

Date of 2 Corinthians

By Richard South Thompson – 11/2/2001

Even Christians that read their Bibles regularly probably could not tell you when any of the Epistles of Paul were written with any more accuracy than “some time in the middle of the 1st Century.” For thirty of my forty years as a Bible student I myself could not have told you closer than four or five years for most of the Paul’s Epistles. That ignorance did not prevent me from understanding and being blessed by what I read! Why then should I now worry at all about the precise dates the Epistles were written?

I have come to realize that to thoroughly understand any of the Bible, you have to be able to understand the precise historical background in the mind of the writer and the recipients. If this reason is true for the rest of the Bible, it is particularly true for 2 Corinthians, an epistle of Paul, that I will show, has been incorrectly dated for at least 200 years, by every commentator I could find! Moreover, I believe a correct dating will revolutionize the way many of the passages in 2 Corinthians are understood!

Believe me, I don’t take this position lightly! After all, who am I to throw up my puny opinions against the combined weight of all the learned commentators? However, I have this advantage, the facts are on my side.

For many years I unhesitatingly subscribed to the popular view that 2 Corinthians was written within a year, or two at most, of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians and was written during the period, described in Acts 20:1-2, just after Paul left Ephesus and was travelling through Macedonia. The consensus is that this was about 57-58 AD. Recently, I innocently decided to prepare some footnotes for 2 Corinthians. As I repeated the conventional wisdom about the chronology of 2 Corinthians, I became acutely aware that I couldn’t, in good conscience, defend my own footnotes.

First, as I read Luke’s description of events in Acts 19 and compared it with Paul’s description of, supposedly, the same time, in 2 Corinthians there seemed to be too many differences to reconcile. Chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians describes Paul in Asia as a man who is in daily and imminent danger of death, yet Acts 19 describes Paul in Asia as a man who is preaching openly in the same public theatre in Ephesus every day for two years.

Second, as I read the passages in 2 Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1 which states that Paul would be coming a third time to the Corinthians, I was troubled again. Prior to Acts 20, Acts only records one visit to Corinth, not two. I was familiar with the argument made by theologians that Paul had made a unrecorded whirlwind visit to Corinth from Ephesus after writing 1 Corinthians.¹ However, when I reviewed some of the arguments by the commentators who supported this view, one of their statements stuck in my mind. They said that since there were only **two recorded visits by Paul to Corinth**, therefore an unrecorded visit to Corinth **must** have been before the visit of Acts 20:1. I remembered from recent studies that this statement was **definitely inaccurate**. There **was** a later visit by Paul to Corinth, recorded in 2 Timothy 4:20. There, Paul tells Timothy that “Erastus stayed in Corinth.” If Erastus **stayed** in Corinth, then Paul **went on from Corinth** about the time of 2 Timothy. Virtually everyone agrees that 2 Timothy was written in about 65-66 AD and certainly describes the events of the last year of Paul’s life.

Third, in 2 Corinthians 11:25 Paul says that, as of that writing, he had been shipwrecked three times. Luke, who was very meticulous in recording Paul’s journeys, did not record a single shipwreck before Acts 20. We also know from Acts, that before Luke takes up his detailed account of Paul’s journeys in 47 AD, Paul was in a landlocked environment where he could not possibly been in one shipwreck, let alone three!

As someone who believes in the inerrancy of Scripture, I immediately get nervous about any interpretation of one scripture which seems to call into question the accuracy of other scripture. The dating of 2 Corinthians in 57-58 AD seemed to me to do this for the accuracy of Acts. I therefore had to ask myself if this dating was wrong, or Acts was inaccurate. As a result I looked at the possibility that 2 Corinthians was written after Paul’s first Roman imprisonment in

¹ This speculation is based on 2 Corinthians 2:1 which is translated “So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.” Commentators have determined that Paul’s only other visit, recorded in Acts, could not be this painful visit, because first it was more than a visit, it lasted a year and a half (Acts 18:11), and second it was not painful, but rather joyful. Hence there must have been an unrecorded visit. Unfortunately for this interpretation, the literal translation of 2 Corinthians 2:1 is “But I determined this with myself that I would not come again to you in affliction.” What is Paul saying? Nothing more than that rather than going through Corinth to Macedonia and then coming back again as he originally planned (2 Corinthians 1:16), he will only come the one time and not make another visit. What about the affliction? All Paul’s visits to anybody at this time were in affliction.

about 65 AD and after the narrative of Acts had ceased. If so, Paul's first visit to Corinth was the one in about 52 AD described in Acts 18, the visit described in Acts 20 was his second, and the visit described in 2 Corinthians was his third! If so, there was no inaccuracy in Acts which left out a visit to Corinth. Also, if 2 Corinthians was written in 65 AD, Paul's first shipwreck was the one recorded in Acts 27, on the island of Malta, and the subsequent two occurred in the three years after Paul's release from prison. If so, there was no inaccuracy in Acts which left out three shipwrecks. So the dating of 2 Corinthians in 65 AD solved a lot of problems.

However, if this was so, then it makes an important change to the date of writing by seven or eight years, and the whole context of 2 Corinthians as well. It would mean that 2 Corinthians was a window into the last years of Paul's life and ministry. These years are also dealt with in First and Second Timothy, which reveal a level of persecution and suffering consistent with that revealed in 2 Corinthians.

Though I had reasons to doubt the accuracy of the traditional dating of 2 Corinthians, still I knew that there had to be reasons that men of good conscience had come to their different conclusions. I asked myself, "What were those reasons?" and "Were they valid?"

Here, I confess, I could find little detailed documentation in my reference works, or in any of the commentaries or sermons I could find on the internet (See Appendix 1). The dating always seemed to be stated as an obvious fact that needed no justification. The objections I stated above were not even dealt with. As a result, I had to take up the role as "devil's advocate" (no disrespect to the commentators intended).

In that role, I found that the most powerful reason for dating 2 Corinthians as contemporaneous with Acts 20 (i.e. 57-58 AD) was that in both 2 Corinthians and Acts 20, Paul was gathering an offering to take to Judea. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 that subject is discussed. An offering has been taken up by the churches of Macedonia (which included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) which is to be added to the offering of the churches of Achaia (which included Corinth). On the other hand, we know that at the same time as Acts 20 a very similar gift is being taken up. How do we know this? Because, Romans was written just before Paul's visit to Jerusalem, and it is universally conceded that Paul's Epistle to the Romans was written during Paul's visit to Greece described in Acts 20:2-3. In Romans, written from Corinth, Paul describes just such a gift:

Romans 15:25-26 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

Also, Acts describes the gift when Paul arrives in Jerusalem:

Acts 24:17 "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings."

It is evident from 2 Corinthians, that it is Paul's intent to take the offering described in that book to Judea himself.

2 Corinthians 1:16 I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.

Are these verses and facts enough to conclude that the offering in 2 Corinthians and the offering in Romans and Acts are the same offering, and therefore that the date of both gifts are the same? If they are, the popular date of 2 Corinthians is correct, but the other questions I raised are still unanswered.

However, consider the following:

There are reasons to believe there were multiple offerings taken to the Church at Jerusalem, probably every year. What are the reasons.

First, it was part of the instructions given to Paul at the Council of Jerusalem in 50-51 AD:

Galatians 2:10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Second, in 2 Corinthians 8:10, Paul mentions an offering taken the year before.

² Corinthians 8:10 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.

Third, the outlying churches commonly sent offerings to the home church at Jerusalem. Paul himself had taken an offering to Jerusalem from the Church at Antioch about 44 AD (Acts 11:29-30).

Fourth, it was a Jewish tradition to send offerings to Jerusalem once a year. According to Josephus, Julius Caesar himself forbade Roman officials from interfering with the free transportation of this money.

Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, BOOK XVI, CHAPTER 6, Verses 3. 3. “‘Caesar to Norbanus Flaccus, sendeth greeting. Let those Jews, how many soever they be, who have been used, according to their ancient custom, to send their sacred money to Jerusalem, do the same freely.’ These were the decrees of Caesar.”

The outlying Churches almost certainly continued this tradition until the Church quit Jerusalem on the warning of God in 66 AD four years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the time frame of 64-65 AD and following, there would have been an even greater reason than usual to send an offering. According to Josephus, not only was the situation of all of Judea more precarious, but also the High Priest had seized and executed James and all the leaders of the Church just before the beginning of Albinus’ tenure as Governor of Judea in 63 AD.²

To me, these four facts lead me to the conclusion that there was likely an offering sent every year to Jerusalem, and therefore the offering described in 2 Corinthians is not necessarily the same as the offering in Romans.

There is a second reason for dating 2 Corinthians around the time of Acts 20. That is because some believe that the passage in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and the passages in 2 Corinthians 2:4-11 and 2 Corinthians 7:12 are related. The inference is that both passages are about the same person or incident and therefore both books were written within a short time period. I believe even a cursory examination of the two passages will show there is no connection. Below is the first passage from 1 Corinthians:

¹ Corinthians 5:1-13 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. 3 For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of

² Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, Chapter 9.1. “AND now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this eldest Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrim without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.”

3 During the Day of Preparation for the Passover, the Jewish house was swept and dusted in every nook and cranny to eliminate every speck of yeast or leaven from the house. This was to assure that the Passover bread was completely pure. Christians, who have truly celebrated the real Passover, by believing in the redemptive power of the cross, have become the truly pure bread in Jesus Christ. Since we are pure, spiritually, it is up to us to live, experientially, as we are positionally.

this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

What is this about? A stepson takes his Father's wife (a second wife, not his mother). The Corinthian church is proud! Why? Probably because the Father is a pagan and the Father's wife left the Father to be with the stepson. This is patently against the Law. 4 Paul instructs the Church to have no association with this man. He doesn't mention the woman in this condemnation.

In 2 Corinthians 2:4-11, and 2 Corinthians 7:12 Paul writes of someone who had grieved him and the church.

² Corinthians 2:4-11 For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent--not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven--if there was anything to forgive--I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

² Corinthians 7:12 So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are.

In 2 Corinthians 2:4-11, 2 Corinthians 7:12 Paul refers to some person who committed a grievance against Paul and the Church. Some might argue that when Paul says "I wrote you" he was referring to 1 Corinthians. However, this grievance was probably the subject of the letter carried by Titus mentioned in 2 Corinthians 7:6-8, which has been lost. There is certainly no way to argue convincingly that the Corinthians could possibly have thought that it was "on account of" the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians that Paul wrote that epistle. Furthermore, the aggrieved person in case of the incestuous couple of 1 Corinthians was not Paul or the Church as in 2 Corinthians, but the man's Father. At the very least, I submit that it is impossible to argue that these two cases are without doubt about one and the same man. There are not enough details in the given in these 2 Corinthians passages. I believe the preponderance of the evidence argues that the passages are two different cases.

I found a third, weak reason, that Bible scholars might date Romans and 2 Corinthians at the same time. In both Romans and 2 Corinthians Paul talks about moving on to other mission fields:

Romans 15:20-25 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."⁵ This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.

² Corinthians 10:13-16 We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you.⁶ We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our

⁴ **Leviticus 18:8** "Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father." **Leviticus 20:11** "If a man sleeps with his father's wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." **Deuteronomy 22:30** "A man is not to marry his father's wife; he must not dishonor his father's bed." **Deuteronomy 27:20** "Cursed is the man who sleeps with his father's wife, for he dishonors his father's bed."

⁵ Isaiah 52:15

⁶ Paul's assigned portion or "field" had been to be Apostle to the Gentiles and the Jews **Acts 9:15** "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.'"

area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory.

As I said, however, this is no real support for the early date. Paul was always looking for open doors. We know that he was always looking for new territory, though we know that he also did come back to the established churches of Ephesus, Macedonia, and Corinth at least twice. In Romans, in 57-58 AD Paul was looking to the West, to Spain. In 64-65 AD, the time I suggest for the date of 2 Corinthians, we know that Paul found a new region to the south of Corinth, Crete. This journey described in the Epistle to Titus was, by general consensus, made about a year or two before Paul's last imprisonment, and would therefore match the description of 2 Corinthians 10 of preaching in new territories beyond Corinth. We also know that Paul was planning on preaching on the western shore of the Adriatic in Nicopolis (another new region), when he wrote to Titus (Titus 3:12).

In my opinion, the three reasons I have given *against* the dating of 57-58 AD for 2 Corinthians, far outweigh the three reasons *for* that date. However, if you shoot down one date, you need to provide another. I believe there is compelling, definite, evidence for another date 64-65 AD!

First and foremost, there is the discrepancy of the description of the events of the preceding time period in the province of Asia. Read for yourself the two accounts. First the account in Acts:

Acts 19:1- 20:3 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all. Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. The assembly was in

confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months.

Next the account in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us.

2 Corinthians 2:12-17 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there.⁷ So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

2 Corinthians 7:6-7 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

Notice the discrepancies between these two passages.

In Acts, you read the account of a great successful ministry. Two years of the time was spent teaching openly in the synagogues and lecture halls. At the end of that time there was a disturbance which Paul escaped entirely, and which two of his associates were dragged into the city theatre. The result of the disturbance was that there was a lot of shouting and the city clerk told the people to go home. Evidently, no physical harm was done to any Christian.

In 2 Corinthians, you read about "great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." I believe this has to record another much later trip through Asia, obviously after his first Roman imprisonment. At this time Christians were being vigorously persecuted by the state. It was in 64 AD that two thirds of Rome burnt and Nero blamed or allowed the blame to be put on Christians for the fire. Under such circumstances, the enemies of the Church were unleashed to imprison and kill Christians. This is the environment described by Paul in 2 Corinthians.

In Acts, you read that after the disturbance Paul went to Macedonia on the way to Greece (Corinth) to fulfill a promise he had made to the Corinthians in his first letter.⁸

⁷ Titus had evidently been told to meet Paul in Troas after he had straightened out affairs in Corinth, but since he was delayed Paul was worried about the Corinthians and Titus.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 4:19 "But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing"

In 2 Corinthians, you read how Paul instead went to Troas (still in Asia Minor) to preach before going into Macedonia. Again, either Acts leaves out a significant journey and open door, or this is a different time from Acts.

In Acts, you read how Paul “sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia.” But there is no word of sending Titus to Corinth.

In 2 Corinthians, I read how Paul sent Titus to Corinth, but no word about sending Timothy ahead into Macedonia. Again a significant difference.

In Acts there had been one recorded visit to Corinth by the time of Paul’s taking the offering to Jerusalem mentioned in Romans, yet 2 Corinthians says there had been two.

Secondly, of major importance, there is the passage in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea.

According to the accounts in Acts, before Paul’s Acts 20 visit to Corinth, he had been stoned once (Acts 14:19), beaten once with rods (Acts 16:22), and no shipwrecks. While it is quite possible, even likely, that Paul had been beaten other times before Luke takes up his story in detail, it is unlikely that he could have been shipwrecked three times. His early ministry was around Antioch and Tarsus, and no sea travel was needed outside of his one trip recorded back to Tarsus from Caesarea in 40 AD (Acts 9:30). From the time of that trip until the Council of Jerusalem, Paul states that he ministered in Cilicia and Syria, (Galatians 1:21). Luke takes particular care to record the details of his sea travel after that until the end of Acts. Luke records nine trips before 57 AD (Acts 13:4, Acts 13:13, Acts 14:26, Acts 16:11, Acts 18:18, Acts 18:21, Acts 20:1, Acts 20:13-16, and Acts 21:1-8). It is unlikely that three of them could have ended in shipwreck, plus a night and a day in the open sea without Luke mentioning it. If you read the listed passages, you will see that Luke takes particular care even to record an instance when Paul walked overland while the rest of them went by sea (Acts 20:13). If you compare the trips Luke records with Paul’s travels, it is clear that Acts includes all of them. (*Except of course of the “unrecorded” trip he supposedly took to Corinth and back*). Of course, the shipwreck recorded off of Malta in Acts 27 occurred after 57 AD after when Paul is “supposed” to have written 2 Corinthians. I have no doubt it is included in Paul’s tally in 2 Corinthians since I believe 2 Corinthians was written about 65 AD. The other two must have occurred after Paul’s release from prison, but that would put 2 Corinthians also after Paul’s release from prison. Perhaps one or more occurred on his possible mission trip to Spain. (Romans 15:24)

Thirdly, there is the fact that it is clear from the scriptures that Paul visited not only Corinth after his first Roman imprisonment, but that he also visited Ephesus, Miletus, Troas, and Macedonia. Those five places form a crescent around the Aegean Sea and encompass all of the most successful of Paul’s missions. It includes Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. It escapes me why no one has even speculated that 2 Corinthians might have been written on one of these trips! The proof:

1. Paul visited Troas, Corinth, and Miletus after his first Roman imprisonment:

Everybody acknowledges that 2 Timothy was written during Paul’s second Roman imprisonment and shortly before his death. Read 2 Timothy 4:9-22:

2 Timothy 4:9-22 Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the metalworker⁹ did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at

⁹ Alexander the Jew had taken a great part in the riot in Ephesus instigated by Demetrius. Acts 19:33

my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.¹⁰ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth,¹¹ and I left Trophimus ¹² sick in Miletus.¹³ Do your best to get here before winter.¹⁴ Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Paul is no doubt describing his last swing around the Aegean before he was arrested. He describes how he left Trophimus sick in Miletus, he left his cloak and scrolls at Troas, and Erastus stayed in Corinth. Can there be any doubt Paul was not describing his trip of 58 AD, but of a trip more proximate to the time of his writing 2 Timothy in 65-66 AD?

2. Paul visited Ephesus and Macedonia after his first Roman imprisonment:

Read 1 Timothy 1:1-4:

¹ Timothy 1:1-4 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I went into **Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus** so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

It is clear that Paul is describing a trip to Macedonia during which Timothy stayed behind in Ephesus. Yet on the two trips by Paul to Macedonia described in Acts, Timothy accompanied Paul, he did not stay behind in Ephesus. On the first trip, in Acts 16, Timothy had just joined Paul and he went with Paul and Silas to Macedonia (Acts 17:14, 18:5), having been kept out of Asia. On the second trip Acts describes how Timothy preceded him into Macedonia (Acts 19:22) and traveled with him back from Corinth at least to Troas. What is my conclusion? Paul's trip to Macedonia described in 1 Timothy is a different trip to Macedonia from the one in 57-58 AD.

Fourthly, there is the argument to be made, from the factor of Paul's writing disability. Paul does not mention his disability at all in 1 Thessalonians, his first epistle. Paul first mentions the disability in Galatians 6:11, the second of his epistles where he mentions that he wrote with a "large letter." By the third epistle, 2 Thessalonians, he states that he has only signed the letters, and someone else has written them (2 Thessalonians. 3:17). In the next three letters (1 Corinthians, Romans, and Colossians) Paul says he only signed them (1 Corinthians 16:21, Romans 16:22, Colossians 4:18). No letter after Colossians mentions Paul's writing problem or who was his transcriber. This presents a logical pattern. The appearance, the worsening, and the healing of his disability. 2 Corinthians does not mention the problem at all, but if we date its writing in its usual place, after 1 Corinthians and before Romans we would break this logical pattern. If however, we date it after his first imprisonment, the logical pattern is maintained.

There is yet another argument to be made for dating 2 Corinthians in 65 AD. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-7:

² Corinthians 12:1-7 I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows-- was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

¹⁰ Evidently before Paul's final trial, he was almost consigned to die in the arena by death by lions. According to tradition, he was eventually given the death of a Roman citizen, death by executioner's sword.

¹¹ Erastus was originally director of Public works in Corinth. He was living in Corinth when Paul wrote Romans about 9 years earlier. Romans 16:23.

¹² Trophimus was from Ephesus and had been with Paul in Corinth in 58 BC and in Jerusalem afterwards.

¹³ It seems likely that Paul visited Ephesus on his last missionary journey as Miletus was the port of that city. From there he probably hugged the coast north to Troas where he crossed into Macedonia and thence to Corinth where he left Erastus, and then went to Nicopolis in Dalmatia where he had Titus meet him. (Titus 3:12). After that he was taken to Rome.

¹⁴ Probably, because sea travel was very dangerous in winter.

If we date this episode back 14 years from a time of writing of 65 AD, it places it in 51 AD, during Paul's second missionary journey, when he was visiting Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. This passage speaks of two things that happened at that time, a vision and a thorn in the flesh. During that time, Acts says that Paul had the only two visions recorded in Acts, other than at his conversion (Acts 16:9-10, 18:9-10). Also at that time Paul first records his unique prophecy of the Rapture of the Church (2 Thessalonians 4:16-17, later repeated in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53), probably first revealed in this vision.¹⁵ It was also about this time that he started mentioning in his letters, the fact that he was having trouble writing. In 1 Thessalonians, he mentioned no problem, in Galatians, he says his whole letter is written in a large letter (Galatians 6:11). It may well be that this was a resurgence of the illness, which seemed to have afflicted his eyes, which he contracted when he was in Galatia (Galatians 4:13-15). By the time he wrote 2 Thessalonians, he could only sign the letter (2 Thessalonians 3:17). This well may have been the thorn in the flesh. It certainly appeared at the right time, if 2 Corinthians was written in 65 AD.

What, therefore is my conclusion of when 2 Corinthians was written?

My answer is that Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians was written about 65 AD after his first Roman imprisonment!

What difference does that make?

My answer is that it means that Paul's trip to Corinth in 2 Corinthians was probably made as a fugitive from Roman persecution. His very presence endangered those who might shelter or hide him, much less give him a platform for teaching! I found that the change alone revolutionized my reading of 2 Corinthians! It also eliminates the need for a defense of the accuracy of Acts. It also helps shed a whole new light on the last years of Paul, by allowing us to reconcile the facts of 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and 2 Corinthians into a new and better chronology of those years which I have outlined below.

Paul's Last Missionary Journey

Other Assumptions

If we put 2 Corinthians in 65 AD that means that Paul made at least two visits to Macedonia after his 1st Roman imprisonment. The first time was when he wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia and Timothy was with him.

^{2 Corinthians 1:1} Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:

The second time was when he wrote 1 Timothy.

If Paul visited Macedonia twice, he also visited Ephesus twice. The first time was when he went from there to Troas on the way to Macedonia to write 2 Corinthians, and the second time was when he left Timothy there prior to writing 1 Timothy. This compelled me to develop a scenario for Paul's last missionary journey based on the facts we have in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews. Although this is another subject, I have no doubt that Paul wrote Hebrews after his first Roman imprisonment. He indicates that he is writing from Italy, and that he intends to visit the Hebrews (Jerusalem). This then is my scenario for Paul's last missionary journeys.

Chronology

62-63 AD

Paul is released from prison in Rome. It is possible that at this time Paul went to Spain for a short trip. Paul writes Hebrews from Italy (Hebrews 13:24). Timothy had been imprisoned (possibly in Philippi¹⁶ where Paul had sent him).¹⁷

¹⁵ In fact in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul states that this was the according to the Lord's own word. It is not recorded in the Gospels or anywhere else. How could Paul state this except that it was what Paul heard the Lord say in his vision?

¹⁶ Indeed, Paul comments on the persecution which the Philippians are undergoing which seems to include imprisonment. **Philippians 1:29-30** "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

¹⁷ **Philippians 2:19-24** "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself,

(Hebrews 13:23) Paul writes Hebrews and sends it to Judea stating his intention to visit. Timothy is released and rejoins Paul. We know that he had indicated to Philemon that he intended to visit him in Colossae after his first imprisonment,¹⁸ and he had also indicated that he planned to visit the Philippians.¹⁹ So we know that after Paul's release he intended to visit Philippi, Colossae, and Judea. We have no concrete reason to suppose that Paul failed to fulfill those intentions. I propose that Paul left Italy with Timothy, and then attempted to go back to Judea. It may have been at this time that he was shipwrecked and spent a day and a night on the open sea (2 Cor. 11:25). Finally persuaded that God didn't want him back in Judea, he then came back to Ephesus in Asia, possibly by way of Antioch, Tarsus and Colossae.

64 AD

Ephesus is not a safe place for Paul at this time. It is possible that by this time Paul is again a wanted man, only this time, by Nero. Nero has burned Rome and begun persecuting the Christians. Alexander the metal worker ²⁰ makes it his personal mission to see that Paul is arrested. Paul sends Titus to Corinth, on what is expected to be a short mission, with a letter and instructions to meet him at Troas where a door has been opened for the gospel. Paul and Timothy go to Troas and preach the gospel. Titus is not there as expected and doesn't show up. Paul is worried about the Corinthians. Paul leaves his cloak and scrolls in Troas. Somewhere during the voyages from Italy to Judea to Asia to Troas to Macedonia, Paul is shipwrecked again.

65 AD

Paul and Timothy go to Macedonia and meet Titus. Paul writes 2 Corinthians. They gather the offering for the saints in Judea. Paul, Timothy and Titus go to Corinth as promised and gather the offering for Judea from the Corinthians. Paul, and Titus go to Crete where Paul preaches and leaves Titus to organize the fledgling church. (Titus 1:5) Paul and Timothy possibly may have taken the offering to Judea themselves (it was their original intent), or have sent it by a third party.

66 AD

Paul and Timothy arrive back in Ephesus. Paul leaves Timothy there. Paul goes to Macedonia by way of Miletus. He has to bypass Troas for some reason (perhaps wind and weather at sea) and thus cannot retrieve his cloak and scroll. Paul writes 1 Timothy and tells Timothy of his intention to eventually return to Ephesus to rejoin him. (1 Timothy 4:13). Paul goes to Corinth. Paul writes the Epistle to Titus and sends Apollos to Crete with instructions to Titus to meet Paul in Nicopolis (Dalmatia). Paul goes to the church at Nicopolis and meets Titus there.

67 AD

Paul returns to Rome, or is arrested and taken to Rome. He is imprisoned, this time in a cell in the Mamertime Dungeon. Titus had been with him but returns to Dalmatia to minister to the church there. Paul writes 2 Timothy asking Timothy to come to him and bring Mark. Luke is with him. Mark and Peter have been traveling together in Asia, and they both come to Rome in response to Paul's letter. Paul is executed. Within the year Peter is also executed in Rome.

because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon."

¹⁸ **Philemon 1:22** "And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers."

¹⁹ **Philippians 2:24** "And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon."

²⁰ **Acts 19:33-34**, also **2 Timothy 4:14** "Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done."



Appendix 1

Other Commentaries

Ray Stedman

We call this Second Corinthians, but it should, perhaps, be called Fourth Corinthians, because it is the last of four letters that Paul wrote to the church there. Two of these letters have not been preserved for us -- that is why we only have First and Second Corinthians -- but they are not in the order that these titles suggest. If I can just recapitulate a little bit of the background, at least this one time, then you can refer back to this if you are confused about the chronology.

- 1) Paul began the church in Corinth somewhere around 52 or 53 A. D. He stayed there for about a year and a half; then he went to Ephesus, where he remained for a few weeks, and then he went on a quick trip to Jerusalem, returning again to Ephesus.
- 2) While he was at Ephesus, he wrote a letter to the church at Corinth which is lost to us. It is referred to in First Corinthians 5:9, where Paul says he wrote to warn them about following a worldly lifestyle. In response to that letter, the Corinthians wrote back to him with many questions. They sent their letter by the hands of three young men who are mentioned in First Corinthians.
- 3) In reply to that letter, Paul wrote what we now call First Corinthians. In it he tried to answer their questions, and we have looked at those answers. He tried to exhort them and instruct them how to walk in power and in peace; and he tried to correct many problem areas in the church. Evidently that letter did not accomplish all that Paul intended. There was a bad reaction to it, and in this second letter we learn that he made a quick trip back to Corinth. How long that took we do not know. Paul calls it a "painful" visit. He had come with a rather sharp, severe rebuke to them, but again he did not accomplish his purpose; again there was a great deal of negative reaction.
- 4) So when he returned to Ephesus, he sent another brief letter, in the hands of Titus, to Corinth to see if he could help them. Now Titus was gone a long time. Transportation and communication were very slow and difficult in those days. Paul, waiting in Ephesus, grew very anxious to hear what was happening in the church there. He became so troubled that he left Ephesus and went to Troas and then up into Macedonia to meet Titus. There in Macedonia, probably in the city of Philippi, he and Titus came together.
- 5) Titus brought him a much more encouraging word about the church, and in response to that, out of thanksgiving, Paul wrote what we now call the Second Corinthians letter, although it was really the fourth of a series of letters.

Bob Deffinbaugh

On his second missionary journey, Paul comes to Corinth with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He stays there for 18 months, founding the church at Corinth (see Acts 18:1-18). After firmly establishing this church, Paul moves on, concluding this missionary journey by returning to Antioch (Acts 18:22). When Paul commences his third missionary journey, he travels first to Asia Minor, where he stays in Ephesus for some three years of ministry, resulting in the proclamation of the gospel to all who lived in Asia (Acts 19:10). While still in Ephesus, Paul begins to receive reports from Corinth of disunity and schisms in the church (1 Corinthians 1:11)—even immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul also receives a number of questions (1 Corinthians 7:1, 25), which prompt him to write his first preserved Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:8).

In his first epistle, Paul tells the Corinthians he intends to send Timothy to them (1 Corinthians 16:10). It is not certain whether he ever arrived there, and, if he did, we are not told what kind of reception he received. At some point in time, Paul finds it necessary to make a quick visit to Corinth, but we are given no details about this encounter (2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1). Some refer to this as Paul's "painful visit," based upon inferences from some of Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians (see 2:1-11). Paul also refers to a letter written to the Corinthians which seems to have been lost (2 Corinthians 2:3; 7:8). In his second epistle, Paul expresses great concern for the Corinthians. Because he has had to deal firmly with these saints, Paul is fearful they might reject him and his rebuke. He therefore sends Titus to check on the welfare of the saints at Corinth, while he takes the longer route by land. Not finding Titus in Troas, Paul is deeply troubled and cuts short what could have been an even more fruitful ministry (2 Corinthians 2:12, 13; 7:5-9, 13-15; Acts 20:1-2). When Titus finally rejoins Paul somewhere in Macedonia, he has a most encouraging report. He tells Paul about the repentance of the Corinthians and of their love for him (2 Corinthians 7:5f.). Paul then writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia to express his great joy and to encourage them further in their faith, as well as to give instructions regarding

the gift they had previously promised (chapters 8-9). This epistle we know as 2 Corinthians. Later on Paul visits Corinth again, at which time he receives their gifts and delivers these monies to the saints in Jerusalem.

C.I. Scofield

DATE: A.D. 60; probably from Philippi, after the events of Acts 19:23-20:1-3.

Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown - Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (1871)
The TIME OF WRITING was after Pentecost, A.D. 57, when Paul left Ephesus for Troas. Having stayed in the latter place for some time preaching the Gospel with effect (2Co 2:12), he went on to Macedonia, being eager to meet Titus there, having been disappointed in his not coming to Troas, as had been agreed on between them. Having heard from him the tidings he so much desired of the good effect produced on the Corinthians by his First Epistle, and after having tested the liberality of the Macedonian churches (2Co 8:1), he wrote this Second Epistle, and then went on to Greece, where he abode for three months; and then, after travelling by land, reached Philippi on his return at Passover or Easter, A.D. 58 (Ac 20:1-6). So that this Epistle must have been written about autumn, A.D. 57.

People's New Testament

Macedonia was THE PLACE from which it was written (2 Co 9:2, where the present tense, "I boast," or "am boasting," implies his presence then in Macedonia). In Asia (Lydian Asia) he had undergone some great peril of his life (2Co 1:8, 9), whether the reference be [PALEY] to the tumult at Ephesus (Ac 19:23-41), or, as ALFORD thinks, to a dangerous illness in which he despaired of life. Thence he passed by Troas to Philippi, the first city which would meet him in entering Macedonia. The importance of the Philippian Church would induce him to stay there some time; as also his desire to collect contributions from the Macedonian churches for the poor saints at Jerusalem. His anxiety of mind is recorded (2Co 7:5) as occurring when he came into Macedonia, and therefore must have been at Philippi, which was the first city of Macedonia in coming from Troas; and here, too, from 2Co 7:6, compared with 2Co 7:5, must have been the scene of his receiving the comforting tidings from Titus. "Macedonia" is used for Philippi in 2Co 11:9, as is proved by comparison with Php 4:15, 16. So it is probably used here (2Co 7:5). ALFORD argues from 2Co 8:1, where he speaks of the "grace bestowed on the churches (plural) of Macedonia," that Paul must have visited other churches in Macedonia, besides Philippi, when he wrote, for example, Thessalonica, Berea, &c., and that Philippi, the first on his route, is less likely to have been the scene of his writing than the last on his route, whichever it was, perhaps Thessalonica. But Philippi, as being the chief town of the province, was probably the place to which all the collections of the churches were sent. Ancient tradition, too (as appears from the subscription to this Epistle), favors the view that Philippi was the place from which this Epistle was sent by the hands of Titus who received, besides, a charge to prosecute at Corinth the collection which he had begun at his first visit (2Co 8:6).

The second Letter to the Church at Corinth is the supplement of the first. It is due to the same circumstances which called out the first, and to the effects that were produced in the church at Corinth by the receipt of the first letter. We can almost be thankful for the disorders which occasioned these two letters, not only on account of the rich fund of practical instruction which they contain, but on account of the picture which they present of a Gentile Church, composed of those who had so recently been heathen, in the first century of Christianity. They recall us to the immorality which had to be overcome, the obstacles in the way of a Christian life, and the mighty triumph which the gospel achieved over human nature itself in establishing the spiritual reign of Christ where the sensuality of heathen worship had before prevailed.

The first letter was written at Ephesus in the spring of A. D. 57; the second was written a few months later at some point in Macedonia where Paul had journeyed to visit the churches of that province before extending his tour to Corinth. We learn from the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of Acts that not long after the first letter was written, Demetrius and his fellow-craftsman aroused the terrible riot at Ephesus in which Paul so nearly lost his life (2 Cor. 1:8-10), and that immediately after, at the urgency of the brethren, he started on his long contemplated journey to visit the churches of Europe. He had expected to meet Titus at Troas with word from Corinth concerning the effect of his first letter and was greatly disappointed when he did not find him there (2 Cor. 2:13). Hence, although a fine opening for planting the gospel was presented, he pressed on to Macedonia. Here he met Titus, who was on his way to him, and was greatly rejoiced when he learned that his letter had been well received and his commands obeyed (2 Cor. 7:5-7). Still the circumstances required another letter before his coming and the second letter was written, not only to express his joy over the better state of things in the church, but in order to convey further counsels.