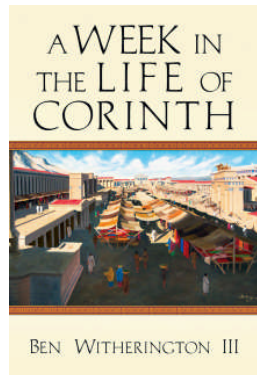


BOOK EXCERPT



A Week in the Life of Corinth

Available May 2012
\$16, 168 pages, paper
978-0-8308-3962-9

"This very readable—indeed, gripping—book gives us an imaginative insight into the Greco-Roman world of Paul's mission to Corinth. . . . I recommend it to all who want to understand the setting in which early Christianity grew and flourished."

—Alanna Nobbs,
professor of ancient history, Macquarie University

Reconstructing Corinth

What would it be like to experience life in the ancient town of Corinth as one of its citizens? Knowledge of this vital center of the New Testament world would likely yield insights about Paul's letters to the church there, would it not?

So it is that expert New Testament scholar Ben Witherington has penned a fictional account of a Corinthian merchant's life through an eventful week of business dealings and conflict. Readers will discover what it was like to live in this bustling Greco-Roman coastal town as they join Nicanor in his day-to-day dealings. Throughout the text, helpful sidebars, maps and diagrams serve to further illuminate the sociocultural context of the early Christian world.

The weak winter sun warmed his shoulders as he clambered down the gangplank, carrying only his shoulder bag with his few traveling possessions. The fog was gently lifting from the hills up to the left, where the road to Corinth could be found. On the dock there were *amphorae* of wine just unloaded. Sailors, just given leave, were heading immediately for the dockside taberna. Roman soldiers kept watch over the toll collector's booth. A garment salesman offered fresh tunics and togas to the dirty disembarking souls. And prostitutes were hanging about with knowing smiles, hoping for some early morning business.

Compared to the salty tang of the clean sea air, Nicanor was immediately struck by the stench that emanated from and hovered over the dock and shore. It was not merely the stench of those disembarking the boat, but the strong smell of sweating human flesh, of rotting garbage and of the overripe scraps of seafood from the fishmonger's stall, even as he unloaded a fresh catch from a little boat not ten feet away.

Clashing with that, and just as potent and pungent, was the smell of the small spice market across the way. There every manner of myrrh, frankincense, anointing oils, pistic nard and other fragrances were available. Some of the newly disembarked would head straight to this shop before heading inland. Knowing they did not have time to bathe or clean up, they chose to overpower their stench by hanging a little vial of nard or

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A frequent contributor to *Patheos.com*, Witherington has also appeared on numerous TV news programs such as *Dateline*, *60 Minutes*, *20/20* and the Peter Jennings ABC special *Jesus and Paul—The Word and the Witness*.

some other potent fragrance around their necks. Pistic nard was very expensive, the most expensive of the perfumes, and yet you would never know it on this day as it was selling rapidly to the more wealthy of the newly landed residents and tourists. Nicanor made a mental note—here was another little business he might invest in one day.

Grabbing a small loaf of bread and some olives and figs from a street vendor only one hundred yards from the dock, Nicanor began his walk toward the villas that lay nestled on a hill between the old city of Corinth and the Acro-Corinthus. It was a cloudless sky, and thus far everything augured well for Nicanor. It was only the first hour of the day and so the early morning business trade was in full swing. . . .

Nicanor was only twenty-seven years old, but already he had begun to make a decent living as the freedman of a man on the rise in Corinth—Erastos, or Erastus, himself the offspring of a Greek mother and a Roman centurion who had mustered out in Roman Corinth during the reign of Augustus. But Erastos had a secret, a secret he did not want spread abroad as it would ruin his chances to become aedile, the office that included the tasks of being the city treasurer and public works supervisor. Erastos had become part of a new religious cult in town that met privately only in people's homes. . . .

Nicanor had been gone just long enough to have entirely forgotten how soon the preparations would begin for the biannual Isthmian games held in summer. Among other things, the games meant considerable business opportunities for Nicanor as the tourists began to come to the region, rent tents and camp out near the site of the temple of Poseidon. Nicanor had two small businesses. He ran a taberna in Isthmia, a small eating and drinking establishment that would be flooded with customers this summer during the games. And he also had a small construction firm that was currently employed repairing the aqueduct on the back side of the Acro-Corinthus. On top of all that, he continued to serve as a business agent for Erastos, though he wondered how, with his own businesses beginning to thrive, he would be able to continue tending to Erastos's affairs.

—Adapted from chapters 1 & 2