

# New Testament Survey

## The Book of 2 Corinthians

### I. Attestation and Authorship<sup>1</sup>

#### A. External

1. Polycarp, in his *Epistle to the Philippians*, quotes 2 Corinthians 4:14 (chapter 2) and 2 Corinthians 8:21 (chapter 6).
2. There may be an allusion to 5:10 in Athenagoras' *The Resurrection of the Dead* (chapter 18).
3. Tertullian cites 11:14 in his *Treatise on the Soul* (chapter 57).
4. Clement of Alexandria comments on 11:3 in *Stromata* (III.xiv).
5. Irenaeus frequently quotes from 2 Corinthians in *Against Heresies*.
7. 12 Corinthians is mentioned in the Muratorian Canon. It is also found in the Old Syriac and Old Latin versions.

#### B. Internal

1. The writer calls himself Paul twice (1:1, 10:1).
2. It is unmistakably Pauline in tone and content.

### II. Background and Destination

#### A. The Church at Corinth.

1. It's Founding - Acts 18:1-18
  - a. Paul arrived at Corinth via Athens during his second missionary journey. His major stops prior to that included Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea.
  - b. In Corinth, Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquilla, a Jewish couple who had been expelled from Rome during the reign of Claudius. During the week Paul worked as a tentmaker, and on the weekends he attended the synagogue where he proclaimed the Gospel.
  - c. Soon, Silas and Timothy arrived, possibly with a gift, so that Paul could devote himself fully to the Word.
  - d. At some point, the Jewish opposition grew so strong that Paul left the synagogue and retired to the house of Titus Justus, where he continued to preach.
  - e. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, became a believer along with all of his house as well as many other Corinthians.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 206-207.

- f. After a ministry of some eighteen months, the Jews brought Paul before Gallio who had recently become proconsul (A.D. 51-52). Gallio refused to hear the matter and drove the Jews from the judgment seat.
- g. After some days more, Paul left Corinth from the port of Cenchrea and journeyed back to Ephesus. He then continued on to Antioch in Syria, Jerusalem, and Ceasarea.
- h. Most of the Corinthian church was Gentile in nature, although there were a few Jews. From Paul's discussion of the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 11, it appears that most of the church consisted of people from the lower economic ranks, although there does appear to be a few wealthy members.

## 2. It's Environment

- a. Corinth was situated on the narrow isthmus connecting the Peloponnesus and mainland Greece.
- b. It was also situated on two great trade routes. One ran through Corinth connecting the two parts of Greece, the other was a route that connected the Adriatic and Aegean seas. Corinth had two ports on either side of the narrow isthmus, Cenchrea and Lechaem, where ships would dock, unload their cargo, and then be dragged across the narrow isthmus to the other sea. This saved many weeks of travel around the Peloponnesian peninsula.
- c. Corinth was a very wealthy city, given over to every vice know to man. It had a great temple to Aphrodite which housed thousands of prostitutes. At night, these prostitutes would ply their trade in the streets of Corinth.
- d. Corinth was host to the Isthmian games, an athletic event that rivalled the Olympic games of that day. This can be seen in Paul's frequent use of sports metaphors in his writings.

## II. Occasion and Date<sup>2</sup>

- A. Written approximately A.D. 54-55 from Macedonia during Paul's third missionary journey.
  - 1. After Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, matters did not seem to improve in the Corinthian church. The party spirit continued to divide the church into many factions.
  - 2. In addition to the factions within the Corinthian church, there appeared to come a group from Palestine that was anti-Pauline in nature. The vehemently opposed and tore down Paul in the Corinthian church. Apparently there was a ring-leader who was very much against Paul and slandered his character (2 Corinthians 2:5-8, 7:12, 10:7-11).
  - 3. When Paul found out what was going on, he apparently made a quick trip to Corinth to straighten things out, but failed (2:1; 12:14, 21; 13:1-2).

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<sup>2</sup> Thiessen, pp. 208-209.

4. Sometime shortly after Paul's second visit to Corinth he writes a severe letter to the Church (2:3, 4, 9; 7:8-12). He sent this letter by the hand of Timothy.
5. Because of difficulties, Paul leaves Ephesus ahead of schedule. He meets up with Timothy in Macedonia where he finds out about the situation in Corinth. Timothy reports that a revival had broken out in the church although there still was an anti-Paul group.
6. It is in response to this report, and the need for Paul to take a collection to Jerusalem, that he writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (2:13; 7:5-7; 8:1; 9:2-4).

#### IV. Purpose and Plan<sup>3</sup>

- A. To explain the purpose for his sufferings in Asia (1:3-11).
- B. To justify himself as to his failure to return to Corinth as planned (1:12-2:4).
- C. To encourage the church to receive a repentant brother (2:5-11).
- D. To express his joy over the good report from Timothy (2:12-13).
- E. To represent the Gospel and its ministry as superior to the law (2:14-6:10).
- F. To appeal for separation and reconciliation with him (6:11-7:16).
- G. To urge the Corinthians to finish collecting relief for Jerusalem (8-9).
- H. To establish his authority as an Apostle (10:1-13:10).

#### V. A Basic Outline<sup>4</sup>

- A. Salutation - 1:1-2
- B. The Personal Concerns of the Apostle
  1. The Purpose of His Suffering in Asia - 1:3-11.
  2. The Reasons for His Change of Plans - 1:12-2:4.
  3. The Advice Concerning the Offender - 2:5-11.
  4. The Apostle's Anxiety about News from Corinth - 2:12-13.
- B. The Glory of the Gospel and Its Ministry
  1. The Seal of His Apostleship - 2:14-17.
  2. The Superiority of the New Ministration to the Old - 3:1-11.
  3. The Consequent Boldness of the New Ministers - 3:12-4:6.
  4. The Trials and Triumphs of the Apostle - 4:7-5:10.

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<sup>3</sup> Thiessen, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> Thiessen, pp. 211-212.

5. The Apostle's Motives, Message, and Ministration - 5:11-6:10
  - C. The Appeal for Separation and Reconciliation
    1. For Separation - 6:11-7:1
    2. For Reconciliation - 7:2-4
  - D. The Account of the Reconciliation - 7:5-16.
  - F. The Collection for the Poor Christians at Jerusalem
    1. The Example of the Macedonian Churches - 8:1-15.
    2. The Commendation of the Messengers to Corinth - 8:16-24.
    3. The Exhortation to Respond Promptly and Generously - 9
  - G. The Vindication of Paul's Apostolic Authority
    1. The Reply to the Charge of Cowardice and Weakness - 10:1-11.
    2. The Justification of His Mission to Corinth - 10:12-18.
    3. The Reasons for His Self-Commendation - 11:1-15.
    4. The Apostle Contrasted with the False Teachers - 11:16-33.
    5. The Apostle's Visions and Revelation - 12:1-10
    6. The Apostle's Credentials - 12:11-18.
    7. The Warnings Against Evil and Exhortations to Holiness - 12:19-13:10.
  - H. Conclusion - 13:11-14
- VI. Chapters To Remember
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|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2 Corinthians 4   | God's Power in the Ministry    |
| 2 Corinthians 5   | The Ministry of Reconciliation |
| 2 Corinthians 8-9 | Giving                         |
| 2 Corinthians 12  | The Thorn in the Flesh         |
- VII. Points and Peculiarities
1. 2 Corinthians is the most personal of all of Paul's epistles.
  2. 2 Corinthians gives us a good understanding of the purpose of suffering.
- VIII. A Closer Look
- A. 2 Corinthians 1
1. Concerning Sufferings - 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

- B. 2 Corinthians 2
  - 1. Restoring a Repentant Brother - 2 Corinthians 2:5-8
  - 2. Triumph in Christ - 2 Corinthians 2:14-17
- C. 2 Corinthians 3
  - 1. Ministers of the New Covenant - 2 Corinthians 3:1-18
- D. 2 Corinthians 4-5
  - 1. God's Sustaining Power for Ministry - 2 Corinthians 4:1-18
  - 2. The Ministry of Reconciliation - 2 Corinthians 5:1-21
- E. 2 Corinthians 8-9
  - 1. Regarding the Collection - 2 Corinthians 8:1-24
  - 2. God Loves a Cheerful Giver - 2 Corinthians 9:1-15
- F. 2 Corinthians 10-13
  - 1. Paul's Apostolic Ministry - 2 Corinthians 10:1-18
  - 2. Warnings Regarding False Teachers - 2 Corinthians 11:1-15
  - 3. Paul's Afflictions for Christ - 2 Corinthians 11:16-33
  - 4. Pauls' Thorn in the Flesh - 2 Corinthians 12:1-10