

Introduction to Second Corinthians

- **Authorship and Date**

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians when he was in Ephesus on his third preaching trip (1 Corinthians 16:8, 19-20), c. 55 A.D. He then wrote 2 Corinthians about a year after that from Macedonia (Acts 20:1-3; 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:10; 10:1), c. 56 A.D.

- **Paul and Corinth** (approximate order of events)

1. Paul first came to Corinth on his second preaching trip from Antioch, c. A.D. 51-52. He worked with Priscilla and Aquila to support himself (Acts 18:1-4) and then later he received financial support from churches (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 11:8-9). He preached the gospel there and a local church was formed. He stayed a year and six months and worked in Corinth and the surrounding area (Acts 18:1-6; Rom. 16:1-2). He also experienced persecution there (Acts 18:12-17). Apollos came to Corinth later to help them (Acts 18:27-28; 1 Cor. 3:5-6; 16:12).
2. Sometime after leaving Corinth, Paul wrote a “lost letter” dealing with fornicators at Corinth (1 Cor. 5:9; not 1 Corinthians).
3. The Corinthians wrote Paul and asked him some questions (1 Cor. 7:1) and Paul also heard from the household of Chloe concerning their division (1 Cor. 1:11).
4. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 16:8-9, 19-20), c. A.D. 55.
5. Paul wanted to come to Corinth (Acts 19:21; 1 Cor. 4:18-21; 16:5-7), but he sent Timothy ahead to assist the Corinthians with their problems (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11). Timothy later returned to Paul and reported that there were problems at Corinth.
6. About this time, certain Jewish teachers (2 Cor. 11:22) who were opponents of Paul claimed to be Christ’s “apostles” (2 Cor. 10:7; 11:13-15). They came to Corinth with letters of commendation (2 Cor. 3:1) and began to discredit Paul’s ministry and apostleship (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11-12). They were deceiving the Corinthians by preaching a “different gospel” (2 Cor. 11:3-4) and they hoped to undermine Paul’s influence with the Corinthians.
7. Paul later made a second visit, a “painful visit”, to Corinth from Ephesus to help the Corinthians deal with their problems (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1). This visit is not mentioned in Acts. Sometime after making this “painful visit”, Paul changed his plans and did not come to Corinth again in order to spare them (2 Cor. 1:15 – 2:1). He wrote them a letter instead (see #8 below).
8. Paul returned to Ephesus from Corinth and wrote them a tearful letter (some call it a “severe letter”), c. A.D. 56, which Titus carried (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 9; 8:16-17). Paul

wanted to know if the Corinthians would be obedient to his previous instructions (2:9). We do not have a copy of this letter.

9. Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas where he preached (2 Cor. 2:12-13). He wanted to hear from Titus about the Corinthians but Paul did not find him there. This visit to Troas is not the one mentioned in Acts 20:5-12.
10. Paul left Troas and went to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:13). There, he met Titus and received from him a favorable report concerning the Corinthians. While in Macedonia, Paul, along with Timothy, wrote 2 Corinthians possibly from Philippi, Thessalonica, or Berea (Acts 20:1; 2 Cor. 9:1-5), c. A.D. 56. Titus gave Paul a positive report on how the Corinthians had responded to Paul's previous visit and correspondence (2 Cor. 7:5-7). A large part of 2 Corinthians is Paul's positive response to Titus' positive report as well as a defense of himself against his Jewish opponents (see #6 above). Titus and two unnamed brethren delivered this epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:16-24) and helped the Corinthians to get their collection ready for when Paul came not long after (2 Cor. 9:1-5).
11. Not long after Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he left Macedonia and visited Corinth for a "third time". He stayed there three months (Acts 20:2-3; 2 Cor. 12:14, 21; 13:1).
12. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth on his third visit. He writes about the contribution of the Corinthians (Rom. 15:26-27) and he mentions some of the brethren by name who were in the church at Corinth and in nearby Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1-2, 21-23).

• Purpose and Occasion

Paul's primary purpose in writing 2 Corinthians surrounds his ministry and his apostleship. Paul had Jewish accusers and opponents at Corinth who were trying to discredit his work among the Corinthians. They built themselves up (5:12; 10:7; 11:12, 18) while they personally attacked and insulted Paul. They called into question his ministry and apostleship. They accused him of being fickle (1:17), proud and lacking commendations (3:1), worldly (1:17; 10:2), weak (10:10), inferior (10:12-15), unstable (5:13; 11:16-19), unqualified to be an apostle (11:5; 12:11-12; 13:3), rude (11:6), dishonest (12:16-19), and crafty (12:16-18). They were also over-bearing toward the Corinthians themselves (11:19-21).

Paul used most of 2 Corinthians (with the exception of chapters 8-9) to strongly defend and vindicate his ministry (1:3 – 2:4; 3:1 – 6:13; 7:2-7, 12-16) and apostolic authority (10:1 – 12:21). This defense makes his opening words, "an apostle of Christ Jesus", very important (1:1). Paul also dealt harshly with his accusers and opponents. In 1 Corinthians, the threat to the Corinthians was primarily internal and Paul wanted them to be united together with each other. 1 Corinthians is largely systematic and corrective. In 2 Corinthians, the threat to the Corinthians was primarily external and Paul wanted them to be united with each other (13:11-12) and with him (6:12-13; 7:2, 7, 12; 12:11).

He also wanted them to be able to answer his critics (5:12). 2 Corinthians is largely personal and exhortative.

2 Corinthians is the most personal and autobiographical of all of Paul's epistles. In this book, Paul writes about his positive emotions such as blessing and comfort (1:3-7; 7:4, 6-7, 13), hope (1:7, 10, 13; 3:12; 5:11; 8:5; 10:13; 13:6), thanksgiving (1:11; 2:14; 8:16), confidence (1:15; 2:3; 3:4; 10:2), certainty (1:19-20), joy (2:3; 6:10; 7:4, 9, 13, 16; 13:9), love (2:4; 11:11; 12:15), forgiveness (2:10), triumph (2:14), sufficiency (3:5), boldness (3:12; 7:4; 10:2, 15; 11:21; 13:6), glory (3:18), perseverance (4:1, 16; 12:12), assurance (4:13; 5:1), renewal (4:16), focus (4:18; 5:7, 9, 14), good courage (5:6, 8; 7:16; 10:1), fear of the Lord (5:11), optimism (4:8-9; 6:5-10), open-heartedness (6:11; 7:3), and penitence (12:13).

Paul also writes about his negative experiences and emotions such as afflictions (1:3-10; 7:4), anguish and tears (2:4), no relief (2:13), troubles and trials (4:8-12; 6:5-10; 11:23-33; 12:10), groaning and burdened (5:2, 4), fightings and fears (7:5; 11:3; 12:20), regret (7:8), disparagement (11:21), and weakness (11:29; 12:9-10; 13:4, 9).

Paul spends much time in this book defending his own personal integrity. He says that he is holy and sincere (1:12; 2:17; 6:6; 11:31), truthful (1:13; 4:3; 6:7-8; 7:14; 11:10; 12:6; 13:8), open with everyone (4:3; 5:11; 6:11; 11:6), humble (4:7; 11:7; 12:6-7), without blame (6:3-4; 8:20), kind (6:6), honorable (8:21), meek and gentle (10:1), unashamed (10:8), feeling godly jealousy (11:2), caring (11:28-29), prayerful (12:8), spiritually strong (12:9-10; 13:4), sacrificial (12:14-15), edifying (12:19), mournful (11:21), and firm (13:2, 10). He is not corrupt (2:17; 7:2), deceitful (4:2), self-promoting (4:5, 15), or worldly (5:16; 10:1-4).

In addition to defending himself, Paul also wanted to follow-up with the Corinthians concerning their spiritual state after getting a positive report about them from Titus (7:5-7). He wanted to let them know that he was comforted and joyful over them (7:13). He wanted to commend them for their obedience (7:15; 9:13-14; 10:6). He wanted to discuss how they handled the matter concerning the disobedient, but penitent brother (2:5-11; 7:8-11). He also wanted to exhort them to remain pure and holy (6:14 – 7:1), to complete their contribution for the needy saints (chapters 8-9), to avoid being led astray by false teachers (11:3-4), and to examine themselves in their current relationship to Christ before Paul comes to them (12:20 – 13:10).

2 Corinthians is also a book that contains an unusual style of writing for Paul. His writing in this epistle includes irony (10:12; 11:16-21), sarcasm or satire (11:22-23), boasting (1:12, 14; 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:3; 10:8, 13-18; 11:10, 12, 16-18, 30; 12:1, 5-6, 9), foolish talk (11:1, 16-17, 19, 21, 23; 12:6, 11), and writing in the third person (12:2-5).

- **Outline**

I. Greeting (1:1-2)

II. Paul's Ministry Explained (1:3 – 7:16).

III. The Contribution (8:1 – 9:15).

IV. Paul's Apostleship Defended (10:1 – 13:10).

V. Closing Admonitions (13:11-14).