1st Corinthians

Introduction to the Book

- Historical Background
  - The City of Corinth and its People
    - Corinth was located about 48 miles from Athens on an isthmus that connects the Peloponnese peninsula to mainland Greece.
    - The Isthmus of Corinth was a very strategic piece of land because it separates two gulfs – the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf.

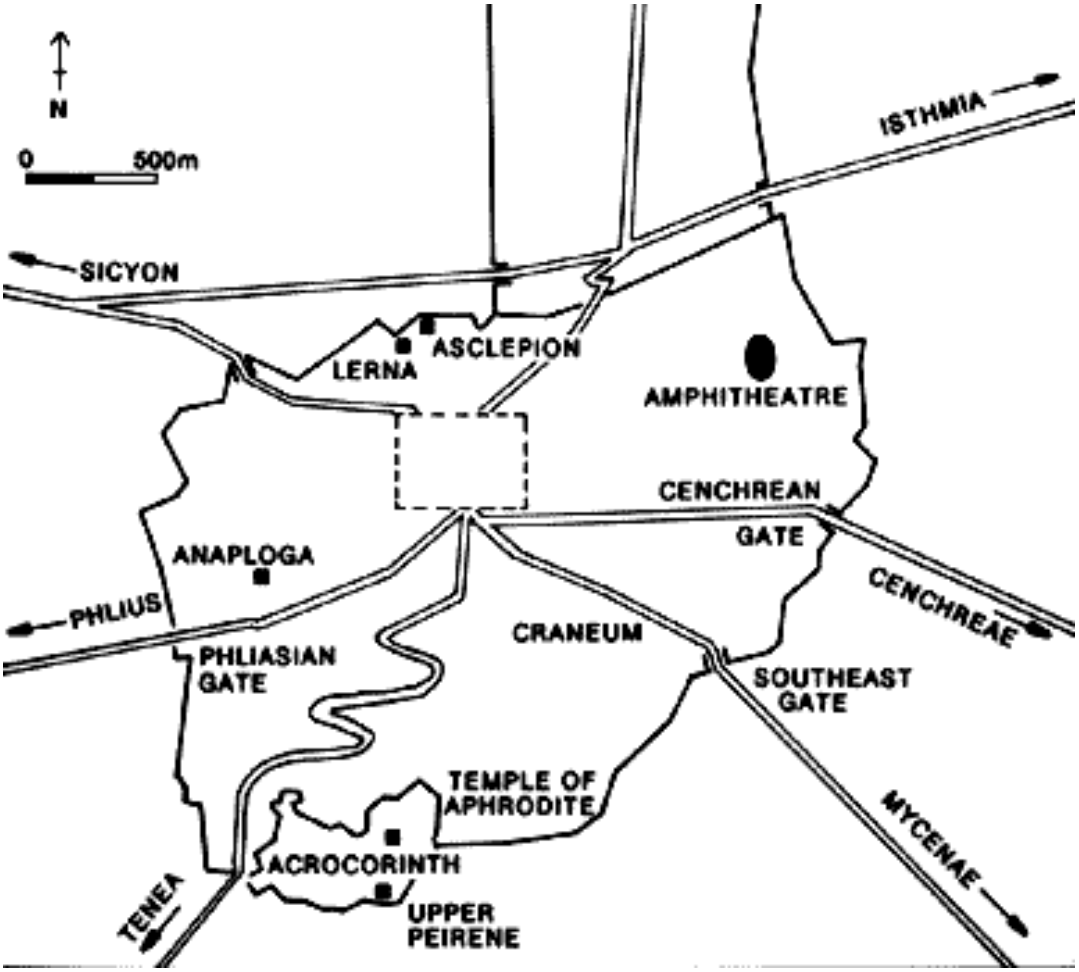


    - Sailing around Cape Maleae of the Peloponnese peninsula was very perilous due to contrary winds and high seas, leading to the proverb, "When you double Maleae, forget your home."
    - The two gulfs – one leading to Asia and the other leading to Italy – provided a safe way of passage for cargo ships.
    - To facilitate such commerce, a paved road (the *diolkos*) was built across the isthmus which permitted light ships to be hauled from one gulf to the other.
    - These ships were hauled on a platform running in grooves cut into the pavement 4.5 feet apart.
    - This platform also hauled goods across the isthmus.



- Because of its strategic location, Corinth was central to both East-West and North-South trade routes.
- This allowed Corinth to levy a percentage on trade in both directions making the city flush with money.
- The plain of the isthmus was a region of agricultural productivity which helped the citizens to be wealthy.
- Corinth was renowned for its ceramics, textiles, architecture and shipbuilding.
- In addition, Corinthian bronze was a prized commodity for making vessels, statues, etc.

- Corinth was the home of the most famous Temple of Aphrodite wherein prostitution was promoted.



- Thus, the city of Corinth became a symbol of commercialized sex.
- Aristophanes coined the term *korinthiazesthai* which meant "to fornicate".
- Plato used the phrase *korinthia korē* (a Corinthian girl) to mean a prostitute.
- The population of Corinth was primarily made up of Gentiles with a few Jews who had migrated there.
- Because it was a hub of commerce, Corinth also had many, many visitors who came to the city.
- The flow of visitors in and out of Corinth made it a perfect hub for the spread of the gospel.

o A Roman Colony
- Corinth enjoyed social and political stability for centuries as a city of Greece.
- Rome had granted freedom to the cities of Greece after the 2nd Macedonian War (200-196 B.C.) and allowed them to unite in various leagues.
- Corinth became a member of the Achaian league.
- As time went on, Rome began to see these leagues as a threat and was determined to break them up.

- The Achaian league asserted its independence and refused to disband.
- Corinth was defeated in 146 B.C. when Rome used military force to subdue the city.
- The city was subsequently looted but not totally destroyed nor completely depopulated.
- Corinth rose from the ashes and once again became a center of commercial activity.
- In 44 A.D. Julius Caesar established Corinth as a Roman colony.
- Many freed Roman slaves settled in the new colony of Corinth from other places – Syria, Judea, Egypt, etc.
- This gave them separation from their former masters and their children would be born free.
- These settlers brought many skills that contributed to the continuing success of the city of Corinth.

- Paul's First Letter to the Church at Corinth
  - Authorship
    - The letter itself attributes the authorship to the Apostle Paul [1:1; 16:21].
    - Even the radical German "higher" critics of the 19th century agree that Paul is the author of this letter.
    - This is remarkable given their propensity for doubting the authorship of most books of the Bible.
  - Occasion for the Letter
    - Paul came to Corinth during his 2nd missionary journey [Acts 18:1] likely in 51 A.D.
    - There he met Aquilla and Priscilla [Acts 18:2] who had left Rome in 49 A.D. when Claudius issued a decree ordering the expulsion of all the Jews from that city.
    - They were tent makers, just like Paul [Acts 18:3].
    - According to his custom, Paul first went to the synagogue and tried to persuade his hearers that Jesus is the Christ [Acts 18:4-5].
    - When his door for ministry in the synagogue closed, Paul left and went to the home of a Gentile believer named Titius Justus [Acts 18:6-7].
    - Many people who heard Paul believed and the Lord assured Paul that there were many believers in the city of Corinth [Acts 18:8-10].
    - Paul settled in at Corinth, teaching the word of God there for a year and a half [Acts 18:11] before he was driven out by the Jews [Acts 18:12-18a].
    - Paul took Aquilla and Priscilla with him and decided to leave them in Ephesus before continuing on his journey [Acts 18:18b-21].
    - Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and spent over two years teaching the word of God to the disciples there [Acts 19:1-10].
    - While at Ephesus, Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Corinth that they misunderstood [1 Cor 5:9-11].
    - Paul learned of their confusion as well as other issues occurring at the church in Corinth from the household of Chloe [1 Cor 1:11] which prompted him to write the letter we know as 1st Corinthians.

- Date of Writing
  - Paul was in Ephesus during his third missionary journey from 53-55 A.D.
  - It was during this time that he wrote this letter to the church at Corinth addressing various matters.
  - This was the second letter he wrote to them while in Ephesus which puts the date of writing at 54-55 A.D.
- Nature of the Letter
  - In this letter, Paul was addressing his concerns for a local church that was experiencing difficulties.
    - Divisions and disorders in the local church.
    - Marriage issues in the local church.
    - Confusion about Christian liberty.
    - Misunderstanding about the Rapture.
  - Given their struggles, it seemed that the spirit of the world had more sway with the church at Corinth than the Holy Spirit did.
  - Paul addressed their issues while also encouraging them to focus on all that God had provided for them to live a successful Christian life.
- Outline
  - Salutation [1:1-3]
  - Thanksgiving for God's grace [1:4-9]
  - Divisions in the Church [1:10-4:21]
    - Details of the Divisions [1:10-17]
    - Reasons for the Divisions [1:18-4:5]
      - Misunderstanding the Message [1:18-3:4]
      - Misunderstanding the Ministry [3:5-4:5]
    - The Cure for Divisions [4:6-21]
  - Disorders in the Church [5:1-6:20]
    - Failure to Discipline a Sinner [5:1-13]
    - Failure to Resolve Personal Disputes [6:1-11]
    - Failure to Practice Sexual Purity [6:12-20]
  - Difficulties in the Church [7:1-16:4]
    - Marriage issues [7:1-40]
      - Marriage and Celibacy [7:1-9]
      - Marriage and Divorce [7:10-24]
      - Marriage and Ministry [7:25-38]
      - Marriage and Widows [7:39-40]
    - Confusion about Christian Liberty [8:1-14:40]
      - Christian Liberty and Pagan Worship [8:1-11:1]
        - Liberty and Brotherly Love [8:1-13]
        - Liberty and Privilege [9:1-10:13]
        - Liberty and Idolatry [10:14-11:1]

    - Christian Liberty and Christian Worship [11:2-14:40]
        - Women in Worship [11:2-16]
        - Sanctity of the Lord's Supper [11:17-34]
        - Use of Spiritual Gifts [12:1-14:40]
  - Misunderstanding about the Rapture [15:1-58]
    - Certainty of Bodily Resurrection [15:1-34]
        - Historical Argument [15:1-11]
        - Logical Argument [15:12-19]
        - Theological Argument [15:20-28]
        - Experiential Argument [15:29-34]
    - For the Living and the Dead [15:35-58]
        - Resurrection of the Dead [15:35-49]
        - Transformation of the Living [15:50-58]
  - Collections for the Poor [16:1-4]
- Conclusion [16:5-24]
  - Future Visits [16:5-12]
  - Exhortations [16:13-18]
  - Closing [16:19-24]
    - Greetings [16:19-21]
    - Imprecation [16:22]
    - Benediction [16:23-24]