

01. Second Letter to Timothy Introduction



We first hear of Timothy when, after the Jerusalem Assembly Paul and Silas return to Southern Galatia.

Acts 16:1-3

‘Paul went on to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.’



Timothy accompanied Paul to Macedonia, to Philippi.
Thessalonica and Beroea



When the situation became too dangerous, Paul was sent off to Athens, and then to Corinth. Timothy stayed behind. He joined Paul in Corinth with news from Thessalonica. This led to Paul's Letters from Corinth to Thessalonica.

Paul was in Ephesus for three years (52-55). Timothy was with him. In a letter written to Corinth from Ephesus, Paul writes: 'I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church' (1 Corinthians 4:17).

'If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am' (1 Corinthians 16:10).

In his Letter to the Colossians, also probably written from Ephesus, Paul writes: 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in the Messiah in Colossae' (Colossians 1:1)

Timothy is also mentioned in a personal Letter to Philemon sent along with the Letter to Colossae: 'Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker' (Philemon verse 1).

When Paul discerned that it was nearing time to leave Ephesus 'he sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he himself stayed for some time longer in Asia' (Acts 19:22).

It was from Macedonia that Paul wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians. The Letter opens with the words: 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia' (2 Corinthians 1:1).

Timothy was with Paul in Corinth in the winter of 56-57. Paul composed his Letter to the Romans there and concludes: 'Timothy, my co-worker, greets you' (Romans 16:21).

Paul went from Corinth to Jerusalem. His enemies tried to kill him. He spent two years under house arrest in Caesarea. He then claimed his right as a Roman citizen to be judged by the Emperor. He was taken by ship to Rome where he spent two more years under house arrest awaiting trial.

The last words of the Acts

‘Paul lived in Rome two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance’ (Acts 28:30-31).

It was probably during these two years that Paul wrote to the community in Philippi. The opening words are: 'Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus' (Philippians 1:1). He goes on to write: 'I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you' (Philippians 2:19).

Author of the Second Letter to Timothy

The author introduces himself as Paul and there is no evidence from the early church or, indeed, for the first eighteen hundred years of the church's life, of any dispute about the identity of the author. However, modern critical scholarship has brought us to the situation today in which most scholars either argue or assume that someone other than Paul composed the First Letter to Timothy and the Letter to Titus. For what appears to me no good reason they include the Second Letter to Timothy.

It is important to remember that this Letter is called 'Second' not because it was written *after* the First Letter to Timothy, but because it is *shorter*. The arguments that lead some scholars to favour the idea that the First Letter was composed by a disciple after Paul's death, are not relevant to this his so-called "Second Letter".

There is nothing inherently problematic about a disciple of Paul writing in his name provided it is understood that this was the way which a disciple chose to convey what he understood to be Paul's authentic thoughts. In keeping with the practice of the times, it is possible that a disciple of Paul wrote in Paul's name in order to remind people that the martyred Paul was still present among them, inspiring them by his teaching and active in the life of the church.

However, after two hundred years of scholarly debate, some scholars continue to argue that Paul is, in fact, the author. First, nothing in what is written requires a situation significantly different in time from the period just before Paul's death. Secondly, a number of considerations favour this time rather than late in the century. The content could have been written in the mid-sixties and could have been written to Timothy in Ephesus as the letter claims.

Still focusing on the content, we ask a second question: Could what is said have been said by Paul, or does it reveal an author with different ideas, different values, different concerns? The fact that the Letter to Timothy was accepted for so long as being written by Paul is itself an indication that it not only does not contradict Paul's thought, but that it has been read as being consistent with it.

We must not forget that if the Letters was composed by a disciple it was his intention that those reading the letter would do so as though they were listening to Paul himself. The intention was to reproduce what Paul himself would have said were he still alive. We should remember that this is how this letter has been read down through the centuries, and why it was preserved, treasured, copied and distributed.

While accepting that the Second Letter to Timothy may have been composed by a disciple of Paul, I have not found their arguments conclusive and so prefer to stay with the tradition that Paul himself was the author.

If in fact Paul is the author, it is necessary to accept the tradition that Paul was released from house arrest in Rome at the end of the statutory two years, and that he returned east. He wrote this Letter to Timothy after he was once again imprisoned.

The church historian, **Eusebius**, writing in the opening years of the fourth century, has this to say regarding Paul's Second Letter to Timothy: 'After defending himself, the Apostle was again sent on the ministry of preaching, and coming a second time to the same city suffered martyrdom under Nero. During this imprisonment he wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy, indicating at the same time that his first defence had taken place and that his martyrdom was at hand' (*History of the Church*, 2.22).

All the indications are that Eusebius is correct. Paul writes from prison (2 Timothy 1:8). He has been in Asia, for he mentions that he 'left Trophimus ill in Miletus' (2 Timothy 4:20). This must have happened after his first imprisonment in Rome, because Trophimus was in Jerusalem when Paul was taken into custody (see Acts 21:29), and Paul could not have been to Miletus between that and his two-year house arrest in Rome.

He seems also to have visited Troas recently (2 Timothy 4:13). Timothy seems to be somewhere in the Roman province of Asia. Paul asks him to give his greetings 'to the household of Onesiphorus' (2 Timothy 4:19), who is also mentioned as having contributed to the work of the church in Ephesus (2 Timothy 1:18). When Paul writes: 'I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus' (2 Timothy 4:12), it is unclear whether he is saying that he is sending Tychicus who can be a support to Timothy in Ephesus, or whether perhaps Timothy has found Ephesus too hard and has left there so that Paul is replacing him.

Paul is back in Rome and in prison. This imprisonment is not like the house arrest mentioned in Acts in which Paul 'welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance' (Acts 28:30-31).

This time a friend had difficulty finding him (2Timothy 1:17), and he is 'chained like a criminal' (2 Timothy 2:9). He has already undergone a trial which was successful in that it did not lead immediately to execution (2 Timothy 4:16-17), but he knows that death is not far off (2Timothy 4:6).