

# Introduction and Background

📖 2 Timothy 1:1-7

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Today we're going to start a five-week study in 2 Timothy. You may be wondering why I'm starting with 2 Timothy rather than 1 Timothy. The reason is because I need to prepare for a conference teaching in October, and so it will help me be in the best contextual position for my assigned passage. And, of course, it is a letter we have never studied together, so it will be good for all of us. As always, we will begin by spending some time on introductory and background issues, and then we will press on to the exposition.

Our method of studying 2 Timothy will be the same as our method of studying any book of the Bible. It is known as the grammatical-historical hermeneutic. By hermeneutics we mean the art and science of interpretation. Hermeneutics is the bridge that helps the interpreter understand the interpretation of a text. As a science, hermeneutics is a set of rules that the interpreter applies to the study of the text; rules such as first usage, single referent, authorial intent, context, etc... As an art, hermeneutics is the ability or skill of the interpreter to follow these rules rigorously and consistently, and that is something that comes with time and practice. When we preface hermeneutic with grammatical and historical we are limiting our areas of study to these two areas, meaning we exclude things like our theology, which would bring bias to the text. Our goal is to eliminate bias through this approach so that we allow the text to speak to us. That's the idea of *exegesis*, from the Greek word meaning "to lead out." We want to allow the text to lead out the meaning of the text. To do this we spend most of our time in two areas. First, grammatical. We study the grammar of the original language in which the document was written. This means looking at the basic unit of thought, which is the sentence, and studying how each part of the sentence relates to every other part, which is syntax, as well as doing word studies and noting emphasis conveyed by word order, etc.... Second, historical. We study the historical setting at the time the text was written. This involves knowing the political situation, the cultural and customary practices of the day, the people groups involved, etc... When we put all that information together under the rules of interpretation and the art of the interpreter, the goal is to understand what God has written through the human author of the text.

2 Timothy belongs to a corpus of three letters called the Pastoral Epistles. These include 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. The concerns of these letters are as the title suggests, pastoral. They relate to ministry. How do I minister to others? What is my focus in ministry? How do I conduct myself in ministry? And lest you think the

letter is addressed only to ministers, professional ministers or pastors, think again, because Paul addresses women, older and younger, men, older and younger as well as those who are elders or deacons or aspire to those offices. The reason all believers are involved in ministry is because all believers have received the Spirit of God and He gifts them for ministry at the moment of their spiritual birth. Paul said in 1 Cor 12:4-6, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons." So, it is a letter that is applicable to all believers since all believers have the same Spirit, Lord and God who distribute a variety of gifts, ministries and effects. But these do not automatically flow or function, the believer has to exercise his volition. This letter explains how Timothy, a believer and pastor, needed to exercise positive volition in his ministry and what that would look like in his historical situation.

As far as authorship, the external evidence from the early church fathers is in favor of Paul. The writings of Polycarp, Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr all mention Paul as the author. It is only in modern times that Pauline authorship has been challenged. Internal evidence also supports Paul as the author. 2 Tim 1:1 cites Paul as the author saying, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus." Further, the writing style and vocabulary are consistent with Paul's other writings. Lastly, the biographical details in the letter are consistent with what is said about Paul elsewhere in the NT.

As for location Paul was writing from, there are numerous verses that indicate he was in prison in Rome. For example, 2 Tim 1:8, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God..." Lest one thinks Paul only means spiritual prisoner here, consider verse 16, "The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me—" If that too is not clear enough, then in 2:8-9 he states, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned." These references indicate clearly that Paul was in Rome, suffering in chains because of the gospel. However, Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome, so a follow-up question is which imprisonment was this? A number of contrasts between the two imprisonments indicates it was Paul's second and final imprisonment. First, Paul wrote what are known as the prison epistles during his first imprisonment. The prison epistles include Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. But during his second imprisonment he wrote only 2 Timothy. Second, at the first imprisonment Paul was charged by the Jews with heresy. But at the second imprisonment Paul was charged by Rome with treason against the Roman empire for preaching the gospel (2 Tim 2:9). Third, the time period of the first imprisonment was AD60-63, when persecution was only local and sporadic. But the time period of the second imprisonment was AD64-68, when persecutions were Empire wide under Nero's belligerence toward Christians. Fourth, during Paul's first imprisonment he had decent living conditions in a rented house chained to a Roman soldier but with permission to move and have visitors. But in

his second imprisonment he was in a cold, dark dungeon with only one visitor, Luke. Fifth, in his first imprisonment he was optimistic for release and freedom. Turn to Phil 1:25. When imprisoned he wrote this to the Philippians, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again." Paul clearly expected release. But in his second imprisonment he expected death. Turn to 2 Tim 4:6. "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith..." Clearly here Paul expected he was near execution. The conclusion is that Paul was imprisoned in Rome twice and that the location from which Paul wrote 2 Timothy was his second imprisonment in Rome.

As for the exact date, the years of his second imprisonment were somewhere between AD64-68. AD64 was the year when a fire broke out in Rome that was not brought under control until the sixth day. Emperor Nero was suspected of being involved in starting the fire in order to make room for one of his building projects. However, it is unlikely that Nero was involved. However, he did use the fire as political leverage for two purposes. First, to implement his re-design of the city of Rome. And second, according to Tacitus, to blame the Christians for the fire in order to stifle the increasing number of Christians and their influence. As a result, he had hundreds of Christians arrested, imprisoned and executed. Paul himself must have been arrested sometime during these persecutions. As for when exactly, in Titus 3:12 we are told that Paul spent the winter in Nicopolis. After this, according to Rom 15:24, 28 he planned to go to Spain. Tradition says that Paul was in Spain from AD64-66. He then returned to Greece and Asia. Then 2 Tim 4:13, 20 says that Paul visited Corinth, Miletus and Troas. Two passages indicate that Paul was arrested in Troas and taken suddenly to Rome for imprisonment. First, in 2 Tim 4:13 Paul tells Timothy, "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments." The implication being that when Paul was arrested he was torn away from Troas so that he was not able to take along his possessions and that he hoped Timothy would bring these things to him. Verse 21 indicates that winter was rapidly approaching. "Make every effort to come before winter." Paul was expecting to remain imprisoned during the winter, the dungeon was dark and cold and he hoped Timothy would bring his cloak. Second, in 2 Tim 4:6-8 we have every indication that Paul thought his death was imminent. "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; <sup>8</sup>in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." Adding to this the tradition that Paul was executed in June of AD68 we conclude that Paul must have written the letter in the late summer or early fall of AD67, lived through the winter and spring and was executed in June of AD68. Therefore, 2 Timothy is the last of Paul's epistles.

As far as the audience, Paul wrote the letter to Timothy. For example, turn to 2 Tim 1:2 to see that Paul addressed Timothy. "To Timothy, my beloved son; Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Who was this Timothy? Timothy was from Lystra, in the Galatian region. His father was a Greek but mother was a

Jew named Eunice and his grandmother was Lois. According to 2 Tim 3:14-15, these two women had raised him in the OT Scriptures. When Paul and Barnabas came through Lystra on their first missionary journey, all three of them became believers. The year was AD46. When Paul and Silas returned to Galatia in AD50-51 they passed through Lystra and found a disciple named Timothy. Paul saw promise and wanted to take him with him for the remainder of the second mission trip. But since his father was a Greek he was uncircumcised and would not be able to have missionary contact with the Jews. Therefore, Paul had him circumcised. Some think Paul was wrong for doing this, but his only reason was for the advancement of the gospel, so that he could evangelize Jews without circumcision being an issue. As Paul said in 1 Cor 9:20-22, "To the Jews I became a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law...I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it." Timothy submitted to circumcision for the sake of the Jews and became a traveling companion and ministry assistant to Paul. He is noted as being with Paul on many occasions; at Berea (Acts 17:14) at Athens (Acts 17:15), at Corinth (Acts 18:5). He was sent by Paul into Macedonia (Acts 19:22), later to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17) and Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1ff). He is co-author of several of Paul's epistles including 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1), 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 1:1), Philippians (Phil 1:1) and Colossians (Col 1:1). He is noted to be a co-worker with Paul (Rom 16:21). He became known as Paul's "beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1 Cor 4:17) and eventually the pastor of the Church at Ephesus. And many think, and I agree, that this letter is almost like a second epistle to the Ephesians, since the final phrase of the letter in 4:22 uses the plural form of "you," "grace be with you all," referring to the Church at Ephesus.

Now that we know that Paul is writing from prison in Rome, and that his death is imminent in the year AD67 and he is writing to Timothy, where is Timothy? I've mentioned Ephesus, but what is the evidence that Ephesus is the destination of this letter? Turn to 1 Tim 1:3. Here Paul says, "I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus." Assuming that he followed Paul's advice and stayed on, Paul wrote to Timothy when he was at Ephesus. In support of this, several people Paul mentioned in 2 Timothy are people who, at one time or another, had been residents of Ephesus. For example, according to 2 Tim 1:18, Onesiphorus rendered service "at Ephesus" and in 2 Tim 4:19 Paul asks Timothy to greet Onesiphorus, so the strong implication is that Onesiphorus was with Timothy at Ephesus. Also, Paul tells Timothy in 2 Tim 4:19 to greet Priscilla and Aquila and according to Acts 18:18-28 Priscilla and Aquila had ministered with Paul in Ephesus years before, where they became Christians. The reason Priscilla and Aquila were in Ephesus is because they had fled Rome during the Jewish persecution of Claudius around AD50. Now that Nero had begun persecutions against Christians in AD64, it is likely that Priscilla and Aquila had returned to Ephesus. Also, Alexander the Coppersmith mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:14 may be the same Alexander mentioned in Acts 19:33 at Ephesus. If so, these people associated with Ephesus, confirm that Timothy was also at Ephesus where he served as pastor near the end of Paul's life.

What is the purpose or purposes Paul is writing Timothy at this late stage in his life? There are several. First, Timothy was apparently not a very assertive pastor. He is described as timid (2 Tim 1:7), sickly (1 Tim 5:23) and still youthful (1 Tim 4:12), being about 38 years old in AD67. Second, his non-assertiveness caused him to shrink back due to the Neronian persecution. As mentioned before, Nero was suspected of being involved in a plot to burn Rome. While this is unlikely, Tacitus mentions that Nero used the situation as political leverage to begin persecutions against Christians. This marks the first time Christianity was viewed as distinct from Judaism. Before this Christianity had been viewed as a sect within Judaism (cf Gallio's decision at Corinth in Acts 18:12ff). And since Judaism was a legal religion within the Roman Empire, Christianity had been legal. With Nero, Christianity was severed from Judaism and Christianity became illegal. This led to the arrest, imprisonment and execution of thousands of Christians, eventually including Paul. This led Christians and especially Christian pastors to begin to go underground. Timothy, being a timid, non-assertive pastor, seems to have been shrinking back to avoid detection, arrest, imprisonment and the likely end of execution. Andy Woods said, "Paul needed someone to carry the gospel forward to the next generation. Thus, Paul wrote 2 Timothy for the purpose of encouraging Timothy not to shrink back from ministry duties but rather to be faithful and endure in the ministry."<sup>1</sup> This makes 2 Timothy a very appropriate book for our time, since increasingly we are seeing opposition to Christianity in America and around the world. We need this instruction so that we are able to keep our focus on the word of God and to stand firmly and be good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

In addition to this main purpose Paul had several other sub-purposes in writing. First, he wanted Timothy to come to Rome from Ephesus, bringing his cloak for the upcoming winter, as well as the books and especially the parchments that he had left at nearby Troas. This would challenge Timothy to face his fears, going right into the devil's den, so to speak. Second, he wanted Mark to come with Timothy. Mark's companionship would help Timothy overcome his fears on the journey. Third, he wanted to encourage Timothy to engage the divisiveness at Ephesus. False teachers had entered and Timothy didn't want to do anything about it because it would draw attention and likely result in his arrest. So, Paul encouraged Timothy to engage this divisiveness. Fourth, Paul wanted to make clear the characteristic of apostates. Fifth, Paul wanted to warn Timothy about Alexander the Coppersmith. Sixth, Paul wanted to urge maturity based on the teaching of the Scripture. Seventh, Paul wanted to inform Timothy that his death was imminent. Eighth, he wanted to inform Timothy of the results of his first trial. Ninth, Paul wanted to greet those he knew and loved in Ephesus. Tenth, Paul wanted to send greetings from others in Rome to those in Ephesus.

What is the message of 2 Timothy? The message of 2 Timothy is faithful endurance in the face of apostasy inside the Church and persecution from outside the church, so that the truth of Christianity would be preserved for the next generation. This is a vital message for our generation as we see denomination after denomination cave in to apostasy, endorsing homosexual marriage, women pastors, evolution and any number of false doctrines that tickle the ears. At the same time American culture is increasingly antagonistic to Christianity and we have to learn how to faithfully endure in order to preserve the truth for the next generation.

What are some uniquenesses of 2 Timothy? There are several. First, 2 Timothy is a personal letter. It's not written directly to a church, like Corinth or Philippi, but to a person. It is therefore, very personal instruction, though it has application to all believers. Second, the letter is known for the many metaphors of the Christian minister in chapter 2. A good Christian minister is a good teacher, suffers like a soldier, competes like an athlete, etc.... Third, it contains the most famous verse on the inspiration of Scripture, 2 Tim 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good purpose." This reminds us that the Scriptures always have to be first and foremost in our ministry. Fourth, it is Paul's last letter. It is therefore, his valedictory, or farewell address. Fifth, it shows that Paul was willing to offer himself as a martyr to serve the Lord (4:6). He was not willing to shrink back from declaring the whole truth in order to preserve his own life. The Lord had laid down His life on our behalf and Paul was willing to lay down his life in return. Sixth, the letter informs us that Paul had remained faithful till the end of his life, that he did persevere, that he did fight the good fight. Seventh, the letter has several warnings that the church will go to apostasy. It was already bad, but it would get worse. Eighth, the letter shows several parallels between the closing days of Paul's life and the closing days of Christ's life. Both found themselves alone, both predicted their imminent deaths, and both encouraged their disciples to be faithful in light of imminent death.

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Woods, 2 Timothy Argument, 3-4.