

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

The second Letter to the Corinthians was probably written in the autumn of 56 A.D., the first Letter to them having been sent in the spring of that year. But there are other letters of which we have no clear account. One, lost to us, evidently preceded the first Letter (1Co 5:9). In our "second" Letter we find mention (2:2,4) of a severe communication which could not but give pain. Can this have been our "first" to the Corinthians? Some think not, in which case there must have been an "intermediate" letter. This some students find in 2Co 10 1-8:10. If so, there must have been four letters. Some have thought that in 2Co 6:14-7:1, and 8, 9, yet another is embedded, making possibly five in all. The reader must form his own conclusions, inasmuch as the evidence is almost entirely internal. On the whole it would seem that our first Letter, conveyed by Titus, had produced a good effect in the Corinthian Church, but that this wore off, and that Titus returned to the Apostle in Ephesus with such disquieting news that a visit of Paul just then to Corinth would have been very embarrassing, alike for the Church and the Apostle. Hence, instead of going, he writes a "painful" letter and sends it by the same messenger, proceeding himself to Troas and thence to Macedonia, where, in great tension of spirit, he awaits the return of Titus. At last there comes a reassuring account, the relief derived from which is so great that our second Letter is written, with the double purpose of comforting those who had been so sharply rebuked and of preventing the recurrence of the evils which had called forth the remonstrance. In this way both the tenderness and the severity of the present Letter may be explained.