

2 Timothy: Introduction

Author: 1 and 2 Timothy along with Titus are known as the “pastoral” letters because they’re addressed to young pastors and in general discuss things pastors should know concerning the church, i.e., how everyone in the church, from the elders to those in the pews, should behave. Prior to the 19th century, scholars agreed that Paul wrote these letters. But then scholars began questioning Pauline authorship. They had several arguments but all are weak:

- (1) someone using a pseudonym or an “admirer of Paul” wrote them. This is unlikely since the personal details and names Paul mentions in the letters could be easily verified or denied.
- (2) the heresies, church government, and theology described in these letters is too advanced; they belong in the 2nd century not the 1st. But the church government Paul describes in the pastorals was present in the church from the beginning (Acts 6:1-6; 14:23; Philippians 1:1) and as for the heresies and theology, the church has had heresies (even the types discussed in the pastorals) from the beginning (e.g., Acts 15; Galatians). Additionally, most of the theology discussed in the pastorals is also present in Paul’s other writings.
- (3) the vocabulary and style used is missing from Paul’s other letters (this language is 2nd century not 1st). But the vocabulary and style of an author depends on the subject matter; if the subject matter differs, then the style and vocabulary may also differ. Additionally, the body of literature available from the 2nd century for comparison is limited.
- (4) the travels described in these letters are missing from the historical account of Paul in the book of Acts. However, Acts never claims to be a complete historical account of Paul’s life; the book ends with his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28) from which he expected to be released (Philippians 2:24). Something else, church tradition names Paul as the author, which is not insignificant since the church was very careful before accepting any writing as part of the canon of Scripture.

Conclusion: since there’s no legitimate reason to doubt the text of Scripture—Paul claims to be the author in the first word of each of these letters (1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1)—Paul wrote 2 Timothy (along with the other two pastoral letters).

Date: Paul likely wrote it in the Fall of A.D. 67. At this time Paul was in prison in Rome, his second Roman imprisonment, 2:9; 4:16.¹ This was during emperor Nero’s reign (A.D. 54-68); he began the persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire.

Audience: this letter is addressed to Timothy, 1:2. Timothy was one of Paul’s close companions; Paul considered him a son, 1:2. His name is mentioned more than any other at the beginning of Paul’s letters (2 Corinthians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 and 2 Thessalonians; 1 and 2 Timothy; Philemon²). His father was Greek and his mother and grandmother were Jewish and they raised him in the Old Testament Scriptures, 1:5; 3:15 (Acts 16:1). Paul made him part of his team during his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy was ordained for ministry by Paul himself and the elders of Timothy’s church, 1:6 (1 Timothy 4:14). He served as one of Paul’s righthand men in Troas, Berea, Thessalonica, and Corinth (Acts 16-20; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). During Paul’s Third Missionary Journey, Timothy was Paul’s representative in Ephesus, Macedonia, and Corinth. He was also with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment and Paul sent him to Philippi to get an update on the church (Philippians 2:19-23). After Paul’s release, Paul left him in Ephesus to straighten out the mess concerning the false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-7). At one point, Timothy was imprisoned and released but we’re not told where (Hebrews 13:23). Timothy was perhaps thought of as sickly (1 Timothy 5:23) and timid 1:7 (1 Timothy 4:12). And now Paul is calling on him to visit him before the Romans execute him, 4:6-9, 21.

¹ One tradition says that it’s the Mamertine prison in Rome, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4Gb0tWvYx4>.

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Setting: In A.D. 64 there were rumors and suspicions that emperor Nero was responsible for the fire that burned much of Rome. Needing a scapegoat, Nero blamed the unpopular Christians, thus their persecution began and it was severe. From the locations mentioned in the pastorals and church tradition we know that Paul was freed from his first Roman imprisonment and traveled to Ephesus, Colossae, Rome, Macedonia, Asia Minor, Spain, Crete, Nicopolis, and Greece. After this, he was arrested and brought to Rome for his second Roman imprisonment. With Nero's persecution in the air, Paul's fellow Christians abandoned him, 1:15; 4:10. At his first defense before the Imperial Court, no one stood with him; all forsook him, 4:16. This is a much different circumstance than the one he faced during his first Roman imprisonment where Paul was chained to a Roman guard 24/7 but he was allowed to stay in a rented house at his own expense. He was also allowed visitors anytime he wanted and because of this he evangelized many including some in Caesar's own household (Acts 28:16, 30-31; Philippians 1:13; 4:22). But now Paul is in a Roman prison, under horrible conditions; it's likely a cold dungeon, which is why he asks Timothy to bring his coat, 4:13. And unlike his first imprisonment where he knew he was going to be released and was (Philippians 2:24), this time, he knew he was going to die at the hands of the Romans, 4:6-8, 17-18. This is the background to 2 Timothy and it's evident throughout the letter that Paul knows he's on his last days.

Purpose: This letter comes about five years after 1 Timothy. Paul knows that he doesn't have much time, 4:6-8, so he desperately wants to see Timothy—his beloved spiritual son—one last time. This is also why this letter is different from Paul's other letters, i.e., it's very personal, 1:3-4. With Nero's persecution as the backdrop, which caused many Christians to turn their backs on the Lord (and Paul, 1:15; 4:16), Paul wants to encourage Timothy to not follow suit; he must remain resolute in the face of all the apostasy and persecution. This is crucial because Timothy is still in Ephesus; we know this because Paul asks him to greet Onesiphorus who lives in Ephesus, 1:16-18; 4:19. If you recall from our study of 1 Timothy, Timothy was in Ephesus to undo all the damage done by the false and erroneous teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 18-20; 2:8-15; 4:1-16; 6:3-5). Well the problem is still there; he's still facing the false teachers and their apostasy, 2:14-18 (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20), 23; 3:1-9, 13; 4:1-4. So Paul urges Timothy not to shrink back from the Gospel truth, 1:6-14; 2:1-13. Timothy must stand on God's Word: he must avoid the sinful ways around him, 2:22, and instead stand on God's Word—continue to study it, live it—and teach others how to do the same, 1:13-14; 2:1-13, 14-26; 3:14-17; 4:2. He must not let the apostasy, 4:3-4, or persecution, 3:12; 4:5, make him timid, 1:6-7; 2:1-3; 3:14-17, instead he must endure, 2:1-13; 4:5.