

1 CORINTHIANS
FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

1 CORINTHIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

J.K. MCKEE

MESSIANIC
APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

1 CORINTHIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

© 2015 John Kimball McKee

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the author.

Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries

P.O. Box 850845

Richardson, Texas 75085

(407) 933-2002

www.outreachisrael.net

www.messianicapologetics.net

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, The Lockman Foundation.

Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Apocrypha are from the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), © 1952, Division of Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE	ix
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 CORINTHIANS 1	21
1 CORINTHIANS 2	43
1 CORINTHIANS 3	57
1 CORINTHIANS 4	77
1 CORINTHIANS 5	93
1 CORINTHIANS 6	107
1 CORINTHIANS 7	133
<i>Excursus: Celibate Singleness Among Contemporary Messianic People</i>	<i>143</i>
<i>Excursus: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 and Today's Messianic Movement</i>	<i>164</i>
1 CORINTHIANS 8	173
1 CORINTHIANS 9	189
1 CORINTHIANS 10	203
<i>Excursus: Eating What is Served Before You</i>	<i>229</i>
1 CORINTHIANS 11	233
<i>Excursus: Approaching Male and Female Headcovering Garments</i>	<i>245</i>
1 CORINTHIANS 12	255
1 CORINTHIANS 13	265
1 CORINTHIANS 14	275
1 CORINTHIANS 15	295
1 CORINTHIANS 16	319

EPILOGUE	331
THE MESSAGE OF 1 CORINTHIANS	333
FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS: AN AUTHOR'S RENDERING.....	349
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	369
COMMENTARY ON ACTS 18:1-18: PAUL'S VISIT TO CORINTH	371
BIBLIOGRAPHY	389

ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
Ara: Aramaic	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Baoli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	KJV: King James Version
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	LXX: Septuagint
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	m. Mishnah
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: New International Version (1984)
GNT: Greek New Testament	NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
Heb: Hebrew	NT: New Testament
	orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world

OT: Old Testament
PME: Practical Messianic Edition of the Apostolic
Scriptures
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New
Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life
Version (2014)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New
Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New
Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

PROLOGUE

2013-2014 was an important year for Outreach Israel Ministries, as our family finished the transition into this new season of our lives living back in the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex, and began a period of consolidation, as we reach out into new spiritual frontiers. Our Wednesday Night Bible Study conducted a lengthy study of Paul's letter to the Romans, which in terms of the production of commentary volumes in the *for the Practical Messianic* series, also marks an important point – as the bulk our examinations now, will mainly involve books of the Bible that have not often been touched by Messianic people.ⁱ This is most especially true of the examinations that we will be conducting over the next two years, as we reach toward completing an important benchmark in having Messianic commentaries released on all of the Pauline letters, with 1&2 Corinthians remaining.

While I am consciously quite aware of how today's broad Messianic community often has difficulty understanding passages within the letters of Paul (cf. 2 Peter 3:15), in my experience there are some letters we have more ease approaching (i.e., Romans, Ephesians) than others (i.e., Galatians, Philippians, Colossians). Yet when we open our Bibles, there is little denying the fact that the Apostle Paul wrote more to the Corinthians, than any other group of ancient Believers, as two letters (the first at sixteen chapters, and the second at thirteen chapters), have been preserved for us as Messiah followers. While there are for certain many verses and important passages we turn to, in order to be guided or find encouragement – 1 Corinthians 13:13 being a significant one, as it says, "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love" – there are also many places in Paul's Corinthian correspondence which completely confound and bewilder today's Messianic people. I know this, because even though we are beginning what is likely to be the only extensive Messianic commentary on 1 Corinthians (and later 2 Corinthians) for quite some time – that almost every time I have had to explain passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:12-20;ⁱⁱ 7:17-24;ⁱⁱⁱ or 10:14-33,^{iv} I have had to do so with probably giving more information than some thought was necessary, given the complexity of this letter and its original audience.

How much of our relationship with 1 Corinthians has been disjointed from a reading of the complete letter, and has been associated more with "cherry picking" verses, as it were? 1 Corinthians certainly has some good things to say! The supremacy of God is uplifted in Paul's exclaim, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1:20). Messianic people often love Paul's direction, "Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed" (5:7). And for certain, the unity and diversity of people within the Body of Messiah, and their gifts and talents and skills, is represented in Paul's assertion, "For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Messiah" (12:12). Even Paul's firm declaration, "if Messiah has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (15:14), is most imperative.

ⁱ As things stand today in 2015, *for the Practical Messianic* volumes have been released on: Acts 15, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, 1&2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral Epistles, Hebrews, James, as well as the survey studies of the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures.

Beyond the selective commentary appearing in David H. Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, and the above mentioned texts, there have been, to the author's knowledge, Messianic volumes composed on the Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of John, the General Epistles (James, 1&2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude), as well as a wide selection of Torah and Haftarah resources.

ⁱⁱ Consult the examination of 1 Corinthians 6:12 in *The New Testament Validates Torah* (2012), and the examination of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 in the *Messianic Koshher Helper* (2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ Consult the FAQ entry on the Messianic Apologetics website, "1 Corinthians 7:17-24" (2013).

^{iv} Consult the examination of 1 Corinthians 10:14-33 in the *Messianic Koshher Helper* (2014).

Beyond these kinds of passages—which are most useful and quite edifying—how much do you really understand Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, or what is at least listed as his first letter to them? Are you aware that 1 Corinthians is not the first actual letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians (5:9)? How much of what Bible readers encounter in 1 Corinthians, involves reading the other side of an ongoing conversation, and with it some theorizing of what is being responded to? This was a group of First Century Believers which were confused at best, disjointed and fractured for certain, and licentious at worst. This has led to many different opinions, interpretations, and applications to emerge among Christian examiners of 1 Corinthians—many of which are quite good and useful for our consideration, and then some others which are not so good. And for certain, as today’s Messianic people should be most aware, a letter like 1 Corinthians does have various translation issues present from Greek into English, some of which are definitely rooted in theological value judgments and presuppositions.

I have been blessed over the past four to eight years, between my studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2005-2008) and working on various other writing projects, to have widely reasoned through the bulk of the “difficult” passages that 1 Corinthians tends to present to today’s Messianic people. Surprisingly for some, this does not just include those passages that concern the relevance of God’s Torah in the post-resurrection era (i.e., 6:12; 10:13), but also concern the place of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah (7:17-24; 9:20-22; 10:1). 1 Corinthians is a letter which presents our faith community with both external *and* internal challenges. Only a complete examination of Paul’s letter will help us to truly appreciate and inculcate those principles and ideals, enabling us to better understand the challenges that this group of First Century Believers, in a very wicked and sinful city, encountered.

What are we going to learn by *fully going through* the letter of 1 Corinthians? Each of us, being a part of a still-emerging and steadily maturing Messianic movement, probably brings a series of different expectations to Paul’s letter. Some of us just want some answers to those passages that strike us as perhaps being anti-Torah. Others of us want a better appreciation for the situation of the Corinthians, perhaps making connections and witnessing parallels with some sort of Messianic fellowship or assembly present on the scene today. Still, what a number of us probably do not want, is to be admonished from 1 Corinthians—in seeing that we have misinterpreted and misapplied some of Paul’s direction. And beyond this, there might even be one or two of us, who have just flat forgotten what Paul said in some parts of 1 Corinthians. All in all, we need to be aware of how—in spite of each of us having an under-developed, and even under-informed approach to 1 Corinthians—Paul himself acknowledged how this letter was difficult for him to write: “I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children” (4:14). So, in the event that any of us are admonished, convicted, or rebuked in some way—it is all with the explicit intention that we might grow as men and women of faith.

1 Corinthians is a difficult letter, because of the history that sits behind it, the complex spirituality of its original recipients, as well as the diverse interpretations and applications that are derived from it. 1 Corinthians presents many puzzles to be solved by its readers, but they are not impossible puzzles. 1 Corinthians also provides a venue for some significant growth and maturation for each of us. For as Paul wanted of its original readers, and would certainly also tell us today, “Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (16:13-14, RSV). A fair and thorough Messianic approach to 1 Corinthians is well-needed in this hour, especially as the mid-2010s is now upon us!

J.K. McKee
Editor, *Messianic Apologetics*

INTRODUCTION

The letter of 1 Corinthians (Grk. *Pros Korinthious A*, ΠΡΟΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΟΥΣ Α) is widely known among today's Bible readers for a variety of very positive and edifying statements, most especially with 1 Corinthians 13 being known as the proverbial "love chapter."¹ But while 1 Corinthians has many uplifting remarks, on the whole it can probably be said that not enough people approach Paul's letter with his assertion, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote..." (7:1), in mind. When Bible readers sit down to really read through 1 Corinthians, they encounter a piece of work transcribed to a group of First Century Believers—some of them *purported Believers*—who needed some serious and severe help. Not recognizing some of the complicated background behind the composition of 1 Corinthians, contemporary readers are often at a loss regarding what to do with the complex series of topics addressed—much less how to apply a correct interpretation of them in the Twenty-First Century. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner are correct to acknowledge, "It is, in fact, one of Paul's most difficult letters...It is far removed from our world...To make matters worse, far from arriving at a consensus, modern biblical scholarship throws up rival interpretations of the letter."² **And if this is true regarding Christian examination of 1 Corinthians, then the limited Messianic examination seen from 1 Corinthians is not immune to this either.**

The Apostle Paul was informed as to events that had transpired among the Believers in Corinth (1:11; 16:17-18), particularly in terms of the factionalism that had arisen. A previous letter had been written to these people (5:9), which they apparently had misunderstood (5:10-11). The piece of correspondence that we call 1 Corinthians tries to offer some clear direction and admonition to a group of people riddled with a whole host of problems—which is why it can be so difficult for contemporary readers and examiners. Stephen C. Barton properly asserts, "It has been well said that reading 1 Corinthians is like reading someone else's mail,"³ and it is precisely in the areas of trying to posit what was being said on the other side of the conversation, as well as the circumstances that transpired, why there can be a diversity of views present surrounding this letter.

On the whole, to a commentator like F.F. Bruce, the correspondence of 1&2 Corinthians together, "is full of allusions to persons and incidents well known to Paul and his readers, but (apart from these allusions) quite unknown to us. In reading them, we often find ourselves in the position of people listening to one end of a telephone conversation and trying, not very successfully, to reconstruct what is being said on the other line."⁴ He also mentions how "There are many interpretive problems in the Corinthian correspondence the solutions to which can hardly be more than intelligent guesses."⁵ Yet, while 1&2 Corinthians—1 Corinthians in particular—do have difficult statements in them, postulating a conversation and/or debate between Paul and his audience, is not at all an impossible task.

A definite thrust of the letter of 1 Corinthians, is that this audience needed to remember who the Apostle Paul was as their spiritual father (4:15). The Corinthians had to be directed to the proper way in emulating

¹ Please note that in spite of the common reference to 1 Corinthians as "the Book of 1 Corinthians," I am going to purposefully refer to the text as either the Epistle of 1 Corinthians or the letter of 1 Corinthians, and not use this reference. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting (and not Paul's first letter to the Corinthians at that; cf. 5:9), we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

² Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1.

³ Stephen C. Barton, "1 Corinthians," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1314.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Paul (4:16), notably as he emulated Yeshua the Messiah (11:1). The Corinthians were regarded as widely being infants in the Lord (3:1-4), meaning that most of them were not where they needed to be in terms of spiritual maturity.

1 Corinthians is a letter that many have turned to, in order to better understand some of the challenges that contemporary Believers face in allowing the Lord to sanctify their behavior unto Him. Among the Messiah followers of Ancient Corinth, there was an entire litany of moral and religious incidents that had erupted, not to mention a wide degree of confusion among those who were seemingly trying to do the right thing. Alas, while there are connections to be made between the Corinthians and more modern-day Western people, there is a disconnect as well, as we are not the exact same people living in a relatively pagan metropolis. Craig Blomberg notes, “Probably no contemporary church faces this exact cluster of issues all at once.”⁶

One of the things that has surely been repeated across the centuries of Messiah faith, is how various Corinthians, purporting to be Believers, thought that they knew better than an apostolic figure like Paul (4:7), who was a bit firm with them (4:8). The Corinthians were largely a group of people who were significantly affected by their surrounding culture and ungodly lifestyles, although in stark contrast they were called by the Lord to be holy (1:2). Ciampa and Rosner indicate, “the Corinthians were still behaving as if they belonged to their city!”⁷ and as such there are many relevant concepts and ideas communicated to modern people who are influenced more by the society around them, rather than making a difference upon society.

In far too many ways, much of the letter of 1 Corinthians presents a group of ancient Messiah followers, that contemporary Believers are to take serious warnings from—much like the Corinthians themselves being directed in how they were to learn from the errors of the Ancient Israelites (10:11). In the estimation of Richard B. Hays, “No doubt the Corinthian Christians of Paul’s day would have preferred that this correspondence not be broadcast to the ages, for it portrays them in an unflattering light and divulges a number of things that they might well, with the wisdom of hindsight, wish to have kept private.”⁸ The letter of 1 Corinthians was indeed preserved for future generations of Believers, but there are many First Century and Corinth-specific issues addressed within it. Challenges and confusion ensue by trying to extrapolate more modern interpretations and applications, but in a general sense, all who examine 1 Corinthians tend to recognize the parameters of a localized faith community trying to grow and mature in the midst of a God-less environment. 1 Corinthians is an extremely relevant letter for all of us, provided we follow the tried and true rule of interpreting it for its original audience first, before extrapolating it for Twenty-First Century situations. As Craig S. Keener appropriately directs,

“We could learn from [Paul] in matters such as mutual support versus competition; humility and sacrifice versus pursuit of status; marital fidelity; caring for the needy and rejecting materialism; spiritual gifts and their appropriate use for serving others; the value and sanctity of the body; and future accountability for present actions.”⁹

Each of us will no doubt be challenged in this examination of the letter of 1 Corinthians on some level. This may involve our approach to First Century historical and religious issues. We might be intellectually stretched with some of the translation controversies present from the Greek of the letter into English. And, a few of us might really be convicted on various attitudes, behaviors, and actions which we know are ungodly and need to change—as we evaluate how such actions can adversely affect others, and our testimony of Yeshua to the world around us.

⁶ Craig Blomberg, *NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 17.

⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, 6.

⁸ Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: 1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

PAUL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE CORINTHIANS IN THIS LETTER

The Apostle Paul was the founder of the assembly of Messiah followers in Corinth (4:14-15; 2 Corinthians 10:13-14), with Luke detailing a record of Paul's visit to Corinth in Acts 18:1-18. All examiners are agreed on genuine Pauline authorship of the letter of 1 Corinthians,¹⁰ even with a Sosthenes (1:1) listed as a co-sender. (This Sosthenes, although largely unknown, is likely the same individual mentioned in Acts 18:17). Only those who would deny Pauline authorship of all of Paul's letters, would deny 1 Corinthians being written by him.¹¹ The early usage of 1 Corinthians by a late First Century work such as *1 Clement* (37:5 referencing 1 Corinthians 12:14-26; 47:1-3 referencing 1 Corinthians 1:12; 49:5 referencing 1 Corinthians 13:4-7), helps to affirm the epistle's authenticity. It is true, however, that what is traditionally called "The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians," is in actuality "The First *Canonical* Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians," as this is not Paul's first piece of writing to this audience (5:9), perhaps with this letter to also be labeled "Corinthians B."¹²

Paul had spent a year-and-a-half or eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11), most probably during 51-52 C.E. – a time he spent in this city at the direct issuance of the Lord, no less (Acts 18:9-10) – and then he moved back to Ephesus (Acts 18:19). Apollos visited the Corinthian Believers subsequent to Paul's departure (Acts 19:1).

While in Corinth, Paul became acquainted with fellow Jewish Believers in Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2-3), who like himself were tentmakers or leatherworkers. He went to the local Jewish synagogue and declared the message of Yeshua the Messiah, with many being convinced of the good news (Acts 18:4-5). He was forced to leave the Corinthian synagogue (Acts 18:6), likely due to some kind of rivalry or him being a threat to the leadership, but this did not mean a total severance from the Corinthian Jewish community. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, professed faith in Yeshua (Acts 18:8), and a fellowship of Messiah followers was established at the home of Titius Justus (cf. Romans 16:23a), who had been a God-fearer, right next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7).

As is witnessed from the contents of 1 Corinthians, the overwhelming majority of the Corinthian Believers were not just non-Jewish, but were taken from among the lower classes, and were poor (1:26-29). A number of the Corinthian Believers were most probably also slaves or former slaves (7:20-24), although some Corinthian Believers were rich. In the view of S.J. Hafemann, "most of the [assembly] was apparently from the lower or middle socioeconomic class, with only a few wealthy families represented."¹³ Ben Witherington III thinks that there was some variance among the Corinthian Believers, noting, "the social level of the Corinthian Christians apparently varied from quite poor to rather well-off, though they probably did not include any Roman aristocrats."¹⁴ The scene of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 and the first and second class dinners, was probably the result of a class conflict between rich and poor. Presumably, there had to have been some financially well-to-do Corinthian Believers, who had the funds to take others to court (6:1-8). That there were wealthy Corinthian Believers can also be deduced from Paul's direction for those of this assembly to give generously to his Jerusalem collection (16:1-2; cf. 2 Corinthians 8-9). An important figure mentioned in later writing, Erastus (Romans 16:23),¹⁵ was the city treasurer, presumably having held a lower office at the time of 1 Corinthians.¹⁶

¹⁰ S.M. Gilmour, "Corinthians, First," in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:688; S.J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letters to the," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 175; J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:789.

¹¹ Leon Morris, "Corinthians, First Epistle to the," in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:775.

¹² Bruce, 24.

¹³ Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letters to the," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 173.

¹⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 22.

¹⁵ Gilmour, "Corinthians, First," in *IDB*, 1:684; W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10:178.

¹⁶ J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinth," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1138.

Much attention in some 1 Corinthians examination has focused on the system of Roman patronage, and how Corinth was a place where people could make their fortunes,¹⁷ moving up the social ladder. Recognizing the immaturity of many of the Corinthians, the view of D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo is that “The problem was not so much that they were relapsing into paganism, as that their Christian faith, however sincere, had not yet transformed the worldview they had adopted from the surrounding culture”¹⁸ (1:18-25). Various references seen in 1 Corinthians to “knowledge” (i.e., 8:1, 11), are issued with the intent of pointing out how those who presumed to have “knowledge,” did not actually have it. Some of this may have come from rich Corinthian people thinking that they were entitled to act a certain way, when what they were doing was not at all edifying to the faith community (cf. 6:12; 10:23). Bruce observes,

“The ‘knowledge’ which they cultivated, if it was not accompanied by...love, was not calculated to build up the...community or strengthen its fellowship; there was a temptation to despise fellow-Christians who were not so far advanced in knowledge and to show no patience in fact of their unenlightened scruples in matters of food and sex.”¹⁹

The majority of the Corinthian Believers were former pagans (8:1; 12:2), although there was surely a large enough Jewish contingent.²⁰ Hays details how for the Greek and Roman Believers, “Paul was faced with a massive task of *resocialization*, seeking to reshape the moral imaginations of these Gentile converts into patterns of life consonant with the ways of the God of Israel.”²¹ The Apostle Paul did associate elements of Israel’s worship as being the same elements of non-Jewish Believers’ faith practice, including monotheism (8:4-6), the Passover lamb (5:7), and the Tanach Scriptures (10:26). There were important Jewish Believers connected to the Corinthian assembly, though, such as Priscilla and Aquila (16:19; Acts 18:2-3), Apollos (1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12; Acts 18:24-19:1), and Sosthenes (1:1; Acts 18:17). Paul’s trusted companion Timothy also served in Corinth with him (Acts 18:5).

The Apostle Paul regarded himself as a spiritual father or parent to the Corinthian Believers, something which is surely detectable in some of his tone of communication to them (4:8-14; 9:1; 11:17; 15:34). Most especially displeasing in his correspondence of 1 Corinthians is how factions had sprung up among the Messiah followers following Paul’s departure. Chloe’s people (1:11) had come to Paul in Ephesus (16:17), to report to him about some of what had taken place—and while Paul’s letter on the whole is addressed to the Corinthians, certain sections of the letter do bear specific admonitions for the different factions. (Unfortunately, given the tenor of *1 Clement* 47:1-3²² in the late First Century, such factionalism did not really go away.)

The biggest problem that had arisen among the Corinthians, which Paul had apparently written them about before (5:9-10), was how sexual immorality had arisen. The Corinthians are noted as being gifted (1:4-7), but they were also very immature (3:1-4). The divisions and factions (1:10-4:21) involved conflicts over the spiritual gifts (chs. 2; 12-13), problems with sexual perversions (ch. 5; 6:12-20), lawsuits (6:1-8), challenges to Paul’s apostolic authority (ch. 9), problems during public worship (ch. 11) and eating abuses (11:17-34), misunderstandings surrounding the future resurrection of the dead (ch. 15), and broad questions about marital condition and personal status (ch. 7). 1 Corinthians also includes the sure indicator that Paul was planning a return visit to Corinth (16:2; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:15; 2:1; Acts 20:1-4).

¹⁷ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp 436-427.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁹ Bruce, 21.

²⁰ Cf. Witherington, pp 24-28.

²¹ Hays, 4.

²² “Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle. What did he first write to you in the beginning of the gospel? Truly he wrote to you in the Spirit about himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then you had split into factions” (*1 Clement* 47:1-3; Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 109).

WHERE WAS PAUL WHEN HE WROTE THIS LETTER?

Paul himself states in the closing sections of 1 Corinthians that he was in **Ephesus** when this letter was composed: “I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost [*Shavuot*]” (16:8). Paul had spent three years in Ephesus, following his departure from Corinth (Acts 20:31). The Corinthians are told by him, “The assemblies of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you much in the Lord, together with the assembly that is in their house” (16:19, HNV), which further indicates an Ephesian/Asia Minor origin for 1 Corinthians. Paul states that while he intended to stay in Ephesus, that he did intend to go to Macedonia, and then on to see them as well for an extended period (16:5-9), before going on to Rome (Acts 19:21-22).

As Paul was in Ephesus writing to the Corinthians, he noted how “a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (16:5). Presumably, wherever Paul went – whether in Corinth or in Ephesus or back “through Macedonia and Achaia” (Acts 19:21) – while there were opportunities to present the good news, teach, and disciple others in the Lord, there was also opposition. Paul’s immediate intention in his letter was to send Timothy to Corinth (4:17; 16:10), who apparently had found the situation in Corinth a bit beyond his control. Paul’s time in Ephesus while writing 1 Corinthians, is actually associated with the Torah-prescribed appointed time of *Shavuot* or Pentecost (16:8; Leviticus 23:11, 15).

WHEN DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER?

The composition of the letter called 1 Corinthians is often dated to sometime between 52-55 C.E., toward the end of Paul’s three-year residency in Ephesus (16:5-9; cf. Acts 20:31). It can be usually tied to when the Edict of Claudius was issued in 49 C.E., ejecting the Jews from Rome, given the presence of Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth (Acts 18:2), as well as when Gallio served in office as proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12),²³ which is usually dated to 50-51 C.E. A preferred dating for 1 Corinthians would then likely be **54-55 C.E.**, given the time it would have taken for the issues and problems addressed in this letter to develop, considering the fact that there is a non-extant letter written to the Corinthians before this letter (5:9), as well as how the Corinthians themselves had composed a correspondence back to Paul (7:1; 8:1). (It has at least been proposed, though, that the contents of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 might contain some of that non-extant first letter.)²⁴ The Apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians at a time subsequent to the visit from “some from Chloe’s household” (1:11, NIV) to him in Ephesus, as well as a visit from Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17).

WHO WAS THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THIS LETTER?

The city of Ancient Corinth (*Korinthos*, Κόρινθος) was an important center within the Eastern Roman Empire of the First Century C.E. While there had been previous settlement during the more classical Greek period several centuries earlier,²⁵ 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 B.C.E., but was reestablished in 44 B.C.E. by Julius Caesar, being populated with many freedmen from Italy (Strabo *Geography* 8.6.23), who had intermingled with the local Greeks and Easterners.²⁶ (Some do think that the freed slaves were not Roman, but were more localized people.)²⁷ The colony was named for its new founder as *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*.²⁸ For a commentator like David E. Garland, “Corinth rose in status as a Roman colony while the surrounding areas tied to the Greek past decreased in status.”²⁹ By 27 C.E. Corinth had become the

²³ S.J. Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 177; Carson and Moo, pp 447-448.

²⁴ Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:687.

²⁵ Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:682; Morris, “Corinthians, First Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 1:772-773; Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in *ABD*, 1:1135-1136.

²⁶ Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:685; Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 173.

²⁷ Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in *ABD*, 1:1136.

²⁸ Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:682, 685.

²⁹ David E. Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4.

1 CORINTHIANS FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

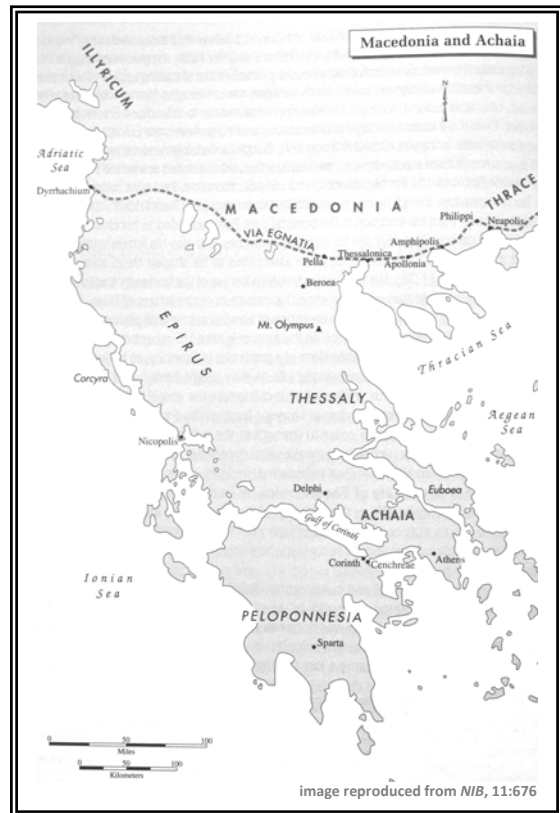
administrative capital of the province of Achaia. The city of Corinth was important on the same level of cities such as Alexandria, and to some degree, even Rome itself.³⁰

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 ft. 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. Anthony C. Thiselton is keen to direct how, "Virtually all modern classical and archaeological studies confirm the commercial importance of the *diolkos*, a paved roadway built across the isthmus originally in the sixth century B.C. at its narrowest point of less than six kilometers. It was used for the transportation of cargo or even light ships, and parts can be seen today."³¹ Corinth was located in a strategic point for the First Century Mediterranean, given how sea voyages around Southern Greece could be dangerous.³² The Greek geographer Strabo, from the First Century B.C.E.-C.E., had this to say about how the physical location of Corinth contributed to its importance:

"Corinth is called 'wealthy' because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other. And just as in early times the Strait of Sicily was not easy to navigate, so also the high seas, and particularly the sea beyond Maleae, were not, on account of the contrary winds...At any rate, it was a welcome alternative, for the merchants both from Italy and from Asia, to avoid the voyage to Maleae and to land their cargoes here. And also the duties on what by land was exported from the Peloponnesus and what was imported to it fell to those who held the keys. And to later times this remained ever so. But to the Corinthians of later times still greater advantages were added, for also the Isthmian Games, which were celebrated there, were wont to draw crowds of people" (*Geography* 8.6.20).³³

Corinth, being a major center of commerce connecting the Eastern and Western Roman Empire, as a sure consequence attracted many people from far and wide. Population estimates for the time of 1 Corinthians' composition have been estimated anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 or more. It also cannot go overlooked that while Corinth was an important city, that it had a less-than-stellar reputation among many. In the view of the poet Horace,

"To achieve things, to display captive enemies to the crowd, is to touch Jove's throne, and mount the sky: Yet it's no slight glory to have pleased the leading men. It doesn't happen that every man gets to Corinth. He who feared he mightn't reach it, stayed at home.



³⁰ See especially the summaries offered by Witherington, pp 5-19; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp 1-17.

³¹ Thiselton, pp 1-2.

³² Morris, "Corinthians, First Epistle to the," in *ISBE*, 1:772; Willis Wendell, "Corinth," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 280.

³³ Strabo: *Geography*, eds. H.C. Hamilton and W. Falconer (1903). Accessible online at <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0198%3Abook%3D8%3Achapter%3D6%3Asection%3D20>>.

‘Fine, but the one who arrived, did he play the man?’ Yes, here if anywhere is what we’re seeking. He dreads the load as too great for his frail mind and body: He lifts it, carries it on. If virtue’s no empty word, the enterprising man seeks worth and honour. Those who keep quiet about their own needs in front of their patron, win more than those who beg: that’s the aim. It does matter whether you receive, humbly, or snatch” (*Epistles* 1.17).³⁴

Classical Greco-Roman religion was practiced in Corinth, with many temples present and deities venerated, no doubt serving as some background behind Paul’s statement, “For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords” (8:5). Among the gods and goddesses present, the most pronounced of these probably involved the Temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love.³⁵ So significant was the presence of Aphrodite, Strabo detailed how there were a thousand temple prostitutes who brought great riches to Corinth:

“And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for instance, the ship captains freely squandered their money, and hence the proverb, ‘Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth’” (*Geography* 8.6.20).³⁶

Bruce further details how “The cult-statue of Aphrodite was attired in the armour of the war-god Ares, with his helmet for a foot-rest and his shield for a mirror. This background helps to explain the necessity for the repeated warnings against fornication in Paul’s Corinthian correspondence.”³⁷ David Prior makes the comparison, “The worship of Aphrodite is parallel to that of the Ashtoreth (taken from Syrian worship of Astarte) in the days of Solomon, Jeroboam and Josiah [1 Kings 11:1-9, 33; 2 Kings 23:13],”³⁸ and he goes on to detail some further possible Eastern influence on Corinthian religion.

Some have noted how the Corinthian prostitution issue, attested in historical works, might have been a bit purposefully overblown via the talk of neighboring and rival cities like Athens.³⁹ Donald Guthrie asserts, “In spite of its reputation it was probably no more immoral than any other maritime port, but it was one of the main such ports in the empire at the time.”⁴⁰ Gordon D. Fee also states, “Sexual sin there undoubtedly was in abundance; but it would have been of the same kind that one would expect in any seaport where money flowed freely and women and men were available.”⁴¹ The sins of idolatry and sexual debauchery, in a variety of forms,⁴² were present all throughout the ancient world. The Ancient Israelites themselves are referenced as an example by Paul to the Corinthians, as people not to emulate: “Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY’ [Exodus 32:6]” (10:7).

Corinth was not just a home to classical Greco-Roman religion and its deities, but various Egyptian deities and cults from the East were also present. “Numerous shrines dedicated to Apollo, Athena, Aphrodite, Asclepius, Demeter and Kore, Palaimon, and Sisyphus witness to the continuity of Greek cults...Egyptian influence is documented by the worship of Isis and Serapis” (*ABD*).⁴³ Paul’s famed opening words of Romans 1:18-32, in detailing the fallen state of humanity, were most probably delivered with a Corinthian backdrop.⁴⁴

³⁴ Horace: *Epistles*, trans. A.S. Kline (n.d.). Accessible online at <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceEpistlesBkIepXVII.htm>>.

³⁵ Cf. Witherington, 13.

³⁶ Strabo: *Geography*, eds. H.C. Hamilton and W. Falconer (1903). Accessible online at <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0198%3Abook%3D8%3Achapter%3D6%3Asection%3D20>>.

³⁷ Bruce, 19.

³⁸ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 11.

³⁹ D. Georgi, “Corinthians, First Letter to the,” in Keith Crim, ed., *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 181; Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in *ABD*, 1:1136; Wendell, “Corinth,” in *EDB*, 280.

⁴⁰ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 432; also Hays, 4.

⁴¹ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 3.

⁴² Cf. Witherington, 13.

⁴³ Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in *ABD*, 1:1138; also Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 173; Witherington, pp 14-19.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ciampa and Rosner, 16.

1 CORINTHIANS FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

The city of Corinth, as previously noted by Strabo (*Geography* 8.6.20), was the site of the Isthmian Games, as well as a notable *macellum* (*makellon*, μάκελλον) or meat-market (10:25).⁴⁵ Also to be recognized is how there were dining rooms employed for religious meetings, which have been discovered among the temple ruins of Corinth.⁴⁶ To a degree, this might be in view per Paul's writing various (presumed) Corinthian Believers who thought they could freely socialize and eat idol meat (chs. 8, 10).

While the pagan components of Ancient Corinth tend to garner a huge amount of attention from examiners, there was a definite Jewish presence in Corinth, having to include at least one synagogue (Acts 18:4) at the time of Paul.⁴⁷ Frequently referenced tends to be the statements of the Jewish philosopher Philo, who describes some of the significant Diaspora Jewish communities spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean:

“Concerning the holy city I must now say what is necessary. It, as I have already stated, is my native country, and the metropolis, not only of the one country of Judaea, but also of many, by reason of the colonies which it has sent out from time to time into the bordering districts of Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria in general, and especially that part of it which is called Coelo-Syria, and also with those more distant regions of Pamphylia, Cilicia, the greater part of Asia Minor as far as Bithynia, and the furthest corners of Pontus. And in the same manner into Europe, into Thessaly, and Boeotia, and Macedonia, and Aetolia, and Attica, and Argos, and Corinth and all the most fertile and wealthiest districts of Peloponnesus. And not only are the continents full of Jewish colonies, but also all the most celebrated islands are so too; such as Euboea, and Cyprus, and Crete” (*Embassy to Gaius* 281-282).⁴⁸

It is reasonable to assume that the local pagans attracted to the Jewish Synagogue—many of whom in the record of Acts 18:1-18 did come to Messiah faith—had found Judaism's monotheistic ideology and its morality quite attractive.⁴⁹ The *IDB* entry for 1 Corinthians makes a point to summarize the important place of the God-fearers in the local synagogue, who were among some of the first new Believers in Corinth:

“In every respect save that of ceremonial and ritual adherence to the Jewish faith, they thought and acted as Jews, but hesitated to pass over as recognized converts for two reasons: the anti-Semitic prejudice of the day that made formal identification with the Jewish community a matter of some social consequence in Gentile circles; and—almost as important a barrier—the fact that even within the Jewish community a proselyte remained for his lifetime a second-class Jew.”⁵⁰

Certainly for these people, the gospel message declared by Paul—which not only offered permanent forgiveness for sins, but also an equality for all—was something that they found most attractive. Yet, by the time Paul's written correspondence with the Corinthian assembly began, many more non-Jews had to have entered in—directly from paganism—and with it introduced a variety of the sinful challenges needing to be addressed.

Of all the problems witnessed in 1 Corinthians, directly affected by Ancient Corinth, the sexual sins being committed by various persons in the assembly, tend to garner not only the most attention, but also the most revulsion, by Bible readers. *Corinth was a significant center of (temple) prostitution*. The classical philosopher Plato had actually referred to a prostitute as a “Corinthian girl” (*Republic* 404d).⁵¹ It is widely stated among examiners⁵² how the verb *Korinthiazomai* (Κορινθιάζομαι), technically meaning “to be a Corinthian,” more often

⁴⁵ Morris, “Corinthians, First Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 1:773-774.

⁴⁶ Georgi, “Corinthians, First Letter to the,” *IDBSup*, 180.

⁴⁷ Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:685; Murphy-O'Connor, “Corinth,” in *ABD*, 1:1138.

⁴⁸ Philo Judaeus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), pp 782-783.

⁴⁹ Steven Barabas, “Corinth,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 233.

⁵⁰ Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:685.

⁵¹ “And what about Corinthian girl-friends? Do you disapprove of them for men who want to keep fit?” (*Republic* 404d; Plato: *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee [London: Penguin Books, 2007], 102).

⁵² Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:685; Barabas, “Corinth,” in *NIDB*, 233; Morris, “Corinthians, First Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 1:773; Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 172-173; Carson and Moo, 420; et. al.

also meant “*practise fornication*, because Corinth was famous for its courtesans” (Liddell-Scott-Jones).⁵³ Even with this possibly being exaggerated in past history, it did demonstrate how Corinth did have a reputation that was less-than-desirable.

Comparisons between Ancient Corinth and more modern cities have certainly been made by many examiners. The thought issued by *IDB* is, “Although the site had been inhabited as early as Neolithic times and ancient Corinth has played an important role in early city-state politics, the city in Paul’s day was a new and burgeoning metropolis, more nearly comparable to Houston, Texas than to Boston, Massachusetts.”⁵⁴ Hafemann is a bit more general, in observing, “By Paul’s day Corinth had...become a pluralistic melting pot of cultures, philosophies, lifestyles and religions, and had the feel of an economic ‘boom-town.’”⁵⁵ Witherington hits on a point that surely sat behind many of the problems that erupted among the Believers: “Corinth was a city where an enterprising person could rise quickly in society through the accumulation and judicious use of newfound wealth. It seems that in Paul’s time many in Corinth were already suffering from a self-made-person-escapes-humble-origins syndrome.”⁵⁶

Because of the apparent ability to rise up the social ladder, groups and sub-groups in Corinthian society were apparently common. This is an environment where one can easily detect the rich getting richer, and where the poor and slaves are easily abused. Garland indicates, “One could possess high status according to certain markers but low status when it came to others, creating a status dissonance that fed an internal restlessness and a greater desire to achieve the *dignitas* that one believed was one’s due.”⁵⁷ How controversial must Paul’s word have been! “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (12:13), where universal availability for God’s Spirit is present for **all those who are in Yeshua**. Unfortunately, much of the competition culture of Ancient Corinth was present among the Messiah followers. Garland is forced to acknowledge, “Values that were antithetical to the message of the cross—particularly those related to honor and status so basic to the Greco-Roman social system, in which power manifesting itself in ruthlessness and self-advancement is thought to be the only sensible course—percolated into the [assembly], destroying its fellowship and its...witness.”⁵⁸

Given the Romanization of Corinth, Latin was certainly a language used within the city, but Greek was still the overwhelming language of business and commerce for the Eastern Mediterranean. “Latin was established as the official language, and the Roman character of the city is reflected by the many Latin names in the NT (Acts 18:7f; Rom. 16:21-23; 1 Cor. 16:17); nevertheless, the majority of the population were Greeks, and Greek was likely the language of the common people” (*ISBE*).⁵⁹ Considering Paul’s Greek-speaking Corinthian audience, no scholastic claim has ever been made trying to suggest a Hebrew or Aramaic composition for his epistle. There are very few quotations made from the Tanach in this letter, so even the amount of possible Septuagintisms is low. The fact that Paul did write this letter in Greek is easily confirmed by noting how all of the people in the Corinthian assembly, especially the Jewish members of his audience, had proper names of Greek and Latin origin: Gaius, Fortunatus, Crispus, Justus, Achaius, Sosthenes, Aquila, Priscilla. It has been said of 1 Corinthians that “The character of the letter has made it one of the fundamental sources for a social description of ‘the first urban Christians’” (*EDB*).⁶⁰ However, no one should deny the deep

⁵³ *BibleWorks 9.0: LSJM Lexicon (Unabridged)*. MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.

⁵⁴ Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in *IDB*, 1:685.

⁵⁵ Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 173.

⁵⁶ Witherington, 20.

⁵⁷ Garland, 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Morris, “Corinthians, First Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 1:773; also Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinth,” in *ABD*, 1:1138; Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 173; Carson and Moo, 420; Keener, 7.

Witherington, 37 goes into some of the possible compositional process of 1 Corinthians.

⁶⁰ Peter Richardson, “Corinthians, First Letter to,” in *EDB*, 281.

Tanach and Jewish background of the Apostle Paul, nor the presence of Aramaic-derived terms like “maranatha”⁶¹ (16:22).

Ultimately, while Ancient Corinth was ethnically and culturally diverse, mainly with Greeks and Romans, as well as various Easterners and Jews—the big difference present in Corinth was between the rich at the top, and a massive number of poor at the bottom (cf. 1:26-29). The view of Fee is that “All evidence together suggests that Paul’s Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.”⁶² Yet, regardless of what modern sinful city one chooses to compare to Ancient Corinth, Norman Hillyer’s conclusion is the most significant: “within 25 years of the crucifixion, the gospel was being proclaimed in the first and worst city of S Greece, with its teeming cosmopolitan population of half a million Greeks, Roman colonists and Jews.”⁶³ It can be recognized that for many of those who had made some kind of profession in Yeshua in Corinth—that their identity was more *Corinthian* than it was *in Messiah*, and this presented many problems. **But the Messiah of Israel was indeed being recognized and worshipped as Lord in Corinth, and many lives were changed with His salvation.**

WHAT IS THE THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE OF 1 CORINTHIANS?

Given the many complexities of the setting of Ancient Corinth, both Jewish and Greco-Roman, it is hardly a surprise that academic commentators and examiners have a much easier time in approaching the contents of Paul’s letter, than your standard Bible reader. One who is engaged in a more scholarly venue in reading through 1 Corinthians, will make light of more of the contemporary history, translation issues from the Greek source text into English, and above all a diversity of interpretation perspectives—than a layperson who is just reading 1 Corinthians in his or her Bible. Still, this hardly means that reading through 1 Corinthians and interpreting it should be an impossible or daunting task. In much of contemporary Christianity, as noted by Blomberg, many “[find] Paul’s principles in addressing the Corinthian church as a paradigm for how to do urban ministry in the modern world.”⁶⁴ The letter of 1 Corinthians is highly relevant and most imperative for people today.

Attention needs to necessarily be given to the relationship of what is called 1 Corinthians to what is called 2 Corinthians. Given the presence of a non-extant first letter (5:9), there are various theories which have been offered, surrounding the composition of what is canonically called “The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians,” but is better thought of as being “Corinthians B.” While there are scholars who have proposed our canonical 1 Corinthians as possibly being a compiled edition of multiple pieces of correspondence, more frequently 1 Corinthians is proposed as being one of four total pieces of correspondence written to the Believers in Corinth.⁶⁵ These four pieces of correspondence would include: (1) the previous letter (5:9), (2) the canonical 1 Corinthians, (3) a severe letter (2 Corinthians 2:3; 7:8-12), and then (4) the canonical 2 Corinthians.

For the interpreter of 1 Corinthians, the statement “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people” (5:9), tends to gain the most attention. A relatively conservative commentator like Leon Morris thinks, “The letter had been misunderstood (1 Cor. 5:9-10) and Paul mentioned it only to clear up a misconception. The newer letter superseded the older, and thus there was no point in preserving it.”⁶⁶ In later correspondence, Paul makes reference to a sorrowful letter he sent: “For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while” (2 Corinthians 7:8). Was this severe letter something non-extant as well? Or was this letter simply the

⁶¹ Grk. *marana tha* (μαράνα θά); transliteration of the Aramaic מָרָנָא תָּא [marana ta] (our *Lord, come!*) (Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 616).

⁶² Fee, 3.

⁶³ Norman Hillyer, “1 and 2 Corinthians,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1049.

⁶⁴ Blomberg, 20.

⁶⁵ Guthrie, pp 437-453; Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 174; Thiselton, pp 36-41.

⁶⁶ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 23.