

# The Time of First and Second Timothy

## First Timothy

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Pauline authorship of the pastoral Epistles requires Paul's release from his Roman imprisonment (Acts 28), the continuation of his missionary endeavors, and his imprisonment for a second time in Rome. Unfortunately, the order of events can only be reconstructed from hints because there is no concurrent history paralleling Acts to chronicle the last years of the apostle. The following reconstruction, therefore, is only tentative:

As he anticipated in Philippians (1:19, 25,26; 2:24), Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment. It is possible that his Jewish accusers decided not to appear at his trial before Caesar. In fulfillment of his promise to the Philippians (Phil. 2:19-23), he sends Timothy to Philippi to relate the good news. Paul himself went to Ephesus (in spite of his earlier expectations in Acts 20:38) and to other Asian churches like Colosse (see Philem. 22).

When Timothy rejoined him in Ephesus, Paul instructed his assistant to "remain in Ephesus" (1:3) while he journeyed to Macedonia. When he saw that he might be delayed in Macedonia; Paul wrote First Timothy, perhaps from Philippi (3:14,15). After he saw Timothy in Ephesus, the apostle journeyed on to the island of Crete where, after a period of ministry, he left Titus to continue the work (Titus 1:5).

In Corinth, Paul decided to write a letter to Titus because Zenas and Apollos were making a journey that would take them by way of Crete (Titus 3:13). He instructed Titus to join him in Nicopolis after the arrival of his replacement in Crete, Artemas or Tychicus (Titus 3:13). He instructed Titus to join him in Nicopolis after the arrival of his replacement in Crete, Artemas or Tychicus (Titus 3:12).

If he went to Spain as he had planned (Rom. 15:24,28), Paul probably departed with Titus for that western province after his winter in Nicopolis. Early church tradition holds that Paul did go to Spain. Before the end of the first century, Clement of Rome said that Paul "reached the limits of the West" (Clement 5:7). Since he was writing from Rome, he evidently had Spain in mind.

Paul may have been in Spain from A.D. 64 to 66. He returned to Greece and Asia-to Corinth, Miletus, and Troas (2Tim. 4:13,20), -and may have been arrested in Troas where he left his valuable books and parchments (2Tim. 4:13,15).

Now that Christianity had become an illegal religion in the Empire (the burning of Rome took place in A.D. 64), Paul's enemies were able to successfully accuse him. He was imprisoned in A.D. 67 and wrote Second Timothy from his Roman cell after his first defense before the Imperial Court (2Tim. 1:8, 17:2;9; 4:16,17).

He was delivered from condemnation, but he held no hope of release and expected to be executed (2Tim. 4:6-8,18). He urged Timothy to come before that happened (2Tim. 4:9,21); and, according to tradition, the apostle was beheaded west of Rome on the Ostian Way. Paul wrote First Timothy from Macedonia in A.D. 62 or 63 while Timothy was serving as his representative in Ephesus and perhaps in other churches in the province of Asia. Timothy was to appoint elders, combat false doctrine, and supervise church life as an apostolic representative.

# The Time of Second Timothy

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The cruel and unbalanced Nero, emperor of Rome from AD 54-68 was responsible for the beginning of the Roman persecution of Christians. Half of Rome was destroyed in July AD 64 by a fire, and mounting suspicion that Nero was responsible for the conflagration caused him to use the unpopular Christians as his scapegoat.

Christianity thus became a religio illicita (an impermissible or illegitimate religion), and persecution of those who professed Christ became severe. By the time of Paul's return from Spain to Asia in AD 66, his enemies were able to use the official Roman position against Christianity to their advantage.

Fearing for their own lives, the Asian believers failed to support Paul after his arrest (1:15) and no one supported him at his first defense before the Imperial Court (4:16). Abandoned by almost everyone (4:10-11), the apostle found himself in circumstances very different from those of his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31). At that time he was merely under house arrest, people could freely visit him, and he had the hope of release.

Now he was in a cold Roman cell (4:13), regarded "as an evildoer" (2:9), and without hope of acquittal in spite of the success of his initial defense (4:6-8, 17-18).

Under these conditions, Paul wrote this epistle in the fall of AD 67, hoping that Timothy would be able to visit him before the approaching winter (4:21). Timothy evidently was in Ephesus at the time of this letter (see 1:18, 4:19), and on his way to Rome he would go through Troas (4:13) and Macedonia. Priscilla and Aquila (4:19) probably returned from Rome (Rom 16:3) to Ephesus after the burning of Rome and the beginning of the persecution. Tychicus may have been the bearer of this letter (4:12).