

Studies in

2 Corinthians



Lesson I

An Introduction

Second Corinthians is considered the Apostle Paul's most personal epistle. In it, we gain tremendous insight into the character of the Apostle and the many struggles he endured for the cause of Christ. Scholars have pinpointed A.D. 55 as the probable date of writing, written from Macedonia, just months after Paul penned the first letter (cf. 1 Cor. 16:5-8; 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5).

It seems that Paul wrote as many as four letters to the church at Corinth: (1) the letter referred to in 1Co 5:9 (see note there); (2) 1 Corinthians; (3) the "severe" letter (see 2Co 2:3-4; see also below); (4) 2 Corinthians. After writing 1 Corinthians Paul continued his ministry at Ephesus until he heard that his letter had not completely accomplished its purpose. A group of men had come to Corinth who presented themselves as apostles. They were false teachers who were challenging, among other things, Paul's personal integrity and his authority as an apostle (see 11:4; 12:11).

In the face of this serious situation, Paul decided to make a quick trip to Corinth (12:4; 13:1-2) to see whether he could remedy the situation. The visit turned out to be painful and did not accomplish its purpose. So when Paul returned to Ephesus, he wrote the Corinthians a severe letter "out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2:4), probably sending it by Titus (12:8). Some identify this letter with 2Co 10-13. Others think it has been lost.

After writing the severe letter, Paul had second thoughts. He was deeply concerned about how the Corinthians might react to it. So after the riot caused by Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths (see Ac 19:23-41), he left Ephesus and set out for Macedonia by way of Troas. He expected to meet Titus in Troas to get news of the effect of his severe letter on the Corinthian church, but Titus was not there (see 2Co 2:12-13). Still deeply concerned and despite the fact that the Lord had opened up an opportunity to preach the gospel at Troas, Paul said good-bye to the believers there and moved on to Macedonia, where he met Titus. To his relief, the news from the Corinthian church was basically good. The severe letter had brought its intended results (7:5-16). The encouraging report of Titus of the improved situation at Corinth is the immediate occasion of the writing of 2 Corinthians.

How, then, does one explain the harsh tone of chapters 10-13, which is so different from the rest of the letter? Some think that when Paul had just completed writing the first nine chapters, a report came to him that a strong and vocal minority was still causing trouble at Corinth. So before sending off the letter he added the last four chapters to address this troublemaking group. Others hold that chapters 10-13 were written some time after Paul had sent the first nine chapters and that they constitute a separate letter. There is, however, no manuscript evidence that warrants splitting 2 Corinthians into two parts.

—NIV Commentary

(accessed online: <http://www.ibs.org/niv/studybible/2corinthians.php>)

General Outline

- I. Address (2 Cor 1:1-11)
- II. The Crisis between Paul and the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:12-7:16)
 - A. Past Relationships (2 Cor 1:12-2:13)
 - B. Paul's Ministry (2 Cor 2:14-7:4)
 - C. Resolution of the Crisis (2 Cor 7:5-16)
- III. The Collection for Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:1-9:15)
- IV. Paul's Defense of His Ministry (2 Cor 10:1-13:10)
- V. Conclusion (2 Cor 13:11-13)

Reading: 2 Cor. 1:1-11 (NKJV)

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also *you will partake* of the consolation.

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver *us*, 11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift *granted* to us through many.

Group Discussion

1. Who is the primary audience of this letter (vs. 1)? If the letter was written to these 1st century believers, what value is it to 21st century believers (2 Timothy 3:16; Rom. 15:4)?
2. What do verses 3-7 tell us about suffering and the Christian? How does God respond to our suffering? What role does the family of God have in the lives of those who suffer?
3. What does verse 8 tell us about the way some Christians experience suffering? What well known prophet "despaired even of life"? (1 Kings 19:1-9). How can we better reach out to those who endure various degrees of depression (and may even be suicidal)?
4. What confidence do Christians have in the midst of suffering? (vv. 9-11)