NEW TESTAMENT · PAUL'S LETTERS · BOOK 47 OF 66

2 Corinthians

My strength is made perfect in weakness (12:9)

13	Paul	c. A.D. 55–56	Weakness
Chapters, 257 Verses	Author (1:1)	From Macedonia	God's Strength

STRUCTURE

The Book in Three Parts

The letter moves from joy over the church's repentance (1–7), to an appeal for generous giving (8–9), to a sharp defence against the false apostles (10–13).



Each bar shows that part's share of the 257 verses.

I 1–7 · 132 verses

Paul's Ministry

Comfort, the new covenant, reconciliation, joy.

II 8–9 · 39 verses

The Collection

The grace of giving for the saints in Jerusalem.

III 10–13 · 86 verses

Paul's Defence

False apostles, sufferings, the thorn, strength in weakness.

BACKGROUND

Paul and the Corinthians

A few years of letters and visits lie behind this letter. Here they are in order.

1 ACTS 18

Church Founded

Paul stays eighteen months in Corinth, c. A.D. 50–52.

2 1 COR. 5:9

An Earlier Letter

Not to keep company with fornicators (now lost).

3 c. A.D. 54

1 Corinthians

Written from Ephesus to answer problems and questions.

4 2:1

A Painful Visit

Paul came "in heaviness."

5 2:4

A Tearful Letter

Written "out of much affliction and anguish of heart."

6 7:6–7

Titus Returns

Good news of repentance; Paul writes 2 Corinthians.

Comfort and the New Covenant

CHAPTER 1

The God of All Comfort

> *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble"*
>
> 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (KJV)

1:9
Trust in God
Not in ourselves, "but in God which raiseth the dead."

1:20
Yea and Amen
"All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen."

1:22
The Earnest
God has sealed us and given "the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."

CHAPTER 3

Two Covenants Compared

Paul compares the ministry of Moses with the ministry of the Spirit.

THE OLD COVENANT	THE NEW COVENANT
Written in tables of stone 3:3	**Written in fleshy tables of the heart** 3:3
The letter killeth 3:6	**The spirit giveth life** 3:6
The ministration of condemnation 3:9	**The ministration of righteousness** 3:9
A glory that was done away 3:7, 11	**A glory that remaineth** 3:11
A veil upon their heart 3:15	**With open face beholding the glory of the Lord** 3:18

> *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."*
>
> 2 Corinthians 3:17 (KJV)

Treasure in Earthen Vessels and Reconciliation

CHAPTER 4

Treasure in Earthen Vessels

The glorious gospel is carried in fragile clay jars, so everyone can see the power is God's.

> *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."*
> 2 Corinthians 4:7 (KJV)

Troubled
"yet not distressed"

Perplexed
"but not in despair"

Persecuted
"but not forsaken"

Cast Down
"but not destroyed"

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17–18

The Things Not Seen

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

CHAPTER 5

A New Creature, Ambassadors for Christ

5:7

By Faith
"For we walk by faith, not by sight"

5:14

Love's Constraint
"For the love of Christ constraineth us"

5:17

New Creature
"if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

5:20

Ambassadors
"we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

> *"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."*
> 2 Corinthians 5:21 (KJV)

2 CORINTHIANS AT A GLANCE · PART 4 OF 5

Giving and Paul's Sufferings

CHAPTERS 8–9

The Grace of Giving

Paul's longest teaching on money, written to encourage a gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

1 8:5

Give Yourself First

The Macedonians "first gave their own selves to the Lord."

2 8:9

Christ's Example

Though rich, for your sakes He became poor.

3 8:12

As You Are Able

"According to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

4 8:20–21

Handled Honestly

Providing for honest things in the sight of the Lord and of men.

5 9:6

Sowing and Reaping

"He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

6 9:7

Cheerfully

"Not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

2 Corinthians 9:15 (KJV)

CHAPTER 11:23–33

Paul's Sufferings

Instead of boasting of success, Paul lists what he endured for Christ.

11:24

Five Times

Forty stripes save one from the Jews.

11:25

Thrice Beaten

With rods; once stoned.

11:25

Thrice Shipwrecked

A night and a day in the deep.

11:26

Perils

Of waters, robbers, the heathen and false brethren.

11:27

Hardship

Hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness.

11:28

The Churches

"The care of all the churches."

11:32–33

Damascus

Let down by the wall in a basket.

11:30

Glory in Weakness

"I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities."

Strength in Weakness, Themes and Key Verse

CHAPTER 12

Strength Made Perfect in Weakness

Paul was given a thorn in the flesh. Three times he prayed for it to be taken away; the Lord answered differently.

12:2–4
Caught Up
Into paradise, hearing unspeakable words.

12:7
The Thorn
"A thorn in the flesh … lest I should be exalted above measure."

12:8
Three Prayers
"I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."

12:9 · THE LORD'S ANSWER
"My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

12:10 · PAUL'S RESPONSE
"for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Paul does not say what the thorn was. What matters is the Lord's answer, which holds for every believer.

BIG IDEAS

Key Themes

Comfort
Comforted by God to comfort others.
1:3–7; 7:6

The New Covenant
The Spirit gives life and liberty.
3:6, 17–18

Power in Weakness
Earthen vessels and sufficient grace.
4:7; 12:9–10

Reconciliation
A new creature; ambassadors for Christ.
5:17–21

Generous Giving
Christ became poor that we might be rich.
8:9; 9:6–15

True Ministry
Marked by suffering and love, not boasting.
6:4–10; 11:23–30

KEY VERSE

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

2 Corinthians 12:9 (KJV)