

The Date Of 1st Timothy

First Timothy is acknowledged to be genuine: a letter from Paul to his "*true child in faith*" (1 Tim.1:1). But, when did the Apostle write the letter: sometimes during Paul's last two journeys or later, during or after a first Roman imprisonment? Were it possible to establish a clear-cut, definite time for the date of the letter, such would neither alter the fact that it was written by Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit. The primary value of establishing the approximate date would be to add -- or diminish strength from the opinion of many that there were two Roman imprisonments of Paul. An important key to this letter's date is in 1:3-4. These verses tell us Timothy had been left in Ephesus at some point by Paul and that he was still there when the letter was written. When did this transpire?

There are some things which can be determined. The letter could not have been written prior to Paul's second journey for it was then that he first began to use Timothy in his work (Acts 16:1-3). Paul began his letter writing during this journey. Both letters to Thessalonica and most likely, Galatians were written during this journey. Timothy acted as a messenger for Paul during the period of time. He and Silas were left when Paul fled Berea for Athens where Paul sent word that they should come with all speed to him there (Acts 17:14). Apparently Paul left before the two reached him in Athens but they followed him to Corinth as Acts 18:5 indicates. Both his letters to Thessalonica were likely written from Corinth and both include Silas and Timothy in their salutations (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). It was not until his second journey was concluded before Paul visited Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21).

Could Paul have left Timothy at Ephesus at this point? After Acts 18:5 Timothy "dropped from view." He could have traveled with Paul to Ephesus, along with Prisca and Aquilla whom we know traveled there with him (Acts 18:18). The record is silent but even had he left Timothy there at this point, it would not have been the occasion Paul wrote of in 1 Timothy 1. On this journey Paul was going the wrong way! When Paul exhorted Timothy to tarry at Ephesus, he was going into Macedonia, but when he left Ephesus on his second journey, he was going to Syria (1 Tim. 1:3; Acts 18:18). This was not the occasion when he wrote Timothy at Ephesus. Timothy was Paul's companion on Paul's third journey and at Ephesus. Far from there he sent Timothy and Erastus (two of his companions) into Macedonia (Act 19:22). From Ephesus Paul wrote his first letter to Corinth (which letter was carried to them by Titus as 2 Corinthians 2:13 and 12:17 shows), but Paul anticipated Timothy might possibly go to Corinth for he wrote those brethren charging them to receive Timothy safely (1 Cor. 16:1). Then, after the uproar created by Demetrius, Paul left the city of Ephesus (Acts 20:1).

At this juncture Paul is going the right direction, from Ephesus into Macedonia, but a problem exists that this is the time Paul mentions in his first letter to Timothy (Acts 20:1). There is no indication that Paul left Timothy in Ephesus when he left there. To the contrary, the Acts account indicates Timothy left Ephesus before Paul and it was scarcely six months later when Paul wrote Corinthians their second letter from somewhere in Macedonia at which time Timothy was with Paul, not in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:1). Add to this the fact that in Paul's second letter to Timothy Paul implied Timothy was still in Ephesus where Paul had earlier left him, yet Timothy was part of Paul's company of messengers who carried gifts from Gentile churches to poor saints in Jerusalem.

There is a great difference in the tone of First and Second Timothy. In the first letter, Paul gave no hint he was a prisoner. That would not in itself argue that it was not save for the fact that every other recognized prison letter clearly identifies itself as such. This all strongly adds weight to the hypothesis that Paul's appeal to Caesar ended with his release, at which time he traveled among churches, visiting Crete and Ephesus where Timothy was left when he passed from there into Macedonia. Somewhere along the way he was charged once more with "crimes" against the Roman State, stood before Caesar again at which time an unfavorable verdict was given regarding him.

What is the profit of such a study as this? The value is that we may see that only sketchy details of Paul's journeys are supplied by Luke in his account in Acts, but that from Paul's letters many important matters may be dovetailed into Luke's history, giving us a broader and richer history of the life of this noble apostle. It shows the value of considering all things written on a particular subject, ever remembering the Psalmist's words: "*The sum of thy word is truth.*"

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