

A.D. 54-56: 2-Year Stay in Ephesus

Paul in Ephesus

Acts 19:1-22

A.D. 55-56: The Corinthian Correspondence

Written in Ephesus during the spring, prior to Pentecost (per 1 Corinthians 16:8)...

1 Corinthians 16:8

“But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost...”

...1 Corinthians is actually the second of a total of at least four letters in his Corinthian correspondence. He refers to his first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9, in which he'd warned the members of that church not to associate with sexually immoral people.

1 Corinthians 5:9

“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people...”

1 Corinthians, then, the second letter, is Paul's written response to information he'd received from “some from Chloe's household” (1:11) in the wake of this first letter, reports of factional quarrels in the congregation...

1 Corinthians 1:11

“My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.”

...as well as a continuing situation involving gross sexual immorality (5:1-13)...

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... I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.”

...and various questions about practical matters of Christian faith, worship, and living. It seems that Timothy was sent to deliver the letter. In chapter 16 Paul also mentions the planned collection for the gift offering to Jerusalem.

A.D. 55: Writing of 1 CORINTHIANS

1 Corinthians 1:1-16:24

A.D. 56: The Corinthian Crisis

After sending 1 Corinthians, Paul continued to minister in Ephesus. During this time, it seems that a group of men had come to Corinth who presented themselves as apostles (or “super apostles,” as Paul refers to them in 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11). These were false teachers who not only challenged Paul's personal integrity, but called his apostolic authority into question (2 Corinthians 11:4 and 12:11).

2 Corinthians 11:4-5

“For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.”

2 Corinthians 12:11

“I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing.”

With the congregation in Corinth thus imperiled and incited by false teaching, it seems that Paul made what he refers to as a “painful visit” to that city (2 Corinthians 13:1-2 and 2:1); perhaps this trip was prompted by Timothy’s report of his reception in Corinth when delivering the first letter. During this visit it would appear that various people in the Corinthian congregation openly disrespected Paul and called his apostolic authority into question; the pivotal issues may have concerned the teachings of these already mentioned “super-apostles” who’d been deriding his capabilities and questioning his apostolic authority, demanding proof that God was in fact speaking through him (2 Corinthians 13:3), as well as dissension in the wake of his command to excommunicate the sinner (1 Corinthians 5:13).

2 Corinthians 13:1-3

“This will be my third visit to you. ‘Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.”

2 Corinthians 2:1

“So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.”

1 Corinthians 5:13

“God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you.’”

A.D. 56: Writing of the “Severe Letter”

(2 Corinthians 10:1-13:14 ?)

Soon after that visit Paul wrote an angry letter to them (this, his third letter to the Corinthians, to which he refers in 2 Corinthians 2:2, 4, and 9)...

2 Corinthians 2:4,9

“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... The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.”

...forcefully reminding them of his authority and warning them of his impending visit (2 Corinthians 12:14, 13:1), which would be his third visit to that city.

2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1

“Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you... This will be my third visit to you.”

This letter was sent with Titus (2 Corinthians 12:18).

2 Corinthians 12:18

“I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course?”

Many scholars posit that this second letter to the Corinthians may actually still be extant in 2 Corinthians 10-13, the idea being that when Paul wrote his more irenic third letter, which we have in 2 Corinthians 1-9, the “fierce” letter might have been appended to the peaceable one, much in the way that earlier emails are appended to replies; and that what has come to us as Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians should in fact be understood as his second and (appended) third letters to that church.

For the purposes of this outline, I shall include the proposed “fierce” letter first, if only because Paul himself refers to an earlier letter. If as is quite possible these chapters were not that letter but were simply always the conclusion of Paul’s single letter which we have received as 2 Corinthians, then the “fierce” letter is no longer extant.

After Paul sent the “fierce” letter with Titus, but before Titus had returned with an update on the Corinthians’ reaction, the following incident forced Paul to withdraw from Ephesus and to set off toward Macedonia.

A.D. 56: 2-Year Stay in Ephesus (cont’d): The Riot in Ephesus
Acts 19:23-41

A.D. 56: The Corinthian Crisis (cont’d): Through Macedonia and Greece
Acts 20:1

Paul had still not heard back from Titus (per 2 Corinthians 2:12-13)...

2 Corinthians 2:12-13

“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. So I said good-by to them and went on to Macedonia.”

...so whereas he had planned to go to Corinth first, then to Macedonia, then back to Corinth again, he opted not to visit, lest that should cause more grief (2 Corinthians 1:15b-16; 2:1).

2 Corinthians 1:15b-16

“Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. 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.”

2 Corinthians 2:1-4

“So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. 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.”

When he had come as far as Troas and had still heard nothing from Titus, Paul reports that he had no peace of mind.

2 Corinthians 2:12-13

“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. So I said good-by to them and went on to Macedonia.”

2 Corinthians 7:5-16

“For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn--conflicts on the outside, fears within. 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.”

A.D. 56: Writing of 2 CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians 1:1-9: 15 (-13:14 ?)

Thus when Titus did finally return with welcome news of a faithful response from the Corinthian congregation. Now Paul, from Philippi or some other city in Macedonia, composed 2 Corinthians, a letter expressing his considerable relief. Another major intention of this letter was to make sure they were prepared for the collection he was gathering for the Jerusalem church, a task with which he was occupied along the way through Macedonia, per 2 Corinthians 8. Presumably he sent the letter along with Titus and another brother (Erastus, per Acts 19:22?), ahead of his own arrival toward the end of the year.

A.D. 57: 3-Month Stay in Corinth

Through Macedonia and Greece

Acts 20:2-3a