

## THE BOOK OF 2 TIMOTHY

### ORIENTING DATA FOR 2 TIMOTHY

- Content: an appeal to Timothy to remain loyal to Christ, to the gospel, and to Paul, including a final salvo at the false teachers (of 1 Timothy)
- Author: the apostle Paul (although doubted by many)
- Date: ca. A.D. 64, from a prison in Rome (the lion in 4:17 is an allusion to Nero or to the empire itself)
- Recipient(s): Timothy primarily; secondarily to the church (the first “you” in 4:22 is singular, the final one is plural)
- Occasion: Paul has been once more arrested and taken to Rome (most likely from Troas and at the instigation of Alexander, 4:13–15 [probably the same man who was disfellowshipped in 1 Tim 1:19–20]); the letter urges Timothy to come to Paul’s side, but mostly offers him a kind of last will and testament
- Emphases: the saving work of Christ, “who has destroyed death and brought life ... through the gospel” (1:10); loyalty to Christ by perseverance in suffering and hardship; loyalty to Paul by recalling their longtime relationship; loyalty to the gospel by being faithful in proclaiming/teaching “the word” (= the gospel message); the deadly spread, but final demise, of the false teaching; the final salvation of those who are Christ’s

### OVERVIEW OF 2 TIMOTHY

This is Paul’s final (preserved) letter. At the end, we learn that its primary purpose was to urge Timothy to join Paul in Rome posthaste (4:9, 21) and to bring Mark and some personal items along with him when he comes (4:11, 13). Timothy is to be replaced by Tychicus, the presumed bearer of the letter (4:12). The reason for haste is the onset of winter (4:21) and the fact that Paul’s preliminary court hearing has already taken place (4:16).

But the majority of the letter is very little concerned about this matter and very much an appeal to Timothy to remain loyal to Paul and his gospel by embracing suffering and hardship. And in this sense it also becomes a community document (hence the plural “you” in 4:22b), implicitly urging the believers to loyalty as well. This appeal is made in the context of the continuing influence of the false teachers (2:16–18; 3:13), the defection of many (1:15), and Paul’s expected execution (4:6–8).

Everything in the letter reflects these matters, including the thanksgiving (1:3–5) and the concluding personal matters and instructions (4:9–18). The body of the letter is comprised of

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ca. *circa*, about, approximately

three major appeals to loyalty (1:6–2:13; 2:14–3:9; 3:10–4:8), each of which follows a similar ABA pattern, which together create the same pattern for the whole letter. In the first appeal it is loyalty-defection-loyalty (1:6–14/1:15–18/2:1–13); in the second it is opposition-loyalty-opposition (2:14–19/2:20–26/3:1–9); in the third it is Paul’s loyalty-appeal-Paul’s loyalty (3:10–12/3:14–4:2, 5/4:6–8), interspersed with notes about opposition and desertion (3:13; 4:3–4). In the larger picture, the first and third sections are mostly appeal, while the sandwiched section is mostly about the opposition.

## SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR READING 2 TIMOTHY

This letter does not fit comfortably the category Pastoral Epistle (see “Overview of 1 Timothy, pp. 373–74), in the sense of offering instruction on church matters to a young pastor. But it is certainly pastoral in the sense of Paul’s concern for Timothy personally, which is intertwined with his concern for Christ and the gospel. You may want to mark these instances as you read.

Second Timothy is not the first letter we have from Paul while he was “chained” (2:9). But in contrast to the earlier ones (Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon), where he expects to be released (Phil 1:24; 2:23–24; Phlm 22), here he just as clearly expects to be executed (2 Tim 4:6–9, 16–18). Although this adds a dimension of poignancy to the whole (the desertions are obviously painful, 1:15; 4:9–12), there is no despair. To the contrary, hardship is simply part of the package (1:8; 2:3; 3:12; 4:5). You cannot miss the note of Christ’s triumph over death and his bringing life, which rings out loud and clear (1:10; 2:8–10, 11–12a; 4:8, 18).

Even the long section condemning the false teachers (2:14–3:9) is interlaced with words of hope: “The Lord knows those who are his” (2:19, echoing Num 16:5). This section also helps to substantiate what you learned about the false teachers in 1 Timothy: They like to quarrel over words (2 Tim 2:14, 23); they have wandered away from the truth, arguing that the resurrection has already taken place (2:18); they have had noteworthy success among some “gullible women” (3:6–7); and their lifestyle does not conform to the gospel (3:1–5).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, [\*How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 379–381.