

## The New Testament, Book 16

### II Timothy

II Timothy, the second of the three “pastoral epistles,” is a continuation of the instruction, exhortation and encouragement that Paul wrote for Timothy in the first epistle. By this time, however, the setting was much different from that in which the first letter to Timothy letter was written; Paul had been re-arrested on Nero’s order, brought back to Rome, and was in the miserable Mamartine prison with Peter, awaiting execution. The Christians in and around Rome were being rounded up and put to death in horrible ways, and the churches in Asia were slipping into error and apostasy. In spite of this, Paul was still unshaken in his faith and confidence in the final triumph of Jesus Christ and his Church.

#### Paul’s “Swan Song”

II Timothy has been called Paul’s swan song; written after his letter to Titus, it is the last of his epistles to be written--his final message to the Church. The time of Nero’s persecutions was a dark and terrible time for the church; Paul is lonely, and he has been forsaken by some of his friends. Only Luke, his beloved physician, has remained with him, staying as close as possible. Paul wishes very much for Timothy to come to him, and to bring with him a cloak and some books and parchments that Paul had left behind at Troas. I cannot improve on Merrill Unger’s summary: “There is a deep solemnity in the epistle, bordering almost on a note of sadness. But above it there is an overtone of triumph. ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.’ ”

Henry Halley eloquently called II Timothy “the exultant cry of a dying conqueror.” I find in this a reminder of Jeremiah, left alone and weeping in the rubble of a destroyed Jerusalem, with his people being carried away to Babylon. There, “the weeping prophet,” perhaps the saddest man in the Bible, wrote in Lamentations, which is perhaps the saddest book of the Bible, one of the most beautiful, bright, and hopeful promises in the Bible: that the Lord’s mercies “are new every morning,” and “great is thy faithfulness.”

We have read already of the very greatest “exultant cry of a dying conqueror” of all time, as Jesus the Messiah shouted from the cross, “It is finished!” We cannot compare Jeremiah or Paul with Jesus, the Messiah;

yet I cannot avoid seeing an interesting continuity here: in Jeremiah of the Old Covenant; in Christ Jesus who sealed the New Covenant with his victorious death; and in Paul here, facing a terrible death, about to live out his great proclamation that “to live is Christ and to die is gain<sup>1</sup>.”

As for young Timothy, the place and nature of his death are unknown; there is, however, an interesting ancient tradition which has it that, while bishop at Ephesus, he died as a martyr. According to the tradition, Timothy was so offended by a lewd procession during the Festival of Diana (undoubtedly one featuring sexual activity, for she was a goddess of fertility), that he attempted to stop the procession. This so enraged the Ephesian celebrants, so the tradition goes, that he paid for it with his life<sup>2</sup>.

**A. Author.** The human author of this epistle is Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, as he states in the very first verse; his authorship is further supported by the very personal nature of the content.

**B. Place and Date.** Paul wrote II Timothy from the miserable Mamartine prison in Rome, ca 68 AD.

**C. Occasion.** Paul is in a filthy Roman prison, and in chains. There are no windows, and the only opening is in the ceiling. After being first tried, exonerated and released, he was later rearrested, falsely convicted, and condemned by Nero. He is awaiting execution<sup>3</sup>. The Roman churches are beset with widespread and horrible executions, and the churches in Asia are slipping into error and apostasy. Paul is writing to Timothy with his final words of guidance and encouragement.

**D. Theme.** The theme of Second Timothy is the ultimate triumph of the believer. Also, as in I Timothy, there is guidance for Paul’s young protégé, encouragement, clarification of doctrinal matters, and a prophetic warning about the end-times.

**E. Highlights.** Highlights in II Timothy include the following:

1. “Timothy My Dearly Beloved Son.” (1:1-5)

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy he called him “my own son in the faith”; here, in what will be his final letter to him, he calls Timothy “my dearly beloved son.” Paul had no biological son, and Timothy’s father was not a Christian; it appears that they had grown to love one another as a father and son. Paul refers to Timothy’s tears; it seems that Timothy has heard of

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<sup>1</sup> Roman law forbade the torturing of a Roman Citizen; yet, according to early Church traditions, Nero had Paul tortured before he was beheaded.

<sup>2</sup> If you have been subjected to the sight of a “gay pride” parade, where degeneracy and debauchery are celebrated, you have probably seen something similar to the procession in Ephesus honoring Diana.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this, see **B. Place and Date** in the study guide to I Timothy.

Paul's imprisonment and approaching execution, and Paul is aware of his grieving. Remembering his own religious heritage, Paul thanks God for the sincere faith of Timothy, first instilled and nourished in him by his Jewish grandmother Lois, and his Jewish mother Eunice.

2. "Stir Up the Gift of God Which Is in Thee." (1:6-14)

As he had done in his first letter to Timothy, Paul reminds him not to neglect the gift of the Holy Spirit that is within him, the endowment with power from on high for the carrying out of his ministry and overcoming "the afflictions of the gospel<sup>4</sup>." This can only be done with the power of the Holy Spirit--not with human power and abilities. He also states a vital fact and precious promise; it is that God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind<sup>5</sup>. Because of this, he says, we must not be ashamed or intimidated; there are afflictions that come with serving and declaring Jesus, but we face them, and overcome them, with the power of God. Paul again enumerates his ministries, and says that it is for these things that he suffers. Yet, he says, he is not ashamed or in any way discouraged, for he knows the One whom he has believed, and is fully persuaded the He will protect and preserve the ministry which he has committed to his Lord and will perform, until the final day.

***NOTE:** The gift, which Paul tells Timothy to stir up in v 6, is almost certainly the gift of the Holy Spirit (the baptism with [or in] the Holy Spirit), which can wane if we do not exercise it, and receive re-fillings, and not one of the nine supernatural gifts<sup>6</sup>. Evidence of this is the use of the definite article: notice that he speaks of "the gift that is within thee by the laying on of my hands." He doesn't say "a gift" (indefinite article), or "the gifts" (plura)<sup>7</sup>." The wording of v 7 re-enforces this probability. This verse also tells us that Paul was one of the elders referred to in I Tim 4:14.*

3. Warning about the Unfaithful and Praise for the Faithful. (1:15-18)

Paul reminds Timothy that all of the believers in Asia in Asia have turned against Paul; the reason is not given, but the names of two prominent leaders in this theological revolt are named. He does not expand on this troubling statement (although we could wish that he had); instead, he turns to elaborate praise for a brother named Onesiphorus, who had ministered to

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; I Tim 4:14.

<sup>5</sup> I Jn 4:18.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 4:31.

<sup>7</sup> See also in this regard Acts 2:38.

Paul while he was at Ephesus for three years, and has now visited and ministered to his needs in the Roman prison<sup>8</sup>.

***NOTE:** The words “all they which are in Asia be turned away from me” in v 15 are troubling; and I find no commentator who attempts to explain them. Mrs. Siewert, in her Amplified Bible does not expand on the key word, “all”; she merely translates as it is and moves on. So how are we to understand this troubling statement?*

*To begin with, “Asia,” here, does not refer to all of Asia Minor (today’s Turkey); instead, it refers to Rome’s province of proconsular Asia, the western-most portion. Interestingly, this portion includes Ephesus, its capital, and the cities of the other six churches of Revelation 1:20-3:22.*

*It seems to me that “all” here could not mean that every believer in all seven churches had rejected the teachings and authority of Paul, for Timothy was bishop/elder at Ephesus, the capital city, and he would not have tolerated such widespread heresy. It probably means that, in some way, on some one point of church polity or doctrine, a movement against Paul’s position has arisen. The only intellectually honest answer is that we don’t know what he means here. It must not have been a matter of much magnitude, for Paul states it in 15 words and then leaves it behind. My marginal note beside the word “all” in v 15 is a question mark.*

4. The Principle of Discipling Subsequent Generations of Leaders. (2:2)

In a single verse, Paul lays out a vital principle: it is that of the perpetual necessity for the training and discipling of one generation of leaders, so that they may do the same for the next generation of leaders. Paul has trained Timothy in the performance of his ministry as a leader in the Church, and he charges Timothy with the responsibility for doing the same thing for the next generation of leaders. This creates a perpetual continuation, with the next generation of leaders always being prepared to serve when its time comes.

5. A Reminder that Hardship Is to Be Expected. (2:3-14)

Because Timothy is to be a teacher of the coming generation of leaders, and an example for them, he is told to endure hardship and suffering as a good soldier of the Lord. With the privilege of serving the Lord faithfully, especially as a leader, there will come hardships and trials. Then Paul makes a series of teaching points that are similar to proverbs: wise advice and principles of just behavior that, while valid, don’t seem to belong, necessarily, with the charge in verse 2.

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<sup>8</sup> Onesiphorus is mentioned here, and in the closing statements in Chapt 4; he appears nowhere else in the Bible.

- a. A good soldier does not entangle himself in affairs of civilian life; he concentrates on his duty, to please the officer who enlisted him.
- b. An athlete, or any other competitor, may succeed, but cannot receive the prize unless he competes within the rules.
- c. The farmer who works hard and produces food should be the first to use and enjoy that food.

These seem to be fundamental principles that church leaders should adopt and keep in mind as they lead and teach others.

Paul says that the message he preaches is that Jesus is the Christ, the son of David, and that he conquered death in the Resurrection. For this, he says, he has been condemned to prison and death; yet, while Nero can imprison and kill him, nothing can confine or kill the truth that he preaches. Therefore, he says, he accepts his suffering as an example for the Church, to the end that all believers may win the ultimate victory. If we die as Christ did, we shall also live with Him. If we suffer as He did, we shall also reign with Him. However, he warns, if the suffering causes us to become unfaithful, and if we deny Him, He will also deny us. He wants us to finish the race and be victorious; yet, if we don't, if we turn from Jesus and deny Him, it in no way diminishes his faithfulness, the truth of the gospel, or the ultimate victory that Jesus obtained.

#### 6. Study to Show Thyself Approved. (2:15-23)

By the time Paul is writing this second and final letter to Timothy multiple problems are troubling the Church in Asia, and one of them is the arising of false doctrines and the loss of the simple clarity of fundamental truths. He urges Timothy to teach the coming leaders to keep the message simple, and not to allow peripheral arguments or intellectual speculations to distract them.

It seems that there are people in that church who enjoy arguing for the sake of argument, and engage in theological speculation in pursuit of new ideas<sup>9</sup>. Among those engaging in this confusion is one Hymenaeus, apparently the same one whom Paul delivered unto Satan that he learn not to blaspheme<sup>10</sup>. It seems that this Hymenaeus, along with one Philetus, is teaching that the return of Jesus, with the resurrection of the dead and the catching away of the saints (the rapture), has already occurred. This has caused so much

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<sup>9</sup> As was the case among the pagans in Athens, who were always seeking to hear of, or speak about, some new idea. (Acts 17:21).

<sup>10</sup> I Tim 1:19-20.

confusion that the faith of some is overthrown<sup>11</sup>. In light of this confusion, Paul enjoins Timothy to be diligent in his study of the Scriptures, “rightly dividing the word of truth,” interpreting it carefully, and effectively teaching those in his charge. Only in this way can he achieve the desired result: a well-taught, doctrinally sound church. And, through it all, the foundation of the Church, laid by God, is solid and unshaken; and all of those (you and I) who claim the name of Christians must depart from sin and keep our lives free from it.

Paul also reminds Timothy that, in order to serve God with a pure heart, he is to flee youthful lusts and follow the path of righteousness, faith, love, and peace with all true Christians. He is also to avoid becoming involved in questions that arise from ignorance, silly distractions, that take the focus off of foundational truth and lead to discord and strife.

**NOTES:**

*a. The Greek verb rendered “rightly dividing” here is orthotomeo, meaning literally “to cut straight.” It is used only here. It has this meaning in that we must “cut a straight line” in interpretation, take it for what it clearly says, not deviating to the right or left, into hazy or unorthodox areas of meaning. By the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, however, the word’s meaning had also evolved to express, in general terms, rightly dealing with a matter. It is used with this meaning in the Septuagint’s rendering of Prov 3:6 and 11:5, in speaking of being properly guided along the right path<sup>12</sup>. Thus the word does not necessarily mean separating part of the Scriptures from other parts, compartmentalizing it, as the English rendering might appear to say<sup>13</sup>.*

*b. Notice that (in the AV/KJV) the word “Let,” within a sentence in v 19, begins with a capital “L.” In Elizabethan grammar, since quotation marks had not yet been thought of, this means that it is the beginning of a quotation. This strongly suggests that “Let every one [of us] that nameth the name of Christ [claims to follow Christ] depart from iniquity” was a proverb or common saying among 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, the sort of thing we would put on our refrigerators with magnets today.*

*This is a minor, but interesting, point and I have not seen a commentator who points this out, although Mrs. Siewert, in her Amplified Bible, follows*

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<sup>11</sup> The Greek verb rendered “overthrown” here is a form of *anatrepo*, meaning to overturn or upset; thus, it seems that the negative result is confusion concerning the faith, not utter rejection of the faith and apostasy.

<sup>12</sup> In case your memory needs refreshing, the Septuagint is the first translation of the OT, from Hebrew to Greek, done about 300 AD. Because the Greek language is much more precise than Hebrew, such comparisons with the Greek OT can be helpful in understanding some passages in the NT.

<sup>13</sup> Vine, W.E.: An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, “Divide,” p 327.

*the AV in capitalizing that “L”; and most of the other modern versions put quotation marks around the statement.*

7. Be Patient and Gentle in Correcting Errors. (2:24-26)

Paul reminds Timothy to be patient and gentle in his teaching when pointing out errors in the flock, giving God time to bring those who are in error to an understanding of their errors and to repentance. Satan is able to blind some to the glorious light of the gospel, and they are led captive at his will. They may need time and patient teaching to clear their understanding and escape his mental and spiritual traps<sup>14</sup>.

8. More Warning of End-Time Perils. (3:1-13)

Here, at the beginning of Chapter 3, Paul suddenly turns from instruction concerning patience and gentleness in helping those in Satan’s snares to become free of deception, to dire warnings about evil men with reprobate minds who will be, in the end times, enemies of the gospel. As he did at the beginning of Chapter 4 in his first letter to Timothy, here Paul, again warns prophetically of the falling away that will occur as the end of the age approaches.

Yet here, in this second and final letter, the warning paints a much darker picture; he writes not just of a cooling indifference, featuring false, demon-inspired doctrines, but of a widespread abandonment of all things godly and good, and an aggressive assault on the family, the civil culture, and the Church. It reads like something out of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here he writes of the breakdown of the culture featuring open hostility toward the faithful. Men will not just be immoral and indifferent to the gospel; rather, they will aggressively hate and attack those who are moral. All of the faithful, who live in godliness, faithfully serving Christ Jesus, will suffer in persecution; there will be no exceptions!

And, within this general breakdown of the culture, and wild, abandoned, pursuit of pleasure, it seems that an equal hazard will be the presence of an apostate, false church, with the appearance of the true faith, but rotten at its core. It will have the superficial appearance of the Church, but will deny the life-changing, miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit, deceiving and victimizing many of those who are open to righteousness, and who would otherwise be saved. Intellectualism will reign rather than the simple truth of the gospel. Its leaders, “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,” will deceive and seduce those who are seeking God but are ignorant and vulnerable, telling them that they are alright when they

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<sup>14</sup> II Corinthians 4:4; Gal 6:1.

are not, leading them ever more deeply away from the truth. Thus the gospel, and vulnerable seekers after God, will be under attack on two fronts: open, aggressive hostility; and subtle, appealing deception. The deceivers will themselves be deceived.

**NOTES:**

*a. This passage is evidence of what Jesus prophesied concerning the gospel and redemption: that before the end comes, the gospel will be declared to the whole World; and that most will reject the gospel and be lost<sup>15</sup>.*

*b. In v 8 we are told the names of the two court magicians who opposed Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh; they were successful until the snake of Moses and Aaron ate their snakes. These two sorcerers are identified by name nowhere else in the Bible<sup>16</sup>.*

*c. Spiritual Death Traps. I believe that the false churches described in vv 5-7 exist today. They may have Bibles in the pews, but deny (to some extent, or completely) their inspiration and final authority. They reject the concept of eternal punishment in Hell; rather than confronting the parishioners with the reality of sin and the need for repentance, they emphasize self-esteem. They are decidedly “seeker-friendly.” They usually deny the supernatural, including the miracles in their Bibles, and, instead, exalt science. They deny the concept of unchanging, absolute truth. They often mock holiness, and exalt tolerance. And they exalt scholarship, “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”; for them, the important thing is “the journey,” i.e. the perpetual exploration of questions and ideas--not the arrival at the final destination, i.e. the unchanging Truth.*

*These “feel good preachers” never speak of sin, repentance, Jesus as the only redeemer, or eternal destinations. I call the counterfeit gospel these false pastors preach, “feel good religion”; and I call their false churches with their thousands of members “spiritual death traps.”*

9. Timothy’s Spiritual Heritage. (3:14-17)

Paul encourages Timothy to continue to walk in the truth, knowing those from whom he has learned, beginning with his godly grandmother and his godly mother, and ending with Paul himself<sup>17</sup>. He says that since Timothy was a child his life has been centered on the Scriptures which are able to bring a seeker to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He then summarizes in one verse the unique nature of the Word of God:

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<sup>15</sup> Matt 7:13-14, 24:14.

<sup>16</sup> Ex 7:1-12.

<sup>17</sup> Before we accept someone’s teachings as valid, no matter how good they may sound, it is important to know the teacher, his background and history, and know him to be a godly, reputable Christian.

a. It is inspired. The Greek rendered here as “given by inspiration of God” is one word, *theopneustos*; it literally means “god-breathed.” This fascinates me, for the breath of God, the Holy Spirit (in Greek the Holy *Pneuma*), was breathed into Adam, giving him life. We sing, “Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew....” God has breathed life into the Holy Scriptures, and, thus, they can impart life to us. They are not just ink on paper; they are much more than that--they are Spirit and Life<sup>18</sup>.

b. It is profitable for doctrine, the basis of valid, effective teaching.

c. It is profitable for reproof and conviction of sin.

d. It is profitable for correction of error--the unchanging standard of truth.

e. It is profitable for instruction in righteousness, the guide to a right relationship with God.

And the purpose of all of this use of, and reliance upon, the Scriptures is that the man of God may be complete, fully prepared for the work of the ministry.

**Notes:**

*a. It is interesting to note that the Scriptures in which Timothy was instructed “from a child” were sufficient to bring him to an understanding and acceptance of salvation. When Timothy was a child the only Scriptures in existence were those of the Old Testament; this tells us that there is revelation in the Old Testament sufficient to bring us to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

*b. The Greek word rendered “perfect” in v 17 is “artios,” and it is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Its basic meaning seems to be “complete,” or, “fully qualified and prepared for a purpose”; but opinions differ.*

10. Paul’s Final Guidance for Timothy (And for Us). (4:1-5)

Chapter 4 begins with what proved to be Paul’s final instruction and guidance, not only for his young protégé Timothy, but for all of us. This letter to Timothy proved to be the last of Paul’s contributions to the Bible (Titus, Philemon and Hebrews, which follow next in the Canon, were written earlier); and I think that he knew it was to be his last--it has the undertone of finality. He encourages and enjoins Timothy to preach the Word at every opportunity (“in season [and] out of season”). He is to show people the error of their ways and correct them when they are wrong, urge and exhort the people in an ongoing way, with patience and sound teaching.

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<sup>18</sup> John 6:63.

There is a sense of urgency in Paul's message here, for the time will come, he says, when people will not listen to the undiluted truth; instead, "having itching ears," they will seek teachers who will tell them what they want to hear, i.e. pleasant things, and not the truth that they need to hear. They will reject truth and embrace fables. But as for Timothy, Paul says that he should be calm and steady, enduring every hardship, persevering in the work of evangelizing; and to fully carry out the ministry to which he has been called.

***NOTE:** In just the second half of v 1 Paul says a great deal about the Second Advent and the final judgment of Christ from the Great White Throne. He reminds us that in that final judgment both the resurrected dead and those who are still alive at his coming will stand before that great throne to be judged. For more on this final judgment see "Death, Resurrection and Eternal Destinations" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

11. I Have Finished the Race. (4:6-8)

If II Timothy is Paul's "swan song," verses 6-8 are its grand summary. He says that he is ready to be offered, to die, laying down his life as a sacrifice at the feet of his Lord, and he knows that this will come soon. He declares with confidence that he has fought the good fight with all that he had, that he has finally come to the finish line of life's race, and, through it all, he has kept the faith. He knows that in the end he will receive a crown of righteousness from the Lord, and it will be the same as that to be given to all of the faithful, who love the very concept of Christ's appearing--that is, of his coming to Earth to redeem us, and of his second coming in the future, to judge and restore all things.

12. Personal Matters. (4:9-22)

Paul closes the letter with his customary personal matters; but they are unusually extensive--still more evidence of the finality of the letter. He urges Timothy to come to him, bringing John Mark, and a cloak, some parchments and books. He says that he is alone except for Luke, his beloved physician, who stays nearby and does what he can for Paul.

He speaks of one Alexander, a coppersmith, who has been an energetic enemy of the gospel, and trusts God to deal with him. But the Lord, he says, has stayed with him, strengthening him; he has continued to preach, and he has been "delivered out of the mouth of the mouth of the lion." He expresses his absolute confidence in the Lord and the final outcome of his life, sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, telling them that (when he was arrested and brought back to Rome) he left Trophimus at Miletus, sick. He

sends greetings from some of the Christians in Rome, again urges Timothy to come to him and, with a brief and final benediction, closes the letter.

**NOTES:**

*a. Was Paul speaking literally in v 17 of the Lord's standing with him through his trials; or was he speaking figuratively, in that the Lord provided the strength and wisdom that he needed? I am inclined to believe that the answer is both. After all, Jesus had come to him previously, when Paul faced lesser trials; it would be difficult for me to believe that He did not appear to Paul in those dark, final days<sup>19</sup>.*

*b. Whether or not Timothy and John Mark reached Paul before his martyrdom is unknown; but it is unlikely.*

*c. Here is evidence of Paul's reconciliation with John Mark, after their having fallen out over his abandoning Paul and Barnabas, and turning back, on the first missionary journey.*

*d. In v 17, does Paul mean that he was literally delivered from death by being torn apart by lions, as many of the martyrs were? Perhaps it does, in the sense of pleading his Roman citizenship (which made such execution illegal). Or, he could be speaking figuratively of the Lord's protective presence up to that moment (especially at Ephesus)? Ancient tradition has it that he was beheaded, as provided for by Roman law, after being (illegally) tortured by order of Nero.*

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<sup>19</sup> Acts 18:9-10, 27:23.