

Second Corinthians

Scripture: 2 Corinthians

Code: MSB47

Title

This is the second NT epistle the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Corinth (see Introduction to 1 Corinthians).

Author and Date

That the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians is uncontested; the lack of any motive for a forger to write this highly personal, biographical epistle has led even the most critical scholars to affirm Paul as its author.

Several considerations establish a feasible date for the writing of this letter. Extrabiblical sources indicate that July, A.D. 51 is the most likely date for the beginning of Gallio's proconsulship (cf. Acts 18:12). Paul's trial before him at Corinth (Acts 18:12–17) probably took place shortly after Gallio assumed office. Leaving Corinth (probably in A.D. 52), Paul sailed for Palestine (Acts 18:18), thus concluding his second missionary journey. Returning to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (probably in A.D. 52), Paul ministered there for about 2 1/2 years (Acts 19:8, 10). The apostle wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus toward the close of that period (1 Cor. 16:8), most likely in A.D. 55. Since Paul planned to stay in Ephesus until the following spring (cf. the reference to Pentecost in 1 Cor. 16:8), and 2 Corinthians was written after he left Ephesus (see Background and Setting), the most likely date for 2 Corinthians is late A.D. 55 or very early A.D. 56.

Background and Setting

Paul's association with the important commercial city of Corinth (see Introduction to 1 Corinthians: Title) began on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18), when he spent 18 months (Acts 18:11) ministering there. After leaving Corinth, Paul heard of immorality in the Corinthian church and wrote a letter (since lost) to confront that sin, referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9. During his ministry in Ephesus, he received further reports of trouble in the Corinthian church in the form of divisions among them (1 Cor. 1:11). In addition, the Corinthians wrote Paul a letter (1 Cor. 7:1) asking for clarification of some issues. Paul responded by writing the letter known as 1 Corinthians. Planning to remain at Ephesus a little longer (1 Cor. 16:8, 9), Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10, 11). Disturbing news reached the apostle (possibly from Timothy) of further difficulties at Corinth, including the arrival of

self-styled false apostles.

To create the platform to teach their false gospel, they began by assaulting the character of Paul. They had to convince the people to turn from Paul to them if they were to succeed in preaching demon doctrine. Temporarily abandoning the work at Ephesus, Paul went immediately to Corinth. The visit (known as the “painful visit,” 2:1) was not a successful one from Paul’s perspective; someone in the Corinthian church (possibly one of the false apostles) even openly insulted him (2:5–8, 10; 7:12). Saddened by the Corinthians’ lack of loyalty to defend him, seeking to spare them further reproof (cf. 1:23), and perhaps hoping time would bring them to their senses, Paul returned to Ephesus. From Ephesus, Paul wrote what is known as the “severe letter” (2:4) and sent it with Titus to Corinth (7:5–16). Leaving Ephesus after the riot sparked by Demetrius (Acts 19:23–20:1), Paul went to Troas to meet Titus (2:12, 13). But Paul was so anxious for news of how the Corinthians had responded to the “severe letter” that he could not minister there though the Lord had opened the door (2:12; cf. 7:5). So he left for Macedonia to look for Titus (2:13). To Paul’s immense relief and joy, Titus met him with the news that the majority of the Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul (7:7). Wise enough to know that some rebellious attitudes still smoldered under the surface, and could erupt again, Paul wrote (possibly from Philippi, cf. 11:9 with Phil. 4:15; also, some early manuscripts list Philippi as the place of writing) the Corinthians the letter called 2 Corinthians. In this letter, though the apostle expressed his relief and joy at their repentance (7:8–16), his main concern was to defend his apostleship (chaps. 1–7), exhort the Corinthians to resume preparations for the collection for the poor at Jerusalem (chaps. 8, 9), and confront the false apostles head on (chaps. 10–13). He then went to Corinth, as he had written (12:14; 13:1, 2). The Corinthians’ participation in the Jerusalem offering (Rom. 15:26) implies that Paul’s third visit to that church was successful.

Historical and Theological Themes

Second Corinthians complements the historical record of Paul’s dealings with the Corinthian church recorded in Acts and 1 Corinthians. It also contains important biographical data on Paul throughout.

Although an intensely personal letter, written by the apostle in the heat of battle against those attacking his credibility, 2 Corinthians contains several important theological themes. It portrays God the Father as a merciful comforter (1:3; 7:6), the Creator (4:6), the One who raised Jesus from the dead (4:14; cf. 13:4), and who will raise believers as well (1:9). Jesus Christ is the One who suffered (1:5), who fulfilled God’s promises (1:20), who was the proclaimed Lord (4:5), who manifested God’s glory (4:6), and the One who in His incarnation became poor for believers (8:9; cf. Phil. 2:5–8). The letter portrays the Holy Spirit as God (3:17, 18) and the guarantee of believers’ salvation (1:22; 5:5). Satan is identified as the “god of this age” (4:4; cf. 1 John 5:19), a deceiver (11:14), and the leader of human and angelic deceivers (11:15). The end times include both the believer’s glorification (4:16–5:8) and his judgment (5:10). The glorious truth of God’s sovereignty in salvation is the theme of 5:14–21, while 7:9, 10 sets forth man’s response to God’s offer of salvation-genuine repentance.

Second Corinthians also presents the clearest, most concise summary of the substitutionary atonement of Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture (5:21; cf. Is. 53) and defines the mission of the church to proclaim reconciliation (5:18–20). Finally, the nature of the New Covenant receives its fullest exposition outside the book of Hebrews (3:6–16).

Interpretive Challenges

The main challenge confronting the interpreter is the relationship of chaps. 10–13 to chaps. 1–9. The identity of Paul's opponents at Corinth has produced various interpretations, as has the identity of the brother who accompanied Titus to Corinth (8:18, 22). Whether the offender mentioned in 2:5–8 is the incestuous man of 1 Cor. 5 is also uncertain. It is difficult to explain Paul's vision (12:1–5) and to identify specifically his "thorn in the flesh," the "messenger of Satan [sent] to buffet [him]" (12:7). These and other interpretive problems will be dealt with in the notes on the appropriate passages.

Outline

I. Paul's Greeting (1:1–11)

II. Paul's Ministry (1:12–7:16)

A. Paul's Plans (1:12–2:4)

B. The Offender's Punishment (2:5–11)

C. Titus' Absence (2:12, 13)

D. The Ministry's Nature (2:14–6:10)

1. The triumph of the ministry (2:14–17)

2. The commendation of the ministry (3:1–5)

3. The basis of the ministry (3:6–18)

4. The theme of the ministry (4:1–7)

5. The trials of the ministry (4:8–18)

6. The motivation of the ministry (5:1–10)

7. The message of the ministry (5:11–21)

8. The conduct of the ministry (6:1–10)

E. The Corinthians Exhorted (6:11–7:16)

1. To open their hearts to Paul (6:11–13)

2. To separate themselves from unbelievers (6:14–7:1)

3. To be assured of Paul's love (7:2–16)

III. Paul's Collection (8:1–9:15)

A. The Patterns of Giving (8:1–9)

1. The Macedonians (8:1–7)

2. Jesus Christ (8:8, 9)

B. The Purpose of Giving (8:10–15)

C. The Procedures of Giving (8:16–9:5)

D. The Promise of Giving (9:6–15)

IV. Paul's Apostleship (10:1–12:13)

A. Apostolic Authority (10:1–18)

B. Apostolic Conduct (11:1–15)

C. Apostolic Suffering (11:16–33)

D. Apostolic Credentials (12:1–13)

V. Paul's Visit (12:14–13:14)

A. Paul's Unselfishness (12:14–18)

B. Paul's Warnings (12:19–13:10)

C. Paul's Benediction (13:11–14)

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).