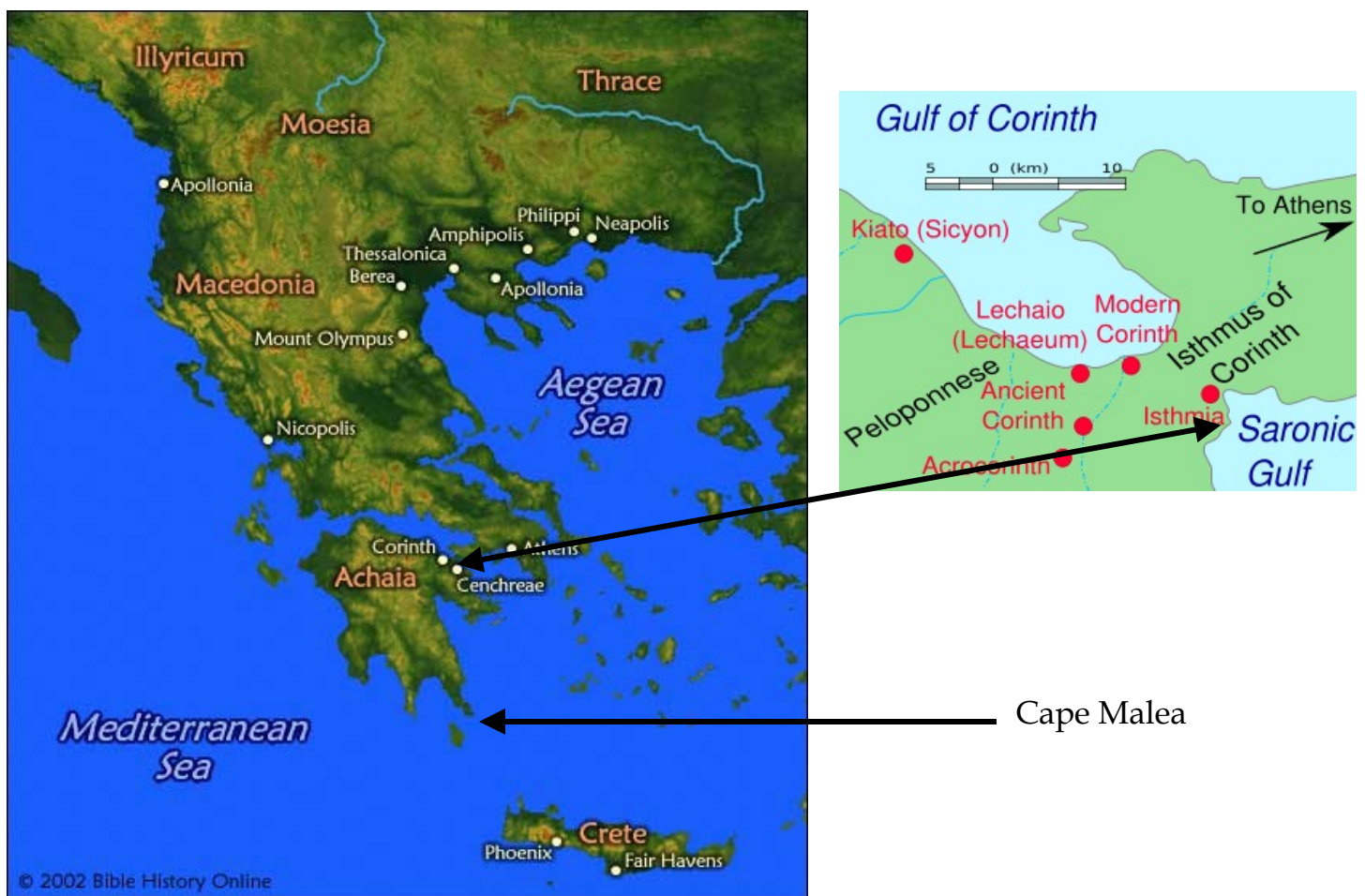


1 CORINTHIANS (INTRODUCTION)

CORINTH: LOCATION

Ancient Corinth located on a broad plain below the towering Acrocorinth, a 1,886-foot-high fortress peak on the Peloponnesian peninsula. From ancient Corinth, the distance to the harbour city of Lechaem along the Corinthian Gulf was about two miles due north. About seven miles to the east was the port city of Cenchreae along the Saronic Gulf. These two harbours brought to Corinth commerce and wealth. Ships from the west (Italy, Spain, N. Africa) brought their wares to Lechaem and ships from the east (Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Egypt, Cyrene) docked at Cenchreae. Captains and crews were reluctant to sail the two hundred miles around Cape Malea, where unpredictable storms made shipping extremely treacherous. Therefore, they moored in either Lechaem or Cenchreae, transport their good via land to the other port and go on from there.

Ancient Corinth was viewed as a strategic commercial harbour. The city's location at the crossroads of international trade meant a constant flow of all kinds of people, ideas and morals passing through it.



**CORINTH: HISTORY**

It is believed that Corinth existed as a city about 2000 years before Christ. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Corinth reached the height of its power because of its commercial appeal. In 196 B.C., the Romans conquered Corinth and granted it the right to be the leader of the league cities in the province of Achaia. 50 years later, Corinth revolted against Roman rule and was destroyed by the Romans consul Lucius Mummius. For about 100 years, the city laid in ruins until Julius Caesar restored Corinth in 44 B.C. and rebuilt the two harbours of Lechaem and Cenchreae. Corinth became a Roman colony.

**CORINTH: PEOPLE**

As a Roman colony subject to Roman law, Corinth has a government similar to that of the imperial city. Roman military and civil officials, among whom was Proconsul Gallio (**Acts 18:12**) would reside in Corinth, together with a multitude of settlers who were ex-soldiers and freedmen (former slaves) from Rome. There will also be merchants, craftsmen, artists, philosophers, teachers and labourers from many countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The city's population also included a number of Jews from Israel and elsewhere, native Greeks, displaced persons, and slaves. The official language is Latin, even though Greek remained the language of the common people. *Equestrians, plebians, freedmen and slaves* form the 4 social classes of the Roman Empire then.

**CORINTH: RELIGION & CULTURE**

For centuries before Christ, Greek and Roman authors have often referred to Corinth as the city of fornication and prostitution. The Greeks coined a term "*to live a Corinthian life*" to describe the city's immorality. Before the city was destroyed in 146 B.C., it was reported that there were a thousand prostitutes working in the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Aphrodite was a cult dedicated to the glorification of sex, the word 'aphrodisiac' derived from it. With a constant flow of seafarers, merchants and soldiers passing through the city, promiscuity is not uncommon in Corinth.

Many diverse religious groups are allowed to exist and practice their faith in Corinth. Besides worshipping Aphrodite, the Corinthians also worshipped Asclepius, Apollo and Poseidon, as well as Athena, Hera, Hermes (Greek deities), Isis and Serapis (Egyptian gods). The Jews there have their own synagogue.

Asclepius was the god of healing while Apollo was the god of music, song and poetry as well as the god of ideal beauty for males. It was reported that there were nude statues of Apollos everywhere around the city, in sensual poses. The devotees of Apollos were encouraged to have physical displays of their devotion with what was called 'the boys of Apollos'. Therefore, besides being a centre of prostitution, it was also a centre of child abuse and homosexuality in the first century world.

By the time of the New Testament, there were at least 26 separate sacred places in Corinth. Many were the temples of the Greeks and Roman gods while others were centres for the mystery religions. This may explain Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 8:5-6**: *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.* Concerning the city of Corinth during Paul's days, Charles Swindoll says, "It was the sailor's favourite port, it was a prodigal's paradise, it was a policeman's nightmare, and it was a preacher's graveyard." It was also called "a sink of depravity". Could this be one reason why Paul came to Corinth 'in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling'? (**1 Corinthians 2:3**) Nevertheless, we observe that Paul's message among them was 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified'! (**1 Corinthians 2:2**)

One of the highlights in cosmopolitan 1<sup>st</sup>-century Corinth was the Isthmian Games. These games were second in importance only to the Olympic Games and were conducted every two years in spring. The games included foot races, boxing, wrestling and chariot racing.

### CORINTH: CHURCH & LETTERS

The church @ Corinth was planted by the apostle Paul around AD 50-52 during his second missionary journey (**Acts 15:36 - 18:22**, especially **18:1-18**). See APPENDIX A. We know from **18:11** that Paul ministered to this church for 18 months. It would be reasonable to believe that this church comprised of converted Jews, Gentile proselytes and Gentiles who previously worshipped idols. From **1 Corinthians 1**, we know that most of the believers were "not wise nor mighty nor noble according to the flesh" while **1 Corinthians 12** would suggest that they were made up of "Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men." Of course, **1 Corinthians 6:9** points us in the direction that some of them were 'fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and extortioners' before their conversion.

**1 Corinthians** is believed to have been written around AD 55 during Paul's third missionary journey. During this journey, Paul stayed in Ephesus for about 3 years, and it is believed that he wrote **1 Corinthians** during this time (**1 Corinthians 16:5-9**). Just before he arrived in Ephesus, we know from **Acts 19:1** that Apollos had visited Corinth.

Paul had earlier written them a letter (cf. **1 Corinthians 5:9**) which is no longer extant. Therefore, **1 Corinthians** would be his second letter to this church. This letter was occasioned by a report brought to Paul by members of Chloe's household (**1 Corinthians 1:11**) and by a letter from the Corinthian Church (**1 Corinthians 7:1**) probably hand-carried by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (**1 Corinthians 16:17**).

From Chloe's household, Paul learned of the factions that had sprung up in the church, thereby undermining its unity (**1 Corinthians 1:11**). He has also heard of the incest (**5:1**), lawsuits (**6:1-8**) and immorality (**6:9-20**) happening in the church. Paul spent the 1<sup>st</sup> 6 chapters of **1 Corinthians** dealing with these matters.

The letter from the church asked various questions, among them marriage and singleness (**7:1**), food offered to idols (**8:1**), spiritual gifts (**12:1**), collection for the saints (**16:1**) and Apollos (**16:12**). We are not certain if *resurrection* is one of the questions asked, but we find Paul having to address it (**15:1**). To each of these concerns Paul would address, one by one, in the remaining 10 chapters of his letter. No doubt Paul would have double-checked with Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus everything he has heard, before writing his letter.

It therefore appears reasonable to believe that the church is made up of Gentiles (majority), and many of whom are at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder. There could be two or three wealthy families among them. As former pagans, they brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic world view and attitude toward ethical behaviour. Although they were the Christian Church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviours that required radical surgery without killing the patient. As Horatius Bonar once said, "*I looked for the church and I found it in the world; and I looked for the world and I found it in the church.*" That was exactly what happened to the Corinthian church. They began to resemble and assimilate the city in which they lived, and all the sins that went along with it.

It is also very possible that some of the beliefs of their former pagan religions were still influencing their thinking. One of the key beliefs of the pagan religions in those days was the dualistic outlook on life, where matter was illusory and evil while the thoughts and the soul are good. Such a belief can affect one's behaviour and lifestyle in one of two ways: (a) ascetic legalism, with its rejection of the physical or (b) libertinism, which regarded the body as worthless and hence its activities of no significance. (a) could explain the issues Paul had to address in **1 Corinthians 7** while (b) could be the background to **1 Corinthians 6**.

From **4:17**, we learned that Timothy was sent to them while from **16:10-11**, Paul believed that Timothy will somehow arrive there after this letter (**1 Corinthians**) has reached them. It can be argued that from almost every chapter in this letter, we can detect a strained relationship between Paul and the church. Hence, in writing this letter, Paul sought not only answer the

questions they raised and correct the number of erroneous tendencies they have, he also wanted to promote the spirit of unity among the believers and repair the strained relationship between him and them!

After reading the 16 chapters of **1 Corinthians**, it soon becomes clear that there were four areas of controversy in the Corinthian Church, encapsulated by four “buzz” words:

(I) *Knowledge*

The Corinthians want to elevate it to primary position in the church, but Paul wants to reduce its importance compared with love (1:5; 8:1,7,10-11; 12:8; 13:2,8; 14:6).

(II) *Wisdom*

This is the focus of the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 chapters. Paul argued that their concept of wisdom was culturally conditioned and driven by the values of this world. On the other hand, God's wisdom is located in the 'foolishness of the Cross'.

(III) *Power*

As an evidence of power, the Corinthians point to the external excitement in the demonstration of the supernatural (tongues, miracles, healing, etc). However Paul sought to correct them in showing that the greatest evidence of divine power is in the saving grace of God, generated by Christ's death (1:18-24; 2:4-5; 4:19-20; 5:4; 6:14; 12:10,28-29; 14:11; 15:24,43,56).

(IV) *Spiritual*

What does it mean to be '*spiritual*'? To answer this question, Paul sought to shift the focus from impressive external displays of gifts and ecstasy to the humble service of love that is the heartbeat of the gospel (2:13-15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3-4; 12:1; 14:1,37; 15:44-46).

THREE BASIC LESSONS TO LEARN

**One:** *The work of the Gospel is . . . HARD!*

Consider Paul's emotional and mental state when he arrived in Corinth. It was on his second missionary journey, and here's some of his stops: Philippi (church planted but physically assaulted), Thessalonica (church planted but physically assaulted), Berea (preached Christ, faced trouble), Athens (no violence, faced cynicism). And now Corinth! What a place!! And all alone!!!

Yet see the fruits God gave, and the encouragements Christ gave Him through a night vision. The lesson is this: *Press on . . . never mind how hard, and what state we are in!*

**1 CORINTHIANS (INTRODUCTION)**

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**Two:** *The power of the Gospel is . . . GREAT!*

In Romans 1:16, Paul said that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and he is seeing this personally in this sin city of Corinth. If the Gospel can take root in Corinth, it can take root anywhere! It was the most populated, wealthy, commercially-minded and sex-abased city in Europe then. A city of degradation, and yet God moved in! In one sense, the glorious gospel is its only hope and Corinth, of all the cities, needed it most!

**Three:** *The holiness of the Gospel is . . . SLOW BUT SURE!*

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 to hear how Paul described these believers in glorious terms! They are real believers – no doubt! Yet one only has to read 1:10, 3:1-3, 6:12-20, 10:14, 11:20-22 to see how messy their lives (after conversion) were! What will you do with the Corinthian Church? Do you give it up? Will you regret planting it?

<b>OUTLINE OF 1 CORINTHIANS</b> <i>(TENTATIVE)</i>
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<b>1:1-9</b>	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Greetings</li> <li>▪ Thanksgiving</li> </ul>
<b>1:10-6:20</b>	Response to Report Problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Divided Church</li> <li>▪ Immoral and Litigious Church</li> </ul>
<b>7:1-16:4</b>	Response to Corinthian Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Marriage &amp; Single-hood</li> <li>▪ Food offered to idols</li> <li>▪ Worship &amp; Gifts</li> <li>▪ Christ's resurrection &amp; ours</li> <li>▪ Collection for God's people</li> </ul>
<b>16:5-24</b>	Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Plans</li> <li>▪ Exhortations</li> <li>▪ Greetings</li> </ul>

Next Study: **1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**REFERENCE MATERIALS YOU CAN REFER**

- Paul - An Apostle of the heart set free (F F Bruce)
- New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians (Simon J. Kistemaker)
- New International Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians (Gordon Fee)
- The Message of 1 Corinthians (David Prior) of The Bible Speaks Today Series
- A Study Commentary on 1 Corinthians (Peter Naylor)
- Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians (Leon Morris)
- The Interpretation of I & II Corinthians (R C H Lenski)
- Strengthening Christ's Church (Roger Ellsworth) of Welwyn Commentary Series
- Let's Study 1 Corinthians (David Jackman)
- 28 audio sermons by Stuart Olyott on 1 Corinthians  
([www.knowyourbiblerecordings.org](http://www.knowyourbiblerecordings.org))
- Matthew Henry's Commentary on 1 Corinthians  
(<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.iCor.html>)

## APPENDIX A

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The Gallio Inscription was found in excavations of Delphi (45 miles NW of Corinth as the crow flies) in the 1880s. The intact tablet, originally over 1.4 meters (55 inches) long, was set up on the outer wall of the temple of Apollo at Delphi 5, and read something close to the following:

*Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, 12th year of tribunician power, acclaimed emperor for the 26th time, father of the country, sends greetings to [...].*

*For long have I been well-disposed to the city of Delphi and solicitous for its prosperity, and I have always observed the cult of the Pythian Apollo. Now since it is said to be destitute of citizens, as my friend and proconsul L. Iunius Gallio recently reported to me, and desiring that Delphi should regain its former splendour, I command you (singular) to invite well-born people also from other cities to come to Delphi as new inhabitants, and to accord them and their children all the privileges of the Delphians as being citizens on like and equal terms. For if some are transferred as colonists to these regions...*

Pivotal in understanding the inscription's impact on dating is Claudius' opening pronouncement. The emperors were engrossed with themselves and their achievements, so all reference to time pertains to them and their reign. Claudius was no exception. Terms such as "tribunician power" and "acclaim" were benchmarks for dates. An emperor's tribunician power began the very day they ascended to the throne. For Claudius, this was January 25, AD 41. His first year then ran through January 24, AD 42. Therefore, his 12th year, the year of the inscription, was between January 25, AD 52. to January 24, AD 53. This, therefore, pins Gallio as proconsul prior to January AD 53.

Perhaps most important in narrowing the possibilities is the fact that proconsuls served for one full year, beginning in July through the following June. With this information, we could say that Gallio was proconsul from July AD 51 to June 52. This accords with the writing of the ascription according to Claudius' tribunician year and 26<sup>th</sup> acclaim. According to Acts 18:11, Paul was in Corinth for 18 months. Then verse 12 notes he was brought before Gallio. Should we take Luke to mean that Paul was there 18 months immediately *after which* he appeared before Gallio? If so, then Paul arrives in early AD 50, and leaves in late summer / early fall of AD 51. Or does Luke mean that Paul spent a total of 18 months in Corinth, and was brought before Gallio *during* that time. In Acts 18:18, immediately after the Gallio fiasco, Luke does mention that Paul "remained many days longer" before leaving Corinth, imply some chronological flow. Whatever it is, we can safely say that Paul planted this church around AD 50-52.