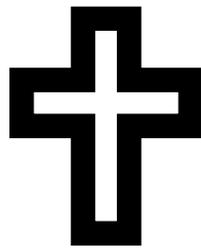# Twelve Lessons

on

I Corinthians
Volume I
(Chapters 1-9)

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CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION TO I CORINTHIANS – LESSON 1

Introduction: This lesson will explain the historical, religious, and moral background of the city of Corinth, and help to establish the need of the epistle to the Corinthian Church.

Lesson Goals:
1. Learn the geographical location of Corinth which helped in the city's development as the center of finance and extravagance in the Greek culture.
2. Review the history of Greece and the influence Caesar Augustus had in its rise to prominence.
3. Show how Corinth's prosperity led to idolatry and immorality.
4. Give an overview of the church of Corinth to whom this epistle was written.

Definitions of Important Terms/Phrases:
1. Isthmus – passage between body parts: a narrow connection or passage between parts of the body
2. Doilkos – The Diolkos from the Greek dia (across) and holkos (portage), was a paved trackway in Ancient Greece which enabled boats to be moved overland across the Isthmus of Corinth. The short cut allowed ancient vessels to avoid the dangerous circumnavigation of the Peloponnese peninsula.
3. Aristocracy – people of highest social class: people of noble families or the highest social class

I. THE CITY OF CORINTH
   A. The Location of Corinth
1. The city of Corinth was located in southern part of Greece. It stood on the small isthmus connecting northern Greece with the Peloponnese Region. This small four to six mile wide tract of land is called the Pelopponesian peninsula.
2. The location of Corinth guaranteed its wealth. All traffic from Athens and Northern Greece to Sparta and the Pelopponese had to pass through the city.
3. Corinth was also considered the hub of the world as its seaport location allowed for extensive commerce.
4. Although a canal across the isthmus would have been convenient, Periander (625-583 BC) built a diolkos or a "place for dragging" ships on platforms with wheels. He chose this method of joining the two gulfs because it would increase the revenue received from transportation taxes. Ships too large for the crossing unloaded their cargo to be transported by hired porters.
5. Although previous Greek kings and Roman emperors had entertained thoughts of digging a canal across the narrow land mass, Nero was the first to actually order the work. Later he stopped the work due to three factors. (Kistemaker, Simon J., *I Corinthians*, pg. 3)
   a. Financial deficiencies
   b. The belief that the digging of a canal would be an act of sacrilege
   c. A theory that the water levels on the two sides of the isthmus differed
6. The Roman general Vespasian sent more than 6,000 Jews to finish the canal in 67 AD, but they did not complete the task. (Josephus, *Wars*, 3.10.10)
7. The canal was completed by French engineers between 1881-93. (Kistemaker, pg. 4)
   B. The History of Corinth – Encarta Encyclopedia 99
1. Because Homer mentioned a city called Corinth, many people believe the city was in existence around 2,000 BC. We know it existed between 625-583 due to the diolkos of Periander.
2. The Peloponnesian War occurred between Athens and Sparta in 432-404 BC. At this time, Corinth allied itself to Athens. Corinth's involvement in the Peloponnesian War left it financially and militarily weak.
3. Philip II of Macedon conquered the city in 338 BC. Due to the interests of Alexander the Great, Philip's son, the city again became a center of commerce and recreation.
4. Greece was conquered by the Romans in 196 BC. 50 years later Corinth rebelled against the Roman Empire and the Roman general, Lucius Mummius, overtook Corinth and destroyed the city.
5. Julius Ceasar understood the economic importance of Corinth to the Roman Empire and in 46 BC he began to restore the city to its previous state. Corinth became a Roman colony known as *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis* meaning that the colony was built to honour Julius Ceasar. It also became the capital city of the Roman province of Achaea.
6. Under Ceasar Agustus, the city became the "glory of Greece".

C. The Characteristics of Corinth

    1. The Citizens – The city was a literal melting pot of different nationalities. Merchants from all over the civilized world traveled to Corinth and there was a constant influx of people. The city consisted of merchants, philosophers, magicians, teachers, artists, and laborers. Although the population was largely Greek, there were also many Latins, Greeks, and Jews. This fact is seen in the names mentioned in the epistle.

        a. Latin names – Gaius, Quartus, Fortunatus, Crispus, Achaicus, and Tertius

        b. Jewish names – Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus, and Titius Justus

        c. Greek names – Erastus, Phoebe, and Sosthenes

    2. The Paganism – Temples and shrines were built in Corinth for the following pagan deities:

        a. Aphrodite – The goddess of sex, love, and beauty, the Roman version of Aphrodite is Venus

        b. Asclepius – The god of medicine, son of Apollo, ripped from the womb of his unfaithful mother, sent to the centaur to be raised, killed by Zeus with a thunderbolt for raising the dead to life

        c. Apollo – The god of prophecy, son of Zeus, protector of young men, credited as being the first winner of the Olympian Games, entertained other gods with his lyre, kidnapped and raped Creusa, the young Athenian princess, and left her alone to raise her child

        d. Poseidon – The god of the sea, brother of Zeus and Hades, his adulterous affairs produced the giant Orion and the Cycops Polyphemus, he fathered Pegasus, the famous winged horse, in the Trojan War he helped the Greeks

        e. Athena – Born from the forehead of Zeus, the goddess of wisdom, industry, and art

        f. Hera – The queen of the gods, sister and wife of Zeus, the goddess of marriage, her children were Ares, god of war; Hephaestus, god of fire; Hebe, goddess of youth; Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth

        g. Hermes – The messenger of the gods, he had winged sandals and hat for his courier duties of Zeus his father, he transported the souls of the dead to the underworld, he was responsible for good and bad luck, known as a thief and trickster, also the protector of farmers and commerce

    3. The Entertainments

        a. Every four years the Isthmian Games were held in Corinth. They featured horse and chariot racers to honor the Greek god Poseidon.

        b. Farrar called Corinth the "Vanity of Fair of the ancient world", others, the "Lounge of Greece".

        c. The wealth generated by the commerce of the city allowed for increased leisure time among the inhabitants and also lured many immoral and degenerate characters from all Mediterranean coasts.

        d. Corinth would have fit the "far country" scenario of the story of the prodigal son.

    4. The Immorality

        a. Corinth became so wicked that the societies around it coined the term "*corinthiazesthai*" which means "to live the life of a Corinthian". It was a lifestyle of sexual perversion, idolatry, and drunkeness.

        b. The temples of Corinth were nothing more than sex filled. In fact, the temple of Aphrodite held over 1,000 prostitutes that served as priestesses.

        c. The lewd character of many sailors increased the sensuality and perverse nature of the area.

        d. Farrar characterized the city as "without aristocracy, without traditions and without well-established citizens". This statement brings to mind the description of the people found in I Corinthians 6:9-11, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you…"*

II. THE CHURCH OF CORINTH

A. The Founding of the Church

    1. Paul visited Corinth after living Athens. He remained in Corinth for 1 ½ years. Luke records the events surrounding this time in Acts 18:1-17.

    2. Upon arriving, Paul resided in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila and Priscilla had come to Corinth from Italy due to the edict of Claudius which evicted all Jews from Rome.

    3. Most historians believe Paul reached Corinth in the fall of 50 AD, and departed in the spring of 52 AD.

    4. Shortly after his arrival Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to help in the missionary effort.

    5. For some time, Paul was allowed to preach in the synagogue of the Jews. He delivered a message that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and this provoked a rebellion among the Jewish religious leaders.

    6. Paul openly rebuked the Jews by shaking his raiment and proclaiming his innocence of their blood. He

then turned to the Gentiles of Corinth. He was practicing "to the Jew first."

      7. With the break from the Jewish synagogue, Paul turn to the proletariat. Justus allowed Paul to hold meetings in his home and many Corinthians believed upon Christ. Although most of the Jews rejected the message of Paul, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, was converted. Luke writes in Acts 18:8, *"and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized."*

      8. When Paul left Corinth, he went to Ephesus and then on to Caesarea and Antioch. At this time, Apollos came to Ephesus. After Aquila and Priscilla showed unto him the way of God more perfectly, he made his way to Corinth where he strengthened the church.

B. The Fallacies of the Church

      1. This letter to the Corinthians was written in response to the information given Paul by Chloe concerning the immoral practices of the church in Corinth after the departure of Apollos.

      2. The major problems in the church were associated with compromise with the world. The church was in the world, but the world was beginning to get into the church.

      3. The church was divided over doctrinal, moral, social, and ethical issues.

      4. The atmosphere of Corinth was one of ease for the church. The Jews were not hostile to the Christians as in Jerusalem, the economy was very affluent, and the lost society as a whole was tolerant of the believers. This state of ease may be the very cause of the church's failures.

      5. Following is the occurrence of Paul's admonishments to the church in Corinth.

        a. One letter preceding I Corinthians – I Cor. 5:9 – *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators."* Evidently this letter was written before I Corinthians. Because the letters of Paul to Corinth were gathered over a period of several years, many believe this letter could refer to II Corinthians 6:13-7:2.

        b. Paul sent I Corinthians by way of Timothy according to I Corinthians 4:17 after he had received more information on the state of the church from Chloe, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaius.

        c. The fact that Paul stated, *"Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you"* shows that he must have visited Corinth personally after he sent I Corinthians. (II Cor. 12:14; 13:1-2)

        d. II Corinthians is a stern rebuke for the sins of the church that have not yet been repented of.

III. THE CONTENT OF I CORINTHIANS – (Book outline from Nelson's Bible Dictionary)

A. Part One: In Answer to Chloe's Report of Divisions   (1:1-4:21)

B. Part Two: In Answer to Reports of Fornication   (5:1-6:20)

C. Part Three: In Answer to the Letter of Questions   (7:1-16:24)