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Lesson 1

Background and Survey of 1 Timothy

The pastoral epistles are especially interesting for their personalized content. They are messages from one man's heart to another. Here we can learn much about *individual* Christians: Paul and Timothy and Titus, as well as the members of churches in Ephesus and Crete. And since human nature does not change from generation to generation, we can easily see why these letters are contemporary in their message. To bridge the centuries, however, and so learn the timeless, universal truths, we must first go back and study the background of each book. In this opening lesson we will give our attention to the background and survey of 1 Timothy.

I. BACKGROUND

It is helpful in the study of a Bible book to first learn why it was written, to whom, and so forth. Learning this material makes one feel “at home” in the later analyses of the actual Bible text. After we have studied these backgrounds of 1 Timothy, we will want to make an overall survey of the book as an introductory study to the detailed analyses of the lessons that follow. Thus our present lesson is in two parts—background and survey. If you are studying with a group, it is recommended that you study this lesson in no fewer than two units (e.g., one lesson on background and one or more lessons on survey). (Note: The three books are studied in this manual in the chronological order of their writing, namely, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy.)

A. The Pastoral Epistles

Paul's three letters to Timothy and Titus are called pastoral epistles, because for the most part they are Paul's counsel to his assis-

tants who served in the pastoral (shepherdlike) functions of the churches in the regions of Ephesus and Crete.¹ (The word *pastor* appears only once in the New Testament, Eph. 4:11, and literally means “shepherd.” Read Acts 20:28-29 and 1 Pet. 5:2-3, where the word *flock* is used, and note the various functions of a spiritual “shepherd,” such as feeding, guiding, and superintending. Also read Jer. 23:1-4.)

The Pauline authorship of these epistles has been challenged by liberal critics, but external and internal evidence strongly supports it.

The place and function of the pastoral epistles in the New Testament are seen when they are compared with the other writings of Paul. Study Chart A carefully, and note the following:

1. The epistles are listed in the chronological order of writing. (Some would place Galatians at a later date.)

2. There are three groups of letters:

Travel Epistles: written during the years of the missionary journeys

Prison Epistles: written during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment

Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy and Titus, written after Paul’s release from prison; 2 Timothy, written during his second Roman imprisonment

3. The main subjects and general purposes of these three groups were different, broadly speaking. Do you see a progression in each list?

4. The first two groups were addressed to churches;² the pastoral epistles were addressed to individuals.

5. The pastoral epistles, especially 1 Timothy and Titus, are about the church and its workers. Sometimes the epistles are referred to as Paul’s ecclesiastical letters.

6. Second Timothy has a place all its own, since it is Paul’s personal farewell to his most intimate friend and collaborer.

1. Technically, it might be said that Timothy and Titus were not *pastors* as we use the term today, since in those early years a church’s pastor was chosen from its elders (cf. Acts 20:17, 28-29). Timothy and Titus were not elders of churches at Ephesus and Crete. Timothy’s task was “to direct, organize, and supervise the work of the churches and to help repel and reject certain errorists whose efforts were threatening to corrupt that work. He had been temporarily left behind to carry on the work which Paul would do if he were there himself” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Timothy*, p. 10). Fortunately, the doctrines and applications of the epistles are unaffected by questions about the men’s official title.
2. Philemon was addressed to others besides the man Philemon (see Philem. 1).

**PROGRESSIVE ADDITIONS OF PAUL'S EPISTLES
TO THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Chart A

GROUP	SETTING	EPISTLE	DATE A.D.	MAIN SUBJECTS	GENERAL PURPOSES	
I TRAVEL EPISTLES	between first and second journeys	GALATIANS	48	SALVATION at Present and in the Future	EVANGELIZING	TO CHURCHES
	second journey	1 and 2 THESSALONIANS	52			
	third journey	1 and 2 CORINTHIANS	55			
		ROMANS	56			
II PRISON EPISTLES	first Roman imprisonment	COLOSSIANS	61	CHRIST and the Christian Life	EDIFYING	
		EPHESIANS				
		PHILEMON				
		PHILIPPIANS				
III PASTORAL EPISTLES	release	1 TIMOTHY	62	CHURCH and its Workers	ESTABLISHING	TO INDIVIDUALS
		TITUS	62			
	second Roman imprisonment	2 TIMOTHY	67		personal farewell	

B. The Man Timothy

Timothy is one of the most likable and devoted Christians of the entire New Testament. From a human standpoint, his greatest honor was to be chosen as an assistant to the church's foremost missionary leader, Paul. He was Paul's closest friend, but the apostle recognized his higher worth and relationship when he called him a "man of God" (1 Tim. 6:11).

The name *Timothy* appears twenty-four times in the New Testament. You may want to read these verses to learn more about the man: Acts 16:1; 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; 2 Corinthians 1:1, 19; Philippians 1:1; 2:19; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:2, 6; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:2; Philemon 1; Hebrews 13:23.

1. *Home.* Timothy was a native of Derbe (cf. Acts 16:1 and 20:4), son of a Gentile father and Jewish mother (Acts 16:1, 3). His mother and grandmother are mentioned by name in 2 Timothy: Eunice and Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). Paul was thirty to thirty-five years old when Timothy was born, which means that the apostle was twice Timothy's age when 1 and 2 Timothy were written (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12).

From the time Timothy was a child, he was instructed by his mother in the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15). His mother had been taught by her mother, Lois. Timothy's Gentile father apparently did not hinder this Jewish religious training.

2. *Name.* The name *Timothy* (Greek, Timotheus) means honoring God or honored by God. Timothy's mother likely chose the name out of her faith in God.

3. *Conversion.* Timothy and his mother were probably converted when Paul visited Derbe on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-7, 20-21). From 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 and 1 Timothy 1:2, we may conclude that it was Paul who led Timothy to the Lord. Timothy was probably in his late teens when he was saved.

4. *Ministry.* When Paul and Silas revisited Derbe on their second missionary journey, Christians from that area highly recommended Timothy to Paul as an assistant (Acts 16:1-2). Paul responded, and Timothy was circumcised and ordained to the ministry of the Word (Acts 16:3-5; 1 Tim. 4:14).³ From that time onward, Timothy was Paul's closest co-worker, serving in these various capacities:

(a) Paul's aide on the journeys, doing many of the necessary menial tasks as well as helping in the ministry of the Word

3. The rite of circumcision in this case was to keep open the door of witness to unbelieving Jews who would learn that Timothy was half Gentile (Acts 16:3).

(b) Paul's representative to young groups of Christians, in follow-up work, while Paul was ministering in new areas (for examples, read Acts 19:22 and 1 Thess. 3:1-2)

(c) Paul's companion in prison (cf. Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philem. 1; Heb. 13:23)

The relationship of the apostle Paul to the younger Timothy has been described by one writer thus:

That an older man should selflessly love, instruct and repose confidence in a youth and then continue to exhibit such close companionship for approximately twenty years is surely admirable. For a young man to respond with similar respect, confidence, and heartfelt admiration, without jealousy, impatience, or resentment is equally commendable. The relationship of these two men is a remarkable display of Christian virtues at their best.⁴

Paul spent about three years of his third missionary journey in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:8, 10; 20:31). Timothy was with Paul at this time (cf. Acts 19:1 and 19:22), so that he became well acquainted with the Christians there. This was the area where Timothy was ministering when Paul wrote 1 Timothy about seven years later.

5. *Character.* Someone has written, "Timothy was one of the magnificent compensations Paul enjoyed for the cruel treatment he received at Lystra." Various things written in Acts and the epistles furnish the background for a personality profile of this man of God. Try to visualize the man Timothy from these descriptions:⁵

tender, affectionate (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:20-21)

timid, tactful (1 Cor. 16:10-11; 1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 1:6-7)

faithful, loyal (1 Cor. 4:17)

conscientious (Phil. 2:19-23)

devoted to God (1 Tim. 6:11)

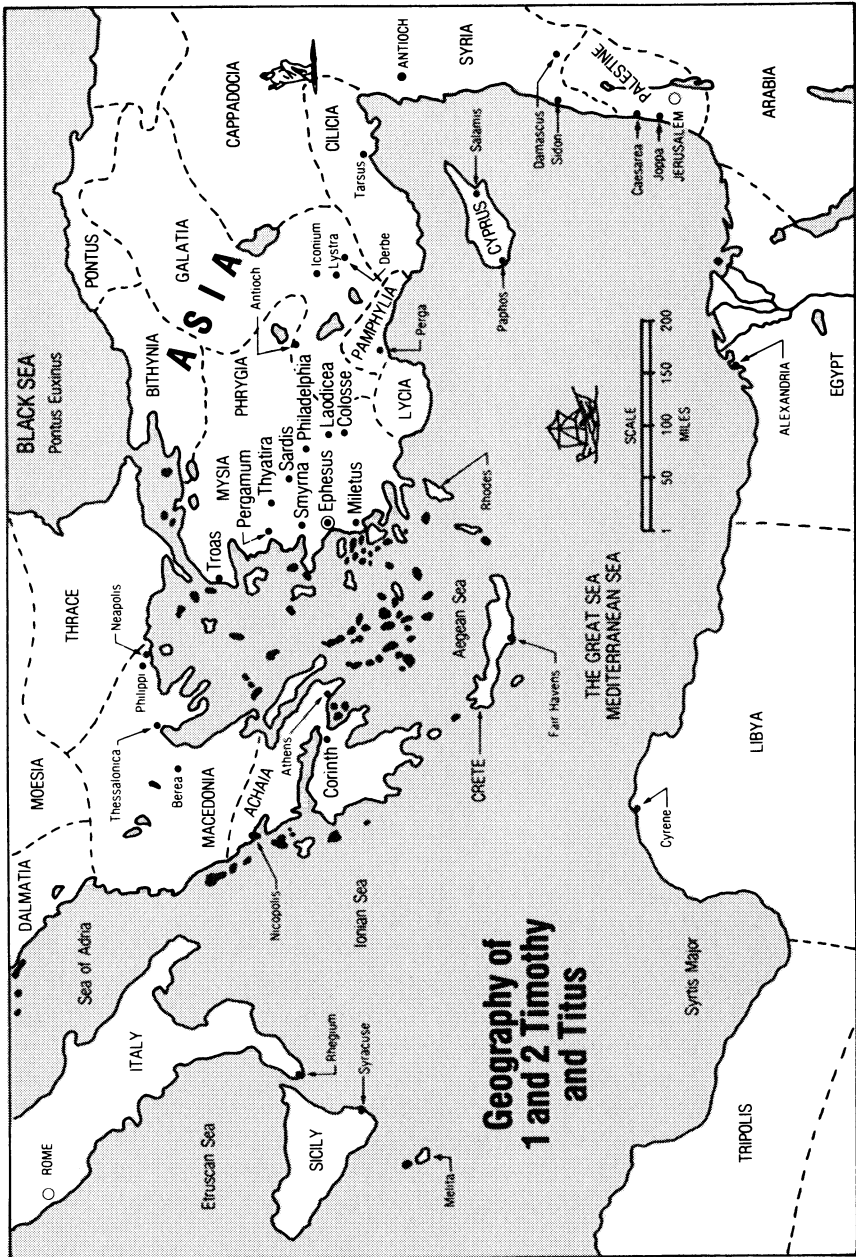
with a physical infirmity (1 Tim. 5:23)

You will become better acquainted with Timothy as you study the two letters bearing his name.

Death. The Bible does not reveal any details of the deaths of Paul or Timothy. According to tradition, Paul was executed by Nero and Timothy suffered martyrdom later under Emperor Domitian or Nerva.

4. Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 19.

5. Sometimes a trait can only be implied from a Scripture passage.



C. The Author Paul

Many things related to the apostle's ministry (e.g., message, methods, people, places) up to the time of his writing 1 Timothy form part of the background of the pastorals. So it will be helpful at this time to view Paul's career in sketch form, observing how 1 Timothy fits into the pattern. For this, study the Appendix entitled "An Approximate Chronology of the Life of Paul." Note especially all references to the man Timothy.

D. The Churches of Ephesus

Timothy's ministry extended to all the local congregations in and around Ephesus, so any reference in this manual to the mother church at Ephesus includes the satellite churches as well. See the map, Chart B, which shows the geographical setting of 1 Timothy.

Read Acts 20:17-21 for Paul's résumé of his ministry at Ephesus when he brought the gospel to that city for the first time (third missionary journey).

When Paul visited Ephesus after his release at Rome, he discovered that during his absence the church was plagued with all kinds of spiritual problems. The city itself, with all of its corruption and idolatry, was proving to be a spiritual battleground for the congregation of believers. One can well appreciate why this was a problem in many first-century churches.

If it be remembered how vast was the change which most of the members had made in passing from the worship of the heathen temples to the pure and simple worship of Christianity, it will not excite surprise that their old life still clung to them or that they did not clearly distinguish which things needed to be changed and which might continue as they had been.⁶

Paul stayed a while and tried to help the people as much as he could. When he had to leave for Macedonia, he left Timothy at Ephesus to continue what he had started (1 Tim. 1:3).

The congregations of Ephesus were five to eight years old when Paul wrote 1 Timothy. Growing pains were still there, issuing from such important tasks as organizing, teaching, correcting, and unifying. To be sure, Timothy had a full-time job, helping the leaders of the various congregations fulfill their ministry.

6. James Stalker sees in this description of the church at Corinth a picture of the average church of Paul's missionary journeys. *The Life of St. Paul*, p. 108.

E. Date and Place Written

Paul probably wrote this letter from Macedonia, around A.D. 62⁷ (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul expected to return to Ephesus shortly, but he knew of the possibility of a long delay (3:14-15).

F. Occasion

It is not difficult to learn from the epistle itself the situation at Ephesus that constrained Paul to write at this time. Read the letter through, not tarrying over details, and observe direct or indirect references to the following problems or needs: spread of false doctrine,⁸ spiritual coldness, personnel problems, problems of the worship services, problems related to offices of the church, and the care of widows.

G. Purposes

Paul's immediate purpose in writing was to urge Timothy to stay on at Ephesus (1:3-4). How Timothy must have yearned to be ministering at the side of Paul again! In general, Paul wrote this letter with two purposes in mind, geared to the occasion discussed above: (1) personal—to help Timothy; (2) ecclesiastical—to help the churches of Ephesus.

Underlying both of these aims was Paul's ever present burden of propagating and preserving the truth of the gospel. The apostle clearly shared this with his colaborer when he spoke of it as "the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (1:11).

H. Distinctive Passages

The passages for which 1 Timothy is especially noted are listed below. Read these briefly. Refer to them again in your survey study.

1. Intercessory prayer—2:1-4
2. Women—2:9-15
3. Church offices—3:1-13
4. Hymn of doctrine—3:16
5. Wealth—6:6-10, 17-19

7. Some hold that Paul wrote from Corinth in Greece.

8. Read Paul's earlier prediction of this in Acts 20:28-30.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what order were the pastoral epistles written?
2. When did Paul first bring the gospel to Ephesus? How long did he minister there at that time?
3. What does the name *Timothy* mean? When was Timothy converted? When did he join Paul's missionary party?
4. In what three ways did Timothy serve with Paul?
5. What kind of man was Timothy?
6. Did Timothy minister to only the "mother" church at Ephesus? What was Timothy's main responsibility?
7. What were the problems in the Ephesian congregation when Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy?
8. What were Paul's two main purposes in writing the epistle?
9. What practical lessons can be learned from this New Testament book for today?

II. SURVEY

We have studied the background of 1 Timothy in order to appreciate more *why* and *how* it was given to the world. Now as we enter the stage of survey study, followed by analysis in the subsequent lessons, our goal is to learn *what* the epistle says and means.

As we consider the actual text of 1 Timothy, the natural question to ask is, Where do we begin? The answer is, Begin with the large whole and then proceed to the small parts. The large, overall view is known by various names: skyscraper view, bird's-eye view, overview, synthesis, survey. Survey study should always precede analytical study, as stated by the rule Image the whole, then execute the parts.

There are three main stages of survey study: (1) making the initial acquaintance; (2) scanning the prominent individual items; and (3) seeing how the book holds together. In your survey of 1 Timothy, don't get bogged down in any particular details. Study of details comes later in analysis. In survey, the purpose is to see the large things, such as general movements, turning points, and highlights.

A. Making the Initial Acquaintance

Read 1 Timothy in one sitting. The purpose of this initial scanning is to get the feel and atmosphere of the book and to catch its major purposes. Write down your first impressions of the epistle and any key words and phrases that stand out as of this reading.

B. Scanning Individual Items

Mark paragraph divisions in your Bible according to the references shown on Chart C. Then go through the epistle again and assign a paragraph title to each paragraph. (A paragraph title is a strong word or phrase, preferably taken from the text, intended to serve as a clue to at least one main truth of the paragraph.) Record your paragraph titles on Chart C (examples are given). Note: This set of titles is not intended to be a formal outline of the epistle. The main value is *in the process itself* of securing the titles, helping you to be paragraph-conscious in this survey as well as in the analytical studies that follow. (The references of Chart C are the opening verses of each paragraph.)

PARAGRAPH TITLES FOR 1 TIMOTHY																								Chart C
1:1 PAUL . . . UNTO TIMOTHY																								
1:3 FABLES																								
1:12																								
1:18																								
2:1																								
2:9																								
3:1																								
3:8																								
3:14																								
4:1																								
4:6																								
4:11																								
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5:9																								
5:11																								
5:17																								
6:1																								
6:2b																								
6:6																								
6:11																								
6:17																								
6:20																								

What have you noticed so far about these subjects in the epistle?

1. How much Paul writes about Timothy's Christian life

Timothy's ministry

The church

2. Notes of praise

3. Various kinds of sin

C. Seeing How the Book Holds Together

Paul's letter is a unit from beginning to end. It is not an unorganized list of miscellaneous thoughts. Let us look at it more closely to see its structural relationships. Then we will be better equipped to focus on each individual part when we begin our analyses in Lesson 2.

1. What is the opening salutation?

2. What would you consider to be the concluding note?

3. Does the word *Amen* appear at any place other than at the end of the letter? What is the function of such a word?

4. Does there seem to be a turning point in the epistle? For example, how does chapter 3 end?

5. How do the opening words of chapter 2 indicate a beginning of something new here? Compare what goes before (chap. 1) with what follows (chaps. 2-3).

9. One writer has pointed out this symmetrical structure of 1 Timothy, centered on the three hymns of the epistle:

Charge (1:3-16)

Hymn (1:17)

Charge (1:18-20)

Charge (2:1-3:15)

Hymn (3:16)

Charge (4:1-6:2c)

Charge (6:2d-15a)

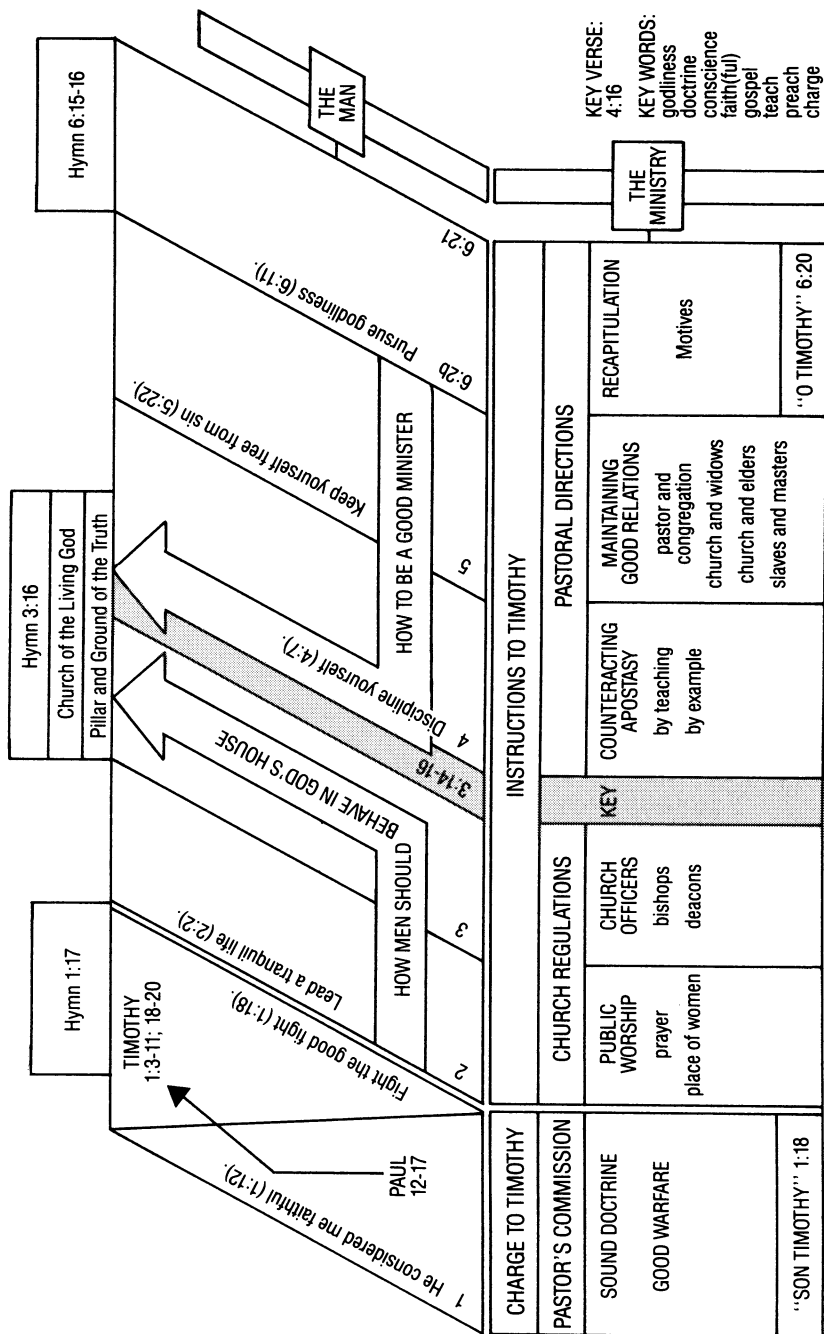
Hymn (6:15b-16)

Charge (6:17-21)

(See Wilbur B. Wallis, "1 and 2 Timothy," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, pp. 1368-70.)

1 TIMOTHY: GODLINESS AND PASTORAL CARE

Chart D



6. What reference to the local church is made in 3:15? Are chapters 2 and 3 about the subject of the church? Support your answer.

7. What seems to be the general subject of chapters 4-6?

D. A Survey Chart of 1 Timothy

One way to show the structure of a book is by a survey chart. Study carefully Chart D in the light of your own observations made thus far. Note the following:

1. A major division is made at 2:1. What is the two-part outline?
2. The key of the epistle is shown as 3:14-16. How is it related to what goes before and to what follows?

3. Study the contents of each chapter as shown on the chart.

4. Note in the outline "The Man" and "The Ministry." These are two subjects you will want to study continually as you move through the epistle.

5. Note the key verse and the key words. Observe that *godliness* appears eight times in the letter. This is one of the reasons for including it in the two-part title "Godliness and Pastoral Care."

SUMMARY

On the basis of what you have seen so far in 1 Timothy, write a list of practical lessons taught by the epistle that apply to the Christian life and the work of the church today.