

# **FIRST CORINTHIANS**



**BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES**

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**STUDIES IN  
FIRST CORINTHIANS**

by  
Paul T. Butler



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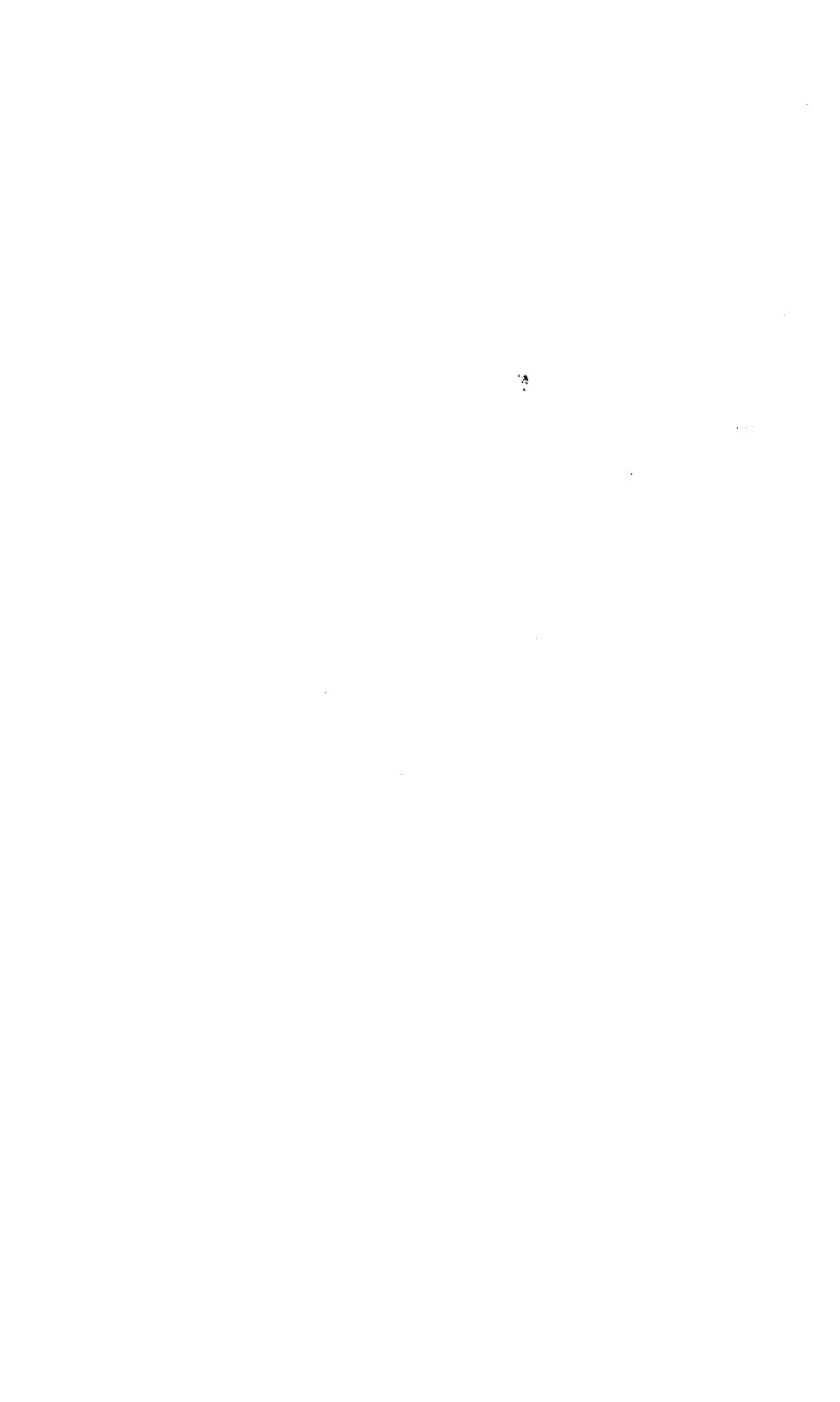
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This volume is dedicated  
to  
Lakin Paul Lankford  
and  
Deker Kyle Lankford  
my cherished grandsons  
in the hope that they will follow in the  
steps of the great apostle to the Gentiles  
and  
preach the gospel of Christ  
wherever they go.



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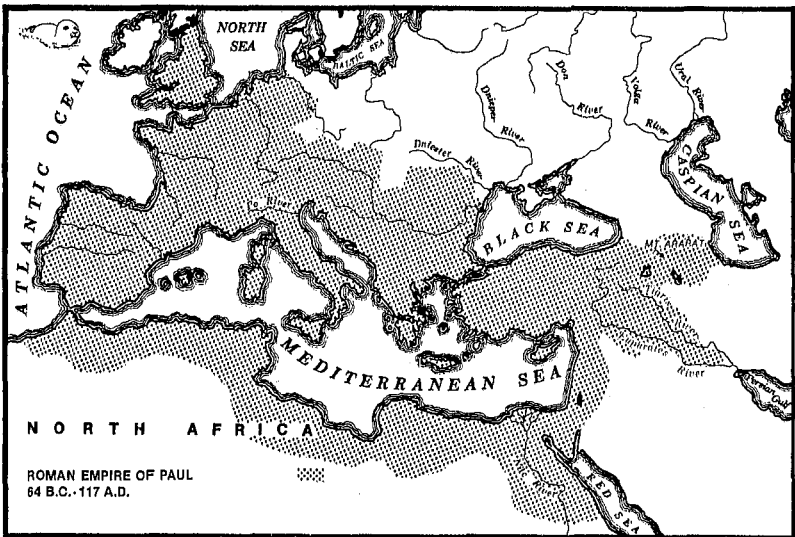
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## INTRODUCTION



### Historical Background:

*Corinth*: in Greek language, *Korinthos*, meaning, “ornament.”

In Paul’s day, Corinth was the capital of the Roman province called by them, Achaia, and the most important city in Greece (even more important from the Roman viewpoint than Athens).

Athens was the intellectual center of Greece; Corinth was the commercial center.

Corinth occupied a strategic geographical position. It was the southern gate on the isthmus into Greece.

It was built on the side or at the foot of the 2000 ft. Mount Acrocorinthus.

The acropolis of Corinth was atop this mountain. On a clear day you could see from this acropolis 40 miles northeast to the city of Athens. Corinth had three harbors.

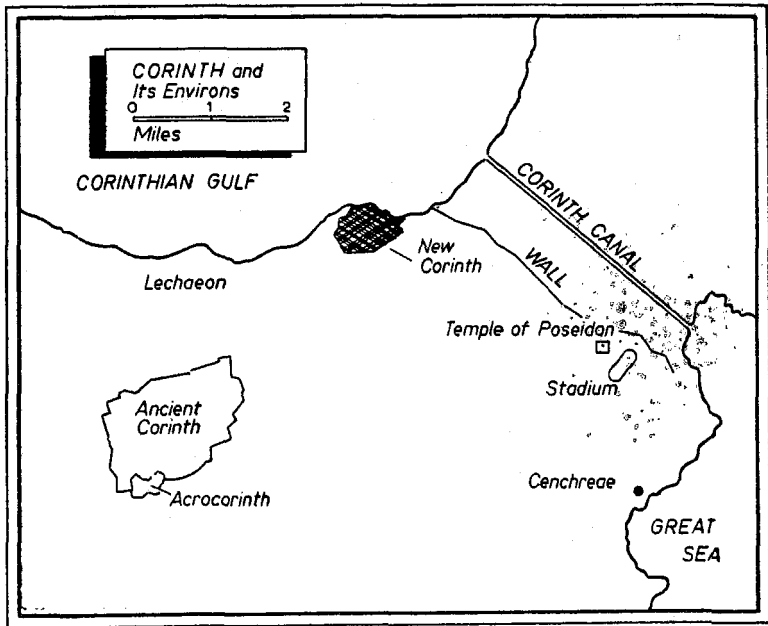
Ancient seafaring men so dreaded having to make the 200 mile voyage around the southern capes of the Peloponnesus, they would tie ropes to their ships, put logs under them and drag them across the isthmus. Large ships were unloaded, dragged across, the cargo carried across, put back on board and then they would sail on across the Mediterranean Sea.

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Many attempts were made to build a canal across the isthmus in ancient times; the most notable attempt being that of Nero (about 15 years after Paul established the Christian church there), in 66 A.D.

The Romans declared Greece and Corinth "free" in 196 B.C. But a Greek rebellion in 146 B.C. caused the Romans to destroy Corinth totally; its famous art treasures were taken to Rome as booty.

Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth as a Roman colony and made it the capital of Achaia in 46 B.C.



At the height of its power, Corinth probably had a population of 200,000 free born Greek citizens and 500,000 slaves. . . . about the population density of St. Louis, Missouri.

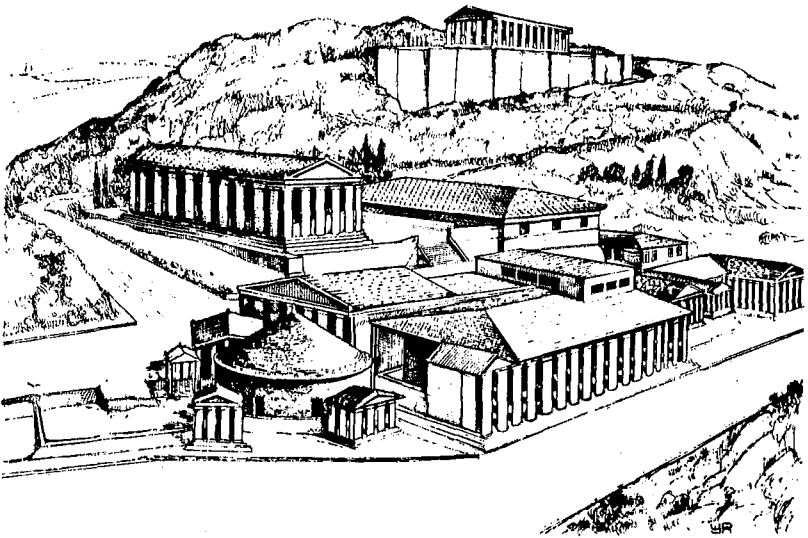
Its population consisted of descendants of the Roman colonists who came in 46 B.C. (100 years before Paul)—many Romans who came for business from Italy—a large Greek population—many strangers from different nationalities—and the inevitable Jewish community with its synagogues.

## INTRODUCTION

A broken lintel (part of a door) discovered by archaeologists bears a Greek inscription, "synagogue of Hebrews."

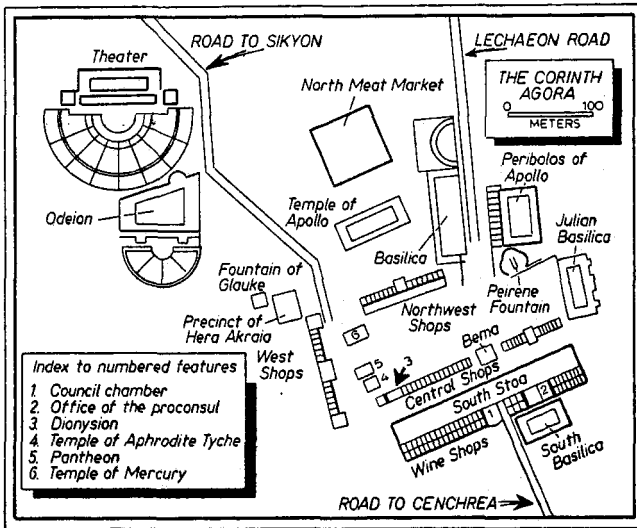
The canal at Corinth, connecting the Ionian Sea with the Aegean was begun in 66 A.D. by Nero. The present canal, begun in 1881, shortens the distance from the Aegean Sea to Athens by 202 miles for ships able to navigate its 69-foot width and 26-foot depth.

Paul undoubtedly chose Corinth for a missionary "base" because of its itinerant and cosmopolitan population. Anyone who could make his voice heard in Corinth was addressing a spectrum of people from all over the known civilized world, many of whom would be sure to go all over the world and possibly carry with them what they had heard.



This is probably what Corinth looked like in Paul's day (up-town). The acropolis had the pantheon upon it where their gods were housed. Poseidon, god of the sea, was their chief god. The Isthmian Games were held there every two years, second only to the Olympic Games in Athens. The agora (market place and public buildings) is in the foreground. What the remainder of the city looked like is not pictured.

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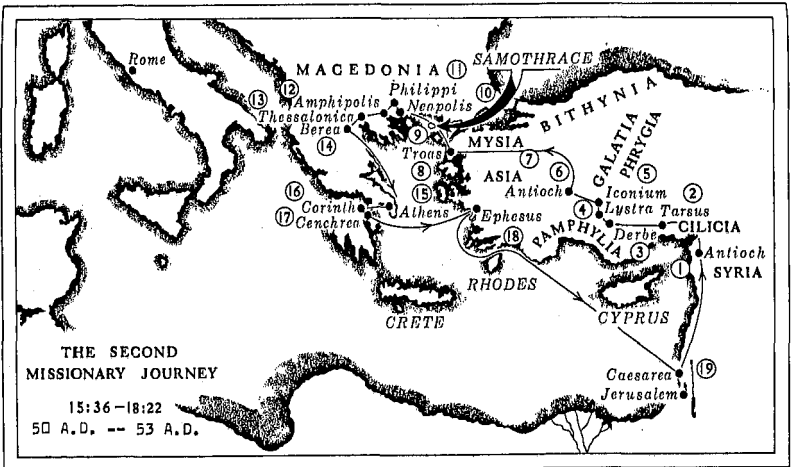
In Paul's time Corinth was a city of wealth, luxury and immorality! To "live like a Corinthian" meant to live a life of profligacy and debauchery. All over the Roman empire, women who were promiscuous or of loose morals were often called "Corinthian girls."

The reason for this is that at the temple of Aphrodite on the Acropolis there were 1000 "Corinthian girls" employed as *hierodouloi* (lit. "temple maiden servants"), actually prostitutes. Aphrodite was the goddess of love (*eros*). Worship at the temple involved sexual intercourse with one of these "priestesses." Young male homosexuals were also used by the Corinthians. This "worship" formed a great temptation, even to the new Christians at Corinth, as evidenced from Paul's exhortations against it (I Cor. 5:1ff., 6:9-19). This attracted "worshippers" from all over the Roman world. To become "corinthianized" meant a person was living the most licentious, debauched life possible. It was customary in a stage play in the theater for a Corinthian actor to come on the scene drunk. Much drunkenness, homosexuality, fornication, robbery, thievery, idolatry and immorality of all kinds went on here. Strabo quoted the proverb, "All the people of Corinth gorge themselves." Corinth had many important industries, its pottery and brass and marble for building columns were famous all over the world.

## INTRODUCTION

Sex crazy, sports crazy, affluent and cynical, citizens and visitors of Corinth liked to tell of the notorious priestesses of Aphrodite, whose studded sandals spelled out in the dust of the street, "Follow me!" Every shop in the city had a deep, spring-fed well in which to cool containers of wine.

Alciphro wrote: "I did not enter Corinth after all; for I learned in a short time the sordidness of the rich there and the misery of the poor." Aristophanes coined the word "corinthianize" to denote debauchery.



### Date of the Epistle:

Paul visited Corinth for the first time on his second missionary journey (Acts 18) about 50-51 A.D. Claudius was emperor of Rome at that time. He had just been to Athens where he was not well received

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so he came to Corinth hesitantly ("in much weakness, fear and trembling," 2:3). The Lord told Paul He had much people in the city. He became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, tent-makers like he was. During his stay of 1-1/2 years he resided in their home. Soon after his arrival, Silas and Timothy joined him with news from Thessalonica. Every sabbath Paul preached in the synagogue of the Jews; he met with strong opposition and gave the rest of his stay in Corinth to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). Titus Justus, Crispus, Gaius and Stephanas were some of Paul's first converts. During Paul's stay, Gallio, the elder brother of the Roman philosopher Seneca came to his rescue when the Jews tried to have him imprisoned.

Paul seems to have visited Corinth again, during his third missionary journey when he was headquartered at Ephesus (II Cor. 12:14, 13:1). While at Ephesus, Paul wrote an earlier letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 5:9) which has been lost. Paul wrote our present First Corinthians from the city of Ephesus about 56 or 57 A.D. in answer to a letter from Corinth (probably brought to him from there by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (I Cor. 16:17) relating some of the problems in the church there. Paul had also heard of factions in the church from the servants of Chloe (1:11), probably one of the women members of the church. Paul wrote this letter to deal with these *problems*, which plagued the saints.

Of course "the church" at Corinth was probably composed of many small groups of Christians meeting in different homes. There were no church buildings as such until about 200 A.D.

### **The Purpose of This Epistle:**

Problems, problems, problems; every church has them. Even the first century churches were beset with problems. The Holy Spirit guided Paul in the composition of this letter that divine wisdom might be delineated for dealing with these enigmas and aberrations. There are nine or ten distinct problems dealt with: factionalism and schism; spiritual maturation; immorality; Christian integrity; marriage and divorce; liberties in Christ; order and decorum in worship; communion in Christ; abuse and misuse of miraculous gifts; probability of life after death (the resurrection from the dead); collections made for the saints. This book reads like a modern, twentieth century, "Report on the State of the Church of Christ."

## INTRODUCTION

The church today faces, essentially, the same problems. The problems do not change because human nature is the same in every generation. Human beings are either in the process of regeneration through the power of the word of God growing in them, or they are in the process of degeneration through the power of the word of the devil developing in them. The Holy Spirit's purpose through the pen of the apostle Paul was to produce a holy growth in the "saints" at Corinth. It will be evident as one studies this epistle that these Christians had much growing to do. But so do we all if we are to reach "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). God wished the Christians at Corinth to know that he loved them with an eternal love as they were growing into the persons for which he had created them. There could never, after the Cross, be any question about the faithfulness of God's love. The question was, then, whether the Corinthians would choose the growth he desired for them. That is still the question for the church today.