

## Getting into the text—2 Corinthians chapter 1



1. Based on your reading of the whole book, what do you describe the reaction of the Corinthians to Paul's last letter?
2. In what sense might Paul's distress (1:6) be considered a comfort for the Corinthian Christians?
3. Paul talks about the hardships (1:8) he suffered as a means to rely more fully upon God (see 6:4-10 for examples). How does this compare to the attitudes of Christians you see suffering today?
4. In 1:16-20 Paul seems to have been accused of being double-minded. What are some experiences you've had with people who say "yes" and "no" in the same breath? Why does Paul then give a defence of God's faithfulness?
5. Paul defends his integrity by writing about his 'boasting' (1:12-14). What character, attitudes and beliefs are at work in the Apostle here? (see these texts for other examples: 1 Cor. 1:28-31; 1 Cor. ch. 9; 2 Cor. 10:13-18; Phil. 2:16) What does Paul's example say to us about our relationships in the church and our practice of ministry?
6. Paul affirms that Jesus Christ proceeds from God and is God's 'yes' to all former promises; he affirms God's loyalty (1:18-22). How would you explain to someone else that Christ fulfils the message of the Old Testament? (see Heb. 1:1-2 for help and give as much detail as you can)
7. Read verses 3-11 again. How does Paul's testimony reflect the theology explored in the previous question?
8. What hardships in life have, or might, shake your confidence in God's faithfulness to you?



# Ministry Matters

## Study Notes

### #1 Hardship & Hope 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:11

*"Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace." 2 Corinthians 1:12*

### Introduction

Corinth was ancient Greece's most important trade city (Acts 18:1; 19:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1,23; 2 Tim. 4:20). Perched on a narrow strip of land connecting the Peloponnese with central Greece and the rest of Europe, Corinth enjoyed a steady flow of trade. Corinth was the connecting link between Rome, the capital of the world, and the East. About 500,000 people lived there at the time of Paul's arrival. Merchants and sailors, anxious to work the docks, migrated to Corinth. Professional gamblers and athletes, betting on the Isthmian games, took up residence. Slaves, sometimes freed but with no place to go, roamed the streets day and night. And prostitutes (both male and female) were abundant.

People from all over the Mediterranean world relished the lack of standards and freedom of thought that prevailed in the city. So widely known did the immorality of Corinth become that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" came to mean "to practice sexual immorality."

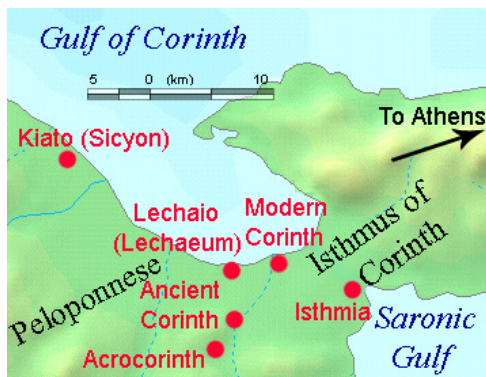


2nd letter to the corinthians

Surrounded by grain fields, vineyards, and olive groves, the city was where the action lay. Enclosed by walls ten kilometres in circumference; most of the daily business was conducted in the marble-paved marketplace at the city's centre. Pagan idolatry and daily trade went hand in hand. Today the Temple of Apollo (pictured front page), partially in ruins, towers above the ancient marketplace. Each fluted Doric column, about seven meters tall, was cut from a single piece of stone in one of several quarries outside Corinth's walls. Corinth was a former competitor for fame and power with Athens in ancient times. From the acropolis nearly 500 metres above the city, the acropolis at Athens can be seen. The infamous Temple of Aphrodite (or Venus) was located on top of this fortified hill. This pagan temple and its 1,000 "religious" prostitutes had great impact on the city's culture and morals.



In tune with his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles and their kings, at Corinth the apostle Paul established a flourishing church, made up of a cross section of the worldly minded people who had flocked to Corinth to participate in the gambling, legalized temple prostitution, business ventures, and amusements available in a first-century navy town (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The new converts, many with little or no background in the history and theology and ethics of their Jewish brothers and sisters, had to learn to live together in harmony; a great challenge to national, social, economic, and religious sensitivities.



The Corinth that Paul knew was partially destroyed by an earthquake in A. D. 521, then totally devastated by another in 1858. Modern Corinth, rebuilt about four kilometres from the ancient site, is little more than a town. However, archaeologists have given us plenty to examine of ancient Corinth's former glory.

## Sequence of Events

Paul's relationship with Corinth can be tracked over a 7 year period. From the *Book of Acts* and from within *2 Corinthians* itself a reconstruction of events may look like the following: together:

- Established the church in Corinth over 1 1/2 year period (AD 50-52)
- During his third missionary journey, Paul received word about immorality in the young congregation
- He wrote a letter (which has since been lost) against mixing with immoral people (1 Cor. 5:9)
- Problems persisted, and Paul wrote a second letter (probably *1 Corinthians*), referring to various points raised by the congregations
- Paul visited Corinth a second time to correct the abuses in person, and called it his 'painful visit' (2 Cor. 2:1; AD 55 or 56)
- From Ephesus Paul then wrote a third letter in which he pulled no punches. This letter, which he sent by Titus, has also been lost. Perhaps it is preserved in *2 Corinthians* chapters 10--13
- In anxiety over the possible effect of this drastic letter, and impatient over Titus' delay in returning, Paul travelled north from Ephesus to Macedonia. There Titus met him and, to Paul's relief and joy, reported that the Corinthians had addressed the issues and repented (2 Cor. 2:5-11)
- Paul then wrote a fourth letter (*2 Corinthians*) from Macedonia, to prepare the church for his third and final visit and recounting his former anxiety and expressing his joy over their reforms
- Paul made his third and final visit and stayed for 3 months (AD 56 or 57)

