

2nd Corinthians

Introduction

A. Author and Date

1. The letter was written by Paul, along with Timothy: **“Paul. An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother...”**
2. Paul wrote the letter during his third missionary journey which is recorded in Acts 18:23-21:17—probably between 55-57 A.D., which was 3 to 5 years after Paul had first visited Corinth and founded the church there
3. He also wrote 1st Corinthians, Galatians and Romans on this same journey

B. Recipients

1. The letter is addressed to not only the Corinthians, but **“all the saints who are throughout Achaia”** (which was basically all of Greece south of Macedonia)
2. As with most of the 1st century churches, the home churches in Corinth were a mix of Greeks and Jews
3. In 1 Corinthians 1:26, Paul wrote that not many of the Corinthian Christians were **“not wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth”** which implies that they were likely fairly common folks or middle class, and this probably constituted a majority of the Christians--a position held by most modern scholars
4. In 1st Corinthians Paul also refers to slaves (1 Corinthians 7:21-24; 11:21) so there were obviously members of the lower class as well
5. In contrast to the above, many of the names we have from the Corinthian church appear to be financially independent so there was likely a fair number of wealthy or prominent members as well:
 - a. Priscilla and Aquilla were tent makers, which was a fairly lucrative trade (which may be why Paul was able to do it part time and cover many of his expenses and those of his traveling companions)
 - b. Gaius (Titius Justus) owned a house large enough to accommodate the “whole church” (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 14:23)
 - c. Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue
 - d. Stephanus and Chloe also hosted churches in their homes, and it is generally thought that such homes could accommodate 40 to 50 people
 - e. Erastus was the city treasurer, a prominent position
6. The make-up of the Corinthian house churches likely reflected the make-up, culture, social attitudes, etc. of the city itself:
 - a. Corinth had been destroyed in 147 BC but then resettled and rebuilt by the Romans in 44 BC by Julius Caesar
 - b. In Paul’s day, it was one of the most modern cities, rather posh, and had as many as 1 million residents
 - c. It sat on an isthmus six miles wide between two sea ports, which made it the trading capital of the region (including the slave trade capital), with all kinds of people groups and cultures traveling through the city

- d. Unlike most “new” cities established by Rome, Corinth started out as a rather poor city because it was initially settled by freedmen (former slaves), but by Paul’s day it had a large wealthy class because social upward mobility was very attainable.
- e. Some of the ways for a person to increase his or her social status was to provide private entertainment, games and festivals, to become members of the right social or religious groups or societies, to demonstrate philosophical and rhetorical skills, or even to provide hospitality and financial benefits or support to visiting philosophers and rhetoricians
- f. This pre-occupation with status may have been what caused some to look down upon Paul and be offended by his lifestyle, misfortunes and refusal to accept payment for his ministry, and may be why Paul spends so much of the letter defending himself, his ministry and his authority

C. History and Chronology

1. **Paul’s First visit to Corinth:**
 - a. Paul first visited Corinth on his second missionary journey around 50 A.D. (recorded in Acts 18)
 - b. He spent a year and a half there, which was his longest stay anywhere up to that point
 - c. This is where he apparently met Priscilla and Aquilla for the first time, fellow tent makers
 - d. He left for Judea (including Jerusalem) in the summer of 52 A.D.
2. **Paul Returns to the Region:** He returned to the region around 53 A.D. but stayed in Ephesus for 3 years, which was close enough for some of the Corinthians to visit him—it was also during this time that both Apollos and Cephas visited Corinth
3. **The Corinthians’ First Letter to Paul** (missing): The Corinthians wrote a letter to Paul over concerns that some believers were involved with sexual immorality
4. **Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians** (missing)
 - a. Paul responded to the Corinthians letter with a letter of his own in which he instructed the Corinthians to dis-associate themselves from those who claim to be Christians but were engaging in sexual sin
 - b. It appears Paul sent Titus to carry this letter to Corinth
 - c. The Corinthians misunderstood Paul’s letter and thought that he wanted them to completely disengage from Corinthian culture and not associated with any non-believers (Paul refers to this misunderstanding in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13)
5. **The Corinthians’ Second Letter to Paul** (missing): This letter was a request for clarification on a number of issues and these questions form the outline for Paul’s response in 2nd Corinthians (e.g. lawsuits among believers, sexual immorality and marriage, expression of Christian liberty, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, etc.)
6. **Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians** (actually called 1st Corinthians): sent via Timothy
7. **Paul’s Painful Visit to Corinth:**
 - a. After delivering Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, Timothy returns to Paul with distressing news

- b. We don't know what the issues were, but they were serious enough that Paul made an unexpected trip to Corinth to address the issues
 - c. This visit is referred to as the "painful visit" because Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 2:1-4 as one filled with sorrow and grief, so much so that Paul cancelled a future visit to prevent a repeat of what happened
 - d. It appears that there may have been at least one individual who had sinned against Paul specifically on this visit to Corinth but the details are unknown (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)
8. **Paul's Severe Letter to the Corinthians** (missing):
- a. After the painful visit, Paul returned to Ephesus and penned another letter to the Corinthians, which he sent by the hand of Titus
 - b. This letter is referred to as the "severe letter" because Paul states that it caused them "sorrow", something for which he expressed some regret, but saw as necessary to lead them to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:8-9)
 - c. In this letter Paul also indicated his change of plans regarding future visits—on the "painful" visit he apparently expressed his plans to visit them two more times, once on the way to Macedonia and then on the way back. However, in the painful letter he indicated that he would only visit them once
9. **Titus Returns with Mixed News:**
- a. After delivering the "severe letter" Titus returns to Macedonia to meet back up with Paul
 - b. He brought Paul a mix of good and troubling news:
 - 1) The good news was that the "offender" had been disciplined and repented
 - 2) The bad news mostly revolved around some false apostles (or "super apostles" as Paul referred to them) that had arrived in Corinth and their claims against Paul:
 - a) It appears they were claiming Paul was unfit for ministry because of his misfortunes (e.g. persecutions) and his unwillingness to take payment for his teaching (something that was common and gave teachers an air of reliability and trustworthiness)
 - b) In the same breath, however, they accused Paul of secretly receiving funds through the collection made by Titus and Timothy—possibly leading to them no longer fulfilling their promise to give to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem
 - c) They also appeared to accuse him of not keeping his word and therefore being a man of the flesh
10. **Paul writes this letter, 2nd Corinthians**
- a. In chapters 1-7 he spends most of the time defending his actions and his ministry
 - b. In chapters 8-9 he encourages them to fulfill their promise to take up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem
 - c. In chapters 10-13 he builds a case for his apostolic authority and warns them to be ready for his upcoming visit
11. **Finally, Paul makes a third visit to Corinth (recorded in Acts 20:3)**

D. Unique Features

1. Most of Paul's letters are heavy on theology and practical application (generally beginning with a theological discourse followed by its application)—their purpose being to teach or correct doctrine and behavior
2. However, Paul's intent with this letter was very different and had a two-fold purpose:
 - a. To defend himself against false allegations by a group of "super apostles" that were challenging his behavior, motives, fitness for ministry and his apostolic authority
 - b. To prepare the Corinthians for his upcoming visit—likely to avoid a repeat of what apparently happened on his second visit (the "painful visit")
3. As such, this letter contains much more autobiographical information than any of Paul's other letters (in other words, he tells us a lot more about himself than he does anywhere else)
4. However, that doesn't mean there's no theology or practical application—it just means it's often below the surface rather than front and center. Some of the topics he covers include:
 - a. He addresses the role of suffering and comfort (1:3-12)
 - b. The importance of forgiveness and comfort after repentance (2:5-11)
 - c. The superiority of the New Covenant over the Old (3:4-4:18)
 - d. Living to please God rather than men (5:1-21)
 - e. The dangers of taking the grace of God in vain and being unequally yoked to unbelievers (6:1-18)
 - f. Principles for financial giving (chapters 8-9)
 - g. The real measure of authority/apostleship (chapters 10-11)
 - h. The value of self-examination (chapter 13)