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Introduction to "2 Timothy"

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2 Timothy

Arrested again after composing 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul realized that his end was near and desired to strengthen his younger coworker's faith. The apostle warns Timothy and all other Christian believers with him about the danger of false teachings. Paul urges Timothy to hold firm to the Scripture and remain faithful to Christ until His second advent. Second Timothy is the final surviving letter Paul wrote before his execution.

AUTHOR

Besides the opening of the letter identifying Paul as its author (1:1), many personal notes, accounts, and references to other co-workers known from other epistles support his authorship (cf. 2 Tim. 3:11 and Acts 13:13, 14; 2 Tim. 4:10-21). As with the other Pastoral Epistles, 2 Timothy appears among other Pauline letters in the Muratorian fragment, indicating that the early church fathers endorsed its Pauline authorship. The eighth-century Muratorian fragment, which may be a copy of a late second-century text, is a Christian document that discusses what books of the New Testament early churches had come to accept as genuine.

DATE

Paul seems to have written 2 Timothy shortly after the Roman authorities imprisoned him for the second time (1:8; 4:6, 7). They probably arrested him either in Ephesus, Troas, or Nicopolis. He relates how Onesiphorus found him in Rome, most likely the place he was currently being held captive (1:16, 17). The letter reflects some of his feelings as he awaited trial and execution, but he still is intent on seeing Timothy again soon (4:9, 13, 21). According to Eusebius, Paul died in Rome during the reign of Nero around AD 67/68 and about the same time as Peter's martyrdom. Other scholars believe both Paul and Peter perished during Nero's most intense period of persecution of Christians in AD 64. Taking into consideration these factors, the apostle probably composed 2 Timothy sometime during the mid-'60s.

AUDIENCE

Paul writes again to his co-worker Timothy (1:2). Besides specific instructions for his younger co-worker, the letter includes many personal notes (cf. 1:4, 5; 4:9-22). Originally from Lystra, Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16:1). Most likely, his grandmother and then his mother were the first ones to accept the gospel as a result of Paul's first missionary journey in that region, then later raised Timothy as a believer (Acts 14:6-21; 16:1, 2; 2 Tim. 1:5). He became one of Paul's trusted co-workers (Acts 16:2, 3; 19:22; 21:4; Rom. 16:21) and even appears as a co-author in



Date of writing
ca. AD 66-67

several of the apostle's epistles (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Phil. 1). It is clear that Paul was very fond of Timothy (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:19-22; 1 Thess. 3:2).

PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

The second epistle to Timothy reflects Paul's awareness of his impending death (1:8; 4:6-8). Since it was probably one of his last letters, it naturally included things that he considered too important to remain unsaid. Also, his peaceful contemplation of death is an echo of his faith and mission. The Christian life does not lack suffering (1:8, 12; 2:9, 12; 3:11, 12), but God's power of salvation sets the stage for the believer's life of "power and of love and of a sound mind" (1:7-10; 2:3-6). Also, Paul emphasizes the divine nature of the Scriptures (3:16, 17) and warns against false teachings (1:13; 2:14-18; 3:1-5; 4:3).

STRUCTURE

While Paul's final surviving epistle begins similar to his other epistles, it has a more personal tone as the apostle reflects on his life as he faces what appears to be a looming death sentence. After his initial greeting (1:1-5), Paul begins by urging Timothy not to be ashamed of his chains like others, but to stay faithful to the gospel (1:6-2:13).

Concern for Timothy, and other church leaders like him, spills over into the central section of the letter. Paul encourages his younger colleague to continue to grow in the faith (2:15, 22) and to avoid getting sidetracked by the foolish controversies that consume false teachers (2:14, 16, 22, 23; 3:5). While such individuals might seem to prosper, they would ultimately be exposed and condemned (3:8-9). After encouraging Timothy again to remain faithful (3:10-17), Paul charges Timothy to proclaim God's word (4:1-2), that is, the message of salvation first promised through the prophets in the Old Testament and finally fulfilled in Jesus (3:14-15). If Timothy carries out his ministry, like Paul, he would be able to look forward to what the Lord has prepared for him when Christ returns (4:8).

The letter ends with an assortment of personal items that provide a glimpse into the heart of the apostle and his deep bond of affection for his friends (vv. 9-15), especially Timothy. Although Paul's situation is grim, his faith is unshakable to the end (vv. 16-18).

As you read Paul's final epistle, reflect on the great confidence he has in God in spite of the hopelessness of his current circumstances.

OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction (1:1-5)
 - A. Greeting (1:1-2)
 - B. Thanksgiving for Timothy's Faith (1:3-5)
- II. Encouragement for a Faithful Ministry (1:6-2:13)
 - A. A Call to Loyalty (1:6-14)
 - B. Examples of Disloyalty and Loyalty (1:15-18)
 - C. A Call to Endurance (2:1-13)

- III. Instructions in Connection to the False Teachers (2:14-3:9)
 - A. Avoid Foolish Controversies (2:14-26)
 - B. Warning of Perilous Times to Come (3:1-9)
- IV. A Call for Commitment in Ministry (3:10-4:8)
 - A. Paul's Example (3:10-13)
 - B. The Importance of Scripture (3:14-17)
 - C. A Charge to Proclaim the Gospel (4:1-8)
- V. Final Instructions (4:9-18)
 - A. Come Soon (4:9-13)
 - B. Beware of Alexander (4:14-15)
 - C. To God Be the Glory (4:16-18)
- VI. Conclusion (4:19-22)
 - A. Final Greetings and Personal Remarks (4:19-22a)
 - B. Benediction (4:22b)

ARCHAEOLOGY

The book of Acts relates that Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16:1). Jewish law did not permit such intermarriages. Not only did Jews avoid marriage to Gentiles, but they also kept all contact with them to a minimum (cf. Acts 10:28). However, in the Diaspora (Jews living outside of Palestine), such regulations were more flexible and intermarriages more common. Naturally, the question of the identity and ethnicity of the children arose: were the children Gentiles or Jews? It was also an issue among Romans when Roman citizens married noncitizens. Roman law solved the problem by specifying that the status of the children would follow that of the mother. The same principle later appeared in rabbinic law, probably as a result of the situation in the Diaspora (Talmud, *Qiddushin* 3-12; m.*Yebamoth* 7:5). In this case, society could consider Timothy a Jew, because of his Jewish mother, even though he had not been circumcised as a baby according to Jewish custom. Nonetheless, Timothy must not have been so readily accepted among the Jewish community because his father was Greek and he was not circumcised. Most likely, this influenced Paul's decision to circumcise him so that his ministry among the Jews did not suffer as a result of such prejudices (Acts 16:3).

Titus

Paul's little epistle to Titus is highly practical. In response to the presence of false doctrine within the church, the apostle emphasizes the importance of church organization and outlines the qualifications necessary for church leaders. He also points out that when the mind is absorbed with religious trivia, like that of the false teachers who were troubling the church on Crete, the essential questions of morality and integrity get ignored, and religion deteriorates into a matter of form and theory.

AUTHOR

Paul, who identifies himself as the epistle's author (1:1), seems to be writing from Nicopolis, or on his way there, where he planned to spend the winter (3:12). Since the Muratorian fragment (see 2 Timothy—Author) includes the letter, it indicates that the early church fathers accepted its Pauline authorship.

DATE

The apostle seems to have written his letter to Titus during the early 60s AD, about the same time as 1 Timothy. Paul mentions that he left Titus in Crete to complete their work there (1:5), which implies that Paul had done some evangelism before departing. Such evangelistic efforts do not fit into the pattern of his earlier journeys recorded in Acts, suggesting that he visited Crete after he was released from the Roman custody described at the end of Acts. When Paul and Timothy left for Macedonia, Titus remained to finish the work Paul had started and to deal with some opposition that had arisen. If this is the case, Paul likely wrote his epistle to Titus around AD 65.

AUDIENCE

The letter is addressed to Titus (1:4). As a Greek (Gal. 2:3), he was probably a convert of Paul and became one of his trusted co-workers (2 Cor 8:6; 12:18). Paul writes to him while he is in Crete and instructs him on what he needs to do in the young church (1:5), so naturally, his instructions would have indirectly affected the believers in Crete as well (cf. 1:10-15, which seems to be addressing a specific situation in the church).

PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

Paul leaves Titus with the charge of appointing elders for the church in Crete (1:5). The first portion of the letter deals with the qualifications that such elders should have in the way of their character, integrity, and family (1:5-9). The strong warning against insubordinate and lazy gluttons (1:10, 12) points to the presence of disruptive figures within the church, who were possibly even advocating false teachings (1:10-16). The apostle also outlines character qualities for the believers—men, women, and ser-



Date of writing
ca. AD 65

vants—with a special emphasis on how they should interact with one another (2:1-10). Furthermore, believers should submit to governmental authorities (3:1, 2). Not simply ethical exhortations, they are the practical implications of the gospel (2:11-15; 3:3-8).

STRUCTURE

Although Paul begins his letter with his customary salutation (1:1-2), the emphasis he places on the importance of “godliness” as believers look forward to the “hope of eternal life” sets the stage for his discussion of the importance of “sound doctrine” in the rest of his letter (vv. 3-4).

Since spiritual leaders play an essential role in the health and life of the church, especially in dealing with false teachers (vv. 5-16), Paul begins the body of his letter by describing the kind of qualities necessary for individuals desiring to serve church leaders (vv. 5-10). In light of the redemption that God has provided for all of His followers (vv. 11-15), Paul explains the way that people within the church should act (2:1-10). The manner of life to which Christians are called to live, however, is not only to be carried out within the church but also in relation to civil authorities (3:1) and people in general (v. 2). As in the previous section, Paul again bases the lifestyle of Christians on a loving response to what God has done for them in Christ (vv. 3-8). He then concludes his letter with some final instructions, a greeting, and a closing benediction (vv. 9-15).

As you read through Titus, note the close connection Paul sees between the glorious return of Christ and the way believers should conduct themselves as they await His return.

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
- II. Instructions to Titus (1:5-16)
 - A. Select the Right Church Leaders (1:5-12)
 - B. Curtail the Activities of False Teachers (1:13-16)
- III. Instructions for the Christian Community (2:1-15)
 - A. Counsel for Older Men and Women (2:1-3)
 - B. Counsel for Younger Women and Men (2:4-8)
 - C. Counsel for Christian Slaves (2:9-10)
- IV. The Christian and Society (3:1-11)
 - A. The Christian’s Civic Responsibilities (3:1-7)
 - B. The Importance of Good Works (3:8-11)
- V. Conclusion (3:12-15)
 - A. Personal Remarks (3:12-14)
 - B. Final Greetings (3:15a)
 - C. Benediction (3:15b)

ARCHAEOLOGY

Paul refers to a Cretan poet who said that "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (1:12), a saying often attributed to Epimenides of Crete (ca. sixth century BC), although his works have not survived. Such negative references concerning the ethics of the people of Crete, however, appear in other literary sources, such as in the writings of the Hellenistic poet Callimachus, who sarcastically mentions that the Cretans claim to have built a tomb for Zeus (*Hymn to Zeus*, lines 8, 9). Greeks had high regard for cunning tricksters such as the hero Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, but even they thought Cretans went too far. The Greek verb *kretizo* ("to speak like a Cretan") became a synonym for "to lie" or "to deceive." It was these kinds of people that Titus had to deal with (1:10-16).