



TGP: 1 Timothy 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 4:1-8; Titus 2:11-14

PAUL

THE MENTOR



BY ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER

WHILE PAUL PREACHED the gospel everywhere he went and planted numerous churches, perhaps his most important contribution was mentoring men such as Timothy and Titus. Many believe Timothy and Titus were pastors of local congregations. More likely these men served, however, as Paul's apostolic delegates who were temporarily assigned to their locations (Ephesus and the island of Crete, respectively) so they could deal with problems in those respective churches.¹ Having trained these men, Paul trusted them to deal effectively with sticky ministry challenges, whether confronting, and if needed removing, sinning elders (Timothy's assignment) or appointing qualified leaders (Titus's task).

Paul's Personal Background

Paul grew up in the bustling city of Tarsus. He studied under the well-known Rabbi Gamaliel I and zealously persecuted the early Christians. An encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus caused a radical change in Paul's outlook: one moment, he viewed Jesus as a messianic pretender cursed by God, the next he believed Jesus was Messiah and Lord. The church's most committed nemesis had become its most fervent propagator.

After a quiet period of preparation (Gal. 1:21-24), Paul joined Barnabas in the early church's mission to the Gentiles (Acts 11:25-26). Paul quickly assumed leadership and gathered a group of coworkers including Timothy and Titus. While assuming ultimate

responsibility for the churches he planted, Paul delegated certain tasks to trusted associates. This became a necessity especially toward the end of Paul's life due to imprisonments (Eph. 6:20; Phil. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:8), ailments (Gal. 4:13-15), and advancing age.²

Mentor to Timothy

Timothy was in Ephesus, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire, smaller only than Rome and Alexandria and boasting a population of 200,000-250,000.³ In his first letter, Paul delineated Timothy's assignment: he was to "command certain people not to teach false doctrines" (1 Tim. 1:3, NIV). Paul even skipped the customary introductory thanksgiving most likely because of the urgency he felt!

At the outset, Paul referred

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South entrance gate to the agora at Ephesus. Paul may have taught adjacent to this gate when in Ephesus.



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Above: Located in Rome, St. Paul's Beyond the Wall marks, according to tradition, Paul's burial place.

Right: Interior of the Mamertine prison where Paul

was imprisoned at one time. It is beneath the church of Giuseppe dei Falegnami in modern Rome. The lower chamber was probably initially a cistern and dated to the 6th cent. BC.



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to Timothy as his “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). Earlier, he had said of Timothy, “I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests” (Phil. 2:20, CSB). The expression “true son” could, but need not necessarily, imply that Paul led Timothy to faith in Christ. Acts 16:1-2 already referred to Timothy as “a disciple,” even though Timothy may have had contact with Paul at an earlier occasion, such as Paul’s first visit to Lystra (Acts 14:8-20). Most likely, “true son in the faith” meant Timothy genuinely reproduced Paul’s own spiritual characteristics, as a biological son would reflect his father’s natural characteristics.

Paul’s first letter to Timothy was written about fifteen years after their initial encounter. Since Timothy was likely a young man

in his mid- or early twenties—Timothy’s designation “disciple” implies independent adulthood—when he first met the apostle. Timothy would have been in his late thirties or early forties at the time of writing, hence the reference to Timothy’s “youth” (1 Tim. 4:12); the apostle Paul would have been in his early sixties.⁴ The respective terms “apostle...son” therefore indicate both the different degrees of authority and the affectionate relationship between these two men of God. As his life and

ministry began to wind down, Paul endeavored to preserve his legacy through his adoptive son in the faith. The phrase “true son” thus designates Timothy as Paul’s rightful successor.

When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, a few years had passed since the first epistle. The visit Paul envisaged (1 Tim. 3:14-15; 4:13) may or may not have taken place as the apostle’s plans were known to change. At the time of the second letter, Timothy was still on assignment in Ephesus; Paul

was no longer in Macedonia (1:3) but once again in prison, most likely in Rome (2 Tim. 1:8). Unlike his first imprisonment, where he stayed in his own rented house and received all who came to see him (Acts 28:30), Paul was now suffering “to the point of being bound like a criminal” (2 Tim. 2:9, CSB) and was “being poured out as a drink offering” (4:6, CSB), meaning his death was imminent.

Paul’s second letter to Timothy

is much more personal in nature than the first. Paul was in a reminiscent mood (1:3-6), and the epistle assumed the character of a last testament in which Paul appealed to Timothy to “Preach the word...in season and out of season” (4:2, CSB) as he passed on the mantle of leadership to him. Although Paul urged Timothy to come to him “soon...before winter” (vv. 9,21), the text is unclear whether Paul saw him one last time. Timothy’s

role was particularly vital as many of Paul’s associates had abandoned him by the time he wrote this second and final letter to Timothy (4:10-11,16). Paul’s ministry was about to end; after his passing, his legacy would devolve to Timothy and other apostolic delegates such as Titus.

Mentor to Titus

While not as close to Paul as Timothy, Titus, too, was a trusted coworker. When Paul went to confer with the leaders of the Jerusalem church concerning the gospel he preached, he took Titus with him (Gal. 2:1-3). Since Titus was Greek and therefore a Gentile, Paul had not compelled him to be circumcised when converting to Christianity. This served to illustrate the nature of Paul’s gospel that proclaimed God’s salvation in Christ by sheer grace apart from any human merit. This was contrary to the false gospel Paul’s opponents, the Judaizers, preached (vv. 3-5). While Acts does not mention Titus, his name surfaces repeatedly in Second Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5-6,13; 8:6,16,23; 12:18; written in the mid-50s AD) and twice in Galatians (Gal. 2:1,3; written ca. AD 49; Acts covers to AD 62).

Titus’s assignment found him on the island of Crete, where he was to take care of unfinished business, appointing elders in every city (Titus 1:5). While doubtless hyperbolic, Homer had famously



Left: Inside one of the hillside houses in Ephesus. Located behind the shops on the north side of Curetes Street was a wealthy residential area referred to as the terrace houses. Each house contained several rooms; many homes were multi-storied and had mosaic decorations inside.

Below: The site of ancient Lystra near the village of Khatyn Serai in modern Turkey; many believe Lystra to have been Timothy’s hometown. Paul healed a crippled man in Lystra, which caused some townspeople to honor him as a god. Opposition arose and the people of Lycus stoned Paul and left him for dead (Acts 14:8-19).

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Left: At Gortyn, Crete, one of five temples dedicated to pagan gods on the island. This one was dedicated to the Egyptian deities: Isis, Serapis, and Hermes-Anubis. Paul cautioned Titus that the

overseer of a local church was to hold onto “the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9, CSB).

spoken of “Crete of the hundred cities.”⁵ About twenty cities are attested in Titus’ day,⁶ the most prominent of which were Gortyn, the administrative capital⁷—and Knossos, a Roman colony Augustus likely established and that was famous for its Bronze-Age palace.⁸ At one time, Crete had been the center of the Minoan culture, one of Europe’s most ancient civilizations (ca. 2600–1100 BC). In Titus’s day, people on Crete worshiped in cults venerating Augustus, Roma, the deified Emperor Claudius, Asclepius (a god of healing), and the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis.⁹ Crete, an island of 3,219 square miles, is mountainous. Travel was often difficult, especially since Crete lacked a system of Roman roads.¹⁰ Thus Titus’s task was challenging both logistically and spiritually; evangelizing the entire island was an ambitious undertaking.

As in his first letter to Timothy, Paul designed his epistle to Titus to encourage his apostolic delegate to complete his assignment and to stand firm against his opponents.

By that time, Paul had known and been associated with Titus in ministry for close to two decades, and Titus had proven himself as a coworker who could be entrusted with delicate and difficult tasks. In the present case, Titus’s challenge came from the magnitude of the task, the false teachers’ opposition, and the widespread and rampant immorality of the Cretan culture.¹¹ Cretans were reputed to be “liars, evil beast, and lazy gluttons” (1:12).¹² The expression “to play the Cretan” or “to speak like a Cretan” was a synonym for lying.¹³

“We may surmise that later on, when Artemas took Titus’s place on the island (Titus 3:12) and [Titus] met up with Paul in Nicopolis, the apostle sent Titus to Dalmatia in Artemas’s place (2 Tim 4:10).”¹⁴ While Paul’s ministry was about to come to an end, his influence was to continue through the work of his trusted associates whom he had strategically trained over decades of faithful ministry and who were poised to take the baton their mentor was about to

pass to them. As far as Paul was concerned, he could confidently say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7–8, NIV). 📖

1. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1-2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 8.

2. Abraham J. Malherbe, “Paulus Senex,” *Restoration Quarterly* 36 (1994): 197–207.

3. Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 17.

4. David W. Pao, “Let No One Despise Your Youth: Church and the World in the Pastoral Epistles,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 4 (2014): 243–55.

5. Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Rodney Merrill (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2007), 2:649; p. 61.

6. Ian F. Sanders, *Roman Crete* (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 11.

7. Jane E. Francis and Anna Kouremenos, *Roman Crete: New Perspectives* (Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books, 2016), 99–103.

8. David W. J. Gill, “A Saviour for the Cities of Crete: The Roman Background to the Epistle to Titus” in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Peter J. Williams et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 224–27.

9. *Ibid.*, 227.

10. *Ibid.*, 221.

11. Köstenberger, *Commentary*, 319–23.

12. Citing the Cretan writer Epimenides (6th cent. BC); cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.59.2; see also Polybius, *Hist.* 6.46.3; Cicero, *De Republica* 3.9.15.

13. “κρητιζο” (*kretizo*, to speak like a Cretan) in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1901), 995.

14. Köstenberger, *Commentary*, 281. Dalmatia is in modern Croatia; Nicopolis is on the coast of western Greece.

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