

THE CHURCH OF CORINTH (PART 1)

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The apostle Paul, on his second missionary journey, spread the gospel of Christ to the Roman province of Achaia, in modern day Greece. The Lord's church was established in the cities of Corinth and Cenchrea (Acts 18:1-18; Rom 16:1). Paul began that second missionary journey by confirming many of the churches he established on his first missionary journey (Acts 15:40-16:5). Paul then established churches in the Macedonian cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16:9-17:14). After preaching in Athens (Acts 17:15-34), Paul made his first trip to Corinth (Acts 18:1), where he remained for 18 months (Acts 18:11). There are many important lessons to be learned from a study of the church at Corinth in the First Century A.D.

The beginning of the Lord's work in Corinth

Paul arrived in Corinth for the first time somewhere between late A.D. 50 or late A.D. 51. There were a number of Jews in this important commercial center, and Paul first came in contact with Aquila and Priscilla who had moved to Corinth when the emperor Claudius evicted the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:1-2). Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, who were fellow tentmakers (Acts 18:3). Paul preached in the synagogue every sabbath to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 18:4). Silas and Timothy, whom Paul had left behind in Macedonia, rejoined Paul in Corinth, and Paul boldly testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:5). Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, believed along with all his family (Acts 18:8), but most of the other Jews rejected Paul's preaching and blasphemed (Acts 18:6). Paul then concentrated on converting the Gentiles and shifted the base of his operation from the synagogue to the house of Justus, next to the synagogue (Acts 18:6-7). As a result of Paul's preaching, "*many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized*" (Acts 18:8). Paul personally baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 1:14-16). The families of Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15) and Epaeetus (Rom 16:5) are referred to as "*firstfruits of Achaia*." The household of Stephanas was also "addicted to the ministry of the saints" in Corinth (1 Cor 16:15). The household of Chloe was another family that was part of the church at Corinth from early on (1 Cor 1:11). Evidently, Paul had not originally intended to remain in Corinth for long, but the Lord appeared to him in a vision one night and encouraged him not to fear or keep silent, but to speak because he would be protected from harm (Acts 18:9-10). The Lord said he had "*much people in this city*" (Acts 18:10). Thus, Paul taught God's word in Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:11). During his time in Corinth, Paul was inspired of God to write 1 and 2 Thessalonians (1 Thes 1:1,7-8; 2:17-3:8; 2 Thes 1:1). Paul laid his hands on all the Corinthian brethren and gave them miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:4-7; 9:2; 12:1-11; 14:26; 2 Cor 1:15 + 13:1; 2 Cor 12:12). The opposition of the Jews in Corinth continued against Paul, and he suffered "affliction and distress" (1 Thes 3:7). They eventually brought Paul before

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Gallio, the Roman deputy of Achaia, but Gallio drove the Jews from the judgment seat, and Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, was beaten there (Acts 18:12-17). This was an answer to Paul's prayer that *"the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified,"* and *"that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for all men have not faith"* (2 Thes 3:1-2). Paul departed Corinth and took Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus and left them there as he returned to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Antioch, completing his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-22).

Development of problems in the church at Corinth

Paul's third missionary journey must have begun around A.D. 53-54 as he went through Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23). During this time, Aquila and Priscilla converted Apollos in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26), and then sent him to Corinth (Acts 18:27). Apollos helped the Corinthian brethren "much" (Acts 18:27), and "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:28). Apollos "watered" what Paul had "planted" (1 Cor 3:6). While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus (Acts 19:1-20:1) and spent a total of three years there (Acts 20:31). Apollos evidently joined Paul in Ephesus during that time, and Paul "greatly desired" to send him back to Corinth but Apollos was determined to go later (1 Cor 16:12). Paul made a second trip to Corinth, almost certainly some time during the three years he was in Ephesus (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1). This was probably a brief visit since he did not give them the "second benefit" of miraculous gifts at that time, but waited until his third visit to do that (2 Cor 1:15). Paul was inspired by God to write 1 Corinthians near the end of his time in Ephesus, around A.D. 54-56 (1 Cor 16:8,19). This letter reveals several problems this still-young congregation was experiencing. There were divisions among them, particularly factions identifying with either Paul or Apollos (1 Cor 1:10-13; 3:1-7,21-23; 4:6-7). Some were even anti-Paul, to the point of disputing the authenticity of his apostleship (1 Cor 9). They were also tolerating and even boasting about a fornicator in the church (1 Cor 5). Brethren in Corinth were taking other brethren to court before unbelievers (1 Cor 6:1-11). Some brethren were causing others to stumble by eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8,10). Some had corrupted the Lord's Supper into an occasion for drunkenness and gluttony (1 Cor 11:17-34). They also had false teachers among them who were gainsaying the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12-58). At least some of these problems were reported to Paul by the household of Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), and likely by some others as well (1 Cor 5:1). The church of Corinth did not have elders at this time (1 Cor 5:3-5), and we do not know when elders were finally appointed. But when these serious problems arose within the church, the apostle Paul wrote to the congregation by the inspiration of God, and planned a third visit to them, to deal with these matters.