

# INTRODUCTION TO 47<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## THE SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS (autumn A.D. 56)

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### **A. THE WRITER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF 2 CORINTHIANS.**

The letter begins with the words, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” That the apostle Paul was the author or writer of the second letter to the Corinthians is not a matter of dispute in reputable scholarly circles. The evidence from the letter itself and the evidence from history point only to Paul.

In no letter do we find so much *autobiographical information*. In no letter do we find so many *unexplained references* to people, situations and events with which the writer and the audience were obviously very familiar and did not need a more precise explanation of names, places and times. A forger would have taken much pain to explain every detail to his readers in order to give them the impression that he was well acquainted with these facts. No forger would have mentioned *the deadly affliction* that overtook Paul in Asia (1:8), or *his visionary rapture* and subsequent *thorn in the flesh* without giving more precise information concerning the nature of these experiences (12:2-12). No forger would have just mentioned *the brothers* who accompanied Titus to Corinth without disclosing their names (8:18,23; 12:18). No impostor would have been able to reproduce the swift changes of mood, the alternating joy, affection, and sternness, and the sudden digressions and switches of subject that characterises this letter. Like in his other letters, Paul refers to the false teachers and their false teachings with irony rather than with a frontal attack.

This letter is characterised for its *sublime teaching of doctrines, warmth of feeling, spontaneous expression and elevation of spirit*. The second letter to the Corinthians is especially characterised by its emphasis on *the triumph of God’s grace in and through the everyday experience of the Christian in whatever circumstances he may find himself, whether it is an experience of exaltation or of suffering*.

### **B. THE OCCASION AND PURPOSE OF WRITING 2 CORINTHIANS.**

#### **1. The 2 Corinthians letter is an explanation of why Paul changed his travelling plans.**

This purpose becomes especially clear in chapters 1-7. In 2 Corinthians 1:15-16, Paul said that he had originally planned to pay the Corinthians a double visit. He had planned to visit Corinth before his journey up to Macedonia and again on his return from Macedonia. But the disturbing news about the state of affairs in the Corinthian church caused Paul to do three things: he sent Timothy to Corinth<sup>1</sup>, wrote the 1 Corinthian letter (*the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 4 letters to Corinth*<sup>2</sup>) and to make known his future travelling plan<sup>3</sup>. Paul wrote a 3<sup>rd</sup> letter to the Corinthians<sup>4</sup>, “a letter written out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (II 2:4). He said that his first letter to the Corinthians was “a test to see whether they would be obedient in everything” (II 2:9), because he dealt with a number of serious aberrations in the Corinthian church.

Paul had arranged with Titus to meet him on his return from Corinth at Troas, but they finally met in Macedonia. Titus brought both encouraging and discouraging news from Corinth. The encouraging news was that the majority of Corinthian Christians had responded to Paul’s 3<sup>rd</sup> letter “with godly sorrow and repentance”, so that they were eager to clear themselves of the offences in their church (II 7:5-11). The discouraging news was that there was still a recalcitrant group within the Corinthian church. Incited by some false apostles, this group made several false accusations against the apostle Paul: he was fickle in his planning, he abused his apostleship by not asking money for his work, and that he was actually a weak person with a big mouth.

#### **2. The 2 Corinthians letter is a gentle admonition to complete the collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem.**

This purpose becomes especially clear in chapters 8-9. The Corinthian Christians should prepare for Paul’s *third visit*<sup>5</sup> to them by setting their own house in order. One of the things they had started a year ago, in A.D. 54/55, but never completed was the collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem. It is possible that they had neglected this due to their internal quarrels or due to the incitement of the false teachers, who desired to discredit Paul. Nevertheless, Paul sent Titus ahead with this 2 Corinthians letter (*the 4<sup>th</sup> of 4 letters to Corinth*) to supervise the completion of this collection.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:17

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:9

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:5-9

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:4; 7:8

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1

### 3. The 2 Corinthians letter is a defence against the false apostles and their false teachings.

This purpose becomes especially clear in chapters 10-13 (II 11:1-15). Certain false teachers, who claimed to be ‘apostles’, had infiltrated the ranks of the Corinthian church. In order to promote their own position, they had gone out of their way to discredit Paul and to call into question the genuineness of his apostleship.

They made several false accusations against Paul:

The false teachers said that Paul was fickle, unreliable, because he had changed his travelling plans (II 1:17).

Paul answered this accusation by saying that he had changed his travelling plans in order not to make another painful visit to them (II 1:23; 2:1). Instead of paying them a double visit, he planned to pay them only one longer visit. He would first travel to Macedonia and then to Corinth. Thereafter he would travel to Jerusalem.

The false teachers said that Paul was not a genuine apostle, because he had come to Corinth without letters of commendation (II 12:11).

These false teachers had succeeded to penetrate the ranks of the Corinthian church by certain letters of commendation that they had presented *to the Corinthian church* (“to you”) on their arrival (II 3:1). When they departed, they would require similar letters of commendation *from the Corinthian church* (“from you”) in order to penetrate another unsuspecting church (II 3:1)! These false teachers were largely dependent on these letters of commendation as a kind of clearance bill so that they could be given the freedom to market their merchandise in spiritual things profitably (II 4:2)<sup>6</sup>.

Paul answered this accusation by reminding the Corinthians that his *sufferings* (II 4:8-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-33), *revelations* (II 12:1-10) and *signs* (II 12:12) *are the proofs of the genuineness of his apostleship!* Paul had founded the church at Corinth. To require letters of commendation from him or to require that his ministry or character need to be boosted by self-commendation (II 4:2; 5:12; 10:12) would be ludicrous. *His personal character, the quality of his ministry and the spiritual results of his ministry were enough proof that he was a genuine apostle of Jesus Christ!*

This does not mean that Paul was against letters of commendation. Such letters had become customary and were indeed necessary in the early Christian Church, because of the appearance of many false teachers. These false teachers sought to lead a parasitic existence by imposing themselves on the local churches as itinerant teachers or preachers. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians was a kind of letter of commendation for Timothy (I 16:10-11) and his second letter to the Corinthians was a kind of letter of commendation for Titus and his companions (II 8:22-24). Paul maintained that these false teachers had unreliable credentials and were unworthy adventurers.

The false teachers said that Paul was unimpressive in his authority and in his speaking.

They said that Paul may seem impressive from a distance in his letters, but from nearby he would make no impression and his message would not be worth listening to (II 10:10-11; 11:5-6). These false teachers were probably Greek speaking Jews, trained in the Greek science of logic and oratory<sup>7</sup>. Paul answered this false accusation by saying that these false teachers or false apostles would discover his authority in his speaking and actions when he came to Corinth (I 1:22-24; 2:1-5; 13:2,10)<sup>8</sup>!

The false teachers said that Paul had no love and that he was crooked, because he did not accept financial support.

They whispered that Paul’s unwillingness to allow the Corinthian Christians to contribute to his material needs was an indication that he did not love them (11:11). They even invented the false accusation that Paul probably used the collection funds to line his own pocket (12:18). Paul answered that, unlike these false teachers who required payment for their preaching, he made it his goal to preach and teach the Corinthian Christians completely free of charge (II 11:7-15). It was his aim never to be a burden to them (II 12:13)<sup>9</sup>. And Paul absolutely denied that he or his fellow workers had ever exploited them (II 12:14-18).

The second letter to the Corinthians was written largely with the purpose of refuting the accusations and insinuations against him with which these intruders had been poisoning the minds of the Christians at Corinth. The letter is Paul’s defence of the integrity of his personal character and of his apostleship. The letter is also an exposure of these intruders as impostors: “false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ” (II 11:13-15). Paul did not defend himself out of self-interest, but in order to protect the church that God had founded through him. These false so-called apostles taught another Jesus and a different gospel than what Christ had entrusted to Paul (II 11:4-5)<sup>10</sup>. Paul repudiated their vicious slander and warned them that he would deal severely with anyone who continued to trouble the church (II 10:6; 13:10).

### C. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING 4 CORINTHIAN LETTERS.

The events recorded in Acts 13-20 took place between A.D. 47-57. Paul made three missionary journeys.

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<sup>6</sup> compare 1 Timothy 6:3-5

<sup>7</sup> cf. Acts 6:9; 9:29; 21:27

<sup>8</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 4:19-21

<sup>9</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 9:7-18

<sup>10</sup> cf. Galatians 1:6-9

### 1. Paul's first missionary journey (1 year: A.D. 47-48).

Paul's first missionary journey was from A.D. 47-48 together with Barnabas and Mark. They went to Cyprus, Pamphilia, South Galatia and Cilicia in Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey.

In about A.D. 49/50, certain Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem to Antioch, saying that unless Gentile Christians were circumcised, they could not be saved. As a result, *a conference or consultation* was held in Jerusalem to speak about the relationship between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. This conference is described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2. At this meeting of only two local churches, the Jewish Christians received a severe blow. They became known as "the Judaist party", a Christian sect which tried to turn Gentile Christians into Jews. They believed that all Christians should keep the Old Testament ceremonial law, especially circumcision, the Sabbath days and the food rules. They immediately plotted revenge. Their plan seemed to have been to follow the missionaries everywhere and oppose "the gospel of justification by faith alone". They came to Antioch, but Paul vigorously opposed them. They also came to the South Galatian churches in Asia Minor and succeeded to pull new believers into their legalism. Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians especially to counter the false teaching of the Judaist party.

### 1. Paul's second missionary journey (2 years: A.D. 50-52)

Paul's second missionary journey was from spring A.D. 50 to spring A.D. 52 (2 years) together with Silas and Timothy. During the spring A.D. 50 they travelled through Syria (Antioch) and Cilicia (Tarsus) to establish churches in South Galatia (Derbe, Lystra, Iconium) in Asia Minor. Then in the summer A.D. 50 they crossed over to Europe and established churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) and Greece (Athens, Corinth).

Acts 18:12-17 speaks of the proconsul or governor of Achaia, called Gallio. According to an inscription on stone found at Delphi in Achaia, Gallio was proconsul or governor of Achaia for only one year starting from 1<sup>st</sup> July A.D. 51. *Paul was therefore in Corinth for one and a half years, from the autumn of A.D. 50 to the spring of A.D. 52.*

From Corinth Paul wrote *three letters*: the letter of Galatians, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, all in the autumn of A.D. 50. During the spring of A.D. 52, Paul travelled to Ephesus and Jerusalem<sup>11</sup>.

### 2. Paul's third missionary journey (A.D. 52-57).

Paul's third missionary journey was from spring A.D. 52 to summer A.D. 57 (5 years) together with Timothy (and Titus). Paul spent some time in Antioch and then travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples<sup>12</sup>. Paul then took the road through the interior of Turkey and arrived at Ephesus in the province of Asia. His journey to Ephesus must have taken some months. For *three months* Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue of Ephesus, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God<sup>13</sup>. Then for *two years* he held *daily discussions* in the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus. By adding the 3 months<sup>14</sup> to the 2 years<sup>15</sup> it approaches three years. For 3 years, probably from the autumn of A.D. 52 to the summer of A.D. 55<sup>16</sup>, night and day he never stopped warning each Ephesian believer.

*Paul paid three visits to Corinth<sup>17</sup> and wrote four letters to Corinthians.*

Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> visit to Corinth was during his second missionary journey from the autumn A.D. 50 to spring A.D. 52. (1½ years) during which Paul established and became closely attached to the church in Corinth<sup>18</sup>. During Paul's absence from Corinth, there was much contact between Paul and the Corinthians. This was possible, because *both Ephesus and Corinth were situated on the main trade route between the east and the west*. The journey from Ephesus to Corinth took about three weeks by sea.

Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians was written between A.D. 52-54. He wrote "a letter which we do not possess and admonished the believers "not to associate with sexual etc. immoral people"<sup>19</sup>, that is, "those who call themselves brothers, but are sexual immoral". It is possible that the Corinthians misunderstood this letter and the letter was subsequently lost.

Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians is our 1 Corinthians (Paul's 4<sup>th</sup> letter in New Testament) and was written in Ephesus probably in A.D. 54/55. His purpose was: "To teach that the Christian Church is *in* the world, but *not of* the world". He answered their questions and pointed out what needed to be changed. This letter did not upset the Corinthians. It showed that there was much communication between Paul and the Corinthians, that letters were exchanged and visits were paid.

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 18:18-22

<sup>12</sup> Acts 18:23

<sup>13</sup> Acts 18:23

<sup>14</sup> Acts 19:8

<sup>15</sup> Acts 19:10

<sup>16</sup> Acts 20:31

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:1

<sup>18</sup> Acts 18:1

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

In 2 Corinthians 8:10, Paul says “*Last year you were the first not only to do (i.e. give towards the collection), but also to have the will/desire (to give)*”. The verb ‘do’ is in aorist tense and ‘will’ in the present continuous tense. The collection for the needy believers in Jerusalem<sup>20</sup> had possibly been started before 1 Corinthians was written<sup>21</sup>, but the Corinthians had not continued it, probably due to a change in attitude towards Paul caused by troublemakers. Thus, dependent on *when a year starts*<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians was probably written in A.D. 54/55, one or two years before 2 Corinthians, which was written in the autumn of A.D. 56.

The questions of the Corinthians together with other serious news Paul had received from Sosthenus, Chloe’s household, Stephanas<sup>23</sup>, Fortunatus and Achaicus<sup>24</sup> concerning the state of affairs in Corinth, caused Paul to do three things:

- He sent Timothy. He had actually already sent (aorist tense) Timothy from Ephesus via Macedonia to Corinth to remind them of Paul’s teachings<sup>25</sup>, but expected him to arrive after the 1 Corinthians letter<sup>26</sup>. Paul calls Timothy his faithful co-worker and says that Timothy would remind them of his way of life in Christ Jesus which agrees with his teaching everywhere in every church and that Timothy is carrying on the work of the Lord just as he is<sup>27</sup>. Timothy was entrusted with the difficult task of solving the problems in the Corinthian church, like party strife, sexual immorality, legal cases against one another, chaos in the worship meetings, etc.
- He wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus to them. He tells the Corinthian Christians that he would soon visit them and that it depended on them if he would come “with a whip” to discipline them or “in love and with a gentle spirit”<sup>28</sup>.
- He shared his future plan with them. He would stay on in Ephesus until Pentecost (June/late spring 54/55 A.D.) because a great door for effective work had opened for him<sup>29</sup>. His original plan was to pay the Corinthians a sort of double visit, crossing over the sea from Ephesus, stay a short while in Corinth, travel north to Macedonia and then spend the winter in Corinth before journeying on to Jerusalem with the collection<sup>30</sup>. However, this plan changed!

Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to Corinth was between writing 1 and 2 Corinthians. While he was in Ephesus, Paul soon received disturbing news about the state of affairs in the Corinthian church. There seemed to have been serious moral problems, especially sexual immorality, the spreading of Judaist teachings and the peddling of the Word of God for profit<sup>31</sup>. Due to these problems Paul probably made *an unplanned short visit* about which we have very little information. He crossed the sea from Ephesus to Corinth and returned to Ephesus disappointed. This was “a painful visit”<sup>32</sup> and caused both Paul and the Corinthians much grief.

Paul’s 3<sup>rd</sup> letter to the Corinthians was written in Ephesus between writing 1 and 2 Corinthians. We also do not possess this letter. Paul wrote this letter “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears”. He admonished them, but also let them know his love for them. He wanted to prevent grieving them when he visited them a third time<sup>33</sup>. Nevertheless, this letter hurt/grieved the Corinthians<sup>34</sup>.

Paul then sent Titus from Ephesus to Corinth probably with the commission to remedy the fallout precipitated by this painful second visit<sup>35</sup> and to find out what effect the third letter had. Paul arranged to meet Titus in Troas.

So, after the great riot of the silversmiths in Ephesus Paul left Ephesus (A.D. 55) and travelled, not across the sea to Achaia, but via Troas to Macedonia<sup>36</sup>. The Lord had opened a wide door in Troas for Paul<sup>37</sup>. He expected to meet Titus in Troas, but finally travelled on and found him in Macedonia<sup>38</sup>. Paul must have stayed a considerable time (at least a year A.D. 55-56) in Troas and Macedonia, because the reaction to his painful second visit and third (now lost) letter took time. Paul also had wanted to visit the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea)<sup>39</sup> and travelled

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:10; 9:2

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:2

<sup>22</sup> The Jewish and Macedonian year begin in the autumn and the religious Jewish year in the spring. The Athenian year begins in the summer and the Roman year in the winter.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:1,11,16

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:1; 16:12,17

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:17

<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:10

<sup>27</sup> Acts 19:22; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:18-21; 11:34 (orderly directions); 16:2-9

<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:8

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:5-9

<sup>31</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:16-17

<sup>32</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:1

<sup>33</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:4

<sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:8

<sup>35</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:13-16

<sup>36</sup> Acts 20:1

<sup>37</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:12

<sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:5-14

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:5

through that area (before arriving in Greece, Corinth)<sup>40</sup>. When Titus finally arrived in Macedonia, he reported the situation in Corinth. They had forgiven the transgressor that had caused much grief in Corinth and had given towards the collection for the poor Christians in Judea, but had not continued the collection.

He also reported that some people at Corinth (Judaists) attacked Paul's apostleship and accused him of several bad things<sup>41</sup>, for example, Paul was fickle in his planning, he abused his apostleship by not asking money for his work, and that he was actually a weak person with a big mouth. Also Timothy met Paul in Macedonia<sup>42</sup>.

Paul's **4<sup>th</sup> letter to the Corinthians** is our 2 Corinthians (Paul's 5<sup>th</sup> letter in New Testament). Overjoyed by Titus' success, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in the autumn A.D. 56 from Macedonia. His purpose was: "To witness that God's strength is manifested through human weakness". Paul planned to visit Corinth, but feared that the Corinthians would not find him as they would like him to be and that he would not find them to be what he would like them to be<sup>43</sup>.

Paul writes that he had *not abandoned* his intended visit to Corinth, but had *changed* his travelling plans. He would no longer pay them a double visit, but a single longer visit after he had visited Macedonia. The purpose of this change of plans was to spare the Corinthian Christians<sup>44</sup> and to give them time to set their house in order in readiness for his visit, because he was fully prepared to exercise the sternest discipline, if necessary<sup>45</sup>.

Paul sent the letter together with Titus from Macedonia to Corinth, because Titus had the same concern for the Corinthians as Paul and acted in the same spirit and followed the same course<sup>46</sup>. He was accompanied by two other brothers, one of whom was a noted preacher. He was commissioned to organize the collections of alms for the Christians at Jerusalem<sup>47</sup>. Titus did not exploit the Corinthians (as the false apostles did)<sup>48</sup>. He had a heart for the Corinthians, was a trouble-shooter, peacemaker, administrator and devoted missionary.

Paul and Timothy spent the winter A.D. 56-57 in Macedonia.

Paul's **3<sup>rd</sup> visit to Corinth** was in the winter early A.D. 57<sup>49</sup>. Paul and Timothy spent three months<sup>50</sup> in Corinth<sup>51</sup>.

Paul wrote Romans (Paul's 6<sup>th</sup> letter in New Testament) in the spring A.D. 57 from Corinth. His purpose was: "To teach that justification is only by grace through faith".

Due to a plot of the Jews against Paul, he left Corinth and returned to Syria via Macedonia<sup>52</sup>. He and Luke travelled via Philippi in Macedonia to Troas in Asia. His co-workers including Timothy waited for them at Troas.

After the Feast of Unleavened Bread<sup>53</sup> (April 57 A.D.) Paul sailed past Ephesus because he wanted to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost<sup>54</sup> (June/late spring 57 A.D.). He made a stop to meet the elders of Ephesus at Miletus and taught them about Christian leadership<sup>55</sup>. After that, Timothy was probably together with Paul in Jerusalem<sup>56</sup>.

#### **D. THE DIVISION OF 2 CORINTHIANS.**

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians may be given **the title**: 2 Corinthians. "The triumph of God's grace over and through human frailty". Or 2 Corinthians. "The complete sufficiency of God's grace, which gives strength through weakness." It emphasises *the triumph of God's grace in and through the everyday experience of the Christian in whatever circumstances he may find himself, whether it is an experience of exaltation or of suffering*. The letter portrays Jesus Christ as our Sufficiency, that is, we need no more and no less than Jesus Christ himself in all our circumstances.

**The theme** of 2 Corinthians is written in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, "Not that we are competent (sufficient, capable) in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence (sufficiency, capability) comes from God. He has made us competent (able and effective, thus worthy) as ministers of a new covenant."

The structure of the second letter to the Corinthians is determined by Paul's coming third visit to Corinth. The letter may be divided into three parts:

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<sup>40</sup> Acts 20:2

<sup>41</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:15-24

<sup>42</sup> Acts 20:4

<sup>43</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:19-21

<sup>44</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:23

<sup>45</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:2

<sup>46</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:16; 12:17-18

<sup>47</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

<sup>48</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:17-18

<sup>49</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1

<sup>50</sup> Acts 20:3

<sup>51</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:1

<sup>52</sup> Acts 20:3-4

<sup>53</sup> Acts 20:6

<sup>54</sup> Acts 20:16

<sup>55</sup> Acts 20:17-37

<sup>56</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:3

### **1. The first part. 2 Corinthians 1-7. The past: Paul explains to the Corinthians his change of travelling plans.**

He reviews his *past*, that is, recent, experiences and their bearing upon the church at Corinth. It consists of five sections:

- 2 Corinthians 1:1-11. Paul says that, after having faced death in Asia, he is able to comfort the afflicted people of Corinth. In chapter 1:12 to 2:4, he says that he had changed his travelling plans and had delayed his coming to Corinth in order to spare them.
- 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Paul orders the restoration of the Corinthian offender.
- 2 Corinthians 2:12-13. Paul says that he had travelled from Ephesus to Troas to meet Titus and preached the gospel in Troas. When he did not find Titus there, he travelled on to Macedonia. Continued in chapter 7:5-16.
- 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 7:5. Paul describes how this open door at Troas and the good news from Corinth caused Paul to focus his attention on “the triumphs and glories of the Christian ministry even amidst suffering”. This is *an extended digression* from the framework, but not from the contents of this letter.
- 2 Corinthians 7:5-16. Paul continues section 3. The sorrow, which Paul’s third letter to the Corinthians had caused them, worked for their good and this encouraged Paul.

### **2. The second part. 2 Corinthians 8-9. The present: Paul urges the Corinthians to prepare for his coming visit by completing the collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem.**

He expresses his *present* desire that the collection for the needy Christians at Jerusalem shall be continued energetically. It consists of three sections:

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. The pattern of giving is the self-sacrificial giving of Macedonia and Jesus Christ himself.
- 2 Corinthians 8:16 to 9:5. The administration of Christian gifts.
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. The results of generous giving.

### **3. The third part. 2 Corinthians 10-13. The future: Paul assures the Corinthians of the certainty and imminence of his visit.**

He defends himself against the false charges of his opponents and assures them that the purpose of his *future* visit is not to tear them down but to build them up. It consists of three sections:

- 2 Corinthians 10. Paul reminds his opponents in the church at Corinth that Corinth is within the province of his apostleship.
- 2 Corinthians 11:1 to 12:13. Paul warns his opponents that they must not think that he is a sham apostle. His sufferings, revelations and signs are the proofs of his apostleship!
- 2 Corinthians 12:14 to 13:14. Paul assures the Corinthians that the purpose of his third visit is not to burden them, nor to exploit them, nor to tear them down, but to build them up.

## **E. THE MAIN MESSAGE OF 2 CORINTHIANS.**

The main theme of 2 Corinthians is “*the complete sufficiency of God’s grace, which gives strength through weakness.*” This theme is bound up with the whole argument for the genuineness of Paul’s apostolic authority. His enemies had blamed Paul for being a weak person, unreliable, unimpressive, unloving and crooked. While Paul denies their false accusations throughout this letter, he does not deny or hide his weakness or self-inadequacy. On the contrary, it is precisely when he is weak and totally inadequate, that God is able to use him in his service. It is only when he is weak that it becomes inescapable apparent that the power of his ministry is entirely the power of God. It is this amazing contrast between his own human frailty and God’s all-conquering strength manifested through him that his apostleship is unshakably authenticated to the world.

Therefore, on the one hand, Paul draws attention to his sufferings, perils, hardships and feebleness of health, which he endured during the fulfilment of his task. And on the other hand he draws attention to God’s great power that is manifested in and through his ministry. In this way he drives home to his readers the truth of this startling paradox that human weakness and divine strength go hand in hand. *Human frailty is not a handicap or a barrier, but rather provides the ideal opportunity for the triumph of God’s grace and power.* The degree to which a worker of God asserts his own adequacy, to that degree does he deny and withdraw from the sole sufficiency of the grace of God. And the degree to which the worker of God asserts his own inadequacy, to that degree does he depend on the sole sufficiency of the grace of God.

For example Paul says in:

2 Corinthians 1:8-9. “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure ... that we might not rely on ourselves but on God.”

2 Corinthians 2:12-14. “I had no peace of mind ... but God always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ.”

2 Corinthians 3:5-6. “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

2 Corinthians 4:7-10. “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

