



Study Guide – Lessons in Discipleship from 2 Corinthians

Appendix - Introduction to 2 Corinthians from the NIV Study Bible

Author

Paul is the author of this letter (see 1:1; 10:1). It is stamped with his style and contains more autobiographical material than any of his other writings.

Date

The available evidence indicates that the year a.d. 55 is a reasonable estimate for the writing of this letter. From 1Co 16:5–8 it may be concluded that 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus before Pentecost (in the late spring) and that 2 Corinthians may have been written later that same year before the onset of winter. 2Co 2:13; 7:5 indicate that it was probably written from Macedonia.

Recipients

The opening greeting of the letter states that it was addressed to the church in Corinth and to Christians throughout Achaia (the Roman province comprising all of Greece south of Macedonia).

Occasion

It seems that Paul wrote as many as four letters to the church at Corinth: (1) the letter referred to in 1Co 5:9; (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 chs. 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 chs. 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.