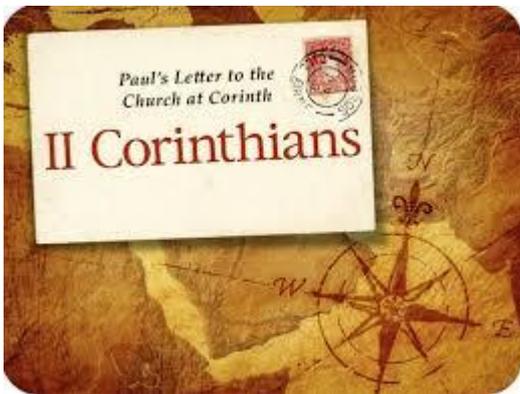


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Second Corinthians from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

To John and Jasmine Kumar, faithful servants of the Lord in America and in India. Their great sacrifice for the advancement of the Gospel, their enthusiasm for task at hand and their gracious spirit are a blessing to us all.



At a school in a small village, there was one girl who came early. She helped the teacher prepare the room for the day. The same girl would stay late - cleaning the board and dusting the erasers. During class, she was attentive. She sat close to the teacher, absorbing the lessons. One day when the other children were unruly and inattentive, the teacher used the girl as an example. "Why can't you be like her? She listens. She works. She comes early. She stays late." A boy blurted out from the rear of the room, "It isn't fair for us to be like her." The teacher thought that was strange and she wondered why. The boy was uncomfortable, wishing he hadn't spoken. "She has an advantage," he shrugged. "She is an orphan," he almost whispered. The boy was right. The girl had an advantage. An advantage of knowing that school, as tedious as it was, was better than the orphanage. She knew that, and she appreciated what the others took for granted.

We, too, are orphans. Alone.

No name. No future. No hope.

Were it not for our adoption by **God** into **His** family, as **His** children, we would have no place to belong.

We sometimes forget that.

The Corinthians forgot that.

They had grown puffy in **their** achievements and divisive in their fellowship. **They** argued over different leaders, what were the greater gifts. **They** rebelled against **Paul's** leadership. They were indifferent to sin and insensitive in worship. **Paul** defended **his** ministry and cautioned **the Corinthians** to remember to whom **they** belonged. **Examine yourselves (13:5)**, **Paul** said: **If anyone is united with Messiah, he is a new creation - the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new (5:17)!**

Good reminder.

Not just for **the Corinthians**, but for us as well. For if we forget, we too will be like the students who did just enough to get by and never enough to show their thanks.¹

Second Corinthians is the most personally revealing of all **Paul's** letters. At the same time, it is perhaps the least familiar of all his inspired writings, often overlooked by individual believers, pastors and Messianic rabbis alike. The neglect of this wonderful letter is a huge loss to the Church, for it has much to offer. No one in ministry should ignore the riches of these insights. **Paul's** godly character shines through as **he** interacts with the most troubled of **his** congregations. Its thirteen chapters reveal **his** humility; **he** described **himself** as a lowly **clay pot (4:7)**, stressed by human weakness and inadequacy (**3:5, 11:30, 12:5** and **9-10**), and was reluctant to defend **himself** when attacked (**11:1, 16-17** and **21, 12:11**). **Second Corinthians** also reveals **Paul's** passionate concern for **his** flock, both for **their** spiritual growth (**3:18** and **7:1**), and for **their** spiritual safety (**11:2-4** and **29**). **His** declaration: **For what we are proclaiming is not ourselves, but the Messiah as Lord, with ourselves as slaves for you because of Yeshua (4:5)**, sums up **his** selfless concern for **them**.

Though it is an intensely intimate look at **Paul**, **Second Corinthians** nonetheless contains rich theological truth. Here the B'rit Chadashah receives its most complete account outside of the book of **Romans**. **Paul** presents important teaching on what happens to believers when we die (**5:1-11**). **He** discusses the doctrine of reconciliation, culminating in the fifteen Greek words of **5:21**. Those words provide

the most concise, yet profound summary of the substitutionary atonement of **Yeshua Messiah** to be found anywhere in Scripture. Similarly, **8:9** is a brief theological gem regarding **Messiah** that is of immense value to every believer.

Second Corinthians also has much to teach regarding the practical aspects of living the life of a believer. **Paul** discusses the principle of separating from unbelievers in dating and marriage (**to see link click [Bi](#) - Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**). **Chapters 8** and **9** provide the most detailed teaching on giving in the B'rit Chadashah; **Chapter 11** gives instruction on how to distinguish true servants of **God** from **false apostles (11:7-15 and 20)**; and **Chapter 12** reveals how **God** uses suffering in the lives of **His children (12:5-10)**. This letter closes with a look at several important elements of the sanctification process (**12:20 to 13:14**).²

Historical Background: For information about the city of **Corinth** and **Paul's** founding of the church there, see the commentary on **First Corinthians [Ag](#) - Founding of the Church at Corinth**.

Authorship: That **Paul** wrote this letter, as he twice claims (**1:1** and **10:1**), is almost universally accepted, even by critical scholars who deny that Paul wrote other B'rit Chadashah books attributed to **him**. It is impossible to imagine a motive for someone to forge such an emotional and highly personal letter. The vocabulary that is used is very similar to that of **First Corinthians**, and the correlation of the evidence from the book of **Acts** also proves **Paul's** authorship. The external evidence also confirms that **Paul** wrote this letter. The Church father Polycarp quotes from it early in the second century, while later in that same century it was included in the Muratorian Canon, the oldest known list of the books of the B'rit Chadashah. Church fathers Clement of Alexandria, Iranaeus, and Tertullian also quote from **Second Corinthians**.

Date: For information about the date of **Second Corinthians** see **[Ae](#) - Events Between First Corinthians and Second Corinthians**.

The Use of the Complete Jewish Bible: Because I am writing this commentary on the book of **Second Corinthians** from a **Jewish** perspective, I will be using *the Complete Jewish Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

The use of ADONAI: Long before **Yeshua's** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal

name, the four Hebrew letters *yod-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **the LORD**, and this remains the rule in most modern **Jewish** settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant. In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase *the Name*, instead of writing or pronouncing **His** Name. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His** Name were lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

The use of TaNaKh: The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "Torah"), **N** (for "**Nevi'im**," the Prophets), and **K** (for "**Ketuvim**," the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB)**. I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

The Use of the phrase, "the righteous of the TaNaKh," rather than using Old Testament saints: Messianic synagogues, and the **Jewish** messianic community in general, never use the phrase Old Testament saints. From a **Jewish** perspective, they prefer to use the phrase, "righteous of **the TaNaKh**." Therefore, I will be using "the righteous of **the TaNaKh**," rather than Old Testament saints throughout this devotional commentary.

Occasion and Purpose: At some point after the receipt of First Corinthians, conditions within the church deteriorated. They were a divided church to begin with (**First Corinthians 1:12** and **Second Corinthians 2:6-7**), but the arrival of **the false prophets** (see **Af - The Problem of the False Apostles**) made it even more so. Therefore, **Paul** received the bad news, probably from **Titus**, that caused

the apostle to make an unplanned visit back to **Corinth** to reinforce the effect of **his** first letter and prevent any further undermining of **his** authority through the subversive activities of those **false prophets**. But it was unsuccessful in reducing the level of opposition against **him**. During this visit **Paul** was personally attacked by one of the members (**Second Corinthians 2:5** and **7:12**). It was a **painful visit** for both **Paul** and **his** spiritual children in **Corinth** (see **Ao - Paul's Painful Visit**).

To spare **the Corinthians** and **himself** from another **painful visit**, **Paul** wrote a "severe letter" (see **Bi - The Effects of the Severe Letter**) to **them** to arouse the discipline of **the one who did the wrong**. But it turned out that the majority of the **Corinthian** believers felt concern, remorse, and even apprehension over **their** behavior during **the painful visit**. **They** longed to see **Paul** again to assure **him** of **their** change of attitude. Therefore, when **Titus** arrived in **Macedonia** from **Corinth** in the summer of 56 AD with **his** welcomed report of the **Corinthians** responsiveness to the "severe letter." On returning to **Macedonia**, **Paul** wrote **Second Corinthians** and sent the letter to **Corinth** in the fall of 56 AD with **Titus** and two unnamed colleagues who would help to complete the collection (**8:6b, 16-24, 9:3-5**).³

The Background of Isaiah 40-55: The key far eschatological text in the letter, **Second Corinthians 6:2**, is a quotation from the Septuagint (LXX), or the Greek TaNaKh, is an important passage within **Isaiah 40-55**, namely **Isaiah 49:8-13**. When examined in the LXX, the passage reveals a number of words - **salvation, covenant, comfort, and lowly** - that prove to be significant within the structure of **Second Corinthians**. Not only are individual words from this passage in **Isaiah** reproduced, but we also find some groupings of words in **Second Corinthians: salvation** and **comfort** in **1:6**, and **comfort** and **lowly** in **7:6** and **10:1**. This short passage in **Isaiah** LXX appears to have been the source of a number of ideas employed by **the apostle** in this letter.

The themes of **a new creation** and **reconciliation**, so prominent in **Second Corinthians 5:17-21**, appear to arise out of **Isaiah's** twin themes of **new creation** and **restoration**. While there is no verbal equivalent to **reconciliation** in **Isaiah**, the prominent theme of **restoration** bears a similarity to it. Isra'el's exile in **Isaiah** is similar to our own alienation from **ADONAI**. In **Isaiah 43** the **new creation** and **restoration** are achieved by the **ransom** of people by a **Kinsman Redeemer** willing and able to pay the price of redemption (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ht - I Have Created You, O Jacob: Fear Not, for I Have Redeemed**

You, You are Mine), by **blotting out** the sins of **His** people (see the commentary on **Isaiah Hv - I Blot Out Your Transgressions for My Own Sake**), themes that are expressed - as fulfilled in **Yeshua Messiah** - in **Second Corinthians 5:17-21**.

In **Second Corinthians 5:20** to **6:2**, **Paul** views **himself** (and, we presume, the other apostles) as **Messiah's ambassadors** and **God's fellow-workers**, encouraging the Corinthians to **be reconciled to God**, and, in the knowledge that this is **the day of salvation**, not **to receive God's grace in vain**. But then, in a short space, **Paul** urges **the Corinthians** to be **reconciled to him**, and to **open their hearts wide to him (6:11-13)**. Between **6:3-10** and **6:11-13**, these two encouragements - the first related to **God** and the second related to **himself** - **Paul** applies to **himself** as a **worker of God** language that reminds us of **the suffering Servant** (see the commentary on **Isaiah HI - The Cone of Isaiah**), found in **Isaiah 40-55**. As **the apostle** that **the Corinthians** are close to rejecting, **Paul** reminds **them** that **he** is the divinely "sent" **messenger** who announces that "now" is **the day of salvation** (see **Bg - Living as a Servant**) and that **they** must be reconciled to **ADONAI** through aligning **themselves** with the message brought by **His apostle**. The language of **suffering** as seen in **an apostle (6:3-10)** serves to legitimize **Paul's** ministry because it was fulfilled in the vicarious **sufferings** of **the true Servant of ADONAI, the Messiah, Yeshua (5:14-21)**.

It seems likely that **Paul** meditated on **Isaiah 40-55** in the light of the crisis in **Corinth** and, as it were, prophesied from **it**, encouraging **the Corinthians** - in particular the rebellious factions - to align **themselves** with **God's day of salvation**, which **Paul** had proclaimed.⁴