

# 2 CORINTHIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

# FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC COMMENTARY SERIES

by **J.K. McKee**

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J.K. MCKEE

**MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS**  
[messianicapologetics.net](http://messianicapologetics.net)

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## FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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# ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	HALOT: <i>Hebrew &amp; Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	Heb: Hebrew
Ara: Aramaic	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
b. Babylonian Talmud ( <i>Talmud Bavli</i> )	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old &amp; New Testament)</i>
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	KJV: King James Version
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament</i> by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	LXX: Septuagint
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	m. Mishnah
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
Ger: German	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
GNT: Greek New Testament	
Grk: Greek	

NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*  
NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*  
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*  
NIV: New International Version (1984)  
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)  
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)  
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)  
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)  
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)  
NT: New Testament  
orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world  
OT: Old Testament  
PME: Practical Messianic Edition of the Apostolic Scriptures  
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*  
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)  
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)

t. Tosefta  
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament  
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*  
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*  
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)  
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)  
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)  
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*  
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*  
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition  
v(s). verse(s)  
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*  
Vul: Latin Vulgate  
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*  
Yid: Yiddish  
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)



# PROLOGUE

Throughout 2015 I conducted a year-long study through Paul's letter of 1 Corinthians, which I was very pleased to see completed in the time that I had originally estimated: about a year. The study was relatively consistent week-to-week, with only a few brief stops along the way, mostly for expected family and congregational activities. *There were no major, unfortunate pauses during 2015, which delayed 1 Corinthians.* One of the biggest things which did take place, during the 1 Corinthians Wednesday Night Bible Study, is that when I immediately returned home from my annual family reunion in Gulf Shores, AL the last week of June, the website domain tnonline.net had been thefted from us, during the middle of the night that it was to be renewed. For about six weeks, between late June and early August, TNN Online transitioned into Messianic Apologetics ([www.messianicapologetics.net](http://www.messianicapologetics.net)), a name which is far more reflective of what I have been doing since I graduated from seminary in 2009. This upcoming, continued study on Paul's letter of 2 Corinthians, bears the distinction of being the first full study conducted for Messianic Apologetics.

Anyone who reads 1 and 2 Corinthians simultaneously should note a definite stylistic shift. Both 1 and 2 Corinthians communicated important things to their original First Century audience, and hence us as Twenty-First Century Believers. Both 1 and 2 Corinthians are intellectually and spiritually deep pieces of correspondence. But, there is a difference between 1 Corinthians, which focuses much more on the catalogue of problems that the Messiah followers were facing, and 2 Corinthians, which is widely reflective of the ministry service and character of the Apostle Paul. Paul is personally sold out to the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, as serving the interests of the Kingdom of God and the good news is what dominates his thoughts and actions. Seeing people appreciate his unique ideology and philosophy of ministry is surely detailed in this letter. For the Bible reader examining the Corinthian correspondence, it offers an important venue to consider to what degree(s) they had taken Paul's admonitions to them seriously.

For my own research and writing, 2 Corinthians should represent a number of significant transitions. From 2006 and the Hebrews study to 2015 and the 1 Corinthians study, issues pertaining to the post-resurrection era validity of the Torah, various Torah practices, and Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah—have dominated a great deal of our focus. While these subjects will seemingly always be present in any Messianic study, **2 Corinthians significantly highlights the person of the Apostle Paul.** How did Paul act under pressure? How did Paul reason through problems? Why did Paul do things a little differently than some of the other Apostles? In examining 2 Corinthians, we will get to reflect a great deal on the character of someone who wrote a significant block of the Messianic Scriptures or New Testament. It is hardly surprising to me, now in 2016, that 2 Corinthians will be the last commentary I write on the Pauline Epistles. And, it is my sincere

hope that its completion will lead to further studies, that will provide for a greater focus on the character development of us as Messiah followers.

Certainly throughout 2015, as we went through the letter of 1 Corinthians, the letter of 2 Corinthians was quoted where necessary, and I went into 1 Corinthians knowing that 2 Corinthians would be addressed afterward. There is a real temptation, when starting an examination of the Corinthian correspondence, to treat 2 Corinthians as a kind of “appendix” to 1 Corinthians. The size of some of the commentaries on 1 Corinthians, compared to 2 Corinthians—even with 2 Corinthians being thirteen chapters, to 1 Corinthians being sixteen chapters—demonstrates how more time tends to focus on 1 Corinthians. *2 Corinthians is not an appendix to 1 Corinthians*. What 2 Corinthians is, are the deeply held emotional transcriptions of an Apostle, who wants this group of ancient Messiah followers to really understand what they are a part of, as members of the Kingdom of Heaven and as fellow servants of the good news along with him.

Have you ever had some challenges in sitting down, and reading 2 Corinthians—perhaps after reading 1 Corinthians? Even though the audience is the same, 2 Corinthians is not the same kind of letter as 1 Corinthians. There has been some degree of resolution to the problems encountered in 1 Corinthians, even though corrections still have to be made, and there is a looming danger that problems could flare up again. Readers of 2 Corinthians do not have to so much theorize or speculate on the involvement of claiming Believers in temple prostitution or eating meat sacrificed to idols. Readers of 2 Corinthians have to instead decisively enter into the heart and mind of the Apostle Paul, and identify with a person who did not consider himself “entitled” to various privileges, as serving the interests of the gospel was his only concern. While other Pauline letters may face controversies in terms of Greek to English or historical background issues, 2 Corinthians deals mainly with the psychology of the Apostle Paul. *2 Corinthians is going to present us with a new class of challenges to consider*. Scott J. Hafemann astutely informs us, “The letter we call ‘2 Corinthians’ is widely recognized as the most difficult to understand among Paul’s letters.”<sup>1</sup>

There are surely statements, appearing in 2 Corinthians, which all of us have quoted, or have had quoted to us, at one point or another—many of which we have genuinely appreciated as they involve Believers’ necessity to place their focus on the Messiah: “Such confidence we have through Messiah toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (3:4-5). At the same time, a figure like the Apostle Paul identified his ministry service as one of constant “death,” so to speak: “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Yeshua’s sake, so that the life of Yeshua also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (4:11). Is this just an observation about Paul’s physical life being frequently threatened because of the subversive nature of his gospel declarations? Or, is it a significant degree that genuine service, unto the Lord, will involve some significant degree of repetition of the Messiah’s own ministry example? Deep questions, to be considered and probed are presented from 2 Corinthians. The theme of suffering (4:7, 10, 11, 12) is hardly a popular one—among others.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, *NIV Application Commentary: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 19.

Sometimes as I begin a new Bible study, I am consciously aware of a theological or spiritual lesson, some intellectual or more personal fine-tuning, that the Lord wants to communicate to me. Sometimes I begin a new Bible study with no more knowledge than knowing that it needs to be conducted, in order for me to move on to other studies (which may bear more personal interest for me). I start 2 Corinthians knowing that when it is completed, there will be *Practical Messianic* volumes on all of the Pauline Epistles. I also start 2 Corinthians, with a certain excitement about what I am going to learn about the person of the Apostle Paul in the First Century Mediterranean—and also for perhaps discovering one or two critical points for my own self, that I can integrate into my own service for the Lord in Twenty-First Century North America.

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# INTRODUCTION

2 Corinthians (Grk. *Pros Korinthious B*, ΙΠΟΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΟΥΣ Β) is the third longest of the letters of the Apostle Paul, and is at least the third piece of correspondence issued to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9).<sup>1</sup> After Bible readers have submitted themselves to what can seem to be a significant chore in dissecting 1 Corinthians, there might be great hope for 2 Corinthians to be a less complicated, more conciliatory text. 1 Corinthians bears testimony to a group of Ancient First Century Believers which was factional and riddled with spiritual problems. Each of us, in approaching 2 Corinthians, innately desires to see those problems widely remedied, and for an amicable and pleasant interaction between Paul and the Corinthians to reassert itself.

While there are surely theological and spiritual controversies encountered in 2 Corinthians, which are all worthy of our attention—what is encountered more is Paul the man, Paul the servant of the Lord in hands-on and on-the-ground service to the Lord in the First Century Mediterranean. How did a figure like the Apostle Paul handle a group of (presumed) Believers like the Corinthians, who were widely dysfunctional? If it can be said that the problems in 1 Corinthians were caused more by the external challenges presented by a Greco-Roman metropolis like Corinth, then the issues present in 2 Corinthians were seemingly caused by various internal challenges and personalities which beset this group of Messiah followers. Within 2 Corinthians, Paul has to go to some lengths to defend the legitimacy of not just his apostolic ministry, but in explaining his personal values and ideology to his audience, which are rooted in his spiritual experiences with the Lord.

2 Corinthians is a different kind of letter, in comparison to 1 Corinthians. There has been some preliminary resolution to the problems which Paul was very firm in addressing in previous correspondence, but there are still some minority elements among the Corinthians, who have their doubts about Paul. The threat of there being further problems is still definitely present—and so it should hardly be a shock that the letter of 2 Corinthians is not just intensely pastoral, but is also intensely personal. In the estimation of David E. Garland, “Second Corinthians presents us with the apostle’s most deeply personal book, a book written in the heart and hurt of crisis, and one that delves most deeply into Paul’s theology of Christian ministry.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that in spite of the common reference to 2 Corinthians as “the Book of 2 Corinthians,” I am going to purposefully refer to the text as either the Epistle of 2 Corinthians or the letter of 2 Corinthians, and not use this reference. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

<sup>2</sup> David E. Garland, *New American Commentary: 2 Corinthians* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 5.

While a figure like the Apostle Paul no doubt was assertive and decisive in much of what he did, in his interactions with the Corinthians—he did so not of his own abilities or skills, but because of the power of God active through him. Still, even though credit was surely given to the Lord for his declaration of the good news, the record of 2 Corinthians testifies to Paul’s internal frustrations and difficulties with the Corinthians—fully consistent with the internal frustrations of figures which had preceded him in Holy Scripture, from the Prophets of Israel to Yeshua the Messiah Himself. J. Paul Sampley indicates how “Paul’s self-descriptions are illuminating because they show a Paul not always victorious, not always triumphant, but often vexed, put upon, and, at times, almost overwhelmed.”<sup>3</sup>

The Apostle Paul has heard about the state of the Corinthians’ behavior, which has apparently improved (7:6-16), as he prepares to visit the Corinthians in person again (12:14; 13:1). To many readers and examiners, 2 Corinthians is a disjointed letter, which varies and fluctuates in tone and approach too much, and perhaps appears to not be as coherent as other pieces of Pauline writing. Is this because 2 Corinthians may actually be a compilation of different pieces of Pauline writing to this audience, *or* is a shift in tone and style more deliberate for rhetorical purposes? Regardless of which composition style one is oriented to, given Paul’s strong feelings toward the Corinthians—it is not difficult to wonder or ask oneself, what the Apostle might communicate to us, *to one of our local assemblies or fellowships*, had he invested so much time and energy in us. Would his message be positive or negative? Would we have allowed inappropriate statements to be made of him, even to the point where the legitimacy of his ministry calling would be questioned?

## PAUL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE CORINTHIANS

Conservatives and liberals alike are agreed on genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Corinthians (1:1; 10:1), although Timothy is listed as a co-sender (1:1-3). And, it is to be recognized how plural terminology is employed by the author in writing to the audience. What might this mean? Sampley details, “Paul employs the plural in self-reference more in 2 Corinthians than in any other letter....By using personal pronouns so often in referring to himself, Paul accomplishes a variety of goals that are important for his rhetorical task of persuading the Corinthians to ally themselves (more fully) with him.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, while there is agreement that Paul is the author of the letter known as 2 Corinthians, there is no agreement among scholars as to the unity of 2 Corinthians—with many concluding that 2 Corinthians was a whole letter written to the Corinthians, and others concluding that 2 Corinthians is a redacted composition of multiple pieces of correspondence written to the Corinthians.

The pagan metropolis of First Century Corinth, capital of Achaia, tends to be probed more for its background significance for the issues addressed in the letter of 1 Corinthians, than for the letter of 2 Corinthians, although there are 2 Corinthians commentaries which

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<sup>3</sup> J. Paul Sampley, “The Second Letter to the Corinthians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11:20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:19.

offer some kind of historical summary.<sup>5</sup> (Consult the author's **Introduction** in *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic* for an historical overview of Ancient Corinth.) The surrounding Greco-Roman and Eastern culture of Corinth presented a mix of challenges for the Corinthian Believers, involving temptations of idolatry, sexual immorality, and a self-serving culture of competition. A figure like the Apostle Paul, who not only issued firm condemnations of idolatry and sexual immorality—but who presented himself as an example of self-sacrificial service, in emulation of Yeshua the Messiah—had much going against him, to get through to the Corinthians who had professed Him as Savior. Scott J. Hafemann concurs,

“Paul’s message and life were an affront to Hellenistic Jews and Gentiles. The materialism and self-serving individualism that dominated Corinth, together with the reigning pluralism and status-oriented civil religion of the day, all fueled by the self-glorifying entertainment and sports subculture, presented a formidable front for the gospel of the cross and for its cruciform messenger (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17-19 with 2 Cor. 2:14-17).”<sup>6</sup>

What are some of the circumstances that we encounter when reading the letter of 2 Corinthians? We know from the record of the Book of Acts, that the Apostle Paul had visited Corinth for an eighteen-month period, a time he became acquainted with fellow Jewish Believers Priscilla and Aquila, and when a mixed assembly of both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers could be established. While once a part of the local synagogue, the Messiah followers were ejected, and moved themselves adjacent to the synagogue. Paul’s time in Corinth concluded after an encounter with the Roman proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:1-18).<sup>7</sup> Paul moved on to Ephesus (Acts 18:24-9:1), during which time the situation in Corinth deteriorated. Paul wrote the Corinthians a non-extant letter about the problem of sexual immorality among them (1 Corinthians 5:9), which would then be followed by the canonical 1 Corinthians.

*What happened between the composition of 1 Corinthians, and (at least most of) the composition of 2 Corinthians?* Timothy was anticipated to visit the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10), and was seemingly sent to not just offer useful teaching and direction to them, but also help alleviate some of the tensions which had erupted between them and Paul. Paul had written the Corinthians of his intention to visit them, and perhaps even stay the winter (1 Corinthians 16:5-7), even though from the record of 2 Corinthians his original plans were altered. Instead, what we see is that Paul made a brief, painful visit to Corinth (2:1; 12:21; 13:2), likely in response to the report that Timothy brought back to him. Paul was humiliated during this visit, and so in response he wrote a harsh letter to the Corinthians (2:4; 7:8). The

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<sup>5</sup> These include, but are not limited to: Colin Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp 13-17; Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, Vol 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), pp xxviii-xxxiii; Paul Barnett, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp 1-4; Scott J. Hafemann, *NIV Application Commentary: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp 22-25; Garland, pp 21-25; George H. Guthrie, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), pp 9-17.

<sup>6</sup> Hafemann, 27.

<sup>7</sup> For a further examination, consult “Commentary on Acts 18:1-18: Paul’s Visit to Corinth,” appearing in *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.