

# FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO TIMOTHY

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**Approximate date:** 63-64 C.E. or 65-67 C.E.

**Time period:** growth of Messianic community with rise of Paul's successors, in the midst of some false teachings and apostasy

**Author:** the Apostle Paul with Luke (secretary)

**Location of author:** traveling to, or in Macedonia

**Target audience and location:** Timothy in Ephesus

**People:**

Paul, Timothy, Hymenaeus, Alexander

**People mentioned:**

Yeshua the Messiah, Satan, Adam, Eve, Pontius Pilate

**Places:**

Rome, Ephesus, Macedonia

**Key Themes:**

proper versus improper usage of the Torah / saving power of Yeshua the Messiah toward sinners / proper worship and conduct in the assembly / the qualifications to be an overseer (bishop) or deacon / false teachings brought in via asceticism / Timothy being encouraged as a young leader in the assembly / instructions on how to handle widows, elders, and slaves / warnings against false teachers who are interested only in personal gain / admonition to hold on to faith in Yeshua and pursue godliness

**Key Scriptures:** 1 Timothy 1:8-10; 3:1-13; 4:12; 6:3-6 / **Greeting** (1:1-2);

**Regulations for Worship and Order in the Local Assembly** (2:1-4:16);

**Discipline Within the Local Assembly** (5:1-25); **Miscellaneous Instructions** (6:1-19); **Concluding Admonition to Timothy** (6:20-21)<sup>1</sup>

**Theological Summary:** The Epistle of 1 Timothy is the first in a collection of three letters, also including 2 Timothy and Titus, which are frequently called **the Pastoral Epistles**, given their widespread attention to matters of congregational administration and leadership. Throughout history, many of those in positions of teaching and leadership have taken

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 652-655.

encouragement from these letters, yet no one would conclude that they are exclusively “pastoral” in nature, as much of what is encountered does pertain to general spirituality.

The author of each of these letters is identified in the text as being the Apostle Paul (1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1), and while many conservatives accept genuine Pauline authorship, liberals do not.<sup>2</sup> Liberals often favor the view that the Pastoral Epistles were written by a second or third generation successor of Paul, possibly composed to honor Paul’s legacy, but including some concepts and ideas that are not from Paul himself. This can understandably cast doubts on the letters’ historicity, and the importance of their instructions. Those who deny Pauline authorship of the Pastorals usually make their argument on the basis of a more organized form of congregational structure being in place, as well as from various terms employed in the three epistles which are believed to be unique in comparison to the agreed-upon genuine Pauline letters.<sup>3</sup> Yet, conservatives who have seen the variance of terms employed<sup>4</sup> are keen on pointing out how that this need not mean that the Pastoral Epistles are the work of a later pseudepigrapher. As Carson and Moo legitimately ask,

“Is it because of different authors, or because of different topics, or because these epistles were written to individuals with certain challenges and not to [assemblies] with quite a different set of challenges, or because of different amanuenses?”<sup>5</sup>

The inclusion of various terms, or the appearance of a certain/unique writing style, in the Pastoral Epistles, is actually thought by many to be the product of Luke’s hand. In 2 Timothy 4:11 we see that Luke is present with Paul in his final days, and Luke is actually thought by many to have served in some capacity as Paul’s secretary in composing these letters.<sup>6</sup> Christian figures of the Second Century C.E. accepted the Pastoral Epistles as genuine works of the Apostle Paul.<sup>7</sup>

Further doubts about Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles are issued from the basis that they portray an historical situation and travels that are not recorded in the Book of Acts. Paul’s imprisonment in Rome in 2 Timothy is not the same as his confinement (mainly a house arrest) depicted at the end of Acts 28. This should not prove to be so much of a problem as liberals espouse, though. It is reasonable to infer that Paul was released from his imprisonment as described at the end of Acts, he traveled to Spain from Rome as he had wanted (Romans 15:24; cf. *1 Clement* 5), and he made it back to the East to visit friends as he also desired (cf. Philippians 1:19, 25; 2:24; Philemon 22), conducting further ministry work in Crete and Ephesus. Paul was later arrested and then returned to Rome, where according to tradition he was executed by Nero (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.5).

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<sup>2</sup> There are various liberal interpreters who do, however, think that some of the more personal references appearing in the three letters may be fragments of some genuine Pauline materials (i.e., 2 Timothy 1:16-18; 3:10-11; 4:1-2a, 5b-22; Titus 3:12-15).

<sup>3</sup> J.C. Beker, “Pastoral letters,” in *IDB*, 3:670.

<sup>4</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 633-636; Carson and Moo, pp 555-558.

<sup>5</sup> Carson and Moo, 558.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp 559-560.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Guthrie, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in *ISBE*, 3:680-681; E.E. Ellis, “Pastoral Letters,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 659.

Paul possibly made it to Spain, but for various reasons needed to return East either because of a lack of ministry success in the West and/or pressing concerns because of false teachings that had been circulating in the East. A likely scenario is Paul serving in Crete and leaving Titus to continue on for him (Titus 1:5), moving on to Asia Minor where he left Timothy in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Having then gone to Macedonia, Paul would winter in Nicopolis where Titus would meet him (Titus 3:12). Paul was later arrested and sent to Rome (2 Timothy 1:16-17), whereas Titus presumably met Paul in Nicopolis and moved northward to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10).<sup>8</sup> A number of commentaries, noting that 2 Timothy would have been Paul's last letter before death (2 Timothy 4:8, 18), actually examine the Pastoral Epistles in the order of: 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy.<sup>9</sup>

In the Epistle of **1 Timothy**, Paul writes his letter to his dear friend and ministry colleague Timothy, actually considered a spiritual son to him (1 Timothy 1:18), who was a native of Lystra in Asia Minor (Acts 20:4). Timothy's father was a Greek, but his mother was a Jewess. Timothy was taught from the Tanach as a young man by his Jewish grandmother Lois and his mother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15), but he was never circumcised, nor converted to Judaism. It is assumed that Timothy's mother may have not originally been religious, causing her to marry a Greek man, who would not allow his son to be circumcised.<sup>10</sup> When Timothy came to faith in Messiah Yeshua, Paul made sure that he underwent circumcision so there would not be any confusion over his ethnicity among Jewish non-Believers. "Paul regarded Timothy's circumcision not as a means of salvation but as a legal act to remove a serious obstacle to the gospel" (Hawthorne, *ISBE*).<sup>11</sup> Timothy assisted Paul in his work in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5), and was with him during most of his work in Ephesus (Acts 19:22). Timothy was Paul's traveling companion, going with him from Ephesus to Macedonia, to Corinth (Acts 20:3), through Asia Minor (Acts 20:1-6), and even to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

The Apostle Paul mentions Timothy as a "co-sender" of six of his letters (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon). When he found himself imprisoned in Rome the second time, Paul asked Timothy to join him (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). We can safely assume that Timothy made every effort to do so, although he may have been arrested himself in the process (cf. Hebrews 13:23). Timothy is mentioned more times than any of Paul's other companions, indicating a fond affection for him.<sup>12</sup> In spite of his young age, natural reserve, and various other personal idiosyncrasies (1 Corinthians 16:10; 2 Timothy 1:7), as well as some ailments (1 Timothy 5:23), he was a faithful servant to the community of faith, following the tasks assigned to him by Paul and the other Apostles with absolute dedication.

1 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy while he was in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul leaves the Ephesian Believers in Timothy's capable care, and writes the letter either in Macedonia or while traveling to Macedonia. 1 Timothy is often estimated as having been

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<sup>8</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 622-624; Carson and Moo, pp 561-563.

<sup>9</sup> The commentaries of Gordon D. Fee, George W. Knight III, and William D. Mounce examine the Pastoral Epistles in this order. The author's commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic* similarly follows suit.

<sup>10</sup> G.F. Hawthorne, "Timothy," in *ISBE*, 4:857.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> William Hendriksen, "Pastoral Letters," in *NIDB*, 1018.

written in 63-64 C.E., although some prefer a slightly later date of 65-67 C.E. Paul indicates in this letter that he might not return for some time, so he writes to encourage him (1 Timothy 1:3, 18). Paul instructs Timothy to refute false teachings (1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-8; 6:3-5, 20-21), and to adequately supervise the assembly (1 Timothy 2:1-3:13; 5:17-25). While the Epistle of 1 Timothy was primarily a personal correspondence written by Paul to Timothy, the Ephesians who Timothy served would eventually encounter its contents as Timothy implemented Paul's instruction, serving as his authorized administrator.

Contrary to the opinion of some in the Messianic community, no Hebrew or Aramaic origin for 1 Timothy has ever been proposed by anyone in the scholastic community. It really is quite impossible, considering the facts that Timothy was raised as a Greek in Lystra, would have spoken Greek as his native language, and then its instructions would somehow be relayed on to the Ephesians. In fact, his very Greek name *Timotheos* (Τιμόθεος) is preserved in modern Hebrew translations of the New Testament as *Timotius* (טימותריוס).

Much of the information encountered in 1 Timothy is delivered with some kind of false teaching present in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3-7; 6:3-5, 20), which had not only stirred controversy and confusion, but had left a path of problems in its wake. This false teaching is something which is said to have involved the Torah (1 Timothy 1:7-9), and some kind of genealogies and speculations (1 Timothy 1:4). Ellis describes how Paul and Timothy "were increasingly endangered by a judaizing-gnostic countermission,"<sup>13</sup> which was likely quite akin to some of the false ideas present in Colossae (Colossians 2:8-3:4).<sup>14</sup> The Ephesian false teaching was something which was particularly appealing to various women, especially widows, who are said to have "go[ne] around from house to house; and not merely [being] idle, but also [as] gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention" (1 Timothy 5:13), helping to promote it. The false teaching had promoted abstention from eating meat and from marriage (1 Timothy 4:1-5), and had a noticeable negative impact on the leaders of the assembly. Interpreters are divided as to whether or not the instructions issued to Timothy on not only elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13), but most especially women (1 Timothy 2:11-15), are universal for all time or situation-bound to countering the effect of the false teaching.

What was the problem that had infected the Ephesian congregation(s)? It is frequently proposed that some form of Gnosticism, or a proto- or incipient-Gnosticism, and/or beliefs from various mystery cults that had negatively influenced the local Judaism, had been promoted by the false teachers. The false teachers are specifically labeled as those "wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions" (1 Timothy 1:7). A major part of what was advocated was speculation on genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4), which likely involved obscure Tanach figures only mentioned once or twice in Scripture (i.e., Genesis chs. 5, 11), but for which there was a great deal of information and/or lore accessible in the (fringe sectors

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<sup>13</sup> Ellis, "Pastoral Letters," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 661.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp 662-663.

of) Second Temple Judaism and various pseudepigraphal works.<sup>15</sup> Combined with their teachings was some form of asceticism, perhaps tied to the errant idea that the resurrection had already taken place (cf. 2 Timothy 2:18) and that people needed to live in a kind of quasi-Edenic manner without eating meat and dismissing the value of marriage/sex (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-5). While various readers have often assumed that many of the problems Timothy had to address were just “Jewish” in nature, there is no indication that any kind of mainline Synagogue Judaism was negatively influencing the Believers. The false teachers, whoever they were and whatever they specifically advocated, overlooked the Torah’s main focus in identifying sin and issuing penalties for it (1 Timothy 1:8-10). **The Torah is not to be used as a springboard from which one can promote strange ideas.**

Within 1 Timothy, we see how Timothy had the job of making sure that proper order and organization were put back into place among the leaders of the Ephesian assemblies. There has been a huge amount of contemporary examination of 1 Timothy chs. 2&3 in the past several decades, which most noticeably focuses upon 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and debates in evangelical Christianity over ordained female clergy. Liberals who deny Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy think that this instruction runs counter to other places in his agreed-upon genuine letters that portray various women in positions of teaching and leadership, and that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is an observation of a later generation.

Complementarian readers think that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is universal instruction from Paul barring women from positions of leadership. Egalitarian readers think that these are situation-specific instructions from Paul, given to counter the false teaching’s influence on various naïve women in Ancient Ephesus, who needed to be taught (1 Timothy 2:11). Per this debate there are various translation issues to be considered regarding the verb *authentēō* (αὐθεντέω) in 1 Timothy 2:12,<sup>16</sup> the clause *dia tēs teknogonias* (διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας) in 1 Timothy 2:15,<sup>17</sup> and whether *Gunaikas hōsautōs* (Γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως) in 1 Timothy 3:11 should be “Women...likewise” or “Their wives likewise” (ESV), the former allowing for female deacons (cf. Romans 16:1).

An interesting point witnessed in 1 Timothy 5:18 is the elevation of Apostolic compositions to the level of Scripture, as it includes quotations from both Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7: “For the Scripture says, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’” “Paul combines an Old Testament passage with a saying of Jesus to bring out the truth that the elders are to be paid for their work” (Carson and Moo).<sup>18</sup> This affects one’s interpretation of what Paul will later communicate to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16, and the scope of what “all Scripture” included in the mid-First Century.

Various sectors of today’s Messianic community face the same issues described by Paul in 1 Timothy. We have false teachers out there who think themselves to be teachers of God’s Torah, but expel more of their time and effort involving themselves not with its instructions

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<sup>15</sup> Please understand that this is not to say that there is not value in various extra-Biblical works. The description seen of the false teachers in 1 Timothy leads us to conclude that these people were poorly taught, under-educated, and under-informed as to whatever material they were dealing with to promote their ideas.

<sup>16</sup> “usurp authority” (KJV).

<sup>17</sup> “through the child-bearing” (YLT), likely a reference to the Genesis 3:15 promise of the Messiah to come.

<sup>18</sup> Carson and Moo, 576.

on ethics, morality, or holy living—but instead various curiosities coupled with perspectives from errant influences like Jewish mysticism. As Paul said, “These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith...They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1 Timothy 1:4b, 7, NIV). There is a proper use of God’s Torah (1 Timothy 1:8), actually attested to be “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Timothy 1:11). We should all expel the necessary efforts to heed Paul’s words to Timothy, and understand them for what they meant to the Believers in Ephesus, and what they might mean for the emerging Messianic movement today. There are a number of important things that we need not overlook any longer!

While the problem and influence of false teachers in Ephesus is something that we need to be aware of as Messianic Believers, such things have been a persistent problem for the Body of Messiah since the First Century. Without question, the biggest amount of debate that will be stirred from the Epistle of 1 Timothy—which is presently going on in much of evangelicalism—is what to do with 1 Timothy 2:11-15. *Are these statements really situation-specific?* Why are there elders and deacons spoken about for Ephesus (1 Timothy 3:1-13), but only elders spoken about for Crete (Titus 1:5-9)? This would seem to indicate that the Cretan assembly was not large enough to need deacons. Recognizing the elder and deacon instruction as largely situation-specific, how will the Messianic movement learn to deal with the many proposals regarding 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and weighing these verses together with other places in the Pauline Epistles that depict women in leadership? We might not come to a fair place on this for quite some time. Unlike Pauline letters like Romans, 1 Corinthians, or Ephesians—where Messianics largely acknowledge various translation and background issues to be considered—the Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy and Titus are largely not afforded this at present.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON 1 TIMOTHY:

**1. What are some of the significant problems that Paul warns Timothy about in this letter? What is their proper First Century context?**

**2. Summarize some of the features that characterized the false teaching that negatively influenced the Ephesian Believers. Did they originate from mainline Judaism or something more sectarian and irregular?**

**3. Summarize the character traits of a proper overseer or deacon in the Body of Messiah. Do you think it is at all possible that some of these qualities were listed to counter the false teaching in Ephesus? Why or why not?**

**4. Having read 1 Timothy, what lesson or lesson(s) do you think is/are critical for today's Messianic community to understand?**

## REFLECTION ON 1 TIMOTHY'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

*Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading Paul's first letter to Timothy:*