

Study 14: Introduction to 2nd Timothy

Introduction

Second Timothy was written at the very end of Paul's life, and was the last (preserved) letter that he wrote. In contrast to the business like approach in other Pastoral Epistles, Paul is very melancholy as he reflects on his life of service, and the finality of the situation that is approaching.

Body of the Study

Background and circumstances

Place, date, and occasion of the letter

The Situation in Ephesus

The Situation in Rome

The style of the letter

Outline of the letter

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the whole book in a single sitting, and a few days later read chapter 1 again.

Read the notes as a review of the study

Notes for study 14: Introduction to 2nd Timothy

2nd Timothy was written at the very end of Paul's life, and was the last (preserved) letter that he wrote. In contrast to the business like approach in other Pastoral Epistles, Paul is very melancholy as he reflects on his life of service, and the finality of the situation that is approaching.

Background and circumstances

The epistle was written at the close of Paul's fourth journey. After leaving Ephesus, he went to Corinth, and he then spent the winter at Nicopolos, where he was arrested and sent to Rome for execution around AD 66 or 67. [For a longer discussion on this, refer to the introduction to Titus, and the Series on the Life of Paul].

The background to the political upheaval at the time is given by the Roman historian Tacitus (written around 118 AD). He tells of the mad Emperor Nero, who had Rome burned, and then put the blame on the Christians:

The next thing was to seek means of propitiating the gods, and recourse was had to the Sibylline books, by the direction of which prayers were offered to Vulcanus, Ceres, and Proserpina. Juno, too, was entreated by the matrons, first, in the Capitol, then on the nearest part of the coast, whence water was procured to sprinkle the fane and image of the goddess. And there were sacred banquets and nightly vigils celebrated by married women. But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

Paul was recognised as a leader of the Christians, and was brought to Rome as a part of the retribution that Nero was bringing upon all. Conybeare & Howson¹ give a brief timeline for these events:

- AD 64 The Great fire at Rome (July 19th)
- AD 66 The Jewish War begins
- AD 68 (Spring) Paul is in prison at Rome, writes 2 Tim.
- AD 68 (Summer) Paul is executed (May or June)
- AD 68 Death of Nero in the middle of June.

¹ Conybeare, WJ & Howson, JS "The Life and Epistles of St Paul" Eerdmans, Grand Rapids Mi. ISBN 0-8028-8086-X p.834

Place, date, and occasion of the letter

Unlike many of the New Testament letters, we can be fairly certain of the time and place for the letter. The time of writing is around 68 AD after Paul had spent the winter in Nicopolos, and before Paul was imprisoned, and executed in Rome. Paul was dreading the coming winter (2:4:13,21) so the time of writing was most likely Spring, before the death of Nero in the Northern Hemisphere Summer (June) of that year.

The occasion of the letter is a little harder to gauge. Paul is summoning Timothy to come to him, and he would be replaced by Tychicus. It is most likely that Timothy is still in Ephesus, although he could be elsewhere in Asia Minor. The general consensus is that Tychicus delivered the letter to Timothy, however this does little to explain why Paul told that piece of information to Timothy in the letter (2:4:12). In favour of Timothy still being in Ephesus, is the mention again of Hymenaeus (2:2:17) and Alexander (2:4:14), compared to 1:1:20.

As Paul writes his last letter to Timothy, his *son in the faith*, he reflects on the loyalty shown to him over his life of ministry.

The Situation in Ephesus

Timothy had been charged with setting the disorderly church in order from some of the elders who were leading the flock away (1:3:14-15; 1:1:18-20; Acts 20:30). Paul had disciplined some of them himself (1:1:20), although it seems they had refused to accept it, and continued to influence the brethren. Despite Timothy's discipline of them (assuming that he had done what Paul told him to do), they were still influencing the brethren.

Timothy has now been in Ephesus for a few years (probably 3 or 4 – 64 to 68 AD), and he is now to be replaced by Tychicus, so that he can come to assist Paul in Rome.

The Situation in Rome

Paul had already faced a preliminary hearing (2:4:16), and he had been abandoned in his defence by his friends. The situation is grave, and Paul is facing execution as being one of the leaders of the 'sect'. Many Christians had already been put to death, and to stand in defence of Paul would most likely result in the same treatment. Paul lists many of his co-workers who had departed and left him alone:

Demas	Has loved the world and departed for Thessalonica	2:4:10
Crescens	Has departed for Galatia	2:4:10
Titus	Has left for Dalmatia	4:4:10
Tychicus	Has been sent by Paul to Ephesus (with the letter?)	2:4:12

This was one of the low points in Paul's life, like the time in Corinth where the Lord assured him that *He has much people in this city* (Acts 18:10). On this occasion, Paul says that "...*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me...*" (2:4:17). Luke is the only accomplice of Paul who is still with him (2:4:11).

The style of the letter

Like the other Pastoral Epistles, the style of the letter is personal (in being written to specific individuals), and is full of practical instruction.

Second Timothy is much less business like than 1st Timothy or Titus, and is very melancholy as Paul reflects on his circumstances. It has very strong feelings as Paul conveys greeting for the final time to his long-standing associates.

Paul writes to Timothy with an appeal to remain loyal to Paul and to the gospel, especially in the face of the persecutions and hardships.

The body of the letter is comprised of three major appeals to loyalty (1:3-5) and the concluding personal matters and instructions (4:9-18). The body of the letter is comprised of 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 opposition².

Outline of the letter

The following outline is taken from Fee & Stuart²

- 1:1- 5 *Salutation and Thanksgiving*
- 1:6- 2:13 *First Appeal*
- 2:14 - 3:9 *Context for the Appeal: The False Teachers*
- 3:10 – 4:8 *Final Appeal*
- 4:9-18 *The First Reason for the Letter*
- 4:19- 22 *Final Greetings*

² Fee, Gordon D & Stuart, Douglas "How to Read the Bible Book by Book" Zondervan ISBN 0-310-211118-2