

Corinth. The seaport city of Corinth was famed for its commerce, chiefly due to its situation between the Ionian and Aegean seas on the isthmus connecting the Peloponnese with Greece. Being a seaport city, Corinth was characterized by all of the hustle and bustle of a busy seaport, commerce, wealth, visitors from all over the Mediterranean, and all of the accompanying vice and corruption that seems to infest major ports. Being a Roman colony and capitol of the province (Achaia), it was a seat of a Roman governmental power in the region as well (Acts 18:8). There were two provinces in Greece, Macedonia and Achaia. Both are mentioned a number of times in scripture. Corinth and Cenchrea were the two major towns of Achaia. Thessalonica, Berea and Philippi were major cities of Macedonia and were the first Europeans contacted by Paul with the gospel.

The people of Corinth had **the Greek love of philosophical subtleties. The immorality was notorious even in the heathen world;** so that "*to Corinthianze*" was proverbial for *playing the wanton*. The worship of Venus, whose temple was on Acrocorinthus, was attended with shameless excesses. Hence arose dangers to the purity of the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians chapters 5-7), founded by Paul on his first visit in his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17).

Corinth was an early Greek city later left desolate; until Julius Caesar refounded the city as a Roman colony. Gallio the philosopher, Seneca's brother, was proconsul during Paul's first residence in Claudius' reign. Paul had come from Athens, shortly afterwards Silas and Timothy from Macedonia joined him. His two earliest epistles, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, were written there, A.D. 52 or 53. Here he made the friendship of Aquila and Priscilla, and labored at tent making with them. After Paul's departure, Apollos came from Ephesus.

The number of Latin names in Paul's epistle to the Romans, written during his second visit of three months at Corinth. (Acts 20:8), A.D. 58, is in harmony with the origin of many of its people as a Roman colony. At the time of Paul's visit Claudius' decree banishing the Jews from Rome caused an influx of them to Corinth. Hence many Jewish converts were in the Corinthian church (Acts 18), and a Judaizing spirit arose.

Corinth is now the seat of an "episcopal see." It is a poor village, called by a corruption of the old name, Gortho. The remains of its ancient Greek temple, and of the Posidonium or sanctuary of Neptune (northeast of Corinth, near the Saronic gulf), the scene of the Isthmian games, are remarkably interesting. The stadium for the foot race (alluded to in 1 Corinthians 9:24), the theater where the pugilists fought (26) and the pine trees of which was woven the "corruptible crown" or wreath for the conquerors in the games (25), are still to be seen. The Acrocorinthus eminence rising 2000 feet above the sea was near Corinth, and as a fortress was deemed the key of Greece. On the other side of the Saronic gulf was Cenchreae (Acts 18:18).

The ornate "Corinthian order" of architecture, and

"the Corinthian brass" or choice bronze statuary, attest the refinement of its people. [Derived in part from *Bible Cyclopaedia*, 1900, A. R. Fausset]

The name "corinth" means "satiated". It means "satisfied to the full", like "stuffed." The believers there were fully blessed with all spiritual gifts, many natural gifts, wealth and intellect. But this was becoming a cause of stumbling, they were losing sight of Christ as their object.

Paul visited Corinth twice and resided there for some time establishing the assembly there among the believers converted under his preaching. The disciples were a mix of Jews, Greeks and other gentiles, so there were natural differences that led to tensions that only the grace of God could overcome. These differences included:

- * the profound paganism of the gentiles,
- * the utterly corrupt nature of their environment,
- * the misdirected religious zeal of the Jews,

* the esteem of human thinking and learning by the Greeks. Given the presence of these differences, existence of a thriving assembly there a wonderfully powerful testimony to the saving, and uniting, grace of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Corinthian assembly therefore became a special target of the enemy whose territory was being invaded by Christianity. And not only his geographical territory but his spiritual territory was now at risk. The "strong man" has been bound (Matthew 12:29) and his house is being spoiled. Souls that had been his were now Christ's. The Adversary does not give up without a fight, and in fact he never gives up. Even though already conquered he has not been confined yet and persists in continuing his hopeless battle against Christ whom he hates. So Satan feeds and nurtures any conflicts and selfish ambition he can spot among the saints in the local assembly at Corinth. And all the while he is marshaling all of the attractions of the world to lure their hearts away from the Lord and back to their former pursuits. This is the situation Paul is dealing with as he writes these letters to them.

They aren't the only ones under attack. Our world surroundings are every bit as profligate as was Corinth. Only we have the added disadvantages of the electronic media, the entertainment, amusements and corrupt elements of the world at our fingertips, right in our own homes, Internet, TV, videos, CD's, tapes, not to mention printed matter. Not that these mechanisms are evil, but man corrupts all of the "good" things invented down through the years and uses them for immoral and violent purposes. We also have powerful bodies of higher learning foisting their reasoning's (evolution, political correctness, revisionist history, etc.) upon the unwary. And we have numerous corrupt religions and a corrupt Christendom clamoring for our allegiance and fellowship as well. So we have good reason to carefully read and heed Paul's letters to the Corinthians. They are for us today.

By Ron Canner, October 16, 2002