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## Article 47: Second Corinthians at a Glance

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## SECOND CORINTHIANS AT A GLANCE

This book emphasizes those spiritual characteristics so vital for a successful and victorious Christian ministry, as practiced by Paul himself. Special consideration is given to the ministry of suffering. The apostle concludes this epistle with a defense of his apostleship which was being denied by the Jewish legalizers.

### BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

A MUST READING FOR THE MINISTRY: THE MOST INTIMATE ACCOUNT EVER WRITTEN OF THE DUTIES AND DEMANDS, JOYS AND SORROWS, TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS, PAIN AND PRIVILEGES INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF GOD.

### FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **Paul.** He was also known as Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11). This relentless enemy of Christians (Acts 8:3; 22:5, 19; 26:11; Gal 1:13) would, following his conversion (Acts 9:3-9), become the greatest missionary, church planter, soul winner, and theologian in church history, authoring nearly half of the New Testament books!
2. What? The books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.
3. When and where?
  - 2 Corinthians: 56 A.D., from Macedonia.
4. Why and to whom?
  - **2 Corinthians:** qualifications for the ministry and a defense of Paul's ministry. Written to the church at Corinth.

### KEY EVENTS

1. Paul comforts suffering saints and explains his recent activities
2. The importance of forgiveness; the triumph of the gospel message
3. Contrasting the law of Moses and the grace of God
4. On how to handle the scriptures and suffering
5. Contrasting the old body to the new body; God's work and our work in the ministry of reconciliation
6. The sufferings of Paul and the separation of believers
7. Paul's joy over the church's repentance
8. Illustrations of and instructions for sacrificial giving
9. Rewards of sacrificial giving
10. Paul defends his apostleship against the lives of his foes

11. Paul's service to and sufferings for the body of Christ
12. Paul's visit to the third heaven
13. Paul's planned future visit to the church

### KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Paul**, author of 2 Corinthians and at least 12 other New Testament books, church planter, evangelist, missionary, and perhaps the greatest of all the apostles
2. **Moses**, referred to by Paul to contrast the fading glory of the law with that of the eternal glory of grace
3. **Titus**, associate minister with Paul, sent by the apostle to help solve some of the problems in the Corinthian church

### KEY PLACES

1. **Corinth**: capital city of the Roman province of Achaia which church in that city would receive two letters from its founder, the apostle Paul (1 and 2 Corinthians)
2. **Troas**: city where Paul was scheduled to meet up with Titus, but did not find him, causing the apostle great concern
3. **Damascus**: capital city from which a threatened Paul escaped by being lowered from the wall in a basket
4. **Third heaven**: heavenly place where Paul was transported that he might see the glory of God

### UNIQUE FEATURES

1. Second Corinthians is actually Paul's fourth letter to the Corinthian church. The first letter, dealing with the problem of fornication in the church, has been lost (1 Cor. 5:9). The second letter (our 1 Corinthians) dealt with various problems he had become aware of. Paul wrote a third letter to the church at Corinth that was harsh and disciplinary in nature (see 2:3-4; 7:8-9). This letter has been lost as well; but according to a report Paul received from Titus, it apparently accomplished its purpose (7:6-8), leading Paul to write this fourth letter (2 Cor.), in which he comforted those who had gotten themselves right with God (1-9) and strongly defended his apostleship against some who were opposing his authority (10-13).
2. 2 Corinthians is the most autobiographical of Paul's letters, giving an intimate view of his personal life and ministry.
3. It is the least doctrinal of his letters, with the possible exception of Philemon. Yet it contains deep doctrinal truths (3-8, especially 5).
4. Paul lists no less than 15 characteristics of the gospel ministry. One of the most important reasons why God allows a Christian to suffer is explained in this book (1:1-6).

5. In no other epistle does Paul refer to his own sufferings as in this letter (4:8-10; 6:4-10; 11:24-33). These sufferings included:
  - Tribulation (1:4)
  - Affliction (1:6; 2:4)
  - Overwhelmed beyond strength (1:8)
  - Despair of life (1:8)
  - The sentence of death (1:9)
  - Anguish of heart (2:4)
  - Many tears (2:4)
  - No rest in his spirit (2:13)
  - Troubled on every side (4:8)
  - Perplexed (4:8)
  - Persecuted (4:9)
  - Cast down (4:9)
  - Delivered unto death (4:11)
  - Imprisonments (6:5)
  - Sorrow (6:10)
  - Extreme poverty (6:10)
  - Inward conflicts and outward fears (7:5)
  - Beaten by the Jews with 39 lashes on five occasions (11:24)
  - Beaten with rods on three occasions (11:25)
  - Stoned and left for dead (11:25)
  - Shipwrecked on three occasions (11:25)
  - A night and a day adrift at sea (11:25)
  - Extreme danger from robbers, his own countrymen, pagans, city mobs, wilderness experiences, false believers (11:26)
  - Bone weariness (11:27)
  - Hunger and thirst (11:27)
  - Cold and nakedness (11:27)
  - The heavy daily burden concerning his churches (11:28)
  - A vicious thorn in the flesh sent by Satan (12:7)
6. This epistle also provides the most concise reason why God uses us to do his work (4:7). The most extended discussion of the grace of giving is found in 2 Corinthians (see 8-9).
7. Paul was the first of two human beings allowed to visit paradise and return again. John the apostle was the other. In fact the phrase, "the third heaven," is found but once in the Bible (2 Cor. 12:2).
8. The book of 2 Corinthians serves as an expose on the person and work of the evil one. (See 2:10-11; 4:4; 11:3, 13-15; 12:7). In fact, he is referred to as:

- Satan (2:11)
  - The god of this world (4:4)
  - The serpent (11:3)
  - An angel of light (11:14)
9. At least four names for Christians are given in this book which are not found anywhere else in the Bible. These are:
    - Living epistles (3:2-3)
    - A sweet savor of Christ (2:15)
    - Treasure-carrying earthen vessels (4:7)
    - Ambassadors for Christ (5:20)
  10. The book of 2 Corinthians is the only epistle in which Paul takes the time to defend his apostleship against the lies of his enemies. (See 10-11.)
  11. It offers the most lengthy contrast regarding the law of the Old Testament and the grace of the New Testament (3:6-18).
  12. It provides (as does no other biblical book) a brief discussion in regard to the intermediate state of the believer's body between death and resurrection (5:1-9)
  13. It records both examples and principles of sacrificial and stewardship giving (8:1-9:15). The three examples are:
    - The Macedonians (8:1-6)
    - Christ (8:7-9)
    - The Father (9:15)
  14. Paul had organized the Corinthian church during his second missionary trip (Acts 18:1-18)
  15. During his third missionary trip he visits the church (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1). He sends Titus to Corinth to organize a special love offering for the poverty-stricken saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8:6, 10). Titus does this and returns to Paul.
  16. He writes a letter (now lost) to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:9). We must keep in mind that God did not choose to inspire *all* of the many letters written by Paul and early church leaders, but *only* those which are found in the New Testament.
  17. After a while, Paul writes another letter. This letter is the 1 Corinthians of the New Testament. There were two basic reasons why he wrote this epistle.
    - To rebuke the church—Paul had heard about some tragic church factions from the household of Chloe, living there in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11).
    - To instruct the church—Paul was visited while in Ephesus by a three-man delegation from Corinth, who handed him a list of questions the church had for him (1 Cor. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:17)
  18. He then sends Timothy to Corinth with this New Testament epistle (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11).
  19. Timothy returns to Paul in Ephesus—This young preacher was apparently unable to straighten things out in Corinth (2 Cor. 1:1).

20. Paul desires to visit the church himself at this time, but is unable to (2 Cor. 1:15-17).
21. He soon hears that his work there is being undermined by some legalistic Judaizers who had just arrived from Jerusalem (2 Cor. 3:1; 10:12-18; 11:22-23).
22. He now sends Titus back to Corinth with orders to straighten things out and meet him in Troas (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:6-7).
23. Paul comes to Troas, but does not find Titus. After a restless period, he departs to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12-13).
24. Here he meets Titus, who gives him a favorable report concerning the work at Corinth.
25. With great relief, Paul writes 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 7:5-15).
26. Paul is finally able to visit Corinth at a later date for a period of three months. Here he writes the epistle of Romans (Acts 20:3; Rom. 15:22-29; Rom. 16:1, 23).

### COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

#### 1. **Romans:**

- Romans is primarily doctrinal and secondarily practical; 2 Corinthians is primarily practical and secondarily doctrinal.
- Romans is the most systematic, and 2 Corinthians the least systematic, of Paul's letters.

#### 2. **Galatians and Hebrews:**

- 2 Corinthians emphasizes the New Covenant, as do Galatians and Hebrews.

#### 3. **First Corinthians**

- This book, 2 Corinthians, may be compared with 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians we see the congregation in the pews; but here in 2 Corinthians can be viewed the preacher in his pulpit.
- One of the reasons Paul had written 1 Corinthians was to instruct the church to remove an unrepentant member (1 Cor. 5:1-8).
- He then wrote 2 Corinthians, instructing the church to receive back that one who had since become repentant (2 Cor. 2:6-11).

### TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. Jesus Christ (1:1)
2. Lord Jesus Christ (1:3)
3. The son of God (1:19)
4. The image of God (4:4)
5. Christ Jesus the Lord (4:5)
6. God's unspeakable gift (9:15)
7. Husband of the bride (11:2)