were also little quadrangular shops, 16 of them on the western side. Behind the western stoa the remains of a Greek stoa with an outer row of Doric columns and an inner of Corinthian were found—they were destroyed in the year 146 B.C. The road ended at the agora (forum, market place)." (Meletzis and Papadakis, *Corinth, Mycenae*, p. 12).

2. Shops and public buildings were on both sides of the Lechaion Road.

B. The Fountain of Peirene.

1. "Peirene, the daughter of Achelous, shed so copious tears at the death of her son Cenchrias, who had been accidentally slain by Artemis, that she was metamorphosed into a fountain, or so at least Pausanias tells us (II, 32). There were two fountains named after Peirene, one high up on the Acrocorinth and the other at the foot of the mountain. The water of the upper fountain was channeled to a large basin near the Peirene Fountain which was hewn out of the rock and subdivided into four. It had a total capacity of some 520 cubic yards. In front of the great basin were 3 containers which were always full so that people could draw water from them. The architecture of the Fountain of Peirene was changed several times. During the Greek period it looked like an Ionian stoa. Later, there were 6 narrow entrances to the fountain." (Meletzis and Papadakis, *Corinth, Mycenae*, p. 12).

2. This is where ancient Greeks believed winged Pegasus was drinking when he was captured by Bellerophon.

C. The Agora (market place).

1. "The Agora at Corinth was one of the largest in Greece. A large space, which was 246 yards long from east to west and 140 yards wide, was paved with marble slabs and divided into two level terraces. The Agora of the Greek period, completely redesigned under the Romans in the year 146 A.D., was considerably smaller and paved with large pebble stones." (Meletzis and Papadakis, *Corinth, Mycenae*, p. 13).

2. Four main streets led off from the Agora.

a) To the north: Lechaion Street (see notes above).

b) To the south: the road leading to Cenchreae.

c) To the north-west: the road leading to Sikyon.

d) To the west: the road leading to the Acrocorinth.

3. Meat was sold in some of the shops surrounding the agora.

D. The Bema.

1. Excavations on the southern edge of the forum have uncovered the marble-faced *bema* (judgment seat) on which Paul stood to address the Roman proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:12).
2. The *bema* was a speaker's platform on which the judge sat or stood for the trial of one against whom an accusation had been made.
3. According to an inscription at Delphi, Gallio was proconsul of Achaia between 51 and 53 A.D.
4. Gallio was the "brother of the philosopher Seneca (Nero's tutor), and uncle of the poet Lucan, the author of the *Pharsalia*. Seneca speaks of him as amiable and greatly beloved" (Marvin Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies In The New Testament*).
5. "The Jewish religion was a *religio licita* and they were allowed to make proselytes, but not among Roman citizens. To prove that Paul was acting contrary to Roman law (for Jewish law had no standing with Gallio though the phrase has a double meaning) these Jews had to show that Paul was making converts in ways that violated the Roman regulations on that subject. The accusation as made did not show it nor did they produce any evidence to do it." (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament*).

E. The Theater.

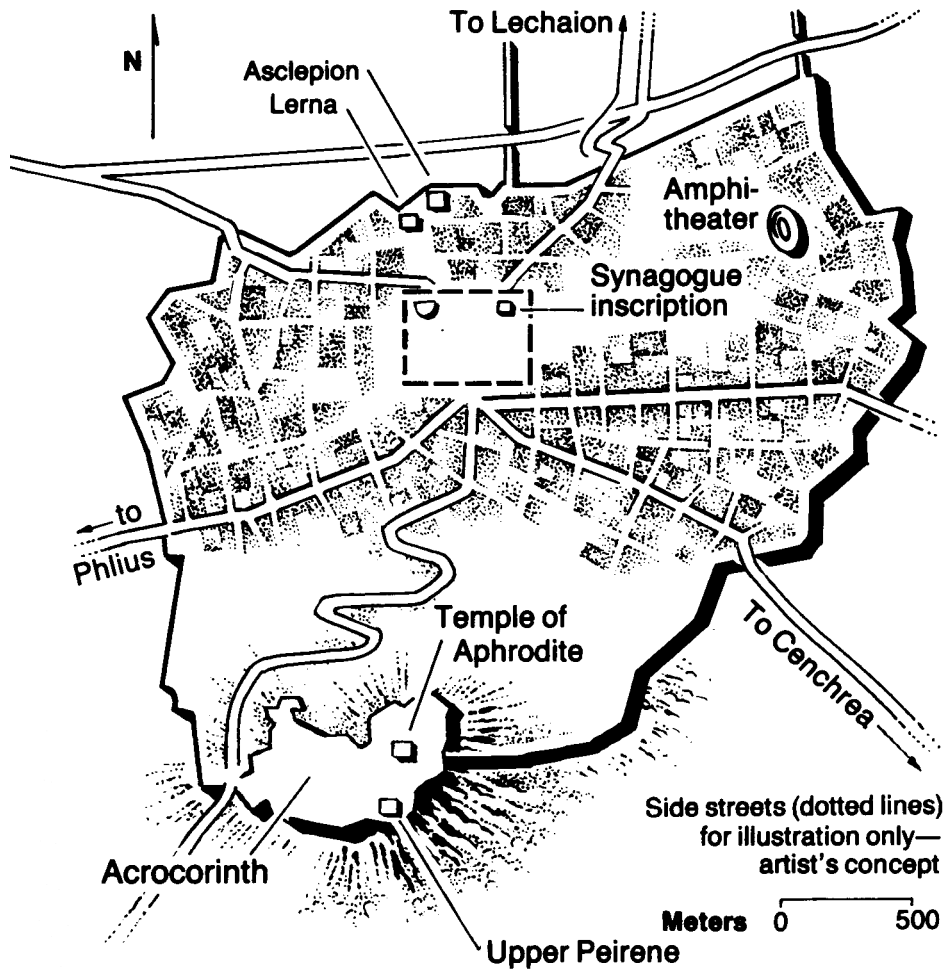
1. The theater was built in the 5th century B.C. and could seat over 14,000.
2. An inscription at the theater tells the story of Andocles and the Lion.
3. In the plaza near the amphitheater is an inscribed limestone pavement which reads: ERASTVS PRO AEDILITATE S P STRAVI.
4. Translation by Otto F. Meinardus: "Erastus, in return of the aedileship, laid the pavement at his own expense."
5. It is possible this Erastus was the friend of Paul (Rom. 16:23; 2 Tim. 4:20).

IV. Paul's Letter To The Corinthians

- A. Some things were right about the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 6:9–11).
- B. Some things were wrong with this congregation.
 1. Division (1 Cor. 1–4).
 2. Fornication (1 Cor. 5).
 3. Going to law before unbelievers (1 Cor. 6).
 4. Marriage (1 Cor. 7).
 5. The eating of meats (1 Cor. 8–9).
 6. Headship and the covering (1 Cor. 11).
 7. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11).
 8. Spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12–14).
 9. The resurrection from the grave (1 Cor. 15).
 10. The collection (1 Cor. 16).
- C. Paul's exhortations delivered to the church (1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Cor. 7:1; 8:7).

Conclusion

- I. Paul had more trouble with this congregation than any other.
- II. From Paul's letters to the Corinthians we learn that transformation of life is possible by loving obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.



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Photographs From Corinth



City Streets and Acrocorinth



Sacred Fountain in Agora



Ex Votos from Sanctuary of Asklepios



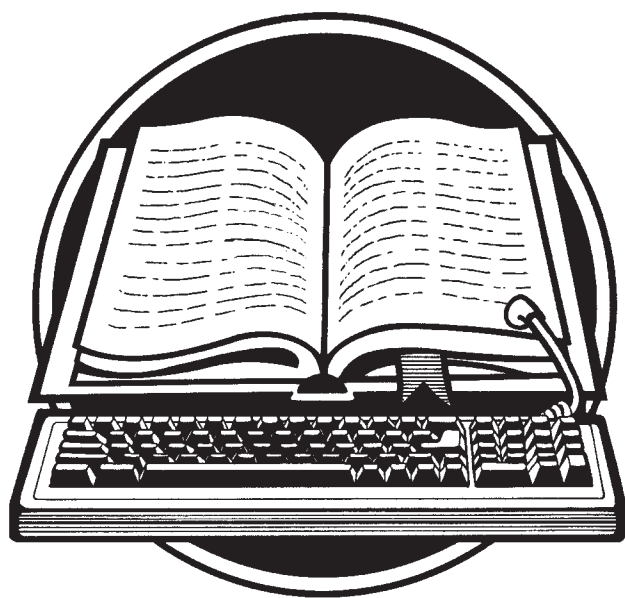
Ferrell Jenkins at the Erastus Inscription



Ferrell Jenkins at Bema Judgment Seat



Gene Taylor before the Bema



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