

# The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

## Lesson 64 – Acts 19-20 – Paul's Third Journey Part 3

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### INTRODUCTION

Paul's third journey, spanning approximately AD 53-57, represents the final and most extensive phase of his apostolic travels as recorded in the book of Acts. This journey solidifies the Gospel's establishment in key urban centers of Asia Minor and Greece, following the foundational work of his first two journeys. After concluding his second journey and briefly returning to Antioch, Paul embarks on this new phase, revisiting the churches he previously planted and establishing a home base in Ephesus.

This period of ministry is characterized by a powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit's empowerment, leading to both widespread belief and fierce opposition. In Ephesus, the influence of the Truth was so extensive that it challenged the city's economic and religious foundations, culminating in a major riot. We will also follow Paul on his farewell journey toward Jerusalem, marked by a poignant farewell.

Through these events, the narrative highlights the ongoing expansion of the early Church, the deep bonds between Paul and the communities he served, and the persistent challenges faced by believers in a hostile world.

### 1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS – LETTERS DURING PAUL'S THIRD JOURNEY

During Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10), he receives troubling reports about the church in Corinth, a congregation he had founded during his second journey (Acts 18:1-17). These reports, combined with a visit from Corinthian representatives, prompt him to write 1 Corinthians to address doctrinal errors, moral failures, and divisions. Later, after leaving Ephesus and traveling through Macedonia (Acts 20:1-3), Paul writes 2 Corinthians in response to ongoing challenges, including false apostles undermining his authority. These letters, written amid Paul's travels and trials, provide critical instruction for the early Church while reflecting the historical pressures of a pagan-dominated Greco-Roman world, where idolatry, immorality, and philosophical debates threatened believer unity and purity.

### 1 CORINTHIANS – CORRECTION AMID CORINTHIAN CHAOS

Written from Ephesus around spring AD 53-55, during Paul's third-year stay there (Acts 19:10; 20:31), 1 Corinthians responds to reports of division and immorality in the Corinthian church. The city's reputation as a commercial hub rife with temple prostitution and philosophical schools amplified these issues, pressuring believers to conform to surrounding cultural norms.

Acts 19:1-20 provides the backdrop: Paul's Ephesian ministry emphasizes the Holy Spirit's power and rejection of idolatry, mirroring the corrections needed in Corinth. The letter addresses every reported challenge with doctrine, urging maturity and unity in Christ.

Key Sections and Topics:

- Divisions and God's Wisdom (Chapters 1-4): Paul confronts factionalism, where believers aligned with leaders like Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (1:10-17). In a city influenced by rhetorical

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schools, Paul contrasts human wisdom with the "foolishness" of the cross (1:18-25; 2:1-5). He asserts Christ's foundation for the church (3:10-15) and warns of rewards based on faithful service (3:8, 14-15). This reflects Acts' emphasis on unity amid opposition, as seen in Paul's Ephesian synagogue debates (Acts 19:8-9).

- Immorality and Discipline (Chapters 5-6): Paul rebukes tolerance of Immorality (5:1-5), calling for church discipline to remove the offender (5:13). In Corinth's sexually permissive environment, tied to pagan worship, he urges fleeing immorality (6:18) and viewing bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit (6:19-20). Legal disputes among believers (6:1-8) are condemned, echoing Roman litigiousness; Paul reminds them of future judgment over angels (6:3).
- Marriage and Liberty (Chapters 7-10): Amid Corinth's diverse population, Paul addresses marriage, singleness, and divorce (7:1-40), emphasizing contentment in one's calling (7:17-24). On Christian liberty, he warns against abusing freedom in matters like eating idol meat (8:1-13; 10:23-33), drawing lessons from Israel's wilderness failures (10:1-13).
- Order in Worship and Gifts (Chapters 11-14): Paul corrects abuses in the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) and "head coverings" (11:2-16), promoting order. Spiritual effects are for edification (12:4-11; 14:1-40), with love as supreme (13:1-13). Tongues and prophecy must build the church, not cause confusion, reflecting early Church transitions from miraculous signs.
- Resurrection and Hope (Chapters 15-16): Paul defends the resurrection as central to the Gospel (15:1-8, 12-19), promising victory over death (15:51-58). This counters the Greek philosophical denial of bodily resurrection.

The letter's strong tone asserts Paul's apostolic authority (4:14-21), written amid Ephesian peace (Acts 19:10), yet foreseeing Corinthian arrogance.

## 2 CORINTHIANS – DEFENSE AND RECONCILIATION

Composed around AD 56 from Macedonia (Acts 20:1-3). This autobiography reveals Paul's sarcasm (11:19) and devotion. After a painful Corinthian visit (2:1), 2 Corinthians defends Paul's apostleship against false apostles who arrived post-1 Corinthians. These intruders, likely Judaizers, slandered Paul for changing travel plans (1:15-17) and questioned his credentials. The historical context of travel disruptions (Acts 20:3's plot) and Ephesian riots (Acts 19:23-41) underscores Paul's vulnerabilities, while Macedonia's churches provided support amid threats.

The letter reaffirms Paul's love, eternal perspective, and ministry integrity, urging generosity and loyalty to Christ.

Key Sections and Topics:

- Comfort and Ministry (Chapters 1-2): Paul shares God's comfort in afflictions (1:3-7), explaining his changed plans to spare them (1:23-2:4). He calls for forgiving a repentant offender (2:5-11), reflecting church discipline from 1 Corinthians 5.

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- The New System Glory and Eternal Hope (Chapters 3-5): Contrasting old and new systems (3:6-18), Paul describes ministry as unveiling Christ's glory (4:1-6). Eternal hope sustains amid trials (4:16-18; 5:1-10), with reconciliation as the Gospel's core (5:18-21): "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
- Apostolic Defense (Chapters 6-9): Paul urges separation from unbelievers (6:14-7:1) and expresses joy over Corinthian repentance via Titus (7:5-16). He promotes generosity for the Jerusalem collection (8:1-9:15), modeling Christ's poverty-to-riches (8:9).
- Authority and Warnings (Chapters 10-13): Sarcastically defending against "super-apostles" (11:5), Paul boasts in weaknesses and visions (11:23-12:10), including thorns in the flesh. He warns of examining their faith (13:5), affirming his authority without burdening them (11:9).

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

These letters emerge from Paul's Ephesian base and Macedonian travels (Acts 19-20), amid Roman provincial stability yet local unrest. Corinth's strategic location fostered trade, immorality, and diverse philosophies, amplifying church issues. Ephesus' Artemis cult parallels Corinth's idolatry, showing the Gospel's clash with economics and religion. False apostles reflect Judaizing threats seen in Galatia, while travel plots (Acts 20:3) explain Paul's itinerary changes. The Jerusalem collection ties to Acts 20-21's relief efforts, promoting unity across Jewish-Gentile divides.

### LITERARY ANALYSIS

As epistles, these are instructional letters with rhetorical elements suited to Hellenized audiences. 1 Corinthians follows a problem-solution structure, using questions (1:13) and imperatives for correction. 2 Corinthians blends defense (apologia) with exhortation, employing irony (11:21) and contrasts (old/new systems). Key themes include unity, love, and resurrection, with Paul's fatherly tone (1 Corinthians 4:14-15) fostering imitation.

### KEY VOCABULARY:

- "Admonish" (noutheteō, 1 Corinthians 4:14): To warn as a father, emphasizing correction.
- "Reconciliation" (katallassō, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19): Restoring a relationship, the result of atonement.
- "Apostleship" (apostolē, 2 Corinthians 11:5): Authority from Christ, defended against fakes.

### CONCLUSION

1 and 2 Corinthians, penned during Paul's third journey (Acts 19-21), address Corinthian crises amid a pagan world, offering timeless doctrines on unity, morality, gifts, and reconciliation. Historical pressures like idolatry and false teaching amplify their urgency, showing the Gospel's transformative power. Paul's corrections and defenses model faithful ministry, urging imitation of Christ and vigilance, ensuring the Church's endurance despite opposition.

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### Addendum: Evaluating the time and location of the writing of 2 Corinthians

The most probable location for Paul to have written 2 Corinthians is Macedonia, possibly in the city of Philippi. This aligns with details in the letter itself, where Paul describes arriving in Macedonia amid external conflicts and inner fears, only to be comforted by the arrival of Titus with positive news from Corinth (2 Corinthians 7:5-7: "For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you..."). This indicates he composed the letter there after meeting Titus, following his departure from Ephesus via Troas (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). In the broader historical context of Acts, this corresponds to Paul's travels after the Ephesus riot, when he left for Macedonia to encourage the churches (Acts 20:1-2).

The most probable time is around AD 55-56, a few months to a year after 1 Corinthians (written from Ephesus ca. AD 54-55). This dating fits the sequence in Acts during Paul's third missionary journey (AD 53-57), after his extended Ephesian ministry (Acts 19) and before his three-month stay in Greece (Acts 20:2-3). It accounts for intervening events like a painful visit to Corinth (implied in 2 Corinthians 2:1), a severe intermediate letter (now lost; referenced in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, 7:8-12), and Paul's afflictions in Asia (2 Corinthians 1:8-10, echoing the Ephesus unrest in Acts 19:23-41).