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Founding of the Church at Corinth

The city of Ancient **Corinth** was an important center within the Eastern Roman Empire for the First Century AD. While there had been previous settlement during the more classical Greek period several centuries earlier, in the time of **Paul's** writing, **Corinth** was a relatively new city, in contrast to its neighbor Athens. It had actually been leveled by the Roman consul Lucius Mummius in 146 BC, but was reestablished in 44 BC by Julius Caesar, being populated with many freedmen from Italy, who had intermingled with the local Greeks and Easterners. The colony was named for its new founder as *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*. By 27 AD **Corinth** had become the administrative capital of the province of Achaia. The city of **Corinth** was important on the same level of cities such as Alexandria, and to some degree, even Rome itself.

Corinth was located on the narrow isthmus (3.5 miles or 5.5 kilometers) connecting the Greek Peloponnesus to the mainland, and sat at the base of the 1,886 foot high Acrocorinth. Corinth had two principal harbors: Cenchrea to the east and Lechaion to the west. Goods were often transported overland to continue sea voyages. And small ships could actually be transported across fully loaded. **Corinth** was located in a strategic point for the First Century Mediterranean, given how sea voyages around Southern Greece could be very dangerous. Population estimates for the time of **Paul's** writing **First Corinthians** have been estimated anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 or more. Thus, **Corinth**, being a major center of commerce connecting the Eastern and Western Roman Empire, attracted many people from far and wide.¹¹



Paul first came to **Corinth** on **his** second missionary journey (see the commentary on **Acts Bu - Paul's Second Missionary Journey**). Upon arriving in **Corinth**, **he** met **Priscilla** and **Aquila**, Jews who had been driven out of Rome, and who were, like **himself**, tentmakers. **They** would become two of **Paul's** most trusted ministry friends. **He** stayed with them for a while and began to preach regularly in the synagogue every Sabbath. **Silas** and **Timothy** joined him from Macedonia, and, as **Paul's** preaching intensified, so did resistance to **his** message. Soon, however, many **Corinthians**, including Jews, began to believe in **Messiah**. Even **Crispus**, leader of the synagogue, along with **his** household, trusted in **the Lord** (**Acts 18:8**).

Paul continued to minister in **Corinth** for a year-and-a-half (**Acts 18:11**). Jewish opposition became so strong that **he** was brought before a Roman tribunal. Since the charges were purely political, however, the proconsul, **Gallio**, refused to hear the case. After staying a while longer, **Paul** left **Corinth** with **Priscilla** and **Aquila** and went to **Ephesus**. There, **he** received a disheartening report of the distressing goings-on in **the Corinthian** congregation. As the founder of the church, in 55 AD **Paul** felt compelled to write **them** a rather pointed letter in which **he** took on **their** many issues head-on. **First Corinthians** represents **Paul's** best attempt to confront and correct **their** problems, heal **their** divisions, and answer **their** questions.¹² Then, leaving **his** friends in **Ephesus**, **he** returned to Palestine (**Acts 18:12-22**).



The second leader of **the Corinthian** church was **Apollos**. An eloquent Jewish convert from Alexandria, Egypt, **Apollos** had come to Ephesus and begun preaching while **Priscilla** and **Aquila** were there. Although **he** had a **thorough knowledge of the TaNaKh**, **he** had some doctrinal deficiencies, which **Priscilla** and **Aquila** were instrumental in correcting. When **he** wanted to preach in Achaia, the Ephesian church not only encouraged him, but gave **him** a letter of commendation, and **he** began ministering in **Corinth** as its next pastor (**Acts 18:24 to 19:1**).



Sometime between **Paul's** leaving **Corinth** and **his** writing what we call **First Corinthians**, **Paul** had written the church another letter: **In my earlier letter I wrote you not to associate with people who engage in sexual immorality (5:9)**, commonly referred to as "the lost letter." It too was corrective in nature.¹³