

The Sequel

Jesus Continued in the Book of Acts

Two Cities, Two Churches Paul's Work in Philippi and Corinth A Prep Guide for Session Seven with Dr. Allen R. Hilton

During our time with Luke's Sequel – not only a literary sequel to his Gospel of Luke, but a spiritual sequel to the life and ministry of Jesus – we have passed from an uncertain, pre-Pentecost church to the explosion of Pentecost and the earliest church's confident activity in Jerusalem, through stages of local opposition from the Jewish leaders, and then, after Stephen's death, beyond Jerusalem to Jesus' named destinations of "Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth." This last category led us in Session Six to consider Paul's preaching in the Jewish setting of Jerusalem (Acts 22) and the Gentile of Athens in Acts 17). On the way, we noticed in Session Five the Jerusalem church's landmark decision to open the young movement to Gentile conversions apart from the rite of circumcision and Moses' binding law. (Acts 15)

It's time now to look closely at the on-the-ground practices of Paul's churches. We'll sample those through a closer look at Paul's ministry in the ancient cities of Philippi (Acts 16) and Corinth (Acts 19). As context, this prep guide will supply you with a brief intro to the city's geography, history, and culture. We'll look closely at the Acts narrative in class.

Part One – Paul in Philippi

Paul's first extended stop in his post-Jerusalem-Council travel placed him in the ancient city of Philippi in Macedonia (the far northeastern edge of present-day Greece). European Christianity began here.

Geography

Philippi sits atop the Aegean Sea on the northeastern corner of present-day Greece, near where Turkey and Greece meet. Its modern town is called Kabala.



History

During the Roman civil war that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Octavian confronted the assassins of Caesar, Brutus and Cassius, at the Battle of Philippi. Antony and Octavian were victorious in this final battle against the partisans of the Republic. They released some of their veteran soldiers and colonized them in the city. In 30 BC, Octavian (i.e., the Caesar Augustus of Luke 2) became Roman emperor, reorganized the colony, and established more settlers there, veterans possibly from the Praetorian Guard and other Italians.

Culture

Roman colonies were outposts of Roman culture in the midst of a native people with sometimes very different culture. These were proud Romans amidst Macedonians, Greeks, and Asians.

This fact helps us understand three bits of scripture related to Philippi.

The first is Acts 16.20-21, where Paul and Silas are arrested in the city. “When they had brought [Paul and Silas] before the magistrates, they said, ‘These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.’ ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods.”

The second is further on in the Acts story. When Paul and Silas are jailed for disturbing the peace and inculcating non-Roman customs (see above), their captors treat them harshly. “When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, ‘Let those men go.’³⁶ And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace.’³⁷ But Paul replied, ‘They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.’³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens;³⁹ so they came and apologized to them (16.35-39).”

Philippians 3.20, where Paul pictures Christian life as a colony in an alien world. “But our citizenship* is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Women in the Narrative and the Church

It is striking that in the Acts account of Paul’s visit to Philippi and in the letter, we encounter only three names that we know belong to Philippians – and all three of them are women. In the Gospels and letters of the early Christians, we can surmise that authors mention only leaders or prominent members, as would have been customary in ancient epistles.

Lydia the Host

A story about Paul’s time in Philippi appears in Acts 16.11-40. In it we are introduced to a key member of the church in that city: Lydia.

“On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.’ And she prevailed upon us (16.13-15).”

The ‘Spirited’ Slave Girl

During his time in Philippi, Paul encounters a young girl who is mysteriously tapped in to the spirit world. Our narrator tells the tale this way:

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”¹⁸ She kept

this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

By story's end, the girl has become useless to her owners, who are pressing charges against the apostle for property damage. Let us hope that she got away free.

Euodia and Syntyche

In the fourth chapter of his letter, Paul asks the community to help these two women to get along. We don't know the nature of their conflict. We know that they must have been prominent members of the community, and probably leaders, for their strife to concern Paul.

"I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, * help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life (4.2-3)."

Part Two: Paul in Corinth

Luke offers his reader the names of his characters only sparingly. In the last session, we noticed that he names Lydia in his extended narrative of Paul's time in Philippi and Jason in the apostle's brief stay in Thessalonica. In contrast, through the first fourteen verses of Acts 18, the account of Paul's time in the Greek city of Corinth, the narrator names no fewer than eight specific characters. Couple this abnormal cast list with Paul's two canonical letters to the church in Corinth, and it is clear that Paul devoted extensive time and energy to his work in this city.

To set the context, we again brush through the geography, history, and culture of that significant ancient city.

Geography

About an 45 miles west of Athens lies the historic city of Corinth. As one summary puts it, "The ancient city of Corinth was a port city that connected the Adriatic Sea to the Aegean Sea, allowing Corinth to become a cultural melting pot of the ancient world." If Philippi was situated in the far northeastern corner of Greece, then, Corinth moves our attention to Greece's southwest.



History

As a strategic port, Corinth was involved in many wars throughout the ancient period. The specific conflict that most shaped the first-century city we aim to understand was the Roman Civil War of the mid-first century B.C.E. As a function of the power he achieved through that war, Julius Caesar decided in 46 BCE to make the city of Corinth the new capital of Greece, and in 44 B.C.E. it became (like Philippi) a Roman colony. These political distinctions, coupled with Corinth's commercial attractiveness as a shipping port made for a whole lot of visitors and transient populations. Paul's eighteen-month sojourn there would have fit nicely into that Corinthian tendency to the temporary.

Culture

The excellent biblical scholar Jerome Murphy-O'Connor offers a description of Corinth's ethos in his *Anchor Bible Dictionary* account of the city.

In choosing as one of his main missionary centers a city in which only the tough were reputed to survive, Paul demonstrated a confidence oddly at variance with his protestations of weakness. Corinth, however, offered advantages that outweighed its dangers. In addition to excellent communications, the extraordinary number of visitors (Dio Chrysostom, Or. 37.8; Aelius Aristides, Or. 46.24) created the possibility of converts who would carry the gospel back to their homelands. In contrast to the closed complacency of Athens, Corinth was open and questioning, eager for new ideas but neither docile nor passive, as Paul's relationship with the Christian community there amply documents (Murphy-O'Connor, *ABD* 1:1138)

The newness of the city from its fresh start of 44 B.C.E. gave the apostle an inroad to a population less set in its ways than others.

Conclusion

This prep guide introduces you to the two cities to which we'll attend most closely in our Session Seven. To supplement it, I've offered the resources you will find below.

Resources for Philippi

This week's resources are intended as a sort of buffet. Choose items of interest, whether about the city of Philippi or Corinth, about the narrative "We" of Acts, or about the social status Luke's narrator imagines for Paul. There's a lot here – more, probably, than any of you will wish to read for our session. Pick and choose...and enjoy!

Charles Gresham, "Paul & Philippi: Historic Times, Significant Relationships."
(<https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1851&context=leaven>)
Underground Network, "Philippi"

Resources for Corinth

Pausanias, "Description of Greece" Book 2 on Corinth.
(<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0160:book=2:chapter=1>)

David G. Horrell, "Corinth", <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/443/en/places/main-articles/corinth>

Steve Walton, "Corinth in Acts: Paul's Financial Support"
(<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/corinth-in-acts-pauls-financial-support/>)

For the "We" Sections in Luke's Narrative

Jaimes A. Blaisdale, "The Authorship of the 'We' Sections of the Book of Acts"
(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1507790?seq=1>)

For Paul's Status

Jerome Neyrey, "Luke's Social Location of Paul: Cultural Anthropology and the Status of Paul in Acts" (<https://www3.nd.edu/~jneyrey1/location.html>)

Corinth

by [David G. Horrell](#)

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Corinth is well known to readers of the Bible because of its importance in the [missionary](#) activity of the apostle Paul: he visited Corinth at least three times, founded Christian assemblies there, and wrote at least four letters to Christians in Corinth (besides 1-2 Corinthians, note the other letters mentioned in [1Cor 5:9](#) and [2Cor 2:4](#), [2Cor 7:8](#)). The city lies at an important trading position about six miles to the southwest of the narrow isthmus that separates the Corinthian and Saronic gulfs. Ancient Corinth had two nearby ports: Lechaem to the north and Cenchreae to the east. In ancient times, ships were pulled across the narrow stretch of land separating east and west on a paved road known as the *diolkos*. Since 1893 there has been an impressive canal connecting the two sides, a project initially attempted, unsuccessfully, by the Roman emperor Nero in the late 60s C.E. Archaeological excavations at Corinth began in 1886 and since 1896 have taken place under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The most extensive excavations have been in the area of the forum and theatre, in the center of the ancient city.

Was Corinth a Greek or a Roman city?

Corinth's history is marked by a major change from Greek to Roman control. The Greek city of Corinth flourished until 146 B.C.E., when it was defeated in a war with the Romans. Just over a century later, in 44 B.C.E., the city was refounded as a Roman [colony](#) with new settlers (particularly freed slaves) from elsewhere in the [Empire](#). Ancient [literary](#) sources that indicate Corinth's total destruction in the interim has often been taken at face value by scholars. Certainly, on its new foundation, Corinth was reoriented according to Roman organization and ideology. This is evident, for example, in the temple (known as "temple E") that dominated the central area. This temple was devoted in some way to the Roman gods and imperial family (the so-called imperial [cult](#)). Latin became the official language, and the city was laid out according to the Roman grid system. Yet recent archaeological evidence has called into question any stark division between a Greek past and a Roman present. There were no established civic institutions between 146 and 44 B.C.E., but evidence for continuing occupation during this period is apparent, along with artifacts indicating that the Greek language continued to be used among the population (and, of course, in Paul's letters). It is perhaps better to see Corinth in the first century C.E. as a place of hybrid identities, where Greek culture, language, and religion were reshaped in a variety of ways by Roman colonization. Roman dominance continued until the end of the fourth century C.E.

Was Corinth a den of iniquity and [idolatry](#)?

The ancient Greek city of Corinth acquired something of a proverbial reputation for sexual promiscuity, and modern biblical scholarship has frequently reiterated a view of the city as a particular hotbed of immorality and vice. Yet even if the proverbial ancient remarks are accurate,

they refer to the period before 146 B.C.E., and there is little to suggest that first-century Roman Corinth was significantly different in this regard from any other city in the empire at the time.

Like other such cities, Corinth was a place of religious variety, with the worship of traditional gods and goddesses from Greek and Roman religions, local [deities](#) and heroes, and divinities from further east, such as the Egyptian deities [Isis](#) and [Serapis](#). Roman cults were especially important to the city's elite, and the [imperial cult](#)—in which the Emperor, his ancestors, and his family were venerated—formed an important part of religious and political life. From Jewish and Christian perspectives this was all idol worship ([1Cor 12:2](#)). Ancient literary evidence, including Acts and Paul's letters, suggests that there were also Jews in Corinth, though archaeological evidence for this dates from several centuries later. Indeed, direct archaeological evidence confirming the presence of Christians in the city only emerges from around the fourth century C.E. and later. It is highly uncertain whether the famous Erastus inscription refers to the same Erastus Paul mentions in [Rom 16:23](#). Recent research suggests a date for the inscription in the second century C.E. Archaeology informs us about the city of Corinth in the first century, but for direct evidence of the earliest Christians there we are dependent on the [New Testament](#).

David G. Horrell, "Corinth", n.p. [cited 3 Jun 2019].

Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/places/main-articles/corinth>

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