

Introduction to the Corinthian Correspondence

1- Corinth

1.1 Location

On the Peloponnesian peninsula, the town of Corinth was situated on a broad plain below a towering peak, called the Acrocorinth [1886 feet high]. On top of the **Acrocorinth** was a fortress, which the steep ascent made secure. Corinth's wealth and commerce was connected to two harbour cities close by.

Two miles to the North, on the Corinthian Gulf, was the harbour city of **Lechaenum**. It docked ships from the West, from Italy, Spain and North Africa. Seven miles to the East, on the Saronic Gulf was the port city of **Cenchrae** where the ships from the Eastern ports were serviced; from Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt and Cyrene. Captains of these ships moored at either of these ports, because the extra 200 miles to go round was not necessary and anyway, the southern cape of the peninsula, Malea, was prone to strong storms.

Such a situation obviously lent itself to the construction of a canal across the isthmus at its narrowest point [4.5 miles]. And all through its history, from 600 BC to the present day, many leaders involved in the Corinthian history attempted it. It was finally accomplished by French engineers in 1881-1893.

1.2 History of Corinth

Mentioned in the Iliad by Homer, Corinth was around in the 2nd millennium before Christ. It was a significant city, affecting the rest of Greece, attaining its peak influence in the 7th Century BC due to its commercial strength. This wealth was considerably helped by Periander who installed a stone road link across the isthmus, and by using dollies with wheels transported the smaller ships coming from East and West across the isthmus.

During the Peloponnesian War [431- 404 BC] between Athens and Sparta, both Athens and Corinth were so weakened by the effort of resisting Sparta that Philip II of Macedon [Alexander the Great's father] conquered Corinth in 338 BC. Corinth became a leading city again after Alexander's death in 323 BC.

In 196 BC, the Romans conquered Greece, granting Corinth the leadership of a league of cities in the province of **Achaia**. Fifty years later [146 BC] Corinth revolted, and was totally destroyed by Lucius Mummius. From 146-46 BC it lay in ruins. In 44BC Julius Caesar restored Corinth, rebuilding also the two harbours at Lechaenum and Cenchrae. In this way it became a Roman colony honouring Julius Caesar as a prosperous trading city drawing people from all over the world.

1.3 People

As a Roman colony, Corinth had a government modelled on Rome's. The official language was Latin although Greek remained the language of the common people. We are not surprised to find Paul listing the Latin names of the people who live in Corinth; such as Tertius, Gaius, Quartus, [Romans 16.22-23] along with the Jewish couple Aquilla and Priscilla, Titius Justus, Crispus, the ruler of the Jewish synagogue and Fortunatus [Acts 18.2, 7.1, 1 Cor.1.14, 16.17].

There were Roman officials, military and civil, including the proconsul Gallio [Acts 18.12], sent there by Claudius and operative from July AD51 – June AD 52. There were also ex-soldiers, ex-slaves [freedmen] from Rome. There were Jews, Greeks all working and living at Corinth.

1.4 The Religious life

Corinth had a dozen or more temples. Foremost in these was that dedicated to the goddess of love Aphrodite. Around this temple much immorality was associated. The Corinthians also worshipped Asclepius, Apollo and Poseidon. There were altars and temples also for the Greek deities Athena, Hera and Hermes. Shrines were also erected for the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis. Against this religious background, and the commercial bustle of a seafaring town's welcome to sailors from all over the Mediterranean, there was much sexual immorality in Corinth. The Greeks even had a term "corinthesthai", which meant to live a Corinthian-type lifestyle of immorality and carousing.

There were also Jewish folks present in Corinth. Jews had been granted by the Emperors Julius Caesar [60-44 BC] and also Tiberius [14BC-37AD] the freedom to practise their religion on the understanding that they refrained from acts of rebellion against the government. Claudius [41 -54 AD] had continued this policy.

1.5 The Isthmian Games

Every two years, in the Spring these games were conducted. Second only to the Olympic Games, they included chariot racing, foot racing, boxing and wrestling. Paul must have witnessed the games in the Spring of AD 51.

He writes of them by way of illustration [1 Corinthians 9.24-27].

2. Chronology – external sources

2.1 Gallio as Proconsul

Gallio was the son of M. Annaeus Seneca, a Roman rhetorician. His brother was Seneca the Roman philosopher and he was the uncle of Lucan the poet. He was born at Cordova and came to Rome with his father in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius [14BC-37AD]. Originally called M. Annaeus Novatus he was adopted and took the name L. Junius Gallio. Probably through the influence of Seneca, he became proconsul of Achaia under Claudius.

“Proconsul” [anthyptos] was a title that had come into use as the Empire was organised under the Emperor Augustus [31-14 BC]. Governors of provinces, if they did not require a standing army, were administered by the Senate; their executive administrator had the title “proconsul”. So this title indicates that Achaia was a senatorial province, and illustrates Luke’s accuracy. Achaia was governed by the Emperor under Tiberius and Caligula. Claudius transferred the province to the Senate in AD 44. The term limit for a proconsul was one year, operative from the 1st July to the 30th June.

Gallio, according to an inscription at Delphi, served as proconsul of Achaia in the twelfth year of Claudius’ reign and the 26th time that he was proclaimed Emperor. Since Claudius commenced his first administrative year on January 25, AD 41 he began his 12th year on 25th January AD52. By that time Gallio would have served seven months of his proconsulship, which we date from the 1st July to the 30th June AD 52-53. Gallio was to eventually lose his life under the reign of Nero [AD 54-68].

Luke makes clear that Paul spent 18 months in Corinth during his first visit there [Acts 18.11] And that after his appearance before Gallio’s court he stayed for many days and then departed to Ephesus.

This date of Gallio’s proconsulship is a reliable one. So we can be sure that Paul founded the church at Corinth in the years AD 50-52.

2.2 King Aretas IV

In the section 2 Corinthians 11.30-33, Paul makes mention of his escape from Damascus. He states that the King Aretas had the town under guard to capture him. Aretas IV ruled as the king of the Nabateans from BC9 – AD 39 or 40. After the death of the Emperor Tiberias on 16th march AD 37, his successor, Gaius Caligula, granted Aretas control of Damascus as a client king. Paul’s escape from that city occurred after Aretas had brought his influence to bear in AD 37 and before Aretas’ death two years later.

2.3 Paul’s Chronology

	Paul converted AD35
	Aretas IV in control of Damascus, courtesy of Caligula AD37-38
37-38	Paul escapes from Damascus AD 37 or 38 Arrives in Jerusalem [15 days] Taken to Caesarea, [put on a ship] Tarsus [Acts 9.29-30] Paul founded churches in Silicia and Syria [Acts 15.41, Gal 1.21] To Antioch under Barnabas’ invitation [for 1 year] Acts 11.25-26
44 or 45	Paul and Barnabas travel to Judea – relief from famine
46-48	FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch
49	Attends Jerusalem Council SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY
	Gallio in Corinth as proconsul of Archaia 1 st July AD 51- June 52
50-52	Paul founds the Corinthian church
Spring 52	Paul departs Corinth, with Aquilla and Priscilla for Ephesus Caesarea, Jerusalem Antioch [Acts 18-18-22] Journeys through Asia Minor
Autumn 52	Arrives at Ephesus – [stays 3 years] Sends letter to Corinthians not to associate with immoral people
55	Writes 1 CORINTHIANS Paid them a “sorrowful visit” and sent a “sorrowful letter” Left Ephesus, travelled through Macedonia as far as Illyricum
56	Writes 2 CORINTHIANS
Winter 57	Spent in Corinth, composes ROMANS Journey through Macedonia, Caesarea,

Pentecost 57	Arrives Jerusalem [Acts 20.16, 21.17] Arrested and lodged at Caesarea under Governor Felix [last two years of his administration] then handed over to Porcius Festus Felix Procurator of Judea. According to Eusebius and Jerome, Felix became Procurator in the 11 th year of Claudius [51] and Festus in the 2 nd Year of Nero [60 or 61]. This would suggest that Felix reigned from 52-59. With Agrippa II in the 10 th year of his reign Festus listened to Paul. Agrippa began his rule in the March AD 50, which would put him hearing Paul in the summer of 59.
Summer 59	Paul heard before Agrippa and Festus

3. Paul's founding visit in Corinth - Acts 18-1-22

Paul spent at least half of his second missionary journey at Corinth, staying there for 18 months. Acts 18.1-17 records his founding visit. After leaving Athens, the fifty mile walk would have taken about two days. Paul met up with some fellow Jewish Christian tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla. They later worked with him in Ephesus as well as Corinth. The house of Stephanus were the first converts of Paul's in Corinth [1 Corinthians 16.5]. Supporting himself and living with his fellow artisans, Paul was probably restricted to Sabbath-preaching. He began in the synagogue, preaching to Jews and God fearers.

When Timothy arrived from Thessalonica, and Silas from elsewhere in Macedonia, Paul could give himself more to the ministry. The irritation of the Jews compelled Paul to turn to the Gentiles - as was his pattern in these circumstances. Moving next door to the synagogue, in the house of Titius Justus, a godfearer, Paul turned to the Gentile community. If not many of the Corinthians were of noble birth [1 Corinthians 1.26], the three early converts he mentions in 1 Corinthians, Gaius, Crispus and Stephanus were all people of means, owning their own homes. Most significant was Erastus, who was the treasurer of the city; a significant post [Romans 16.23].

Paul spent more than 18 months in Corinth,. Sometime into this ministry Paul was accused by the Jews before Gallio of persuading people to worship God in ways that were contrary to the law. Gallio dismissed the charge and all the people turned on Sosthenes and beat him.

4. The Corinthian Letters – their relation to the series of events

The letters we call 1 and 2 Corinthians contain evidence within them, [internal evidence] that suggests that they are letters that were part of an on-going correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church. The most likely arrangement of the sequence of the activities and letters is as follows:

1. Paul had written a letter, which he calls the “**previous letter**” [1 Corinthians 5.9], advising the Corinthians not to associate with immoral persons. It appears they had misunderstood him. Paul had meant not to associate with fellow Christians who were immoral; they had taken it to mean heathen people at large [1 Corinthians 5.10-11].

2. As he heard of their misunderstanding, Paul had received reports from the members of Chloe's family [1 Corinthians 1.11] concerning disorders in the Corinthians church. This had raised questions of unity, and the four divisions that were emerging in Corinthian church.

3. Perhaps, at the same time as he heard from Chloe's people, there was also a letter, brought by a delegation from the church in Corinth made up of Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus [1 Corinthians 16.17]. They had a list of questions Corinth was asking Paul. This letter raised questions about:

- [a] marriage [1 Corinthians 7.1]
- [b] virgins [1 Corinthians 7.25]
- [c] food sacrificed to idols [1 Corinthians 8]
- [d] spiritual gifts [1 Corinthians 12.1]
- [e] the collection for the saints in Jerusalem [1 Corinthians 16.1]
- [f] Apollos [1 Corinthians 16.12].

4. As a result, Paul wrote **1 Corinthians** in the Spring of AD 55.

[a] In the letter [1 Corinthians 16.5-9], Paul indicated that he planned to visit Corinth soon, after he had first been in Macedonia. 1 Corinthians was probably written about Easter, and Paul wanted to delay his leaving Ephesus until Pentecost; this would allow him to have some real time with them, spending the winter in Corinth.

[b] He also indicated that Timothy, as his personal representative, would probably soon come to Corinth [1 Corinthians 4.17 and 16.10].

[c] Timothy, who was with Paul, was not sent with this letter [1 Corinthians]. Apparently, he and Erastus had gone to Macedonia [Acts 19.22]. He may never have reached Corinth, because he is not mentioned

in the body of 2 Corinthians; however, he is linked with Paul in the salutation.

6. Perhaps Timothy did make the round trip and returned to Paul at Ephesus with bad news of how things stood in Corinth. Paul paid the Corinthians an unscheduled visit. It was a “*painful visit*” and Paul probably had to withdraw from it in haste.

[a] The visit is not mentioned in the Acts, but it is implied in 2 Corinthians 2.1; 13.2 and 2 Corinthians also speaks of him coming a “third time” [2 Corinthians 12.14]; which implies he made a second visit.

[b] According to 2 Corinthians 2.1-11, Paul was affronted by an individual on this painful visit. [Was it the incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5.1-5, or the group Paul speaks against in 2 Corinthians 10-13?]. In this affront Paul was not defended by the locals. It was their failure to support him at the time that seemed to have hurt him most [2 Corinthians 7.9-12].

7. Paul, on returning - possibly directly by sea - to Ephesus, attempted to rectify the situation. He had sent a letter “out of much affliction and anguish of heart” [2 Corinthians 2.4]. This letter, in the Summer of AD 55, is known as the “**sorrowful letter**”. It was probably carried by Titus, who would do his best to smooth out the situation. The letter, which would spare the Corinthians another painful visit [2 Corinthians 2.1], would give them opportunity to repent.

8. Paul, having left Ephesus [Acts 20.1] for Troas, delayed there, where he found an ‘open door’ [2 Corinthians 2.12] while awaiting the arrival of Titus with news of how the Corinthians had taken the “sorrowful letter”. Failing to meet Titus in Troas, Paul pressed on to Macedonia, where, in some Christian community, Titus arrived with very good news of the situation in Corinth.

9. Relieved at the success of the severe letter and Titus’ mission, Paul writes **2 Corinthians**, expressing his relief [2 Corinthians 7].

What is the interval separating 1 and 2 Corinthians? The expression ἀπὸ πέρυσι = “a year ago” in 2 Corinthians 8.10 and 9.2 appears to be the time when the collection was commenced in Corinth, organised by Titus [2 Corinthians 8.6]. Does this mean a year has elapsed between the two letters? At the least, it must mean that a ‘new year’ has commenced since the collection was begun.

10. Should we now think of Paul free to evangelise new districts – particularly journeying westward to the Adriatic seaboard - Illyricum - [Romans 15.19]?

11. Later, journeying south, Paul has spent the winter at Corinth for three months [Acts 20.2-3a], during which he composed the letter to the **Romans**. Having enjoyed the hospitality of Gaius for three months [Romans 16.23], Paul returned by way of Macedonia to Jerusalem with the collection of money for the poorer brethren there.

5. Recipients of the letters in Corinth

1 Jews and god fearers

The way Paul uses the OT in this letter means that he obviously thinks that his readers have some knowledge of the Old Testament. About a third of his quotations come from the prophet Isaiah, and the rest from Moses. Many of the God fearers would also have some knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. They had mainly attached themselves to the Jews because they were turned off by the unclean and perverted environment of pagan religious expressions around them.

4.2 Converts

Many of the converts to Christ would have been in Corinth less than 3 years old in the faith. In this respect, their behaviour is often pagan in style, full of strife, envy, immorality, and licentious. They needed nurture in the Christian faith – their revelation was not always mature.

4.3 Romans

Settled by Romans and pervaded by Roman culture and life, there were slaves and freedmen in the Corinthian church. So he writes of issues of law courts, of head coverings [reversing the perception for men and women under Roman practice].

4.4 Leaders

The Corinthian church had some leading figures within it. Apart from Peter and Paul and his helpers in the apostolic task, Apollos, Timothy, Silas and Titus, there were local leaders as well. The former rulers of the synagogue, Crispus and Sosthenes were still with them, as well as Stephanus and his two friends Fortunatus and Achaicus.

Paul doesn’t use the word elders for any of these folks, whereas in other letters to other churches he does [Acts 14.3, Philippians 1.1.]. This suggests that the Corinthian church is in an early stage of the leadership positions.

4.5 Opponents

We have already seen that Paul was pursued down the Macedonian coast by the Jews from Philippi and also Berea. Many people opposed his teaching and not all for the same reasons. The Judaizers had their own axe to grind. But in Corinth there appear to be individuals who were championed.

He had to oppose those who denied the resurrection of the Christian dead; some were influenced by Greek philosophy and rhetoric, being moved by eloquent speech and presentation.

5. Outline of 1 Corinthians

1.1-9	1. Introduction	
1.10-6.20	2. Response to reported Problems	
	2.1 Divisions in the Church	1.10- 4.21
	2.2 Immorality and Lawsuits	5.1 – 6.20
7.1 – 16.4	3. Response to Corinthian Concerns	
	3.1 Marriage Problems	7.1-40
	3.2 Food Offered to Idols	8.1-13
	3.3 Apostles and Rights	9.1-27
	3.4 Warnings and Freedom	10.1-11.1
	3.5 Worship	11.2 – 14.40
	3.6 The Resurrection	15.1-58
	3.7 Collection for God's people	16.1-4
16.5 –24	4. Conclusion	
	4.1 Paul's requests	16.5-18
	4.2 Exhortations and Greetings	16.13-24

6. 2 Corinthians

This letter, written after the good news which Titus brought, reflects Paul's relief and also concentrates on the vindication of his ministry. A ministry based upon bearing the glory of Christ in a human vessel of weakness. His suffering and lack of power had in fact whown forth the power of God. This is not a new idea for Paul, he had shown in 1 Corinthians 1.18-2.5 that the power and wisdom of God are revealed in human weakness and the foolishness of the cross. He had now seen this truth played out in his dealings with the Corinthian church, who although the had judged him by worldly standards he had nevertheless stayed true to the word of the cross.

2 Corinthians is about power in weakness, strength through suffering, life through death and about triumph through seeming defeat. It is about the embodiment in a man's life of the message of the cross he preached.

7. Outline of 2 Corinthians

1.1-2	1. The apostolic greeting	
1.3-11	2. The comfort of God	
	How it is useful for others	1.3-7
	The trouble in Asia	1.8-11
1.12-7.16	3. Paul's defence of his integrity and ministry	
	[a] His integrity	1.12-2.11
	Paul's sincerity	1.12-14
	He is not fickle	1.15-22
	The reason for his change of plan	1.23-2.4
	The treatment of the offender	2.5-11
	[b] His ministry	2.12-6.10
	Recent journey to Macedonia	2.12-13
	Thanks for a share in Christ's triumph	2.14-17
	Letters testimonial	3.1-3
	The Old and New economies of the covenant	3.4-18
	The open nature of the apostolic ministry	4.1-6
	The message and the messenger	4.7-15
	Outer decline & inner renewal	4.16-18
	The Christian hope	5.1-10

	The constraining love of Christ 5.11-15
	The new creation 5.16-17
	The ministry of reconciliation 5.18-21
	Paul as a herald of salvation 6.1-10
6.11-7.3	4. An appeal for large-heartedness and consistency
7.4-16	5. Paul's comfort at the news Titus brought
8.1-9.15	6. The Collection for the poor Christians of Judea
	The example of the Macedonians 8.1-7
	The foremost motive for Christian giving 8.8-15
	The delegates of the Macedonian churches 8.16-9.5
	Blessings that await the generous 9.6-15
10.1-13.10	7. Paul's Apostolic Authority
	The weapons of his warfare 10.1-6
	His consistency 10.7-11
	His sphere of service 10.12-18
	His claims on the Corinthian's loyalty 11.1-6
	His pride in being self-sufficient 11.7-12
	The real nature of Paul's opponents 11.13-15
	Paul's credentials and experiences 11.16-33
	His vision and thorn in the flesh 12.1-10
	His previous behaviour on visits to Corinth 12.11-13
	And on his proposed visit 12.14-21
	His determination to restore discipline at Corinth 13.1-10
13.11-14	8. Conclusion: Benediction