

1 Timothy 1:1-2

“Opening Greetings”

“Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Messiah Yeshua, who is our hope, to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Messiah Yeshua our Lord.”

Within a great deal of examination over the nature and origins of Yeshua the Messiah, titles and ascriptions of honor appearing within the Pastoral Epistles (1&2 Timothy, Titus) do tend to receive some significant attention.¹ These titles and ascriptions of honor issued to Yeshua the Messiah in the Pastoral Epistles, have borne significant points of diversion between those who adhere to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, and a low Christology of Yeshua being a created supernatural agent of God.

Immediately in the opening of 1 Timothy, both ancient and modern readers encountered/encounter theological assertions made about the Father and Son, in Paul’s opening greeting, “Paul, an emissary of Messiah *Yeshua* by the command of God our Savior and Messiah *Yeshua*, our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1, TLV). Paul refers to *Theou Sōtēros hēmōn kai Christou Iēsou tēs elpidos hēmōn* (θεοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τῆς ἐλπίδος ἡμῶν), “God our Savior and...Messiah Yeshua our hope.” Donald Guthrie points out how “It is unusual for Paul to speak of *God our Saviour*, since, apart from the Pastorals, he always attributes the title to Christ.”² Obviously, God as Savior is a concept deeply rooted within the Tanach (Deuteronomy 32:15; Psalm 24:5; 25:5; 27:9; 42:5; Isaiah 45:15, 21; cf. Luke 1:47; Jude 25). Is this just a stylistic change seen in 1 Timothy, with the Father *explicitly* stated to be Savior, unlike other places where it is the Son asserted to be Savior (i.e., Ephesians 5:23; Philippians 3:20)? One easy explanation could be that in writing to Timothy in Ephesus, in asserting how the One God of Israel is “Savior,” Paul is deliberately claiming that Caesar—also referred to as “Savior” in the contemporary culture—is not. Witherington notes, “other persons were called ‘Savior’ in Ephesus, including the emperor, so there can be little doubt that Paul’s acclamation has a countercultural element to it.”³ Given the religious errors addressed in 1 Timothy, this would be an easy way at the outset to dismiss any kind of worship or devotion not focused around the Hebrew God.

Some value judgments in the opening verse of 1 Timothy can erupt. What question does 1 Timothy 1:1 ask the reader? The challenge, as mentioned by Dunn, is, “A tension is thus set up: Are two salvations envisaged, or just one effected by both together or by one as the agent of the other?”⁴ With the reference to the Father being Savior, does this mean that the Son is someone else? Dunn adheres to Deutero-Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy, and so he thinks that 1 Timothy 1:1 “suggests a distinctive development in the theology of the Pastorals,”⁵ and that differences with other Pauline letters really are a result of differences of authorship.⁶ God, meaning the Father, is specifically labeled as Savior in 1 Timothy (1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10). In only 2 Timothy is the Son or the Messiah labeled as Savior (2 Timothy 1:10), and in Titus both

¹ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.

² Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 65.

³ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 188.

⁴ James D.G. Dunn, “The First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11:790.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ If necessary, do review the entries for the Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy and Titus in the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

the Father and the Son are labeled as Savior (Titus 1:3-4; 3:4, 6). Is the mention of the Father as Savior in 1 Timothy at all something serious to worry about—especially to those who adhere a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God?

Throughout the Apostolic Scriptures *sōtēr* (σωτήρ) or “Savior” is a title applied to both the Father and Son. The mention of the Father as Savior was probably employed to make an early statement on the circumstances Timothy was having to oversee in Ephesus. George W. Knight III thinks, “The use of σωτήρ here with reference to God the Father reflects Paul’s concern to communicate this reality of God as Savior as a corrective to the false teachers’ perspective on God as less than the Savior of ‘all people’”⁷ (cf. 1 Timothy 4:10). Likewise, with the Son specifically referenced as the *elpis* (ἐλπίς) or “hope,” does not all of a sudden mean that the Father is not a Believer’s “hope” as well. If anything, 1 Timothy 1:1 portrays both the Father and the Son working together in the salvation experience of persons—both in being redeemed from sin and looking forward to future salvation events like the resurrection. I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner describe,

“This particular designation is used of both God and Christ, linking them each with the salvation that is the content of Christian experience and hope...The collocation of God and Christ in phrases such as this...indicates how natural it was for early Christians to place the two persons alongside one another without any sense of incongruity and demonstrates the way in which Christ was seen to belong on the divine side of reality.”⁸

2 Corinthians 5:19, for example, describes how “God was in Messiah reconciling the world to Himself.” So is there a Christological debate in 1 Timothy 1:1? Conservative interpreters rightly answer, “No.” Knight points out that the main thrust in 1 Timothy 1:1 is that “the apostleship of Paul is one that both God and Christ have conjointly commanded. Those that command as one, when one is said to be God, are considered on par with one another.”⁹ William D. Mounce also concurs, “God and Christ are so united that both perform the same task.”¹⁰ While many would conclude that a high Christology can indeed be detected by some of these assertions, as Bible readers, we have to go with a wider reading of verses than just 1 Timothy 1:1, recognizing that both the Father and Son have the status of being “Savior,” as indicated elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles.

Seen further in 1 Timothy 1:2, Paul’s greeting to Timothy includes the wish that he be experiencing “Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Messiah Yeshua our Lord.” 1 Timothy 1:2, as typical of the Pauline letters, portrays Paul’s balanced view of the Godhead, with the Father largely represented as “God” and Yeshua the Son represented as “Lord.” Yeshua being given the title *Kurios* (κύριος), the common Septuagint rendering for the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה), is far more significant than Him just being considered a kind of “Master.” It should also be noted that, at least with some component of Paul’s writing intending to subvert the Imperial Roman establishment, that Yeshua need not have been referred to as *Kurios*, the Septuagint placeholder for the Divine Name YHWH in the Tanach; Yeshua could have instead been referred to as *basileus* (βασιλεύς) or “king” (Heb. equiv. *melekh*, מֶלֶךְ).

⁷ George W. Knight III, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 62.

⁸ I. Howard Marshall, with Philip H. Towner, *International Critical Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 355.

⁹ Knight, 62.

¹⁰ William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, Vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 9.