

*This character study / commentary into Apostle Paul is based mostly on Charles Swindoll's "Great Lives in God's Word" series on Paul and A.T. Robertson "Epochs in the Life of Paul: A Study of Development of Paul's Career." Main source materials are based on contents in these books unless otherwise noted.

Sunday September 10, 2023

Lesson 20: The Pastoral Epistles

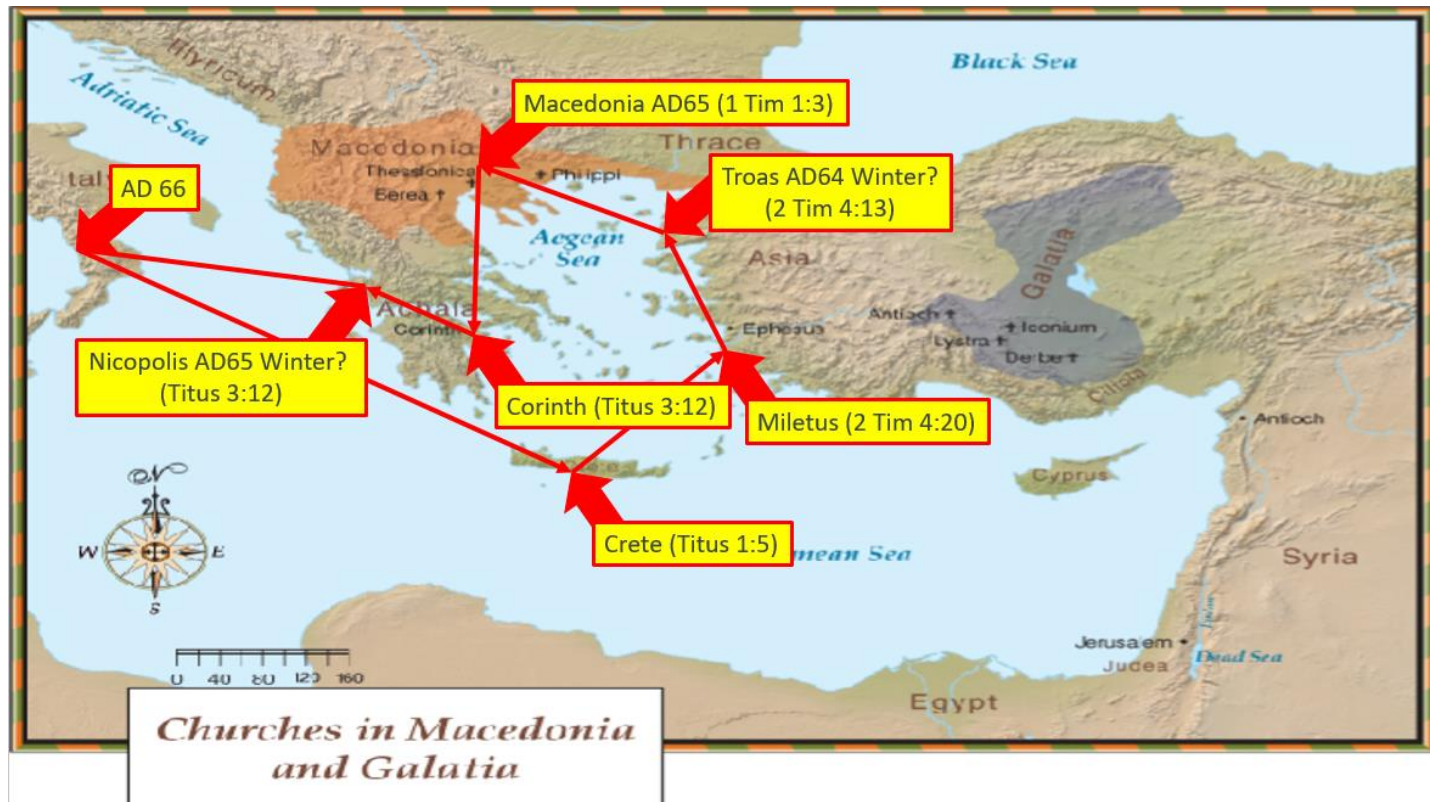
Reference: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus

When we last saw Paul, he was on the verge of being released from his two-year imprisonment in Rome – ending a 5-year imprisonment since the end of this third missionary journey. During his two-year imprisonment, he had evangelized and raised many ministry leaders while keeping up with church activities in Asia Minor and Macedonia.

Timeline – Paul's Travels between His Two Rome Imprisonment

Shortly after writing the letter to the church in Philippi, Paul was released from his house-arrest in Rome; evidently, Nero and the Roman authorities found no justification for keeping him on guard, or that much like Felix, Festus, and Agrippa from Caesarea, they found no evidence that Paul committed acts deserving of death. According to church traditions, Paul was released sometime in AD62.

Before his 5-year imprisonment, Paul had wanted to visit Rome and then start an evangelistic tour of the Western Empire as far as Spain (Acts 19:21; Rom 15:28). However, during his 5-year imprisonment, false teachers had infiltrated many of the churches in Macedonia and Asia (Rom 16:17; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 6:3). Hence, after his release from house arrest in Rome, Paul wanted to (first) stabilize these troubled churches. He would effectively go on another tour – his fourth "missionary journey" through the churches in Asia Minor.



From his letters to Timothy and Titus, and from church tradition, we can formulate the following timeline of Paul's travels after AD62:

- He departed Rome for a tour with a team of trained ministers and leaders, where he (evidently) plan to deploy as his assistants for long-term assignments

- His first stop would be the Island of Crete, where he would spend several weeks; after which, he will leave Titus there to continue the stabilizing work at the church (Titus 1:5).
- He then took the rest of his team with him to Miletus, where he left a sick Trophimus in the care of friends (2 Tim 4:20).
- Before departing Miletus, he sent for Timothy – who was in Ephesus at the time, sent by Paul from Rome (cf 1 Tim 1:3). Paul wanted to avoid Ephesus (again) possibly to avoid becoming entangled in local affairs (cf Acts 20:16).
- He left Miletus for Troas (cf 2 Tim 4:13), spent the winter there (AD64) and (possibly) wrote Titus.
- He then left Troas for Macedonia, where he evidently left his cloak and books behind (2 Tim 4:13). He may have made plans to visit Timothy before leaving for Macedonia (1 Tim 3:14-15; 4:13) though uncertain if this visit ever happened.
- He then left Macedonia for Corinth then to Nicopolis where he hoped to spend the winter there with Titus (Titus 3:12).
- While in Nicopolis, during the winter or early spring, Paul suddenly find himself under arrested again, possibly for the newly invented charges against the Roman state and in particular with the burning of Rome -- it was a matter of public knowledge that Paul had been in Rome not long before the burning of Rome. This brings him back to Rome for his second imprisonment

Timeline – Paul’s Whereabouts from his letter to Titus

Titus was a young co-laborer of Paul who first appeared on the biblical scene in ~ AD49 during the dispute over the need for circumcision for salvation (Gal 2:1-5). Paul’s letter of Galatians informed us that Titus is a Gentile with no Jewish roots (Gal 2:3), and he very likely could have been part of the “other believers” to accompany Paul and Barnabas to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (cf Acts 15:2). Titus would later appear again during Paul’s third missionary journey, serving as Paul’s representative on several trips to Corinth (2 Cor 8:23). He was tasked at that time with the difficult ministry work of mending the broken relationship between Paul and the church (2 Cor 2:12-13; See also Lesson 14 – Pastoral Care for a Worldly Church), ultimately bringing the good report of change in Corinth (2 Cor 7:6-14). During the Winter of AD 57 when Paul was in Corinth, Titus was evidently sent elsewhere as he wasn’t mentioned in Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, nor mentioned as being with Paul as Paul made his journey back towards Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). Titus would resurface again many years later on the Island of Crete, where Paul made a stop after his release from Rome (Titus 1:5). Based on the assignments given to him (church in Corinth, Island of Crete), Titus was likely a tactful troubleshooter effective in conciliating people¹.

From Paul’s account in the book of Titus, we can observe Paul’s whereabouts and ministry activities with Titus after his first Rome imprisonment:

- Though there was no mention of Titus traveling with Paul’s team after leaving Rome (AD62), Titus could have been part of that team of ministry leaders when they arrived in Crete, or he could have met Paul there.
- After spending several weeks with Paul on the Island of Crete, Paul and his team of ministry leaders would leave and head for Miletus, leaving Titus in charge of the mission on the Island. Titus’ task was to put in place a structure for which the church can operate (Titus 1:5).
- While Paul was somewhere between Miletus and Macedonia, he would write this letter (book of Titus) to give Titus his needed authority to enact change.
- Paul had hoped that Titus would meet him in Nicopolis during the winter of AD65 or AD66 (Titus 3:12), and was evidently with Paul on his journey back to Rome before Paul’s second arrest (2 Tim 4:10), being sent by Paul to Dalmatia. This would be the last known reference of Titus before Paul’s death.

¹ Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospel to Glory: Exploring the New Testament*

Timeline – Paul’s Whereabouts from his letters to Timothy

Timothy was a native of Lystra (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim 3:11) who is half Jewish. He was raised to be well-versed in Scripture due to his mother and grandmother’s influence. He likely came to Christ during Paul’s first missionary journey into his home town (Acts 14:8-20), and was recruited by Paul during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-4). He had developed a strong reputation as an ambassador for Christ within his community before Paul recruited him. Since then, he elevated his status to be one of Paul’s key coworker and ministry leader.

Timothy had joined Paul and Silas on the second missionary journey. He was a key liaison for Paul in his communication with the church in Thessalonica while Paul was in Athens and Corinth (Acts 17:15; 18:5; 1 Thess 3:2-8). He also became a valued partner in Paul’s ministry in Corinth (1 Cor 16:1-4; 10-11). Since Timothy is mentioned often in Paul’s missions, the amount of encounters he had with Paul is difficult to pinpoint. He was evidently with Paul in Macedonia when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 1:1), and he likely wintered with Paul in Corinth that year (Rom 16:21). He wasn’t mentioned to be with Paul during Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea, but he evidently visited Paul while he was in Rome since he co-wrote three of the four prison epistles. Sometime during Paul’s Rome imprisonment, Timothy was sent to Philippi (Phil 2:19-23). After Philippi, Timothy evidently went to Ephesus to oversee the ministry at that church (1 Tim 1:3).

From Paul’s account in the book of 1 and 2 Timothy, we can observe Paul’s whereabouts and ministry activities with Timothy after his first Rome imprisonment:

- After arriving in Miletus, Paul evidently sent for Timothy (in Ephesus at the time) to meet him there, and then left a sick Trophimus with him (2 Tim. 4:20).
- As he arrived in Troas and spent the winter there. He may have corresponded with Timothy regarding the conditions of the church in Ephesus, citing his desire to go and help (1 Tim 3:14-15; 4:13).
- After Paul left Troas and arrived in Macedonia, he sent the letter of 1 Timothy, which included a more complete qualifier for church leaders compared with Titus (1 Tim 3:1-12) among other church structure issues.
- After Paul was arrested and sent to Rome the second time, he wrote the letter of 2 Timothy shortly before he would be martyred. In that letter, he asked for Timothy to visit him and to bring to him some of his personal items that he left in Troas (2 Tim 4:13). It is unknown if Paul ever saw Timothy again before his death. However, the writer of Hebrews informed us that Timothy did make it to Rome (Heb 13:23) and was also imprisoned.
- Paul’s first letter to Timothy was a pastoral epistle encouraging Timothy to act upon pastoral responsibilities (1 Tim 1:18; 3:15; 6:20).
- Paul’s final letter to Timothy was more of a personal epistle that effectively highlighted his legacy with encouragement for future ministry leaders to embrace the commitment and count the cost. Unlike his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul very likely knew that his days on earth is numbered when he wrote 2 Timothy.

Analysis – Paul’s Second Imprisonment in Rome

Paul’s final letter to Timothy was written likely with full knowledge that his Earthly life is coming to an end. There were no more instructions to be given, as Timothy is already a seasoned minister and leader. Rather, the letter was a reflection on the things to focus on as a minister and an ambassador for Christ. Swindoll identified four points that his final letter aims to communicate (principles summarized):

- **A Clarion Call to Courageous Living (2 Tim 1:5-12)** – Reflecting upon Timothy’s past and his upbringing, Paul wanted to encourage Timothy to remember how God made him the way he is, and to

courageously apply his divine design in the work of ministry (2 Tim 1:5-8). To fear is human, not divine. In the same manner, Christians in ministry should live courageously by recognizing how God made us who we are, and not be fearful of our identity in Christ in our interactions with the world.

- **A Checklist for Faithful Service (2 Tim 2:1-26)** – As Paul continues, he wanted to leave Timothy – and by extension, all future ministers of Christ – seven exhortations for faithful service:
 - Be strong in grace (2:1)
 - Be faithful to entrust truth (2:2)
 - Be as brave as a soldier (2:3-4)
 - Be as disciplined as an athlete (2:5)
 - Be as hard-working as a farmer (2:6)
 - Be as diligent as a workman (2:15)
 - Be as gentle as a servant (2:24-25)
- **A Warning List for Difficult Times (2 Tim 3:1-17)** – Having stated the seven characteristics of faithful service, Paul then transitions from concepts and ideals into reality; and the reality is, ministry is NOT easy. There will be terrible times, people will be worldly, especially in the last days. Paul tells Timothy to have nothing to do with such people (2 Tim 3:5). The actual warning is that over time, there will be an erosion of standard – a departure from the truth. Hypocrisy, deception, and a watering down of doctrine will become the norm. The proper response is to remain faithful to what has been taught (3:10-11) given the fact that evil doers and imposters will continue to deceive others (3:13). Everyone who wants to live a godly life will face persecution (3:12). The proper response from Christians and leaders is to “...continue in the things you have learned (our beliefs), and continue in those things of which you have become convinced (our convictions) (3:14)”
- **An Urgent Charge to a Ministry of Proclamation (2 Tim 4:)** – Given all of the previously stated points, Paul ends his letter to Timothy by encouraging him to effectively keep things simple and just preach the Word. Don't be creative, don't be cute, just preach the Word (4:2). The time will come when people will want preachers to preach what they want to hear (4:3-4), and this begins when preachers tries to “dress-up” the gospel message. Paul says to simply be prepared to preach the Word as is, correcting and rebuking with sound doctrine through patience and careful instruction (4:2).

Paul's Earthly End – From Swindoll's Write-up:

In the final verses of 2 Timothy, Paul added some personal remarks about the loneliness of his condition, how many have deserted him, including those who were previously allies. Luke was evidently the one bold enough to remain loyal to Paul, staying by his side (2 Tim 4:11). In the last known words written by Paul, he desires to see Timothy and Mark one last time (2 Tim 4:11; 21). It was a sad ending to a letter that offered a preview of his final days. Swindoll probably offered the best descriptive setting in his closing remarks on the life of Paul:

His earthly end came swiftly...abruptly. Alone and without fear, Paul stared directly into the eyes of the execution squad. Several held rods with which they would beat him; one held the sharp axe with which he would sever the apostle's head from his shoulders. Few words were spoken. They marched him through the heavy gate and beyond the stone wall that surrounded Rome... Crowds journeying to Rome knew by the rods and the axe that an execution would soon transpire. They had seen such sights before. They passed it off with a shrug. It happened yesterday; it would happen tomorrow.

The manacled prisoner, walking stiffly, ragged and filthy from the dungeon, was not ashamed or degraded. The squad of grim-faced soldiers never noticed as they frowned and stared ahead, but there was a faint smile on their prisoner's face – he was en route to a triumph – the crowning day of his reward. For to him to live was Christ, to die, gain. No axe across the back of his neck would rob him of his triumphant destiny. It would, in fact, initiate it!

They marched Paul to the third milestone on the Ostian Way, to a little pinewood in a glade – a glade of the tombs, known now as *Tre Fontane*. He is believed to have been put overnight in a tiny cell, near the place of his execution. At first light next dawn, the soldiers took Paul to a stump-like pillar, the executioner stood ready, stark naked, axe in hand.

The men stripped Paul – tied him, kneeling upright, to the low pillar, which exposed his back and neck. The lictors beat him with rods for the last time. He groaned and bled from his nose and mouth. And then, without a hint of hesitation, the executioner frowned as he swung the blade that gleamed in the morning sun high above his head, then brought it down swiftly, hitting its mark with a dull thud.

The head of Paul rolled down into the dust.

In that brutal moment, silently and invisibly, the soul of the great apostle – the man of grace and grit – was immediately set free. His spirit soared into the heavens: Absent from the body he was, at last, at home with the Lord.

Reflections: