

2 CORINTHIANS  
FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC



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## FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

J.K. MCKEE

**MESSIANIC**  
**APOLOGETICS**  
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# 2 CORINTHIANS

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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>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
Ara: Aramaic	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old &amp; New Testament)</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
b. Babylonian Talmud ( <i>Talmud Bavli</i> )	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	KJV: King James Version
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	LXX: Septuagint
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	m. Mishnah
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: New International Version (1984)
GNT: Greek New Testament	NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew &amp; Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
Heb: Hebrew	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 tnnonline.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.

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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.

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.

J.K. McKee  
Editor, *Messianic Apologetics*

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

# INTRODUCTION

2 Corinthians (Grk. *Pros Korinthious B*, ΠΡΟΣ 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>

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

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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.

<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.

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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 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

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

<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*.

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 brief, painful visit Paul made to Corinth (2:1-5), likely involved some kind of altercation. Some suggest that there was an incident with the incestuous sinner of 1 Corinthians 5, while others more probably suggest that the “super apostles” (11:4-5) instead were responsible for a public showdown with Paul. *The visit was not positive, to say the least.*

Subsequent to his brief, painful visit to Corinth, one gets the impression that Paul wrote a sharp letter back to them (2:4; 7:8-9), likely delivered by Titus (12:18). Many treat this severe letter as no longer being extant, but a number of examiners widely think that 2 Corinthians chs. 10-13 actually compose this severe letter.

Further on, Paul left Ephesus, after a major riot as a result of his ministry (Acts 19:23-41). It was Paul’s intention to meet Titus in Troas (2:12-13), but being unable to rendezvous with him, Paul went on to Macedonia (Acts 20:1). Titus did meet with Paul in Macedonia, and brought with him a positive report from Corinth about the effects of the severe letter that had been written to the Believers (7:5-16), as it apparently performed its intended result. During Paul’s time of ministry service in Macedonia, he wrote 2 Corinthians (or at least chs. 1-9), making a third visit to Corinth (Acts 20:2b-3a), which in turn was the likely time of his composition of the Epistle to the Romans. Examiners tend to be in wide agreement that the overall contents of 2 Corinthians do follow what is seen in 1 Corinthians. Leon Morris informs us,

“[Paul] wrote the letter partly to assure the Corinthians of his deep satisfaction, and partly to prepare the way for the visit that he hoped soon to accomplish. Paul was a realist. He knew that the worst of the trouble was over, but that did not mean that was no further cause for concern” (*ISBE*).<sup>8</sup>

The audience of 2 Corinthians was the same as the audience of 1 Corinthians: mainly Diaspora Jews, Greeks, and Romans. Like the Epistle of 1 Corinthians, no original composition in Hebrew or Aramaic has ever been proposed by anyone in the scholastic community for the Epistle of 2 Corinthians. It is only limited to those in the Messianic community who want it to be so. It is an historical impossibility. What is not an historical impossibility, is how deeply rooted the Apostle Paul’s appreciation for the Torah and Tanach is, and that its concepts and ideas are naturally witnessed in the discussions that he has with the Corinthians, in order to communicate deep spiritual truths. This is balanced with an employment of various forms of classical letter writing and rhetoric. As Paul Barnett astutely directs,

“Consistent with his assertion that he is a ‘Hebrew’ (11:22), we note echoes from the liturgy of the synagogue in various benedictions (e.g., 1:3-11, 20; 11:31), thanksgivings (e.g., 2:14; 9:15), and asseverations arising from the OT (e.g., 1:12, 23; 11:10). Paul peppers his text with quotations from and allusions to the OT (e.g., 3:3-6, 16; 4:13; 5:12, 17; 6:1-2, 14-7:1; 9:6-8, 9-10; 10:17; 11:2; 13:1). The vocabulary and thought of Isaiah 40-55 appear to underlie 5:14-7:1. Both the well-developed midrash on Moses’ veil based on a passage from the Pentateuch (3:7-18) and the dualistic apocalypse arising from the division of the ages (4:16-5:10), hinged around the general resurrection (4:14; cf. 1:14; 5:10), arise from the religious culture of contemporary Judaism....On the other hand, increased awareness of the Greco-Roman culture of the period indicates that Paul was familiar with, and prepared to express himself in terms of, that culture. It

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<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris, “Corinthians, Second Epistle to the,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:780.

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has been long understood that 2 Corinthians is written in educated *koinē* in the format of a Hellenistic letter..."<sup>9</sup>

### WHERE WAS PAUL WHEN HE WROTE THIS LETTER?

From what is seen in the record of 2 Corinthians, this letter was obviously composed sometime after Paul's brief, painful visit to Corinth, and before a planned third visit. This is deduced from his words, "Now I am ready to visit you for the third time..." (12:14a, NIV). The most probable, and widely agreed upon, place of composition for 2 Corinthians, is understandably **Macedonia**. This is not only because Macedonia is listed by name in 2 Corinthians (2:13; 7:5), with the Macedonians' generosity for Paul's Jerusalem collection lauded (8:1; 9:2-4), but more specifically because Paul was able to rendezvous with Titus in Macedonia, and receive a report on the Corinthians' response to his painful letter (7:7-16). Macedonia is the most logical choice available to examiners.

### WHEN DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER?

It can obviously be recognized how the letter of 2 Corinthians was written after the letter of 1 Corinthians, as the tone of what is communicated suggests some kind of previous correspondence and interchange between the Apostle Paul and the Corinthians. A standard view, coupled with a Macedonian origin for 2 Corinthians, is that Paul wrote during his Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-20:6), perhaps placing (the bulk of) what we consider to be 2 Corinthians sometime during the **Winter of 56 or 57 C.E.**

One of the more significant issues to be considered from 2 Corinthians, which both conservative and liberal examiners alike have posed, involves whether 2 Corinthians was written as a **single letter** to the Corinthians, or whether what is now considered 2 Corinthians was actually a **series of letters** written to the Corinthians, later redacted together. With a recognition that there are some pieces of correspondence written by Paul to the Corinthians, which are no longer extant and have been lost to history, there were likely a minimum of four letters written to the Corinthians:

1. Corinthians A: a non-extant first letter (1 Corinthians 5:9)
2. Corinthians B: the canonical 1 Corinthians
3. Corinthians C: a non-extant severe letter (2 Corinthians 2:3-4; 7:8)
4. Corinthians D: the canonical 2 Corinthians

Among these four proposed pieces of correspondence to the Corinthians, was there actually a sorrowful letter written to the Corinthians (2:3-4; 7:8), which became lost to history? While conservative examiners tend to support a unified composition of the letter of 2 Corinthians,<sup>10</sup> various conservatives will be open to the proposal that there was a non-extant severe letter written between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians,<sup>11</sup> and/or agree that there were two non-extant pieces of correspondence written to the Corinthians,<sup>12</sup> independent of our canonical 1&2 Corinthians.

Some, reading the text of 2 Corinthians, might understandably draw the conclusion that the severe letter written by Paul to the Corinthians was 1 Corinthians, and that there is no need to posit the existence of hypothetical writings. But would sending the letter now known as 1 Corinthians, merit regret on the part of the Apostle Paul? As he details in 2 Corinthians 7:8, "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while." Donald Guthrie emphasizes in his *New Testament Introduction*, "It is difficult to believe that [Paul] had any such regrets

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<sup>9</sup> Barnett, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Morris, "Corinthians, Second Epistle to the," in *ISBE*, 1:780-781.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), pp 451-452.

<sup>12</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), pp 165-66; S.J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letters to the," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 176; Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 370; Barnett, 12; D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 423.

over the sending of 1 Corinthians, although it cannot be pronounced entirely impossible since our data are not enough to lead to certainty.”<sup>13</sup>

If the severe letter that Paul composed is not to be regarded as our canonical 1 Corinthians—instead being a piece of writing composed between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians—why would this letter have fallen out of circulation? Why would it instead have not been preserved? These are legitimate inquiries, which have been answered a number of ways by theologians. Murray J. Harris suggests that the letter was too sharp and disciplinary, for it to warrant further preservation:

“Not all of Paul’s letters to churches have survived...the ‘severe letter’ may have been a very brief and intensely personal missive, simply calling for the discipline of the ‘guilty party.’...[T]he ‘severe letter’ may have lacked any content of universal interest or applicability but rather focused on a specific, unedifying chapter in the history of the Corinthian church that reflected poorly on that church and was an embarrassment to its spiritual father. There may have been...every reason to suppress or destroy the letter or simply to let it disappear, and, on the other, no reason to preserve it.”<sup>14</sup>

More liberal examiners than not, will consider 2 Corinthians chs. 10-13 to actually be the severe letter described by Paul.<sup>15</sup> In fact, liberal examiners are prone to conclude that the letter of 2 Corinthians might include as many as five or six different components or fragments redacted together, with further fragments also possibly present.<sup>16</sup> As Hafemann properly summarizes in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*,

“The key issues are the apparent breaks in thought between 2 Corinthians 2:13 and 2:14, 7:4 and 5, 6:13 and 14, and 7:1 and 2; the seemingly separate treatments of the collection in chapters 8 and 9; and the distinct unity of 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:14. If each of these transitions marks out a separate document, 2 Corinthians becomes a composite of the following six major fragments, which were then later unified into a single letter: 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16; 2:14-6:13; 6:14-7:1; 8; 9; 10-13.”<sup>17</sup>

Although considerable discussion takes place among commentators over various potential segments of 2 Corinthians,<sup>18</sup> it is the place of **chs. 10-13** which tends to gain the most attention. As John Barclay notes, “Other breaks in sequence seem to require at least pauses in dictation, while the gap between chs. 9 and 10 yawns extremely wide.”<sup>19</sup> So, while some of the seeming disconnects between verses may appear to just be stylistic changes or actual pauses in the time of composition—chs. 10-13 are widely thought to represent a significant enough shift, to necessarily be another piece of writing altogether. And so, there are understandably examiners who conclude that chs. 10-13 could be the severe letter mentioned by Paul (2:3-4; 7:8), but who might otherwise hold to the unity of chs. 1-9, making 2 Corinthians a compilation of two letters.

For the most part, conservative examiners of 2 Corinthians will favor this letter being a unified composition, on the basis of both the issues being addressed, as well as the scribal dictation. Morris, for example, describes how “It is...to be borne in mind that some some strictures as are contained in chs. 10-13 seem to have been necessary. Many writers assume that after the severe letter everything was completely satisfactory in the Corinthian [assembly]. We have no reason for thinking that this was indeed the case. The immediate crisis was over” (*ISBE*).<sup>20</sup> A shift in tone from chs. 1-9 and chs. 10-13, from something that is relatively conciliatory to something more firm, need not be the result of chs. 10-13 being a new and separate letter, later redacted into the canonical 2 Corinthians. It is very easy to see the material of chs. 10-13 needing to be more corrective and sullen, as during the composition of the letter, new information about the Corinthians

<sup>13</sup> Guthrie, 443.

<sup>14</sup> Murray J. Harris, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 8.

<sup>15</sup> S.M. Gilmour, “Corinthians, Second,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:694-695.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, “Corinthians, Second Epistle to the,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1148-1150; John Barclay, “2 Corinthians,” in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp 1354-1356.

<sup>17</sup> Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 176.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Harris, pp 8-51.

<sup>19</sup> Barclay, in *ECB*, 1353.

<sup>20</sup> Morris, “Corinthians, Second Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 1:781; Gundry, 371.

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reached Paul. This point is made by D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo in their resource, *An Introduction to the New Testament*:

“This epistle is fairly long, and Paul was at this time extraordinarily pressed by his ministry in Macedonia. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the completion of the letter was delayed for weeks, or even longer: the phenomenon of unfinished letters is not entirely unknown today, and our letters are usually much shorter than 2 Corinthians! If during that time Paul received additional information about the situation in Corinth and learned that the [assembly] had once again plummeted into the disastrous state presupposed by 2 Corinthians 10-13, the abrupt change of tone that begins at 10:1 would be accounted for.”<sup>21</sup>

While it is not unreasonable to suggest that 2 Corinthians actually contains two letters to the Corinthians strewn together, why would chs. 10-13 be placed at the conclusion of 2 Corinthians, if it indeed was the sorrowful letter (2:3-4; 7:8) that had been composed prior to chs. 1-9? There are those who recognize some of the chronological challenges present, and instead think that chs. 10-13 represent the contents of yet another letter, a Corinthians E, sent to the Corinthians after the contents of chs. 1-9.<sup>22</sup> This is probably a much better proposal, as chs. 10-13 would represent a later letter, and not a former letter, sent to the Corinthians.

A wide amount of discussion has surely taken place as to whether or not 2 Corinthians is to be regarded as a single composition, or at least two letters later edited together. All of us as readers of 2 Corinthians need to know about this. But, there are liberals and conservatives who are understandably pessimistic about 2 Corinthians being anything but a unified letter composed for the Corinthians. James L. Price, whose 2 Corinthians commentary appears in the relatively liberal *Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, asserts, “there is no compelling reason why II Cor. as it now stands could not have been dispatched by Paul as a single letter to the Cor. church. Dictating a letter in ancient times was a slow process, and for one of this length several interruptions would be quite probable. Such breaks may well explain the abrupt shifts of thought and mood found in II Cor.”<sup>23</sup> As obvious as it may be for Bible readers, George H. Guthrie states, “For any competent resolution, the details of the discourse and the case for continuity or discontinuity must be made in the process of exegesis and discourse analysis.”<sup>24</sup> Whether 2 Corinthians is a single letter or a compilation of materials, is best determined as the text is read and analyzed verse-by-verse.

Recognizing the centrality of the material in 2 Corinthians, Ben Witherington III makes light of how “not only the integrity of Paul’s ministry but also the integrity of the Corinthians’ faith is at stake. Paul must defend himself, his behavior, and his ministry and he must also protect his converts from the very real danger of apostasy. Failure to see the letter in this light has contributed significantly to some of the partition theories.”<sup>25</sup> He goes on in his commentary—while definitely frowning on splitting up 2 Corinthians—arguing that the demonstrable shift in tone, between chs. 1-9 and chs. 10-13, is not the result of the latter being another letter, but instead was a deliberate employment of ancient rhetoric by Paul. Witherington concludes,

“Paul, following rhetorical conventions, has come to the point in the letter for a strong emotional appeal—the *peroratio*. This emotional appeal involves some recapitulation of the principal parts of the argument in terms geared to excite the emotions and involving entreaties, tears, and passion. This was to be contrasted with the...*exordium*, where the convention was to speak gently, win favor, and influence people by eliciting goodwill, by showing oneself to be fair-minded, and by removing prejudices against oneself.”<sup>26</sup>

Few of your average evangelical Christian or Messianic readers, of 2 Corinthians, are going to be too interested in partitioning this epistle; at most, they will be interested in knowing that there is some discussion among academics about splitting up 2 Corinthians into multiple pieces of correspondence, and might want to know what to do with chs. 10-13. All of those who encounter both 1&2 Corinthians, recognize that the Apostle

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<sup>21</sup> Carson and Moo, 434.

<sup>22</sup> Kruse, pp 34-35; Sampley, in *NIB*, 11:6.

<sup>23</sup> James L. Price, “The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians,” in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 796.

<sup>24</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 328.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; also Barnett, pp 17-23.

Paul wrote more *extant material* to the Corinthians than any other assembly. What this definitely communicates is that there were many theological challenges and a wide degree of spiritual immaturity—among other things present in Corinth—which needed to be confronted. If there were a minimum of four letters composed to the Corinthians, including the canonical 1&2 Corinthians and two non-extant letters, then it only intensifies the Corinthians’ ongoing problems. If there were more letters written to the Corinthians, with 2 Corinthians being a compilation of at least two letters, then the Corinthians’ problems were likely more frustrating to a person like the Apostle Paul, than readers are presented in the two canonical compositions. F.F. Bruce fairly observes,

“If 2 C. 10-13 be identified with ‘Corinthians C’, then Paul’s Corinthian correspondence has a happy ending. It is far otherwise if these four chapters are the last portion of his correspondence that has survived—but life, including church life, tends to be like that.”<sup>27</sup>

Colin Kruse is one who posits that chs. 10-13 compose a later letter written to the Corinthians, drawing out “the acute tension...which is reflected in 2 Corinthians 10-13.”<sup>28</sup> This would obviously indicate that tensions between the Apostle Paul and the Corinthians, of some sort, continued and may never have totally subsided. Regardless of how the composition of 2 Corinthians is approached, Paul does not seem to have had the relations with the Corinthians that he would liked to have had. It is our responsibility as Bible readers, acknowledging the canon of Scripture, to base our examination of 2 Corinthians on the final form of the text: treating it as a unity. It is possible that chs. 10-13 were a later letter written by Paul to the Corinthians. It may be more probable, though, that chs. 10-13 represent a deliberate stylistic break, with ancient rhetorical devices employed to appeal with emotion to the Corinthians.

## WHAT IS THE THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE OF 2 CORINTHIANS?

A cursory survey of the letter of 2 Corinthians will reveal this text to be precisely that: a letter. All of the contents of 2 Corinthians indicate how this composition not only rises organically out of Paul’s ministry service to the Corinthians, but out of his interactions with the Corinthians—as one who is at least somewhat adjacent to them in the greater Mediterranean basin. Paul is surely thankful for the Corinthians, and their seeming improvements in behavior, but his letter also bears witness how he changed his original travel plans (1:1-2:13). A significant, personally revealing discussion, about what it meant for Paul to serve the Lord in ministry, is provided (2:14-7:14)—which notably included a warning for the Corinthians not to be yoked to non-Believers (6:14-7:1). Some of Paul’s most direct admonitions concern the “super apostles” (10:1-13:10), a vocal minority who were opposed to him. 2 Corinthians does focus a great deal on the unpopular topic of suffering (1:3-11; 4:7-18; 6:3-10; 12:1-10), including the presence of hardship lists (4:8-9; 11:24-27). Paul even considers his ministry service to have at least some component of “pressure” associated with it (11:28).

Far from 2 Corinthians only including negative discourse, the value of Believers to their Heavenly Father is lauded (4:7), as is the significance of the ministry of reconciliation all Messiah followers are to take care for (5:18-19). The need for mutual reliance and interdependence of Believers across the world to emerge, is detected in Paul’s discussion about his Jerusalem offering (8:1-9:15). While Paul’s previous discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 addressed the Corinthians’ confusion about the future resurrection of the dead, Paul’s appreciated words of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 address the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. There are many verses and statements from 2 Corinthians which have affected and positively influenced many Christian people over the centuries to be sure, which have aided them in their diverse spheres of influence for the Kingdom of God.

In academic engagement of 2 Corinthians, more attention, probably than necessary, is spent trying to divide and partition the epistle into different letters and sub-letters. The most important segment of 2 Corinthians, demonstrating some shift of thought and style, is chs. 10-13, which is considered by many to either be the sorrowful letter mentioned by Paul (2:3-4; 7:8), or another letter sent to the Corinthians, after the

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce, 170.

<sup>28</sup> Kruse, 20.

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contents of chs. 1-9. While commentaries and entries on 2 Corinthians certainly bear a great deal of interesting discussion and speculation on the composition of this letter,<sup>29</sup> is the mixed tone of the letter really the result of different pieces of correspondence being redacted together? Or, is a mixed tone and emphasis witnessed, instead the result of the complexity and variety of issues that Paul needed to see addressed? *How “formal” a letter is 2 Corinthians?* Regardless of what position one is inclined to take about this letter’s composition—either as a unity or redaction of different pieces of writing—2 Corinthians is not a formal theological treatise.

Noting the presence of proposed fragments for 2 Corinthians, Norman Hillyer stresses, “Early church editors with scissors and paste are a modern imagination. The ancients used papyrus rolls, not sheets, for important long letters, and it is hardly likely that self-contained sensible portions of such rolls conveniently survived for a later editor to join together.”<sup>30</sup> To this, Craig S. Keener further concludes, “In general, a straightforward reading of a work as a unity is more historically probable than any particular competing hypothesis; this does not necessarily make it highly probable, but simply more probable than specific hypothetical reconstructions, any one of which individually is less probable than the straightforward reading.”<sup>31</sup> At least with chs. 10-13 commonly proposed to be the severe letter, or a later piece of writing—this is a large block of text, rather than a fragment of only several verses here or there.

The letter of 2 Corinthians is not just one in which one gets to experience some of the personality and psychology of the Apostle Paul—but it is a letter which, in some ways, is more densely packed in pastoral care issues than the frequently-labeled Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy and Titus.<sup>32</sup> However, while readers of 2 Corinthians witness an ancient figure like Paul, forthrightly expressing himself in writing to the Corinthians (cf. 10:10), questions are understandably posed to us about why he faced so much difficulty in ministry. Was it just his emphasis on “for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness” (6:14)? Or, was Paul’s style of ministry, something that made him a target of those who, for whatever reason(s), envied him in some way? Paul’s critics had to have wondered how he could have been an authentic apostle or servant of the Messiah, if he suffered so much. While Paul said that his weaknesses were the means by which the Messiah could be strong through him (12:7), others—including some of his fellow Jewish Believers—did not hold to such a conviction.

That a figure like the Apostle Paul was unconventional, in many of his values, is a significant understatement. The Apostle Paul possessed personal views and a deeply-rooted ideology not just focused on emulating the self-sacrificial example of Yeshua the Messiah—but one which was decisively subversive to Greco-Roman culture, and even to many elements of his own Jewish culture. *Paul considered suffering for his Lord to be a great virtue, and not a burden to be eschewed.* To many of the Corinthians, this was baffling. Garland explains, “The Corinthians are dumbfounded by Paul because they do not understand this basic paradox that expresses the very heart of the gospel of the cross that he has preached to them. If they cannot understand and appreciate his cross-centered life and ministry as demonstrated by weakness and suffering, how can they understand the cross and the weakness and suffering of Christ and apply it to their own lives?”<sup>33</sup>

The life of a born again Believer is not to be marked as one where individual men and women achieve more and more of themselves; the life of a born again Believer is to be one where Yeshua the Messiah in a man or woman, accomplishes more and more for the Kingdom. And this most frequently requires a mode of operation, quite contrary to that of the world. As Harris catalogues, “Christian existence is often marked by *paradox*: divine comfort in the midst of human affliction (1:3-4; 7:5-6), divine strength in the midst of human weakness (4:8-9; 7:4; 12:7, 9-10), life in the midst of death (4:10-12; 5:4; 6:9), spiritual rejuvenation in the midst

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<sup>29</sup> D. Georgi, “Corinthians, Second,” in Keith Crim, ed., *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp 183-185; John T. Fitzgerald, “Corinthians, Second Letter to,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 284; Kruse, pp 25-40; Martin, pp xl-liv; Craig S. Keener. *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: 1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp 147-149.

<sup>30</sup> Norman Hillyer, “1 and 2 Corinthians,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1050.

<sup>31</sup> Keener, 147.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Barnett, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Garland, 32.

of physical debilitation (4:16), joy in the midst of sorrow (6:10), and generosity in the midst of poverty (6:10; 8:2).<sup>34</sup> It is to be noted that these are not always qualities of the life of faith that resonate too much with the evangelical Christianity of North America and the West.

For Paul in the First Century Mediterranean, his problems as elucidated in 2 Corinthians did often result from a conflict of values between himself, and mainly the non-Jewish Corinthians. Garland details, “The breach between Paul and the Corinthians was not simply over theological issues but had its roots in Corinthian cultural values that clashed with Christian values he wanted them to adopt....The problem was that as Christians they now lived under the sign of the cross that revolutionizes worldly values and expectations. The Corinthian correspondence reveals that they were not yet comfortable in living out the scandal of the cross, but Paul kept calling them back to Christ crucified.”<sup>35</sup> It is not difficult to theorize how Paul’s self-sacrifices for the gospel, and his appreciation of a significant degree of suffering and humiliation for the Lord Yeshua, **ran completely contrary** to Greco-Roman values for sure, but even a number of Jewish values. In the estimation of Mark S. Seifrid,

“Paul’s contention with the Corinthians...has to do with the profound hermeneutical question as to whether the human being has the capacity of recognizing, understanding, and judging the work of God within the world, or whether it is the work of God that recognizes and judges the human being....The hermeneutic that Paul presents in Second Corinthians is...*material*, bound to God’s work in Christ.”<sup>36</sup>

Seifrid goes on to conclude, “It cannot be reduced to a set of rules. Nor can it be reduced to transcendental judgments about the nature of human understanding,”<sup>37</sup> noting a number of 2 Corinthians passages (2:17; 4:2; 1:18). For Paul, his ministry service was the responsibility of his conformity to the example of Yeshua the Messiah—and hence one to be evaluated by the Heavenly Father—not one where he was responsible to limited mortals, who had the audacity to judge him because of the sacrifices he made for the spread of the good news.

Questions about the apostolic service of Paul, compared and contrasted to others in the Body of Messiah in history since, are surely posed to many readers of 2 Corinthians. Western evangelical Protestants, who are often too comfortable in cultures of prosperity and open democracy, are presented with the thoughts of a man, who might have some targeted words of rebuke for them. *Paul would be incensed at the high levels of sin tolerated by many professing Christians.* Paul’s statement to his ancient audience in 12:21, might only need to be modified slightly to be applicable for much of contemporary evangelicalism: “I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.” A culture of religious entertainment, and not one of consecrated holiness, would absolutely infuriate Paul.

2 Corinthians is an epistle that is inconvenient for Western readers, because many Western Christians do think that they are entitled to a certain standard of living, a spouse and children, and a certain financial status—and are not too subject to suffering various difficulties for their faith. Not having a high standard of living, a spouse or children, or a certain amount of money, is often believed to be “suffering”! *A figure like the Apostle Paul had none of these things.* And, were a figure like the Apostle Paul trying to conduct ministry activities in many of the Christian venues of Twenty-First Century America, many people would think that there was something inherently wrong with him, for not being very prosperous. Let us be perfectly candid with what 2 Corinthians communicates: many of the values held by Paul and detailed by Paul, are not the values held by many Western Christians today—and they are not values too frequently discussed or preached upon by many religious leaders and teachers, either.

Paul would see the great blessings of religious freedom and economic stability offered by the Judeo-Christian West, and doubtlessly rebuke the great abuses of power and position seen in the populist religion of the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries. Compared to some of the more well-to-do televangelists

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<sup>34</sup> Harris, 122.

<sup>35</sup> Garland, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), xxxiii.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

and charismatic preachers, Paul was somebody who would not at all have whipped up a crowd on some prosperity message. Instead, Paul would emphasize service toward others, the necessity of total reliance on God (3:4-5), and the requirement of recognizing that the life of faith is one of challenges, not easiness. Paul would be shocked at how many of today's professing Believers, in a relatively free Western society, have not had to endure that much pain or difficulty. *But Paul would be more shocked at how professing Western "Believers" have abused their freedoms, not using them enough as opportunities to help others come to saving faith.* Paul would without question consider many of today's popular Christian leaders to not be unlike the "super apostles" he criticized (11:5), who were targeted not as much for teaching another Messiah (11:4), but likened unto being servants of Satan (11:14-15).

There are certainly theological questions that have been posed to, and by, Christian readers of 2 Corinthians. Many of these theological questions have been used properly in Pauline studies. But it is those spiritual questions of making sacrifices for the Lord, suffering for the Lord, and that the Lord's ways are not human ways – which can really "rub" at too many evangelical people, especially now in the mid-to-late 2010s, with many changes taking place in the West, and adaptations to the times needing to be considered. Paul would not consider Christian leaders with a huge megachurch of tens of thousands, with a budget running into the tens of millions of dollars, to be too authentic in true Biblical faith. Paul would likely be conflicted at a great number of conservative Christian academics, recognizing the good that some of them do, but then considering others to not have a relationship with God as much as with their doctrine. Paul would consider those who do not act entitled, whose lives are focused on pleasing the Lord and in serving the interests of His Kingdom, and whose aim is making sure that both themselves and others are maturing in the faith (13:5), as being authentic.

In the future, both the positive *and* not-so-positive statements of 2 Corinthians, need to be appreciated – especially as the prosperity and relative freedoms of the Judeo-Christian West, are on the steady decline.

### HOW DOES 2 CORINTHIANS RELATE TO MESSIANIC BELIEVERS TODAY?

There is not a huge amount of writing accessible on the letter of 2 Corinthians, from a distinct Messianic perspective, in order for people within our faith community to gauge their various strengths and weaknesses with the Apostle Paul's ongoing correspondence with the Corinthians. There are a number of selective notes on 2 Corinthians in David H. Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary*,<sup>38</sup> and 2015 did appreciatively see the release of *Practical Messages on Congregational Life: Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians*, by Messianic Jewish leader Joel Liberman, with a preaching-based commentary certainly accessible on 2 Corinthians.<sup>39</sup> And, for what it is worth, the 2015 2 Corinthians commentary by George H. Guthrie, in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* series, includes a sub-section detailing Paul as "A Messianic Jew."<sup>40</sup>

The composition issues, that tend to dominate academic Christian engagement with 2 Corinthians, will probably not concern today's Messianic readers that much. Proposals surrounding whether 2 Corinthians is a single letter, or several letters redacted together, are virtually unknown to most of today's Messianic people. On the whole, though, when informed about the common thought that chs. 10-13 composes either Paul's sorrowful letter or later a letter written after the material of chs. 1-9, most of today's Messianic people will, by default, take 2 Corinthians as a unified letter, with different tones and shifts in style the result of the subject matter being addressed and/or a change of circumstance during the composition process. More on the radar of Messianic attention surrounding 2 Corinthians are likely to be Paul's discussion about the New Covenant ministry of righteousness versus the Old Covenant ministry of condemnation (3:1-18), weighing the Jewish identity of the "super apostles" (11:22-23), and deducing principles about financial support for various venues of Messianic Jewish ministry from Paul's Jerusalem collection (chs. 8-9).

2 Corinthians 3:14 contains the only Biblical usage of the terminology "old covenant" or *tēs palaias diathēkēs* (τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης), actually rendered by the TLV as "ancient covenant." Paul's discussion in ch. 3,

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<sup>38</sup> David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), pp 493-519.

<sup>39</sup> Joel Liberman, *Practical Messages on Congregational Life: Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (San Diego: Tree of Life, 2015), pp 151-238.

<sup>40</sup> Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, pp 7-8.