

Bible Survey, part 6 – The New Testament

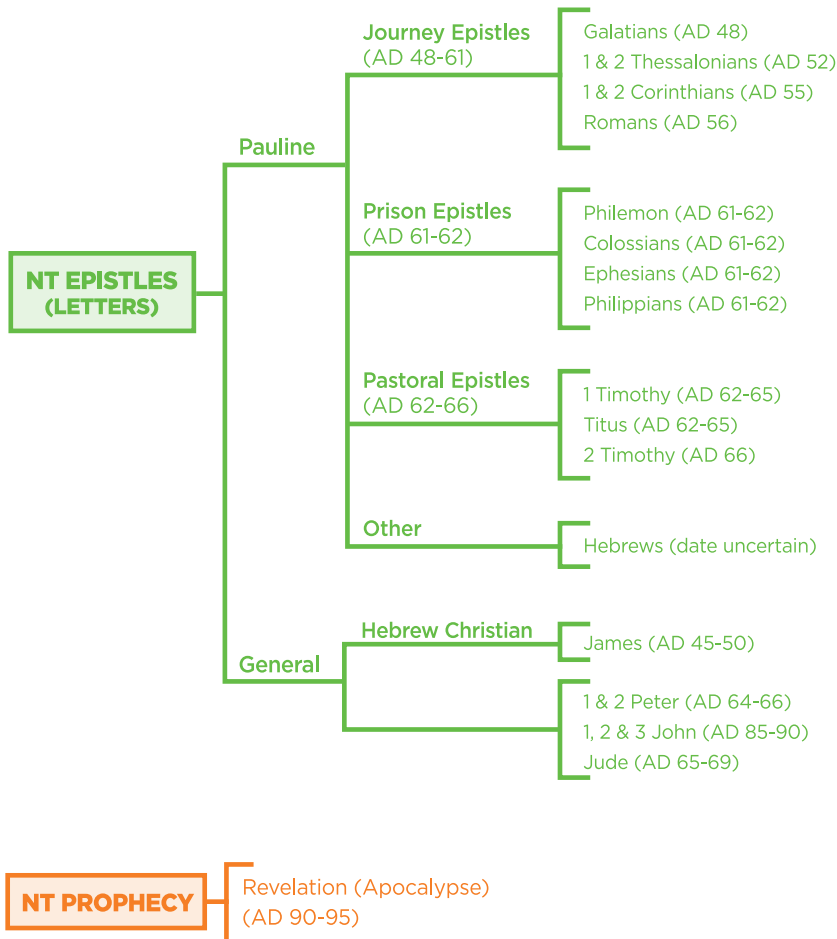
The Epistles – 2 Corinthians

“Why God Lets Christians Suffer”

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

- **WHAT** each book is about
- **WHEN** each one was written
- **HOW** they are all interconnected

OUTLINE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES



HIGHLIGHTS IN THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Birth of Paul	around the time of Christ's birth
Conversion of Paul	AD 33
First missionary journey	AD 47-48
Galatians written after first journey	AD 48
Apostolic Council at Jerusalem	AD 49
Second missionary journey	AD 49-52
1 & 2 Thessalonians written during second journey	AD 52
Third missionary journey	AD 52-56
1 & 2 Corinthians written during third journey	AD 55
Romans written during third journey	AD 56
Arrest in Jerusalem	AD 56
Journey to Rome	AD 60-61
In Rome awaiting trial, under guard	AD 61-62
Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians written from prison	AD 61-62
Paul released, revisits churches, resumes evangelistic ministry	AD 62-66
1 Timothy, Titus written	AD 62-65
Paul arrested, imprisoned at Rome	AD 66
2 Timothy written from Rome	AD 66
Paul executed	AD 66



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The church of Corinth became the most carnal and fleshly church that the Apostle Paul ever started.

Paul had already written the Corinthian church once (1 Corinthians) from Ephesus about their multiple issues of sin and carnality.

Paul received news back that 1 Corinthians had not solved the problems in Corinth – but on top of everything – he discovers that a group of false teachers had showed in Corinth.

- Teaching false doctrine
- Undermining character and apostolic credentials

Paul also learns that this movement against him was “gaining traction” inside the Corinthian church.

Paul made a personal trip from Ephesus to Corinth in 53 AD to try and straighten out all this mess.

- He tried to be gentle and kind with the Corinthians
- They interpreted Paul's **kindness as weakness** and ignored him

“For some say, ‘His letters are weighty . . . but in person he is unimpressive . . .’” 2 Corinthians 10:10

So Paul decides to make a **third visit** to Corinth.

“This will be the third time I am coming to you . . .” 2 Corinthians 13:1

1st visit = when Paul started the church (Acts 18 – 51A.D.)

2nd visit = in between the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians

3rd visit = happening as Paul writes 2 Corinthians

“I told you previously (when I was there the second time) and although absent, I say again – in advance – to those who have sinned – and to all the rest of you as well – that when I come this third time, I will not spare anyone.” 2 Corinthians 13:2

“I am writing this while absent, in the hope that when I arrive there, I will not have to use severity, in accordance with the authority that the Lord has given me.” 2 Corinthians 13:10

Purposes of 2 Corinthians:

#1 – To exhort the Corinthians to clean up the sin in the church before Paul arrives – so he won't have to

#2 – To expose these false teachers and warn the Corinthians not to follow them

#3 – To defend himself from the accusations these false teachers were making about him

Of these three purposes, it's really purpose #3 that dominates 2 Corinthians.

Judaizers

- Jews from Jerusalem
- Claimed they believed in Jesus
- Taught a **different plan of salvation** than the Apostle Paul and the rest of the Apostles taught

“ . . . preach **another Jesus** whom we have not preached . . . and a **different gospel** . . .” 2 Corinthians 11:4

Judaizers: “Yes, trusting the work of Christ on the cross is good – but you still have to keep the Old Testament Law to be saved.”

True Gospel: “Getting eternal life is based on trusting Jesus’ blood **PLUS NOTHING.**”

Judaizers’ Gospel: “Getting eternal life is based on trusting Jesus’ blood **PLUS HUMAN WORKS** – Jewish religious works.”

These Judaizers followed Paul around and, when he would leave a town, they would infiltrate the young church Paul had established and begin to theologically mislead all the “baby Christians” Paul had left behind.

“They should be accursed.” Galatians 1:8

“For such men are **false** apostles, **deceitful** workers, **disguising themselves** as apostles of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 11:13

“For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, so is it any wonder that **his servants also disguise themselves** as servants of righteousness?” 2 Corinthians 11:14-15a

In 2 Corinthians the Judaizers:

- Criticized Paul's physical appearance (10:10)
- Made fun of his speaking skills (11:6)
- Impugned his motives in the service of Christ (4:5)
- Accused him of being arrogant (5:12)
- Challenged his credentials as a true Apostle of Christ (12:11-12)

This **constant stream of slander** was beginning to turn the Corinthian believers against Paul.

“Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.” 2 Corinthians 7:2

“We conducted ourselves toward you in holiness and godly sincerity.” 2 Corinthians 1:12

“God knows – I love you!” 2 Corinthians 11:11

“For I will gladly spend everything and be spent for you . . .” 2 Corinthians 12:15a

Paul wrote the letter of 2 Corinthians in 53-54 A.D. on his way traveling there:

#1 – To deal with ongoing sin in that church

#2 – To expose the false teachers there

#3 – To defend himself personally from their attacks

The result is the Apostle Paul's most personal letter in the New Testament.

SO WHAT?

“I knew a man [Apostle Paul] who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven . . .”

2 Corinthians 12:2a

“This man was caught up into Paradise and heard things that a man is not permitted to repeat [on earth].”

2 Corinthians 12:4

“Because of the greatness of these revelations, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh – a messenger of Satan to torment [“buffet” – King James version] me – to keep me from exalting myself.” 2 Corinthians 12:7

“Concerning this [‘thorn’], I asked the Lord three times that it might depart from me.” 2 Corinthians 12:8

Context of 2 Corinthians 12:

- God sent a physical malady into Paul's life that was making him suffer
- Three times Paul asked God to take it away
- Three times God said, “No”

The **Question** = “**Why?**”

The **Answer** = God was using this suffering to produce **some spiritual things** in Paul's life that God **couldn't produce any other way**.

God is our “**Heavenly Father**” who is **raising us** [as His children] to be godly, holy, Christ-like people. To do this – there are certain spiritual things God **must teach us** that **we can only learn through** the “**gateway of suffering.**”

#1 – HUMILITY

“Because of the greatness of these revelations, to keep me from **exalting myself**, there was given me a thorn in the flesh – a messenger of Satan to buffet me – to keep me from **exalting myself.**”
2 Corinthians 12:7

“... God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5b
“... before honor comes humility.” Proverbs 15:33b

The Bible is clear: in order to **bless us**, God has to **humble us** – and **keep us that way!**

Only **suffering** humbles our high opinions of ourselves.
Only **ongoing suffering** keeps us **ongoingly humble.**
Which is why God lets all of us as believers **have some!**

#2 – RELIANCE ON GOD INSTEAD OF OURSELVES

“We want you to know, brothers, about the hardships we **suffered** in Ephesus. We were afflicted far beyond our ability, and felt the sentence of death in ourselves. 2 Corinthians 1:8-9a

“**This happened** [Paul says] in order that we might **learn** not to rely on ourselves, but on God.”
2 Corinthians 1:9b

We are **all** naturally prone to rely on ourselves – and it’s only when God brings us to the **utter end of ourselves** [through suffering] that we are willing to totally rely on Him 100%.

When we **learn** to rely on God alone – that's when we learn how to **unlock the power of God** in our lives.

“Most gladly, therefore, I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me . . . for when I am weak [relying on Jesus instead of myself] **then** I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:9b, 10b

#3 – MERCY AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our **sufferings**, that we may **learn** how to comfort others who are in any suffering with the comfort God has given us.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Suffering burns out shallowness.

This explains why the people who can **comfort the best** are the people who have **suffered the most.**



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There are some levels of Christian growth that we can only attain through the “**doorway of suffering.**”

- #1 – Genuine and deep **humility**
- #2 – **Reliance on God** instead of ourselves
- #3 – **Compassion and mercy** for others