

## **Covenant History—First Timothy: *Order in the Court...uh, Church!***

### **Date**

The only indication of the date of the letter is Paul's statement in 1:3, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus..." The letter seems to have been written, then, when Paul was leaving Ephesus for Macedonia.<sup>1</sup>

Acts records three occasions when Paul was in or near Ephesus:

18:19-21

19:1-41

20:16-38

On the first and third occasion, Paul left Ephesus to go to Jerusalem. Only on the second occasion did he leave Ephesus to go to Macedonia. "After the uproar [in Ephesus] ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia" (Acts 20:1). This would have been about the year A.D. 56.

It's quite possible, however, that the letter was written later, after Luke concluded writing the book of Acts. And this is the majority opinion of conservative scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Acts concludes by telling us that Paul lived two whole years in Rome at his own expense, under a kind of house arrest (ca. 60-62). We learn, however, from what are trusted to be reliable sources outside the Bible that Paul was released from prison, did further mission work, and was imprisoned a second time, and finally executed under Nero. It's during this brief period after his

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<sup>1</sup> Unless his "urging" was not done in person, but by a letter, or by a third party, acting as Paul's messenger to Timothy

<sup>2</sup> Most liberals deny that 1 Timothy was even written by Paul

release from prison that most conservative scholars believe 1 Timothy was written. This would put the date of the letter at perhaps 63 or 64.

## **Timothy**

Timothy is the perhaps the best known of all of Paul's companions and fellow-workers in the cause of the gospel. He was a native of either Lystra or Derbe in the region of Galatia and appears to have been converted during Paul's first missionary journey (ca. 46-47) about 16 or 18 years prior to when this letter was written.

We first encounter Timothy in Acts 16 early in Paul's second missionary journey.

Acts 16:1-3

We also learn some interesting things about Timothy, personally, and about his calling, in these two letters that Paul addresses to him.

In the first place, we learn that his mother was a faithful and devout woman.

2 Timothy 1:5

And she apparently took her task of raising her son very seriously.

2 Timothy 3:14-15

So although Timothy's father was not a believer, his mother saw to it that her son was properly instructed in the faith. He grew up a faithful Jew, knowledgeable in the Scriptures. And then when he heard the preaching of the gospel under the ministry of the apostle Paul, he came to believe in Jesus Christ. This, as I have said, would have been during Paul's first missionary journey.

Then on his second missionary journey Paul expressed his wish for Timothy to accompany him in his labors for Christ. He was then set apart for the work through the laying on of hands by Paul and the elders of the church.

1 Timothy 4:14

2 Timothy 1:6

By all accounts, Paul and Timothy were very close to each other, very much like a father and son. Paul refers to him not only as his fellow-worker (Rom. 16:21), but also as his “faithful and beloved child in the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:17). They shared a deep affection for one another.

Timothy was one of Paul’s most trusted co-workers. We frequently find Paul sending him to one place or another as his messenger and representative.

To Corinth: “I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.” (1 Cor. 4:17) “When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am” (1 Cor. 16:10)

To Philippi: “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you” (Phil. 2:19)

To Thessalonica: “We sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith” (1 Thes. 3:2)

Likewise, we find him being commissioned by Paul to labor in the church at Ephesus. “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus...” (1 Tim. 1:3).

## Theme—Order in the Court...uh, Church!

Paul tells us very specifically why he wrote this letter in 3:14-15.

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

“I am writing these things to you so that...you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.” Paul’s chief concern in the letter is *order in the church*. This is not the only letter in which he expresses this concern.

I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote *good order* and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:35)

But all things should be done decently *and in order* (1 Cor. 14:40)

For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good order* and the firmness of your faith in Christ (Col. 2:5)

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained *into order*, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you (Tit. 1:5)

Do you see that Paul was concerned about good order? An unruly, undisciplined, disorderly life (or family or church) is contrary to godliness. God is a God of order. We are told in Genesis,

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness covered the face of the deep (1:1-2)

God brought *order* out of this original chaos. When it says that he

created the heavens and the earth but that they were without form and void, we are to understand that he created undifferentiated matter and energy, which lacked organization and structure and meaning. But God imposed order on it. He brought order out of chaos by separating things that differ, putting each in its proper place, and assigning them to different tasks.

- ❖ He separated light from darkness.
- ❖ He separated the earth and the sky.
- ❖ He separated the waters from the waters—the waters that were above the sky from the waters that were below the sky
- ❖ He separated the waters from the dry land

Little by little, you see, he is creating order, by separating and organizing the things he has made.

He creates the sun, moon, and stars and fixes them in their appropriate places in the heavens, to serve as signs for the seasons, so that man may know what time of year it is and order his agricultural endeavors accordingly.

He creates distinct kinds of plants and animals with different purposes and with natures suitable for their purpose.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that God is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). He is a God of *order*. And Paul is writing to Timothy about order in the church.

There are several areas of church life that he addresses in particular.

- I. Greeting (1:1-2)
- II. Order in the matter of doctrine (1:3-20)
- III. Order in matters related to the sexes in public worship (2:1-15)
- IV. Order in the matter of church government (3:1-16)
- V. Order in matters related to Timothy's ministry in the church at Ephesus (4:1-6:10)
  - A. Specific doctrinal errors to guard against (4:1-6)
  - B. The benefits of godliness (4:7-10)
  - C. Personal exhortation for Timothy to lead an exemplary life (4:11-16)
  - D. Instructions for specific classes of people in the church (5:1-6:10)
    - i. Men (5:1)
    - ii. Women (5:2)
    - iii. Widows (5:3-16)
    - iv. Elders (5:17-25)
    - v. Slaves (6:1-2a)
    - vi. Those who teach false doctrine (6:2b-10)
- VI. Closing exhortation