

## INVITATION TO 2 CORINTHIANS

In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote that he was going to stay in Ephesus a little while longer, then visit the churches in Macedonia. He'd pick up the collection they'd taken for the poor, then come to Achaia (see p. 1600). So the Corinthians were surprised when he came to their city before going to Macedonia. They were embarrassed, too, because they hadn't been setting aside money and their own collection wasn't ready. They accused Paul of not being true to his word—of saying one thing and then doing another. One man in particular appears to have offered a sharp challenge to his leadership. After this confrontation Paul left abruptly, saying he'd come back to Corinth for their collection and then go on to Macedonia. Paul returned to Ephesus and sent his co-worker Titus to Corinth with a sharp letter of rebuke. He demanded that the man who'd challenged him be disciplined. Titus was supposed to bring back word of the Corinthians' response. But then Paul had to change his travel plans again. A riot broke out in Ephesus against Jesus' messengers there. Paul had to go into hiding for his own safety (see p. 1555). When he was finally able to travel, he went to Troas, where he'd arranged to meet Titus. But when he couldn't find him, he continued on to Macedonia. There he found Titus and learned that the Corinthians had reaffirmed their respect for his authority and disciplined the man who'd challenged him. But Titus also reported a new threat. Some traveling Jewish-Christian teachers had come to Corinth, bearing impressive letters of introduction. They called themselves super-apostles and were beginning to win a following. They were demanding that Paul demonstrate his own credentials. So Paul had several challenges to address before returning to Corinth. He had to assure the Corinthians that all was now forgiven. He had to explain why he'd changed his travel plans yet again. He still needed to

help them arrange for the offering. And finally, he had to respond to the self-described super-apostles. He did all of these things in the letter we know as 2 Corinthians. It reveals the triumphs and struggles that result when life in the present age meets up with the in-breaking reality of God's kingdom. The main body of this letter has four parts. Each is introduced by a reference to a place: : We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia (pp. 1605–1606). : 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 (pp. 1606–1609). : When we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within (pp. 1609–1612). : I beg you that when I come [to Corinth] I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world (pp. 1612–1615). In the four parts of this letter, Paul envisions himself in these different locations. Recalling or anticipating the state of his relationship with the Corinthians, he addresses them from four different perspectives. Still, a single theme runs through the whole letter: God will comfort us in all our afflictions, and we can offer this comfort to one another. However, in the final, confrontational section, Paul has to make the Corinthians uncomfortable. This is something he doesn't want to do, but they've left him no choice. But he ends the letter on a hopeful note, calling on them to rejoice in God's grace, love and fellowship.