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### Introduction to "2 Corinthians"

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# 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians is Paul's response to an encouraging report that Titus had brought from Corinth. Although Paul's relationship with the Corinthians believers had been complicated and caused him much sorrow, he was grateful that the believers in Corinth had repented of their ways and were willing to be reconciled to him.

## AUTHOR

In 2 Corinthians 1:1, Paul identifies himself as the epistle's author, along with Timothy as his co-writer. Since the letter reflects the necessary historical and literary evidence in favor of Pauline authorship, scholars include it among the Pauline writings. While some scholars speculate that 6:14–7:1 originally came from a different source, we observe no break in Paul's train of thought that would suggest a later composition. Also, the drastic change in tone between chapters 1–9 (happier, more positive) and 10–13 (harsher and forceful) can be explained by the observation that Paul first persuades and gains his audience's confidence and saves the contentious and heated issues for last, as many ancient orators often did. The consistent themes throughout the letter speak for the unity of 2 Corinthians.

## DATE

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (2:12, 13; 7:5; 8:1-5; 9:2) about one year or so after composing 1 Corinthians. This means that the apostle most likely prepared the epistle sometime around the year 56 and AD 57. The exchange of letters between Paul and the church, however, was more extensive:

1. The first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9-13).
2. Timothy brought the epistle of 1 Corinthians to the church (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10, 11).
3. Paul makes an emergency and stressful visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 1:23; 2:1; 12:14; 13:1).
4. The apostle composes the "sorrowful letter" from Ephesus (1:23; 2:3, 4; 7:8, 12). Titus probably delivered it to Corinth.
5. Next, Paul travels to Macedonia to meet Titus (2:12, 13), who brought him the good news of Corinthian repentance (7:6-15).
6. Finally, he writes 2 Corinthians and sends Titus and two others to deliver it and to gather the collection for the Jerusalem poor (8:6, 17, 18, 22).



Date of writing  
between  
AD 56 and AD 57

## AUDIENCE

The apostle addresses 2 Corinthians to the “church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia” (1:1). The audience probably included the neighboring port city of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1).

## PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church was a turbulent one (see *Date*). Most of the members eventually repented of their hostility toward him as a result of the influence of the “sorrowful letter” and Titus’ visit (7:5-16). Nevertheless, broken relationships take time to heal, and the arrival of “super apostles” further encouraged misconceptions circulating among the members (10:10, 11; 11:5; 12:11). In 2 Corinthians, Paul now seeks to defend his authority and legitimacy as an apostle and to confirm the truth of the gospel he had preached to them.

The visiting “super-apostles” were more pious-appearing (“spiritual”) and eloquent than Paul. Their teachings seemed to encourage self-exaltation and progress, a common characteristic of the Hellenistic religion. Such behavior distorted the meaning of being “spiritual” (11:4), and the spirit of competitiveness and boasting fostered division among the believers. Paul writes to correct such views and to show them how the gospel teaches a radically different approach to spirituality.

## STRUCTURE

After his customary greeting, Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by explaining the circumstances that prompted him to change his travel plans (1:15-18), his surprise visit, and the “painful” letter he had written to them afterward (1:23-2:4). Although his letter had been severe, he assures them that it was written out of love and concern (2:5-17).

In the second section of his letter (3:1-7:16), Paul breaks off from the description of his apostolic labors to address the main issue that forms the body of his letter—a defense of his apostolic ministry. He reminds the Corinthians that his sufficiency does not reside in the individual but in God (3:1, 5; 4:5-7). He is merely the agent of the crucified Messiah (4:8-18; 6:3-10). The section concludes with Paul’s elated response to the report from Titus that the Corinthians had recognized the error of their ways and desired to be reconciled with him (7:5-16).

Since Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians had been restored, he encourages them to contribute generously to the financial gift he was collecting to help the struggling Jewish believers in Jerusalem (8:1-9:15). In anticipation of his upcoming visit to Corinth, the apostle ends his letter with an appeal to his opponents in Corinth to accept his apostolic authority (10:1-13:10).

In reading 2 Corinthians, one can see the wide range of mixed feelings Paul expresses as he longs to reconcile with the wayward Corinthian believers. As the ways in which Paul draws strength from the Lord in difficult times are shown, the reader can consider the areas of his life in which God wants him to cast his burden upon him (8:6, 17-18, 22).

## OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction (1:1–2:17)
  - A. Greetings (1:1-2)
  - B. Thanksgiving Amid Controversy (1:3-11)
  - C. Paul's Defends His Change of Plans (1:12-22)
  - D. Paul's Sorrowful Visit and Painful Letter (1:23–2:4)
  - E. Paul's Appeal to Forgive (2:5-11)
  - F. Paul's Unrest at Troas (2:12-17)
- II. Paul's Apostolic Ministry (3:1–7:16)
  - A. Apostolic Credentials (3:1-18)
  - B. Apostles Sustained by Divine Power in Their Ministry (4:1–5:10)
  - C. Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11–6:10)
  - D. An Appeal to the Corinthians to Separate from Evildoers (6:11–7:1)
  - E. Paul's Joy from the Warm Response of the Corinthians (7:2-16)
- III. The Collection for Needy Christians in Judea (8:1–9:15)
  - A. The Liberality of the Macedonian Churches (8:1-6)
  - B. The Example of Jesus Christ (8:7-15)
  - C. The Commission and Commendation of Titus (8:16-24)
  - D. An Appeal to the Corinthians to Do Their Part (9:1-15)
- IV. Paul's Defense of His Apostleship (10:1–13:10)
  - A. A Reply to Those Who Have Belittled Paul as an Apostle (10:1-12)
  - B. Corinth Part of His Appointed Sphere of Labor (10:13-18)
  - C. Difference between True and False Apostles (11:1–12:18)
  - D. A Final Appeal to the Unrepentant (12:19–13:10)
- V. Conclusion (13:11-14)
  - A. Final Exhortation and Greetings (13:11-13)
  - B. Benediction (13:14)

## ARCHAEOLOGY

Paul's mention of "letters of recommendation" (3:1-3) reflects a common practice of first-century Judaism. The religious authorities in Jerusalem would communicate with Jewish leaders throughout the Roman Empire through letters delivered by a *shaliah*, who also had a letter of recommendation from the high priest confirming the *shaliah's* authority. The Greek equivalent of the *shaliah* is *apostolos*, both of which mean "the one who is sent." Paul was an apostle for the Jewish authorities before his acceptance of Christ (Acts 9:1, 2). It seems that the Christian church continued the practice (Acts 28:21). Unfortunately, Paul had to defend his apostolic authority to the Corinthian church without such an official letter of recommendation (3:1). But he ar-

quest that from the 4th century onwards there was considerable evidence of the  
trade of his paintings. 32-33.

Archaeologists have identified a Roman forum in the middle of the Corinthian  
market place, the forum of Augustus, where officials addressed the  
public to hear the laws. When Paul came to Corinth, the Jews took him before Gallio,  
probably in the very place. Acts 18:12-17. Very likely the Corinthian believers thought of  
this when Paul wrote that "all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor.  
5:10). That is, why all should fear appearing before God (5:9-11), and not on  
boasting or competing with one another as they had previously been doing.

# Galatians

Galatians is the apostle Paul's most fiery epistle. He holds nothing back as he passionately pleads with the Galatians to remain faithful to the gospel he had proclaimed to them when they first became Christians—the good news that their salvation was not based in their own actions, but solely in what God had done for them in Christ and accepted by faith.

AunPaul identifies himself as the author of the epistle to the Galatians (1:1; 5:2). At the same time, he mentions “all the brothers with me” (1:2) as senders of the epistle, indicating that they support and profess the same gospel he teaches. The issue is not about the messenger, but about the gospel itself, and the apostle vehemently repudiates those who pervert it (1:6-9). The church has accepted the book's Pauline authorship throughout history, and scholars consider Galatians to be the classic example of his theology and style.

## DATE

It is difficult to narrow down the date of the composition of Galatians, even though the book includes several details from his life (1:11–2:10). The epistle mentions two of his visits to Jerusalem (1:18; 2:1–10). When we compare it to the account in Acts, we see that most likely Galatians 2:1–10 refers to the meeting that occurred in Jerusalem recounted in Acts 11:27–30; 12:25, though others believe it refers to the council in Jerusalem reported in Acts 15:1–30. Whatever the case, Galatians usually believed to have been written between 48 and 52 AD, making it one of the earliest of Paul's epistles. Since it shares similar themes with Romans, some scholars believe that Paul could have written it as late as AD 57/58, around the same time he composed Romans. Such reasoning is not absolute, however, since Paul preached the same gospel throughout his ministry.

## AUDIENCE

Paul addresses the epistle to the “churches in Galatia” (1:2; 3:1; cf. 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Tim. 4:10). Galatia could refer either to northern Asia Minor, home to the ethnic Galatians of Celtic or Gaulish descent or to southern Asia Minor in the Roman province of Galatia, which included Gentiles of various ethnic origins. Most likely, the epistle addresses the churches in southern Asia Minor, congregations planted by Paul during his first missionary journey. They include the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13; 14; 16:6; 18:23).



Date of writing  
between  
AD 48 and AD 52

## PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

Paul writes very forcefully in the book of Galatians (cf. 1:6-9; 3:1; 5:12). Apparently, some Jewish Christians had arrived in the region insisting that, for Gentiles to be included in the blessings of God's promise, they must first become Jewish, undergo circumcision, and rigorously obey the Mosaic law. The apostle identifies their teachings as a false gospel and seeks to make it clear that in Christ, all ethnic and social barriers are meaningless (3:28). After discussing the connection between the gospel and the law (2:15-21), he explains what it means to be free in Christ (5:1-12). It is the Spirit, not the law, who gives us our identity and unites Jews and Gentiles as God's children (4:3-7).

## STRUCTURE

Paul structures his epistle to the Galatians around two primary concerns: his desire to defend his apostolic credentials (1:11–2:21) and a defense of the gospel he was called to proclaim (3:1–5:12).

After alluding to both of these concerns in the opening portion of his letter (1:1-10), Paul sets out in the body of his letter to first prove that his gospel is not of human origin. He does this by providing an autobiographical account of the events before (vv. 13-14), during (vv. 15-17), and immediately after his conversion (vv. 16-24). He also demonstrates that he did not receive his gospel from any human being, but from God Himself, though the apostles did, at a later time, validate his calling and gospel (2:1-10). Paul provides a summary of the gospel he proclaimed in connection to a confrontation he had with Peter in Antioch (vv. 11-21).

Paul dedicates the main section of his letter to demonstrating why faith in Christ and not human behavior is sufficient for securing God's favor (3:1–5:12). He appeals to the experience of the Galatians themselves (3:1-5) and the testimony of Scripture (vv. 6-14). He then reminds the Galatians of the unchangeable promise God gave to Abraham (vv. 15-18) and explains how the law was not given as an alternate way of salvation but to point to humans' need of a savior—Jesus Christ (3:26–5:12).

## OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction (1:1-10)
  - A. Greeting: Paul's Apostolic Authority (1:1-5)
  - B. The Problem in Galatia: Turning from the Gospel (1:6-10)
- II. Paul's Defense of His Apostolic Calling (1:11–2:21)
  - A. Paul's Conversion and Divine Calling (1:11-17)
  - B. Paul and the Jerusalem Believers (1:18-24)
  - C. Apostolic Approval of Paul's Gospel (2:1-10)
  - D. Confrontation in Antioch (2:11-14)
  - E. The Essence of the Gospel (2:15-21)
- III. Paul's Defense of the Gospel (3:1–5:12)
  - A. The Experience of the Galatians (3:1-5)





- B. The Experience of Abraham (3:6-9)
- C. The Testimony of Scripture (3:15-18)
- D. Why the Law Was Given (3:19-22)
- E. The Coming of Christ and the Law (3:23-25)
- F. Not Slaves, but Heirs (3:26-4:20)
- G. Sarah and Hagar: Two Covenants (4:21-31)
- H. Freedom in Christ (5:1-12)
- IV. Paul's Defense of the Freedom of Faith (5:13-6:10)
  - A. Love Fulfills the Whole Law (5:13-15)
  - B. Walking in the Spirit (5:16-26)
  - C. The Gospel and the Christian Life (6:1-10)
- V. Conclusion (6:11-18)
  - A. A Final Plea for the Gospel (6:11-17)
  - B. Benediction (6:18)

## ARCHAEOLOGY

On Paul's first missionary journey, he most likely traveled the Roman road called Via Sebaste, a broad paved Roman highway built by Caesar Augustus. The cities mentioned in Acts 13, 14 all lie along the Via Sebaste: starting from Pisidian Antioch, he would have journeyed 150 km southeast to Iconium, then 30 km southwest to Lystra. Archaeologists are uncertain of the exact location of Derbe, but it was likely situated about 100 km southeast of Lystra. It would be the same route Paul took on his return to Perge, as well as on his second and third missionary journeys when he again passed through the region.

Wealthy families in ancient Rome and Greece usually had a *paidagogos* or a household slave in charge of their children's education. Paintings on vases often depict the *paidagogos* as a bald foreigner with a beard and a stick in his hand. He would constantly be with the child, protecting him or her from danger, teaching proper conduct and good manners, and supervising homework until the youngster was around 16 years old. Paul uses this imagery to explain the function of the law as leading us to Christ and teaching us how to live as true sons and daughters of God (3:24-29).