

Sunday, April 19, 2015—I Corinthians: Introduction

Introduction: Why I Corinthians?

- This morning I would like to begin a study of the book of I Corinthians. The last book study we did was Mark: Dispensationally Considered which ended on 10/7/12. Since that time, over the last two and half years we have done topical studies on:
 - The Things Freely Given Us of God
 - The Battlefield of the Mind
 - A Heart of Thanksgiving
 - The Judgment Seat of Christ
 - Right Division 101
 - Tactics: Developing a Game Plan for Discussing the Word Rightly Divided
- After preaching topically for such a long period of time, a decision I don't regret, it is time once again for a detailed study of one of Paul's epistles. After the Mark study, I resolved that the main focus of our time together during the main service needed to be focused on studying who were are as members of the body of Christ as set forth in Paul's epistles.
- I chose the book of I Corinthians because it chronicles the struggles of a local church to find their way in a culture that was thoroughly corrupt. There are many lessons that can be learned from I & II Corinthians that parallel our current situation in the United States.
 - Fall Bible Conference Theme: What in the World is Going On: Grace in Our Culture?
- This morning as part of our two part introduction to the book, I would like to consider some details regarding the city of Corinth as well as the authorship and date for the epistle.

The City of Corinth

- The city ancient city of Corinth was located about 40 miles west of Athens on a narrow isthmus between Peloponnesus and the mainland. It was the great commercial center of the Roman Empire with three harbors, two of which were important: Lechaem, about one and half miles to the west, and Cenchrea, about eight and one half miles to the east. (McGee, 1)
- The ruins of Corinth were lost to history for many years. A fishing village had been built over them; until a 1928 earthquake uncovered them, thereby allow the city to be excavated. (McGee, 1)
- During the Greek empire, Corinth had been the head of the Achaean League. Later, in 196 B.C., Rome declared it a free city. In 146 B.C. Corinth rebelled and was destroyed by the Roman general Mummius. The cities art and treasures were pillaged and brought back to Rome. (McGee, 1)

- Over 100 years later, in 46 B.C., Julius Ceaser rebuilt the city in all its former splendor and returned it to its former prominence. (McGee, 1)
- In Paul’s day, Corinth was a strategically located in the Roman province of Achaia between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. The cities adjoining ports (mentioned above) made it a center for trade routes passing from East to West. (*Nelson’s*, 386)
- Such positioning brought about the formation of a cosmopolitan city and culture that exemplified both extreme luxury and gross immorality. It is estimated that in Paul’s day, Corinth was inhabited by about 400,000 people. J. Vernon McGee characterized Corinth as “perpetual Vanity Fair.” The streets of the city were teaming with Greeks, Jews, Italians, sailors, merchants, adventurers, and refugees from all corners of the Romans Empire. It was in Corinth that the vices of both East and West met in a demonstration of human degradation. (McGee, 1)
- According to Arno C Gaebelein, “so great was the moral corruption that the Greek word *Corinthiazesthai*, which means “to live like a Corinthian,” had become a byword of shame and vileness among the profligate heathen of that time.” (Gaebelein, 924)

The Temple of Aphrodite

- Religiously, a magnificent temple was built in Corinth for the Greek goddess Aphrodite (Venus in Roman). Simply stated, Sex was the religion of the city. The temple of Aphrodite was teaming with a thousand “priestesses” who were in actual fact nothing more than prostitutes. (McGee, 1)
- Stam thinks that it is important to note thes religious realities of the city of Corinth for at least two reasons:
 - “So that we might sympathize with these often stumbling believers, understanding their background and the situation in which they found themselves.”
 - “So that we might recognize what an amazing miracle of grace it was that there even was a Christian assembly in this city.” (Stam, 19-20)

Center of Philosophy & Culture

- Next to Athens, Corinth was famous for its many Greek philosophers taught there. Gaebelein reports that Greek civilization in all its branches flourished in Corinth. “The fine arts were cultivated, athletic games as well as schools of philosophy and rhetoric flourished in this proud city.” (Gaebelein, 924)

Paul in Corinth

- Acts 18:1—it was into this political, economic, religious, and cultural situation that Paul entered in Acts 18 to preach the gospel of the grace of God. There was no local church in the city when Paul first arrived.
- Acts 18:11—Paul labored with these saints for a year and half (18 months).

Authorship & Date

- I Corinthians 1:1—Paul the apostle of the Gentiles claims to be the author of the book.
- I Corinthians 5:9—it is important to note that Paul had already written the Corinthians an Epistle after leaving the city but before he wrote I Corinthians.
- The impetus for writing the book is twofold: 1) Paul was informed by visitor to Ephesus of the division and immorality, 2) the Corinthians had written Paul a letter with specific questions.
 - I Corinthians—1:11, 5:1, 11:18, 15:12
 - I Corinthians 7:1
- Dates offered in study Bibles and commentaries for when I Corinthians was written vary.
 - Scofield—59 AD
 - *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts*—56 or 57 AD
- Acts 19:22—is when I believe the book was written.
- Acts 19:1—Apollos is at Corinth while Paul is in Ephesus.
 - I Corinthians 1:11-12—when Paul writes I Corinthians there are factions springing up around Paul and Apollos. Therefore, Apollos taught in Corinth after Paul left the city but before he wrote them this epistle.
- Acts 19:21-22—Paul sends Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia.
- I Corinthians 4:17—it is reasonable to assume that when Paul sent Timothy into Macedonia that he carried I Corinthians with him.
- I Corinthians 16:8-10—Paul says that he intended on tarrying in Ephesus until Pentecost.
 - Acts 20:1—Paul leaves Ephesus in the beginning of Acts 20.

- This means that I Corinthians was drafted and sent to the Corinthians during Paul's time in Ephesus in Acts 19. It makes the most sense to view this as having been done around Acts 19:21-22 so that it could have been carried by Timothy when Paul sent him into Macedonia.

Work Cited

Gaebelein, Arno C. *Gaebelein's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

McGee, J. Vernon. *Thru the Bible: I Corinthians through Revelation*

Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts. (author unknown)

Stam, C.R. *Commentary on The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*.