An Investigation of the Mission Motif in the Letters to Timothy and Titus with Implications for the Pauline Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles

ABSTRACT: This exploration of the mission motif in the Pastoral Epistles (here called “Letters to Timothy and Titus” [LTT]) fills an often-neglected gap in scholarship on these letters. In addition, the investigation of the mission motif in the LTT serves as a case study in reexamining the plausibility of Pauline authorship. While conventional avenues of investigation—such as vocabulary and stylistic elements, theological and ecclesiological comparisons, and so on—have largely proved inconclusive, a study of the mission motif provides a fresh way of approaching the issue. Not only are these writings grounded in the Pauline mission but the strategy and missionary ethos reflected in these letters is congruent with the mission strategy in Paul’s undisputed letters (which, for purposes of this article, are identified as the other 10 Pauline letters in the NT canon) and the book of Acts, which heightens the plausibility that Paul wrote the LTT, whether personally or with the help of an amanuensis.

KEYWORDS: Pastoral Epistles, Pauline authorship, mission motif, pseudonymity, Timothy, Titus, apostolic delegates.

Discussions concerning the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (PE), here referred to as the Letters to Timothy and Titus (LTT), customarily take

1. Putting 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus into a category apart from Paul’s other canonical epistles and designating them “Pastoral Epistles” may unduly reflect a historical-critical decision favoring pseudonymous authorship. “Letters to Timothy and Titus” is chosen as a less potentially prejudicial and more neutral and descriptive category that does not
their point of departure from alleged discrepancies or incongruities that cast aspersions on Pauline authorship. Differences in vocabulary and style, the letters’ alleged early Catholicism, and various theological and conceptual differences have all been adduced to demonstrate that there is a chasm between Paul’s undisputed letters and the LTT that renders pseudonymity (or allonymity) most plausible within the framework of historical-critical scholarship. Those who affirm the Pauline authorship of the LTT often allow those who are skeptical toward this possibility to define the terms of the debate. Engaging in point-by-point rebuttals, they show, not implausibly, that none of these arguments against Pauline authorship proves conclusive. In the end, the result often resembles a sort of stalemate, an ultimately dissatisfying outcome for those who (like myself) believe that there are strong positive theological implications for affirming the Pauline authorship of the LTT.

In the present essay, therefore, I would like to depart from the customary, often overly defensive approach taken by advocates of authenticity (acknowledging that I myself have taken this route more than once in previous publications). Instead, I will seek to craft a more positive argument for authenticity by investigating an underserved motif in the LTT, mission. Not only will this study contribute to a better understanding of points of connectivity between Paul’s undisputed letters and the LTT but it will also move the discussion to a more neutral, less prejudicial ground. In fact, the mission motif is absolutely vital for a proper assessment of the place of the necessarily drive a wedge between Paul’s other canonical letters and these epistles. This is also the nomenclature adopted in Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), esp. pp. 88–89; and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1–2 Timothy and Titus*, BTCP (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017).

2. The present essay adapts relevant portions from Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1–2 Timothy and Titus*. Used by permission.

3. For a representative survey of the relevant issues, see Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, vol. 1: *A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 49–75. For the present purposes, I will identify Paul’s undisputed letters as his other 10 letters included in the NT canon, though of course critical scholars have disputed the Pauline authorship of letters such as Ephesians or Colossians. For the relevant introductory matters and a defense of Pauline authorship, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

LTT within the Pauline letter corpus and within biblical theology. The present investigation will thus serve as a case study in charting affinities between Paul’s undisputed letters and the LTT. The real contribution of this article, I believe, is its demonstration of how the outworking of the mission motif in the LTT dovetails with Paul’s mission as set forth elsewhere in the NT, both theologically and practically, with this affinity supporting Pauline authorship.5

The Place of the Letters to Timothy and Titus in Pauline Chronology

Before turning to the mission theme in the LTT, it will be helpful to sketch the historical location of the LTT relative to the early Christian mission and briefly accentuate the positive picture, that is, highlight poignant affinities other than mission and point the way to treatments that flesh out these affinities. In terms of chronology, as I detail elsewhere, and as is widely believed by others, the events and circumstances referenced in the LTT are best accommodated subsequent to the closing of the book of Acts.6 Most likely, Paul (whose plans were known to change from time to time) engaged in a second Aegean ministry after his release from his first Roman imprisonment, which may have taken place in AD 62 (cf. Acts 28).7 He probably wrote the first letter to Timothy from Macedonia (1 Tim 1:3) sometime after the year 62 but before 65 or 66 (the likely date of his second Roman

5. For those who remain unconvinced of the Pauline authorship of the LTT, I hope that the study of the mission motif in these letters will still prove enlightening and instructive.

6. See the discussion in the introductory section of Köstenberger, Commentary on 1–2 Timothy and Titus. For an alternate position, see Stanley E. Porter, “Pauline Chronology and the Question of Pseudonymity of the Pastoral Epistles,” in Paul and Pseudepigraphy, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Gregory P. Fewster, Pauline Studies 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 65–88. Peter Walker, “Revisiting the Pastoral Epistles: Part I,” EuroJTh 21 (2012): 4–16; and idem, “Revisiting the Pastoral Epistles: Part II,” EuroJTh 21 (2012): 120–32, attempts to make a case for an early dating of the LTT—the period between September AD 55 and January AD 57 for 1 Timothy and Titus and soon after March AD 60 for 2 Timothy—though I consider his proposal that Paul wrote the LTT before the Prison Epistles unconvincing. 2 Timothy seems to be associated indisputably in close proximity to Paul’s martyrdom (e.g., 2 Tim 4:6–8), and certainly Acts is silent regarding 1 Timothy and Titus or circumstances occasioning the writing of these letters.

imprisonment, resulting in his martyrdom under Nero, who died in 68.⁸ Timothy, who was at that time stationed in Ephesus, needed counsel on how to deal with false teachers in the Ephesian church, which provided the occasion for Paul to issue a series of instructions. Paul likely wrote the letter to Titus either between 1 and 2 Timothy or prior to 1 Timothy from an unknown location (possibly Macedonia or Achaia).⁹ He probably wrote 2 Timothy from Rome subsequent to 1 Timothy and Titus during his second, more severe imprisonment in 65 or 66 and suffered a martyr’s death not long after penning what turned out to be his final canonical letter.

The Place of the LTT vis-à-vis Paul’s Undisputed Letters

Turning to a quick glance at the relationship between the LTT and Paul’s undisputed letters, a positive case for Pauline authorship can be drawn along the following lines.¹⁰ Not only is there a difference between public letters sent to congregations and personal correspondence addressed to individuals¹¹ but Paul’s desire to preserve his apostolic legacy adequately accounts for the emphasis on church leadership and the faithful passing on of apostolic tradition in these letters. In addition, Paul may have employed amanuenses, as he did at other occasions.¹² What is more, while Paul’s earlier letters owe

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⁸. See my discussion in Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown, 394–95.
¹². For an argument that Luke served as Paul’s amanuensis, see Ben Witherington III, Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians, vol. 1: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 67–68. See also
more to conceptual orality, regularly featuring parentheses and anacolutha (syntactical inconsistencies), the LTT are closer to conceptual writing, which suggests that “their author has expressed himself more carefully and probably had more time at his disposal than the author . . . of the other ten Paulines.”

With regard to church structure and offices, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches they established as early as AD 50 (Acts 14:23; see 11:30; 15:2; 20:28–31; 21:18), and the terms “overseer” (ἐπίσκοπος) and “elder” (πρεσβύτερος) are used interchangeably with reference to the same office (Titus 1:5, 7; see Acts 20:17, 28). Paul’s instruction to Titus to “appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5) therefore draws on well-established precedents. What is more, the fact that Titus is to appoint elders in every town also speaks against the presence of a more developed ecclesiastical hierarchy at the time of writing. Elsewhere, Paul addresses one of his letters to the “overseers and deacons” at Philippi (Phil 1:1), which coheres well with the two-tiered structure presupposed in 1 Timothy. Finally, the emphasis on qualifications for overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy and Titus speaks decisively in favor of a first-century date because a second-century writer would almost certainly have expected his readers already to be familiar with this pattern.

With regard to the Christian message, it has sometimes been argued that references to the gospel as “sound teaching,” “the faith,” or “the truth” (1 Tim 1:10, 19; 3:9, 13; 4:1, 6; 6:3, 10; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1) reflect


a later point in time when Christian teaching had shifted from a dynamic expression of faith in Christ to a fixed set of creedal beliefs. However, there is no reason Paul toward the end of his life should not look at the gospel as a precious stewardship to be passed on to the next generation of leaders. What is more, there are some indications that Paul even earlier viewed the gospel in comparable terms (e.g., Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 11:2; 4:17; 15:1–3). Similar observations apply to the references to virtues such as “godliness” (εὐσεβεία) in the LTT, not to mention references to both God and Christ as Savior, to the church as “God’s household,” and to “epiphany” (ἐπιφανεία) language.

The theology of the LTT is not identical in form to that of Paul’s other letters, but it can plausibly be viewed as complementary, rather than contradictory, and as no less Pauline than the earlier undisputed letters. As Eckhard Schnabel contends,

The absence of Pauline theological themes from the Pastoral Epistles (e.g., the cross, the Holy Spirit, the flesh/spirit dichotomy) does not prove inauthenticity. There is no reason why Paul should mention the whole range of basic theological topics in all of his letters, particularly in letters to coworkers who know his theology. It is only if it could be shown that the theology of the Pastoral Epistles contradicts Paul’s undisputed letters that we would have a serious problem.

This is not to deny that there are legitimate differences between Paul’s earlier undisputed letters and the LTT. Clearly, the LTT are written at a later juncture in the history and mission of the early church and aim to contextualize the Christian message in the midst of a unique set of circumstances. This is the genuine insight underlying pseudonymity proposals. However, there seems to be no compelling evidence to push the LTT beyond Paul’s lifetime into the post-Pauline period, especially if allowance is made for

17. Towner, Letters to Timothy and Titus, 174.
18. Schnabel, “Paul, Timothy, and Titus,” 393–95. See, e.g., David C. Verner, The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles, SBLDS 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), who argues that the metaphor of the “household of God” is used to enforce the traditional patriarchal structure of the household within the church in response to the charge that the church is subverting the political structures of the state; and David G. Horrell, “From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity,” JBL 120 (2001): 293–311, who contends that, whereas Paul addresses believers as “brothers,” the pseudo-Pauline letters use the model of a hierarchically structured household.
19. A possible fifth reason is that the chronology of the LTT seems to be incompatible with Acts.
Paul’s possible use of an amanuensis such as Luke. Historically, literarily, and theologically, these three letters fit at least as comfortably toward the end of Paul’s missionary activity as they do in the period following his death. To demonstrate the plausibility of this thesis, the rest of this essay will be taken up with a closer investigation of the mission motif in the LTT.

The Mission Motif in the Letters to Timothy and Titus

One of the most important questions concerning the LTT is the way in which these writings are grounded in the mission of the early church in general and in the mission of Paul in particular and thus convey his apostolic authority. It is highly probable that these letters were written after the other ten Pauline letters included in the NT canon. It is also evident that these letters are concerned with issues related to Paul’s legacy and the organization of the church at the onset of the subapostolic period. In this regard, it is entirely plausible that these instructions are grounded directly and personally in the mission of the apostle. That is, Paul himself prior to his martyrdom conveyed his ideas, vision, and instructions regarding the ordering of the church to his apostolic delegates. These delegates, in turn, were to pass these on to others. Thus, the vital contents of these letters became part and parcel of the apostolic foundation of the church (cf. Eph 2:20), which remained authoritative and normative throughout subsequent history.

The NT documents at large—including Paul’s writings—are properly viewed as “the documents of a mission,” recording the inauguration of the mission work of Jesus and its extension through his followers. With

22. Cf., e.g., the approach adopted by Adolf Schlatter, who, in contrast to pseudonymity advocates who explain the LTT “from a hypothetical scenario decades after Paul’s death,” provides a reconstruction that “grows out of the life of Paul and Paul’s convictions about Christ, the God who sent him, and the gospel message that by the Spirit makes him known savingly to sinners, foremost Paul himself” (Yarbrough’s summary: “Schlatter and the Pastors,” 309).
regard to Paul, it is increasingly recognized that he operated primarily as a church-planting missionary and evangelist and conveyed his theology in interaction with the churches he planted and the individuals he mentored.25 Whether or not one holds to the Pauline authorship of the LTT, it is clear that these letters portray an extension of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles as he interacts with his delegates in Ephesus and Crete. After an initial visit to Ephesus, Paul established a mission work there (Acts 18:19–21). In 1 Timothy, Paul has left Timothy with this established church in order to put an end to false teaching that is detrimental to Paul’s larger mission (1 Tim 1:3–4), teaching contrary to the sound doctrine that is “in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted” (1 Tim 1:11). In Crete, Titus is to complete what appears to be an initial setting up of churches throughout the island by appointing qualified local church leadership (Titus 1:5), although most likely it was not Paul who originally planted a church in that location (cf. Acts 2:11).26

On a Pauline reading of these letters, in particular, the LTT represent “mission documents” by which the apostle guides and encourages his delegates in their task with regard to an established (Ephesus) and a more


recent work (Crete). The centrality of mission is captured well by Ho, who speaks of the “missionary outlook” of these letters, conveying an “overarching framework of thought that has missions at its center.” Indeed, the LTT, particularly 1 Timothy and Titus, portray the apostle as engaged in the mission to which God called him, relying on co-laborers to handle matters in particular locales as his delegates as he is engaged in travel or occupied elsewhere. Specifically, in conjunction with the larger idea of his mission, we find Paul speaking of his appointment as a preacher, apostle, and teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim 2:7; cf. 2 Tim 1:11).

In 2 Timothy, Paul seeks to prepare Timothy for assuming the mantle of Paul’s mission. With regard to his larger mission, Paul closes 2 Timothy with the intriguing statement that at his first defense “the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed (πληροφορηθῇ) and all the nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) might hear it” (2 Tim 4:17). The connection between πάντα τὰ ἔθνη and the “fullness” or “completeness” of Paul’s proclamation of the apostolic message indicates that more is in view than Paul being able to complete his presentation of his message to the Gentiles.

27. Barram notes that “inasmuch as Paul’s letters aim to nurture the faith of established Christian communities, they are themselves mission in action—tools used by Paul to fulfill the terms of his apostolic commission. Everything in Paul’s letters—autobiographical details and travel itineraries, theological assertions and benedictions, even the epistolary and rhetorical framing of the letters—serves a missional function for the apostle.” Michael D. Barram, Mission and Moral Reflection in Paul, StBibLit 75 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 136. Note that there are some who dispute the presence of the mission motif in the LTT, such as Raymond E. Brown, Churches the Apostle Left Behind (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979), 31, who writes, “Paul’s interests [in the LTT] are now no longer primarily missionary but pastoral; he is concerned with tending the existing flock.” See also the work of Martin Dibelius, who finds in the LTT an expression of christliche Bürgerlichkeit (bourgeois Christianity or good citizenship) as a result of the loss of an eschatological outlook. According to Dibelius, the LTT reflect the aim of coexisting peacefully with the surrounding world, the very antithesis of a missionary orientation. See Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, The Pastoral Epistles, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 8–10. For a helpful summary and critique of Dibelius’s model, see Towner, Goal of Our Instruction, 9–16. More broadly, see Chiao Ek Ho, “Mission in the Pastoral Epistles,” in, Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 241–43.


29. Note also the future plans Paul has for his own travels (1 Tim 3:14–15) and those of his associates (Titus 3:12–13).

30. I discuss N. T. Wright’s work further below.
without interruption on this occasion. Paul’s words in 2 Tim 4:6–7 indicate that he believes he has reached the end of his life and ministry, which supports an understanding of “fully proclaim” (πληροφορηθῇ) that has the Gentile world in view. In any case, Paul has his larger mission in mind as he closes his final canonical letter.

As Towner observes, Paul does not expect only his apostolic delegates to participate in his Gentile mission but individual congregations as well: “the theme of witness that underlies much of the ethical teaching reveals one important way in which the Christian communities are to participate in the mission to the Gentiles.” To use the language of Titus 2:10, it is in this way that believers whose character and conduct reflect their Christianity “adorn the teaching of God our Savior.” Another way in which Paul calls upon his churches to participate in his mission is through prayer. In 1 Tim 2:1–6, the apostle urges that prayers be uttered, first, for all people (ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων) and, second, for kings and those in authority. While these latter prayers may also have the salvation of the rulers themselves in view, “Christians who pray for the authorities of state and city implore God ‘to let them create the necessary free space in which the expansion of the gospel is possible.’”

From a larger biblical-theological perspective, Paul’s language in 2 Tim 4:17 (ἵνα δι’ ἐμοῦ τὸ κήρυγμα πληροφορηθῇ καὶ ἀκούσωσιν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, “so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it”) stands in continuity with the reference to “all the nations” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) in the Abrahamic promises (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4

34. Ho rightly argues that “the ethical posture of the Pastoral is not defensive and merely inward-looking as some commentators have suggested but is also outward-looking and missionary in orientation” (“Mission in the Pastoral Epistles,” 242; note his treatment of the “good witness” motif on pp. 245–46).
LXX; cf. Gal 3:8) culminating in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19) and other teachings and instructions of Jesus (e.g., Mark 13:10; Luke 24:45 47). The use of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη here and elsewhere in Paul’s writings thus reflects his larger understanding of his mission as bringing to culmination something that had begun long ago (cf., e.g., Rom 1:1–6; 16:26). Just as the Great Commission was given to the apostles representing the new messianic community’s leadership (Matt 28:18–20), spearheading the early church’s mission is a critical element of Paul’s mission, extended to his apostolic delegates and successors. This sort of understanding is also reflected in the opening of the letter to Titus, where Paul speaks of his mission as follows: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior” (Titus 1:1–3).

In speaking of that with which he has been entrusted, Paul highlights his stewardship of the hope of eternal life, a gift which God was intent to give before the world began.16 “At the proper time,” this truth was revealed through the gospel, which, in turn, occupied a central place in the apostle’s preaching. In this way, Paul grounds his ministry firmly in God’s overarching plan: something new in this plan has been revealed, which has prompted Paul’s mission to “all the nations,” while at the same time grounding this mission in something very ancient.17 Thus, Paul’s mission unfolds as part of a trajectory that reaches back at least as far as God’s commission to Abraham, which already envisioned a universal blessing through his seed (the Messiah) to all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:1–3; cf. Gal 3:16).

Along similar lines, one is struck by the intriguing connection between 1 Tim 2:8 and Mal 1:11.18 When Paul commands, “I want the men in every place (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ) to pray” (1 Tim 2:8), he is almost certainly...

36. The stewardship motif, in conjunction with the metaphor of “God’s household,” is a central plank in the LTT’s ecclesiology.

37. Towner observes, “It is hardly to be disputed that the Paul of the earlier letters regarded his apostolate as a decisive element within the story of redemption. Although previously he imagined that plot complications would find their resolution in another way, the death and resurrection of the Messiah extended the story in an unexpected way. In short, he discovered that his mission to the Gentiles was to be instrumental in the fulfillment of God’s plan to extend the covenant to the whole world.” Towner, “Portrait of Paul and the Theology of 2 Timothy,” 152 (emphasis added).

appropriating the phrase ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ from Mal 1:11 (LXX): “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the nations, and in every place (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ) incense is brought to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty.” As Towner notes, the prayers uttered in the churches Paul planted become a sign of “the fulfillment of God’s promise to offer salvation to ‘the nations,’” and it is noteworthy that Paul’s exhortation to prayer follows on the heels of his self-identification as “a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles” (1 Tim 2:7).

One final point relates to the specific mission-related information referenced in the LTT. In 1 Timothy, this includes the charge to confront the false teachers in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3–4), particularly Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:18–20). Interestingly, there are no concluding mission-related instructions in 1 Timothy. In this regard, 1 Timothy contrasts with 2 Timothy, which, in addition to mentioning Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2:17), concludes with a long list of specific personal references, with as many as 17 individuals (not counting Timothy) being mentioned by name (2 Tim 4:9–21). Similarly, Titus is instructed to appoint elders in Crete (Titus 1:5), and the letter closes with several mission-related instructions (though not nearly as extensive as those concluding 2 Timothy), including four individuals mentioned by name (Titus 3:12–13).

It may seem obvious but nonetheless bears repeating: these mission-specific references (most of them to coworkers in the apostolic mission) strongly underscore the primacy of the mission motif in general and the foundational significance of the Pauline mission for the theology of the LTT as a whole. While contemporary readers of the LTT often tend to skip these sections, and consider them irrelevant for application due to their time-bound nature, it should not be overlooked that these mission references provide powerful support for the centrality of the mission theme in these documents and indirectly for Pauline authorship as well. Thus, while in the LTT we hear Paul’s ipsissima verba or (for the sake of the argument) only his ipsissima vox (if using an amanuensis such as Luke), the Pauline mission binds Paul’s other canonical letters and the LTT together, and the congruence of the mission motif in both bodies of literature enhances the plausibility of Pauline authorship of the LTT.

Paul’s Larger Mission Theology and Strategy and the Letters to Timothy and Titus

Before concluding the discussion of the mission motif in the LTT, it will be instructive to cast our net a bit wider in order to view the LTT’s mission motif within a larger framework, Paul’s overall mission strategy.41 N. T. Wright seeks to probe the underlying dynamic of Paul’s mission in his later years.42 He locates Paul’s motivation in “Jewish apocalyptic,” understood not as pertaining narrowly to the end of the world but as broad “strategy for both narrating and living the counter-imperial story in which Israel’s God, the creator, dethrones the present world rulers and exalts a messianic figure in their place.”43 In Christ, a “new moment” had come, which constituted “the long-awaited fulfilment of ancient prophecies and promises,” ensuing, in keeping with prophecies such as those found in Dan 2 and 7, “after a historical sequence characterized by a succession of world empires” in the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4).44 As an “apocalyptic thinker,” Paul espoused an eschatology “rethought around Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and around the fresh gift of the divine spirit,” which “necessarily involved an important though oblique confrontation with the last great world empire, that of Rome.”45

Wright contends that, “if we want to understand what Paul thought he was called to do in the last years of his life, we need to place his vision of creation renewed in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises and under the sovereignty of Israel’s Messiah at its heart.”46 This, in turn, involves understanding Paul’s statement regarding a future mission in Spain in Rom 15:24, 28 in the buildup to this passage in the book of Romans. In Rom 4:13, Paul affirms that God’s promise to Abraham and his offspring pertained to their inheritance of the world, not merely some geographical territory in the Middle East. Thus, in keeping with the universal rule promised the future Davidic king, and Ps 8’s vision of glory (i.e., sovereignty) being given over all of creation, Paul, in Rom 8, shows the retold exodus story coming to a climax: “The people who leave the state of slavery by coming through the waters of baptism (Romans 6; compare 1 Corinthians 10.1–2), who then arrive at Mount Sinai to face the challenge of Torah (Romans 7), are now led by the divine presence through the challenging wilderness...
(Romans 8.12–17) to the ‘inheritance’ which is the Messiah’s and which he will share with his people (8.18–30).”

This, in turn, fleshes out Paul’s gospel, which he understood to be about not merely Jewish restoration but “the redemption and renewal of creation itself, and of humans within that.” Thus, the gospel is not merely about justification by faith, vital as that is, but also about the announcement of the universal lordship of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah who had now come historically, died atoningly, and risen triumphantly. All of this reaches a climax in Rom 15:7–13, in particular the catena of OT passages cited in vv. 9–12, all of which prophesy the Messiah’s rule over, and outreach to, the Gentiles. Romans 15:7–13, in turn, lays the foundation for Paul’s missionary strategy enunciated in Rom 15:14–32. What is instrumental to this strategy, then, is Paul’s self-designation, unique to the LT口径, of being a herald (κήρυξ; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11), whose role was to make an initial announcement (cf. the use of the ἐυαγγέλιον word group in Isa 40:9; 52:7). In this vein, Paul conceived of his mission in terms of announcing “Jesus as Messiah and Lord across the key parts of Caesar’s empire.” Thus, having made initial proclamation in Asia, Macedonia, Achaea, and Illyricum, Paul intended to proceed to make initial proclamation of Jesus’s lordship at the end of Caesar’s earth, Spain.


49. See also the citation of the beginning of Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:15) in Rom 15:21, noted by Riesner, “Paul’s Trial and End,” 391.

50. Wright points out that the Jewish expectation of a worldwide messianic kingdom can be found in Second Temple literature, especially related to Deuteronomy (ibid., 58). He also notes that, while Paul contextualizes his gospel in a Greco-Roman environment, he proclaims a thoroughly Jewish message (citing an unpublished paper, delivered at an SNTS meeting, by William Horbury, “Jewish Imperial Thought and [the] Pauline Gospel” [Leuven, 2012]).

51. Wright, “Paul’s Western Missionary Project,” 60. Cf. the use of κηρύγμα in Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 1:21; 2:4; 15:14; and the numerous instances of κηρύσσω in Paul’s letters (e.g., Rom 10:8, 14, 15; 1 Cor 1:23; 9:27; 15:11, 12; etc.).

52. Ibid., 61 (emphasis original).

53. Ibid., 62, in critical interaction with Ksenija Magda, Paul’s Territoriality and Mission Strategy, WUNT 2/266 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2009), ch. 4. On the question whether there were Jews in Spain in Paul’s day, see Wright, “Paul’s Western Missionary Project,” 64–65, esp. n. 50, and the scholarly literature cited there.
In this way, Paul focused his missionary strategy on Roman provinces and major urban centers. What place, then, do the LTT have within the orbit of Paul’s mission? The letters were written at a time when Paul himself had made sufficient proclamation of Christ’s universal lordship in most of the Greco-Roman world, including Ephesus. While he himself endeavored to push forward, he did not therefore abandon the churches he had previously planted. Rather, he assigned their care to trusted deputies such as Timothy and Titus, who were charged with dealing with various issues in the local congregations under their care, whether sinning elders (Timothy) or the need to appoint proper leaders (Titus). In this way, Paul was able to continue to spearhead the early Christian mission while consolidating the work he had previously initiated, so that his efforts would prove not to be in vain (1 Cor 15:58; 1 Thess 3:5; Phil 2:16). As mentioned, the LTT show Paul engaged in his apostolic mission in his last years until the very end (cf. 2 Tim 4:9–22; see esp. v. 10, indicating that Titus had now moved on to Dalmatia). Whether or not Paul ever went to Spain, he laid the foundation for the worldwide proclamation of the good news of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ on which subsequent generations were able to build (cf. 2 Tim 2:2).

Conclusion

The theology of the LTT is firmly embedded in the Pauline mission. This is indicated not only by the presence of Paul’s delegates but also by the congruence of the mission strategy in these letters with the other Pauline correspondents and Paul’s *modus operandi* in the book of Acts. His commitment to appoint qualified leadership in every church and in every city, whether or not Paul ever reached Spain, in God’s sovereign providence his desire to go to Spain via the church in Rome led the apostle to write the book of Romans, which has proven to be a major contribution regardless of whether Paul’s plans to missionize Spain ever materialized.

54. Wright (“Paul’s Western Missionary Project,” 66) makes the intriguing comment that whether or not Paul ever reached Spain, in God’s sovereign providence his desire to go to Spain via the church in Rome led the apostle to write the book of Romans, which has proven to be a major contribution regardless of whether Paul’s plans to missionize Spain ever materialized.

55. As I argue in *Commentary on 1–2 Timothy and Titus*, the LTT make important contributions to the understanding of Paul’s mission in several areas: (1) understanding Paul’s apostolic authority, (2) the significance of his apostolic suffering for his mission, (3) the apostle’s use and training of apostolic delegates, and (4) the connection between the LTT and Paul’s broader mission strategy and theology as evident particularly in the book of Romans culminating in ch. 15 (I discuss this above). In these ways, the LTT bear telling testimony to Paul’s understanding, performance, and continuation of his mission.

his commitment to purge the church of sin and to remove sinning elders, his global vision, his apostolic authority and self-understanding as a herald of the gospel, and his preparedness to suffer for the cause of Christ all tie the LTT inextricably to the mission of Paul as depicted in the book of Acts and Paul's other 10 NT letters.57

Within this mission, it is highly likely that these letters are to be located toward the end of Paul’s missionary career at a time when the apostle passed on his legacy to his trusted associates. In characteristic fashion, Paul is shown to prepare his delegates for the challenges they will face and to formulate a theology that is not a mere carbon copy or extrapolation of that found in his other letters (as a later follower of Paul might have done) but a contextualized theology that effectively engages the world in which Paul and his associates lived and ministered. In this way, Paul, as a missionary and theologian, serves as a powerful example for those who are called to lead and participate in the church’s mission today.

57. See the thorough treatment of §1 Mission in the Biblical-Theological Exposition in Köstenberger, Commentary on 1–2 Timothy and Titus.