

"CORINTH"
(Acts 18:1-17)
(Ben Witherington)

It is fair to say that from an evangelistic or missionary point of view, the two most important cities Paul visited were Corinth and Ephesus; and not coincidentally, they were the cities that, according to Acts, Paul spent more time in than any others. The Corinth that Paul and other Christians encountered in the middle of the first century was a Roman colony city, the most prosperous in Greece and well on the way to being the largest city in Greece, if it was not already so. The Romans had destroyed the classical city in 146 B.C., and shortly before his death in 44 B.C., Julius Caesar had ordered the city to be rebuilt on a Roman plan so that various retired Roman soldiers could be settled there, forming a Roman colony. The architecture, law, and official language (Latin) all reflect the thoroughly Roman character of the city in Paul's day.

Corinth's prosperity in large measure was owed to its two ports, one facing east and one facing west, with only a narrow isthmus (two miles wide) separating the two. In fact, the normal operating procedure was to drag boats, if small, from one side of the isthmus to the other on sledges. Failing that, larger boats usually would offload their cargo on one side of the isthmus and then reload it on another boat on the other side. This practice sought to avoid the trip around the southern cape of Greece, which could be quite treacherous. Corinth then had all the benefits, but also all of the drawbacks, of a major port city. Many people were coming and going, and many who had traveled a long way were looking for some rest, recreation, and entertainment. In addition to being the jumping-off point for travelers going either east or west in the Mediterranean, Corinth was the link between northern and southern Greece for those traveling overland.

To this we may add another reason for Corinth's prosperity. It was the major sponsor for the nearby Isthmian games, a biannual set of games only slightly less famous than the Olympic games. Even an emperor like Nero came to compete in these games. This, of course, created a situation in which many people were looking for temporary shelter, something Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila could help provide through making tents.

Religiously, the city was pluralistic, hosting famous older temples to Apollo (in the city center) and to Aphrodite (on top of the Acrocorinth, the mountain that towered over the city). In addition to this was a well-known healing shrine of the god Asclepius, where people came to get well in part by soaking in the medicinal spring water. We also must note the overlay of Roman culture, which included a temple for the cult of the emperor. In this same city was a well-established Jewish colony, many of whose ancestors originally had been brought to the city as slaves to help rebuild it.

Here, Paul could stay and the world would come to him. He would have occasion to meet people of many sorts of social statuses and ethnic extractions. With so many people transient or new, Corinth was the perfect place to make converts. In short, this city was an ideal locale for an evangelistic religion to imbed itself into the Greco-Roman culture.

Ancient Corinth with Acrocorinth behind



The Temple of Apollo

