

Corinth

Names (also known as)

Ephyra (during the Greek period), which meant “lookout” or “guard”.

Etymology

Κόρινθος - Korinthos – Thayer Definition: Corinth = “satiated”.

Location/Description

Corinth was an ancient and celebrated city of Greece, on the Isthmus of Corinth in Achaia, and about 40 miles (65 kms) west of Athens. Because of its geographical position, it formed the most direct communication between the Ionian (Adriatic) and Aegean seas. One remarkable feature was the Acrocorinthus, a vast citadel of rock, which rises abruptly to the height of 2,000 feet (600 metres) above sea level, the summit of which is so extensive that it once contained a whole town.



The strategic situation of Corinth, and the position of its eastern and western harbors, Cenchreae and Lechaem, were the real drivers of its history. Corinth was a place of great cerebral activity, as well as of commercial and manufacturing enterprise. Its wealth was so celebrated as to be proverbial; so were the vice and profligacy of its inhabitants. The worship of Venus there was attended with shameful licentiousness (see Smith’s Bible Dictionary).

Famous characters

Paul, Timothy, Titus and Apollos; Crispus, Erastus, Quartus and Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14; Acts 18:8; Rom. 16:23); Justus (Acts 18:7); Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:14,16).

Scriptural references

New Testament

Corinth was visited by Paul (Acts 18:1-18; 2 Cor.12:14; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 16:5-7; 2 Cor. 1:16); by Apollos (Acts 19:1); by Titus (2 Cor. 8:16-17; 2 Cor. 12:18); by Erastus (2 Tim. 4:20); and by Quartus (Rom.16:23).

The Apostle Paul wrote two preserved letters to the ecclesia at Corinth (1st and 2nd epistles to the Corinthians) and hints at possibly two other letters in them.



Brief history

The Isthmus of Corinth connects mainland Greece in the north to the Peloponnese Peninsula in the south. Situated on a plateau overlooking the Isthmus of Corinth, the city of Corinth was one of the most strategically located centres of the ancient world. The unique topography made for a place that was easily defended from would-be intruders. Corinth was to become the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia. Having held such an advantageous piece of ground, it did have an important former life in the Grecian empire. However, in 146 BC Corinth was breached and razed by Lucius Mummius, the Roman consul at that time. It seems that the area’s power was growing too great for the tastes of the Roman Empire, so it had to be stopped. Since Mummius was actually able to take the city, he did a very thorough job of wiping it clean. The male inhabitants were killed and the women and children were sold into slavery. The area lay desolate until Julius Caesar issued a decree to rebuild it in 44 or 46 BC. The ruins that have been found in the area are all Roman, nothing of the Greek era remains. During this earlier period, the city

was named Ephyra, which meant “lookout” or “guard”. According to Hellenic myth, the city was founded by Corinthos, a descendant of the god Helios (the Sun). However, other myths suggest that it was founded by the goddess Ephyra, a daughter of the Titan Oceanus, thus the ancient name of the city (also Ephyra). Since Julius Caesar decreed that it should be rebuilt, he added his own touch to the name – Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis; meaning, “Corinth, the praise of Julius”. The new colonists were freedmen from Italy and in a short time, Greeks, and many Jews moved into the city. The revived metropolis became prosperous, mainly because of its position between two ports on either side of the isthmus. It controlled the ports of Lechaion on the Gulf of Corinth (on the Western side, with easy access to Italy) and Cenchreae on the Saronic Gulf (on the Eastern side with easy access to Asia).

For centuries, sailors had to travel an extra 185 nautical miles between the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf. The reason for this extra distance was a thin strip of land only about 4 miles (6.5 kms) across. Whether it was to save time or to avoid the dangerous passage around Cape Malea at the southern tip of the Peloponnesus, the idea of a canal between the two gulfs had appealed to various rulers throughout the centuries. The ancient Corinthians attempted to cut a canal through the natural barrier, but when that proved insurmountable for the “technology” of the day (i.e. crude picks and shovels), instead, the ruler Periander (during Greek times) built an alternative – the “Diolkos” – a limestone path on which a wheeled vehicle could be pulled. The Greeks lifted ships onto the vehicle and pulled them across the path. Ships that were too big to take advantage of the Diolkos instead had the cargo unloaded and transported across the land. The cargo was then reloaded on another ship waiting on the other side.

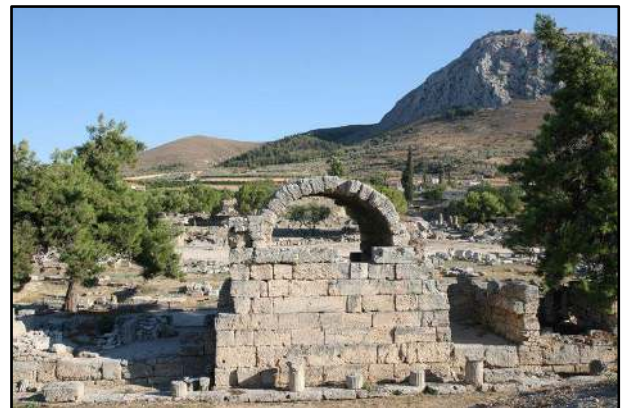


Corinthian Canal

By 67 AD, Emperor Nero made another attempt to dig a canal through the rock, but the unfinished project was abandoned after his suicide. It was not until relatively modern times, in 1893, that a canal was finally opened, as shown in the photograph above.

During this new Roman period, the city became a place of great wealth and indulgence. The saying to “Corinthianise”, i.e. “to live as a Corinthian,” came into existence at this time, and it meant to live in luxury and immorality. With two busy port cities and their cosmopolitan visitors, there was the potential for immoral and licentious behavior. Corinth, embraced this potential without reservation. Paul itemises the various sins of the people of Corinth in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Corinth offered the full range of vices to her visitors, as well as to the locals. The temple of Aphrodite was located on a mountain behind the city called the Acrocorinth and it was here that the ‘goddess of love’ was worshiped. There were more than a thousand temple priestesses that offered themselves to would-be worshipers of Aphrodite. Corinth also had a large marketplace (agora), many temples to various gods and goddesses, fountains (including the famous Peirene), theatres, and the “bema”, a large raised platform in front of the residence of the proconsul.



Many of these ruins have been uncovered in excavations done by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The bema seat area has been located (Acts 18:12) where Paul was taken by the mob to appear before Gallio.

Scriptural importance

Corinth is a great example of the truth being established in the most unlikely places. Paul’s letters to the Corinthian Ecclesia contain

powerful spiritual advice for us to correct and maintain our ecclesias during a time of extreme worldly pressures.

Corinth is mentioned many times in the New Testament, largely in connection with Paul's mission there. The apostle Paul first visited the city in AD 49 or 50, when Gallio, the brother of Seneca, was proconsul of Achaia. Paul resided there for eighteen months (see Acts 18:1–18). Here he first became acquainted with Priscilla and Aquila with whom he later travelled. They worked here together as tentmakers, and regularly attended the synagogue. In AD 51-52, Gallio presided over the trial of the Apostle Paul in Corinth. This event provides a secure date for the book of the Acts of the Apostles within the Bible.

Silas and Timothy re-joined Paul here, having last seen him in Berea (Acts 18:6 suggests that Jewish refusal to accept his preaching here led Paul to resolve no longer to speak in the synagogues where he travelled – “From now on I will go to the Gentiles”). However, on his arrival in Ephesus (Acts 18:19), the narrative records that Paul went to the synagogue to preach.

Paul wrote at least two epistles to the ecclesia in Corinth, the first epistle from Ephesus and the second from Macedonia.

The ecclesia in Corinth consisted principally of non-Jews (1 Cor. 12:2). Paul had no intention at first of making the city a base of operations (Acts 18:1; Acts 16:9-10); for he wished to return to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:17-18). His plans were changed by a revelation (Acts 18:9-10). The Lord commanded him to speak boldly, and he did so, remaining in the city eighteen months. Finding strong opposition in the synagogue he left the Jews and went to preach to Gentiles (Acts 18:6). Nevertheless, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue and his household became believers and baptisms were numerous (Acts 18:8); but no Corinthians were baptized by Paul himself except Crispus, Gaius and some of the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:14,16), “the firstfruits of Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15). One of these, Gaius, was Paul's host the next time he visited the city (Rom. 16:23). Silas and Timothy, who had been left at Berea, came to Corinth about 45 days after Paul's arrival. It was at this time that Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:6). During Gallio's administration the Jews accused Paul of creating riot, but the

proconsul refused to allow the case to be brought to trial. This decision must have been looked upon with favor by a large majority of the Corinthians, who had a great dislike for the Jews (Acts 18:17). Paul became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:18,26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19), and later they accompanied him to Ephesus. Within a few years following Paul's first visit to Corinth the Ecclesia increased so rapidly that they became quite a large congregation.



However, they became known for a variety of failings, including, frequent schism (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4; 11:18-19); toleration of immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-13); going to the law against their brethren (1 Cor. 6:1); disrespect for the memorial services (1 Cor. 11:20-22); misuse of the Spirit gifts in their assemblies (1 Cor. 12 and 14); usurpation by women of the roles of their male brethren (1 Cor. 11:2-7; 14:34-35); unbelief by some in the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12); tardiness in the collection of money for the fund Paul was collecting for poor believers in Judea (2 Cor. 8:1-11; 9:3-5); and support for Paul's Judaistic enemies in Corinth who sought to undermine him and his work (2 Cor. 11:1-4,12-15). None of these things should be named among a community of believers.

Sources:

bibleatlas.org

Smith's Bible Dictionary

(Compilers – Ron & Judy Leadbetter)