

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

Where is it in the Bible?

Second Corinthians is the eighth book in the New Testament and is found between 1 Corinthians and Galatians.

Who wrote it?

According to 2 Corinthians 1:1, the letter was sent by Paul and Timothy, but Paul is generally considered to be the author.

When was it written?

This epistle was written to believers in Corinth during the early 50's, several months to a year after 1 Corinthians.

What is it about?

The epistle itself indicates that it was written after Paul stopped in Corinth on his way to Macedonia. Apparently something occurred while he was there, and Paul left in a huff and decided not to stop in Corinth on his way back as he had planned. "In 2 Corinthians, the apostle seeks to rebuild his relationship with the Corinthians, to defend his own integrity as a trustworthy and competent servant of Christ, and to refute what he perceives as the claims by other evangelists of background and gifts that are superior to his own."¹ Most of all, Paul wants the Corinthians to be reconciled to God in Christ.

How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1-11)
 - a. Greeting (1:1-2)
 - b. Thanksgiving (1:3-11)
- II. Restoring the Relationship (1:12-7:16)
 - a. Change in Travel Plans (1:12-2:13)
 - b. Paul's Message and Mission (2:14-5:19)
 - c. Appeals for Reconciliation (5:20-7:3)
 - d. Paul's Joy (7:4-16)
- III. The Offering for Jerusalem (8:1-9:15)
- IV. Paul Vindicates His Apostolic Authority (10:1-13:13)
 - a. Introduction (10:1-6)
 - b. Defense of Ministry (10:7-18)
 - c. False Apostles (11:1-15)
 - d. Paul's Suffering (11:16-12:13)
- V. Projected Visit (12:14-13:10)
- VI. Conclusion (13:11-14)

¹ Mary Hinkle Shore at <http://www.enterthebible.org/newtestament.aspx?rid=8>

What are some things to look for?

- **Apostolic Authority:** Paul says that his authority as an apostle comes from the Lord himself. Apparently some “super-apostles” in the community have both questioned Paul’s authority and claimed authority for themselves. In 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul says that true apostles are those who have seen the risen Christ, performed signs and wonders, founded churches, and serve as spokesmen for the Gospel that has been passed on to them.
- **Boasting:** Boasting comes up in almost every chapter of 2 Corinthians. Although Paul is not in favor of boasting (1 Corinthians 13:4), in this situation, he is forced to promote and defend himself. Paul tries to deal with this tricky position by boasting in the Corinthians who are his converts and by boasting about his weakness and thus bearing witness to Christ’s strength. When he must boast about himself, Paul says he is speaking like a fool (2 Corinthians 11:21), an implied criticism of his opponents.
- **Generosity:** Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians contain the longest discussion of stewardship in the New Testament. Paul is taking up a collection in the Gentile churches for the church in Jerusalem. He points out that this is an opportunity to express their gratitude to God by sharing what they have received with others.
- **How many letters were there?** Tracing the history of Paul’s correspondence with the church in Corinth is complex and a source of considerable scholarly debate. In addition to the two letters in the Bible, scholars have suggested there might have been as many as five additional letters. Some feel that 2 Corinthians actually consists of parts of several letters and that accounts for the sudden changes in topic and tone that are found in it; however, among those scholars, there is no consensus about how many letters are involved or where the divisions between them are.