

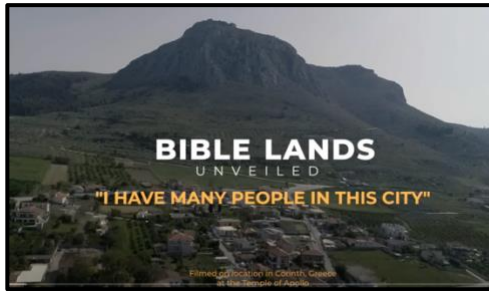


Amir Tsarfati

Bible Lands Unveiled: I Have Many People in This City

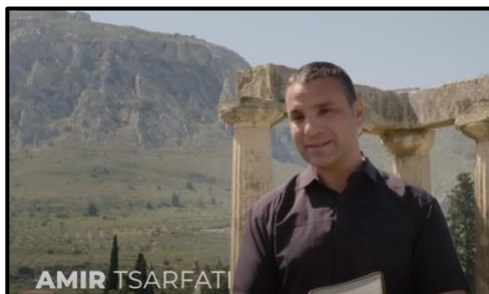
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Shalom from ancient Corinth, a city that is about 50 miles south of Athens, and about two



miles south of the isthmus, which is the land bridge connecting Peloponnes in the south with mainland Greece in the north. We're in an amazing city that was located here and enjoyed that specific geographical location for so many different reasons. But of course, the main one is

the fact that one side of the isthmus is actually facing the west, facing Rome, while the other side of the isthmus is actually facing the east, facing Asia Minor, facing Ephesus, and all the other major cities. Basically, what happened is, there used to be two major seaports on the two sides of the isthmus. On one side would unload the cargo from the main ships, and then they would be dragged, if they were smaller boats, they would be dragged on a paved road to the other side to go back into seawaters. Yet if they were big ships, there was no other way but to unload from one ship and reload on another one. You are talking about two major seaports that attracted commerce from both sides of the ancient world of the time. You are talking about an attraction of seamen,



attraction of businessmen, attraction of travelers, and also an attraction for people who are coming to worship the different deities that this particular city had temples for.

Behind me is actually the remains of the temple of

Apollo. You remember, Apollo is the god of sun, the god

of the light, the god of poetry, the god of wisdom; the son of Zeus was one of the 12 most important

deities of the Greek mythology. In some sources, they say that it was also the god of prophecy. Thinking about it, when Paul arrived in this area, this particular temple was already in ruins. I believe it was used as a way for Paul to talk about the complete lack of worth of those gods, of those things because at the time there was a gigantic golden sculpture of Apollo that was standing inside that place.

The city of Corinth, its name was a synonym for corruption, not just corruption but a complete lack of morality and decency. We know that the place itself attracted so many people, but for the wrong reasons. Apart from the fact that Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games every four years, and it



attracted athletes, and people that loved sports, Corinth also attracted people who supposedly, under the guise of worshiping the goddess Aphrodite, used to come and travel to the upper part of the Acropolis of Corinth, known as the Acrocorinth.



[They came] to visit a temple that had—hear me well—2,000 prostitutes. We are talking about female prostitutes who basically gave sex services to people from all around the area. The fees that were paid to those women were basically offerings to the goddess, Aphrodite, right here, in that particular temple. In other words, the idea of going to the temple of Aphrodite and sleeping with a woman over there who is a prostitute was for many, a religious idea. For many it was, “We are coming to worship Aphrodite. We are coming to contribute to Aphrodite’s temple.” Now you may understand what Paul meant every time he wrote about sexual immorality regarding the people of Corinth. Both in 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 and 2 Corinthians 12:20-21, Paul talks about fornication, and Paul talks about prostitution, he talks about

sexual immorality in complete conjunction with that which was going on here in the city at the time of Paul.

We have to remember that the fame of Corinth in the Greek era was actually not at the time of Paul. At the time of Paul, the city was amazing, don't get me wrong. But if you go back in history, you find out that when the Greeks controlled this area, when they lived here under their own independence as their own empire, it was between the 11th and the 5th century BC that Corinth was so important. That was the time that Apollo's temple was erected and that was the time that Apollo's statue was still standing in this area. Well, of course, what we know is that the city of Corinth was the capital of the Achaean region that rebelled against the Roman Empire. Because of that, the Roman emperors, once they made it to this place, *leveled* it to the ground, and



built a brand-new city in the first century BC. So, when Paul is coming to Corinth, it was not the famous Corinth of the 5th, and the 6th, and the 7th, centuries BC, it is now a Roman city that is situated right where the ancient Greek one was

standing. Very few things are left for us to see today from the time of the ancient Greek's ruling of Corinth, such as Apollo's temple. But we can find of course, other things from the time of the Romans that were not less impressive such as the marketplace, the Agora, which was larger than the one in Rome. It was quite impressive.

Our story from the Scriptures takes us all the way to Acts chapter 18. We know that Paul left the city of Athens. He preached there for a while. We know that he was shocked with the idolatry that was going on. We know he managed to convey the message of the one true God through speaking about the "unknown" God to the people of Athens. Athens, if I may say, was

known for the classic teaching of philosophy and poetry. It was all about people coming to study. Athens, by the way, was the university of even the wealthy people of Rome at the time. If Athens was all about education, Corinth was all about the pleasure and the money. Corinth was almost, in a way, “the world, in your face.” It’s interesting because, after preaching in Athens, the apostle Paul traveled to Corinth as the first 18 verses of chapter 18 are describing. We know that probably after Antioch, that it was the most important city that Paul visited—maybe with the exception of Ephesus—and he stayed here longer than any other city we know of. He stayed here, the Bible says, for 18 months; this is amazing, a year and a half. Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla. Both of them were tentmakers that actually came from where? From Rome. The Bible says that they fled from Rome. We know that according to the Roman historian Suetonius, Claudius, the emperor,



expelled the Jews from Rome about 49 AD because the Jews were in a state of constant tumult at the instigation of one called “Christos,” Christ. Very interesting.

So, although the golden age of Corinth was five centuries before Paul’s visit, Corinth at the time enjoyed an amazing return to prominence during that first century. But remember, at the time it is a Roman city. They had the biannual Isthmian Games that brought a lot of people to this place, second in importance to the Olympic Games in Olympia, Greece. We know that in honor of Poseidon, the god of the sea—they relied on him (the sea god) being right by the sea—these games were held. We discovered more places and more things where the starting gates of the races used to be. We believe it’s possible Paul may have been present in one of those events because Paul knew about running a race. Paul knew about running tracks. Paul also knew what the winner got when he made it to the finish line. In fact, it’s interesting because from Greek sources, we know that it wasn’t a laurel wreath that the winner got here in the

Isthmian games. It was actually wilted celery, of all things. [Amir laughs] The reason why it's interesting is because Paul refers to the worldly crowns that people get as what we call, "corruptible crowns." That *is* a corruptible crown; that is in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. We know that Corinth also had a light industry of manufacturing highly prized bronze works. We know that it included polished mirrors and maybe that could shed a light on what 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 were talking about.

Now Corinth, as we know, is the place where Paul had arrived. We know the location, south of the isthmus, was an amazing thing. Many people tried in the history to somehow cut or dig a canal in order to save the effort of having to unload and reload ships on the two sides. We know that several people such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Caligula, all of these people considered making that canal through the isthmus. We know that in 67 AD, right after the Jewish revolt in Jerusalem and Judea started, in that time, probably about 15 years after Paul visited



this place, Nero came to Corinth to turn over a spade full of soil in a groundbreaking ceremony for a canal. We know that he brought with him Jewish slaves. The idea was to have Jewish slaves digging that canal; but the whole project was abandoned. And believe it or not, that canal that we see today, the famous Corinthian Canal, was dug by locals under the supervision of French engineers between 1881-1893. The city itself, as I said, we know that it flourished; in the time of Paul, it was a very significant place.

What kind of religion did Corinth have at the time? We know that the Corinthians, one could find cults and gods of Egypt, and Rome, and Greece. But the temple of Aphrodite, on the top of that mountain, right behind me, probably stood atop all of them, both physically and in the



way of life in this city. They say that a thousand cult prostitutes continued to ply their profession in the city below. You can imagine that not only what was going on in the temple was immoral, but the immorality spilled over even to the city itself. We

know that many of those women were actually sex slaves that were brought from other parts of the empire. We even know of one account where the winner of the Isthmian Games, the one who won the first prize, basically sponsored 200 prostitutes for the temple of Aphrodite. Women were almost a product that people handed from one hand to another. And of course it attracted—if anyone found a beautiful woman, and she was taken in captivity, that would be the destination. So for the men, we know that Corinth was known as the place with the most beautiful women; and of course, it was the easiest way to satisfy their desires.

And so, you understand now that it is in this context, Paul is arriving... Paul is not naive to the culture of the Greeks and to the culture of idolatry. Yet, still, it was too much for him. Let's dive into the text of **Acts 18:1–8** to understand what happened in this place. **“¹ After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews**

and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. ⁶ But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ ⁷ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” So you would think that this is a very interesting mix of opposition, and acceptance of the gospel by the head of the synagogue. Bear in mind, I have said that many, many times that Paul was in the mindset that it was to the Jew first. He was in the mindset that the revelation that he received regarding Yeshua, Jesus, being the Messiah, is a revelation he must carry first to the Jewish people. So, he lands in the heart of the pagan world, in the heart of the pagan and the most corrupt aspect of humanity, yet he goes first to the Jewish synagogue and preaches there on the Sabbath day, several times. It was all about convincing them and reasoning with them why Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah. In a very, very interesting manner we know that, of course, many opposed. But the head of the synagogue actually, and his entire household, accepted it. Now watch what happened: **Acts 18:9–10, “⁹ Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’”**

Wow. Isn’t that interesting? Paul is arriving to a city that was either religious, or completely immoral. There was really almost nothing in between here. Paul is arriving, most likely, to the most difficult mission field he could ever think of. Can you imagine? People are here either seeking their own righteousness or seeking to somehow fulfill the desires of their flesh. And it was all done

under the religious facade of worshipping a female goddess known as Aphrodite. Think about it, Paul is arriving in this place, he is already so exhausted from the Athens' events. He is coming to a place where he goes to the Jewish synagogue—and I believe that Paul, being human, coming to a place where he is experiencing great opposition—it's not easy to go to a place and to be attacked almost on a daily basis. At some point, I believe, that Paul in the flesh said, "Enough is enough. I'm out of here. Get me out of here." So many times we find ourselves in a situation where we think, "First of all, this is a filthy place. I would never be here." If that's the case, you can imagine, we wouldn't be able to preach the gospel anywhere around the world. The second is, so many times we think, "Oh, I've done everything I could. Enough is enough. I'm out of here." Isn't that interesting, you are thinking about a place that, at its peak, had hundreds of thousands of people. Think about all those women who were locked up in places, and they were forced to sleep with strangers every day.

So, think about the immoral people that lived in that city. One would think that God is so fed up with all of that. And He... you know there is always that image by other people thinking that God takes pleasure in destroying the sinner and destroying the wicked one. And it's so far from the truth. In **Ezekiel 33:11** the following thing He says, **“¹¹ Say to them: “As I live,” says the LORD GOD, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?””** This was said to the people of Israel, but we know that this is the heart of God for all people: that no one should die or perish, but that all will live. Eventually, it's the choice of people to either believe in God, walk in His ways, understand their sinful nature, or reject it. But the heart of God is not the killing of the wicked. The heart of God is that the wicked will come, and repent, and live. Choose life! Moses said, through the Lord of course, in the book of Deuteronomy, “Here

I put before you today, evil and good, death and life, choose life.” That’s what God wants for people. That’s what God also wanted for the city of Corinth, to choose life. Paul had a bad day. “Yeah, yeah, yeah, I need to preach, but I have a bad day.” We all have bad days, don’t we? In the next few minutes, we’re going to look at what is it that Paul did, and what was the heart of God for this city.

We understand Paul had a very, very bad day. We understand that he just heard from God the most uplifting message of all, “I am with you. Nothing bad is going happen to you. In fact, stay here, because you are here for a reason and for a season. I have many people in this city.” I am thinking to myself, Paul must have been on his knees, praying, and asking God, “Am I needed here? Is my job done here? Maybe I should just go away?” When we are having bad days that is probably what is going on in our mind. I cannot help but be reminded of **Psalm 145:14, 17–18** that says, **“¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down.”** Then it goes on and says later on, **“¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all His ways, ...¹⁸ the LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.”** We see God was there, the uplifter and the encourager of Paul when Paul needed that encouragement. We all have those moments. Not only when we preach the Word, but even in our daily conduct of life. But more so when we do the work of God and trust me, if you do the work of God, expect some major opposition. We know that; we know that because Paul said already in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9**, **“⁸ We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—”** He acknowledged that there are difficulties, but it is not over. In fact, he will move forward. He will go on, and he is drawing from the Lord Himself, his encouragement. This is so important.

I don't know where it is that you live right now. You are probably thinking to yourself, "My family, they are all immoral. That they are not all in the mindset of the gospel. My friends are so not in the right mindset." I don't know what you have in mind or what you are surrounded by, but trust me, none of you are surrounded by thousands of seamen who are looking for prostitutes. None of you are surrounded by people that are under the guise of worshipping some goddess, they are actually sleeping with prostitutes who are sex slaves in a big city, a prominent city. Someone described Corinth of those days as Amsterdam on steroids. It's interesting because you need to understand that if Paris was the culture and passion capital of the Renaissance, then this was the one of 2,000 years ago. This was way more than Athens, way more than Rome. Rome was about power; Athens was about education. This is about what? Money and pleasure, and mostly satisfying your flesh. You cannot run away from the understanding that this is where all of the flesh is exposed in the strongest way. Yet, I believe, that even with all that opposition and spiritual warfare, Paul understood that he needed to listen to the voice of God, not to the voice of man. It is so important that we understand that.

We understand that man will never give us the best advice. I am reminded of David running from Saul and hiding in the cave of En Gedi. King Saul was right there, took off his sandals, and put his feet in the water. David had the chance of his life to kill King Saul. His people said to him, "The Lord gave him to you. Now. Today. This is it! Do it!" They even used that—I call it *Christianese*— "Thus says the Lord." They tried to tell him, "This is it!" David was not listening to man, even though they were his men. They were his best people. They were his protectors, and they were his guards, in a way. David knew that "I need to listen to the Holy Spirit." He never touched King Saul. He never did anything wrong. "Far be from me that I will raise my hand on the Lord's anointed." That's what he said. That is why God loved David so much. Because David

did not rely on somebody else's opinion. He relied on God and on the Holy Spirit. He was on his knees. He was praying. He was listening. The Spirit of God talked to David every day: "Go up, go down, turn left, turn right..." even in the most simple, practical things.

So Paul in his bed, is thinking to himself, "I'm done with this place." And God says, "No, you're not. No, you're not." By the way, if you think that the little, minor incident in the synagogue was hard, or was dangerous, wait until you hear what happened right after. Right after! We know that in **Acts** chapter **18**, right after this story, we know that it says in verse **12–13**, "¹² **When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia,**" which is the greater area of this place, "**the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat,**" The judgment seat, here, we found it. The bema seat of Corinth, we found it. And that place is where Paul was brought to, right before Gallio. It's interesting because they brought him to that place "¹³ **...saying, 'This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.'**" Isn't that interesting? You're thinking about all the other gods, and they have no problem with that worship. Think about it. If you're a devout Jew, okay? Judaism, by the way, was a religion that was *permitted*. There is a term that the Romans coined for that, a *permitted religion*. They allowed them to worship their God. But the Jewish people, not even a single time, came to the others and said, "Hey, Aphrodite doesn't exist. Hey, Apollo doesn't exist. Hey, there is only one God. Hey, you are all pagan worshipers." No! But suddenly, out of the blue, comes the one who is a Jew, into their synagogue, and preached with their Scriptures, and is telling them, "You are all wrong. The Messiah had come. He already came, and His name is Jesus, Yeshua. He fulfilled all the prophecies and all the promises that God had for all of you." It is for that that they take him, and before whom? Remember, that is why Paul said, "Don't prosecute one another in front of worldly powers." Paul is convinced that for us, the believers, we need to settle our things between ourselves. Yet you see that the Jewish people are

taking Paul to stand for a trial. Remember, God promised him something, “Don’t worry, I’m here. Nothing wrong is going to be done to you.” You know that when God promises you something, you can take that to the bank. This is it. So here it is, **Acts 18:14–18**: **“¹⁴ And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews,” before Paul even talked, ““If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. ¹⁵ But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.’ ¹⁶ And he drove them from the judgment seat. ¹⁷ Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things. ¹⁸ So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him.”** So, we know that when God told him, “Don’t worry, everything is going to be okay, and there are many people in this city.” We know that Paul decided to stay and to stay, of course, in the city for about one year and six months. All of that is, why? Because he listened to the voice of God and not to the voice of man. **Proverbs 3:6–7**: **“⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;...”** That is the message that Paul had in his mind. “I don’t need to rely on my own wisdom. I need to rely on God’s wisdom.”

So we understand something very important. A city full of wicked people, full of adulterous people, full of prostitution, full of all types of vices right here, and God is telling Paul, “Stay here. I have many people in this city.” I am trying to think to myself, “Isn’t that the heart of God, by just sending Jesus to this world to begin with?” God loves the whole world. God does not need you to be perfect before He will decide if He loves or not. *Because* He loved us first, we love Him. Not the opposite. The Bible says in **2 Peter 3:8-9**, **“⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is**

not slack concerning His promise,” To what? To take us out of here, **“as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”** *All* means all. In John 3, the famous words, **John 3:16–17** continues also, not only that, **“¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”** Paul did not come to this city to preach condemnation, but to preach salvation. Of course if you reject the message of salvation, then you bring upon yourself condemnation. But when these people who never had heard that message, it wasn’t about the condemnation that Paul needed to preach. It was about salvation. God loves them. He wants them. **John 3:18–21: “¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** He’s trying to tell these people, “Repent. God loves you. He sent His only begotten Son. He wants you. He wants to redeem you. He wants to save you. He wants your attention.” Paul stayed right here. He knew, “I must dare to share.” Dare to share. It is something that I really love. You never know. I want to tell you something. You never know. You come to a person, you put your hand on him, and you give him a good word. You just don’t know what is going on in his life or what is going through his mind right now. Maybe he’s thinking, “My life is worth nothing. Nobody loves me.” Maybe he needs

to be reminded of the love of God. Maybe he needs to know because he never heard of such a thing. Maybe he is waiting for such an encouragement, and you're the one. You just never know.

The Bible says in **2 Timothy 4:1-5**, **"¹ I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ² Preach the word!"** He says, **"...Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."** Isn't that amazing? We are called, men and women, young or old, to tell the great story of the One who brought us from darkness into His marvelous light. We are not to keep our mouths shut. We are not to hide. People think about how Peter denied Jesus, and he said, "I do not know the man." But I am telling that you don't have to say, "I don't know Him," to deny Him. You just don't have to say that you know Him, and you already denied Him. This is the sad story. I want to encourage all of you, wherever you are, in your workplace, in your family—that's the family God gave you—in school, wherever you are, you are there for a reason and for a season. Just as Paul was here for a reason and a season. Do you know what? He never really asked Paul, "Hey, Paul, what about staying? Or how about leaving?" No, God told him, "You should stay. As long as you do what you need to do, I will take care of you. It is not going to be easy sometimes, but you will do My work. You are here for a reason and for a season." Preaching the Word of God is not for preachers only. Preachers, I always say, have the easy thing. They preach the Word to those people who already know the Word. The most noble thing is if you sit with someone and tell him, one on one, how you became a believer. Your own testimony is

more powerful than anything else. It's interesting because Paul considered not preaching [as] running the race in vain. He says in **Galatians 2:2**, “² **And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately, to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.**” He was afraid to run this race [in vain]; this life will be meaningless if I don't share the gospel.

I want to conclude this message with one thing: Do not ever underestimate the power of sharing even with one person. He might turn out to be the greatest evangelist of all people and lead many to Christ. You just don't know. All I know is one thing, the people that God puts in the path of your life are people that you meant to see, be with, and talk to, and encourage. Opposition is part of the deal. But remember Psalm 145 talks about how the Lord is the one who encourages and lifts you up. Remember, turn to God and He will guide you. He will be there for you. He will lift you up. He will be there to encourage you. Not man, but God. So, I want to remind you, that even in your city, God has many people.

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