

## Overview of 2 Timothy

**Authorship:** The first two verses of 2 Timothy clearly present the author as Paul and the recipient as Timothy.

**Date:** The letter pictures Paul in prison in Rome, awaiting death. Most likely, then, this letter was written during Paul's second Roman imprisonment (later than the imprisonment recorded in Acts 28). Therefore this letter would have been written after 1 Timothy and Titus. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.25; 3.1) claims that Paul was martyred sometime during Nero's reign (which ended in A.D. 68, but intense persecution began in 64). Since Paul wrote 2 Timothy shortly before his death, it was probably written in A.D. 64-65, though some would place it as late as 67.

**Genre and Audience:** Pastoral and personal letter written to Timothy, Paul's protégé.

**Theme:** Second Timothy is a bold, clear call for perseverance in the gospel in spite of suffering. Paul calls on his young coworker to continue the fight of faith, even as Paul approaches the end of his own life.

**Purpose and Background:** Paul wrote this letter while in prison in Rome. He mentions that several have abandoned him in this difficult time, and several others are away on duties (1:15; 4:9-12). In such a time Paul's recollection of the sincerity and devotion of Timothy is especially poignant (1:3-5). Paul anticipates death soon (4:6-8). Therefore he writes a final exhortation to Timothy to urge him to stand firm and to ask him to come for one final visit before Paul is executed.

Though death is imminent, the timing is uncertain, so Paul also asks Timothy to bring his books and parchments with him. Presumably Paul intends to keep studying and writing until the end.

Second Timothy is very personal, as would be expected in a final letter to a close friend and coworker. Paul exhorts Timothy to continue in faithfulness and points to his own life as an example for Timothy to follow. What he calls on Timothy to do, he himself has done already.

**Why Study 2 Timothy?:** Last words can be significant—they can reveal what is ultimately most important for the speaker. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, we have the last written words known to us of the apostle Paul. As he wrote, Paul was in prison, facing the end of his life, cut off from the churches that he had set up, and deserted by most of his gospel co-workers, to whom he had become an object of shame. Christians had become intimidated by the apparent success of opposition to the gospel from those outside the church. Meanwhile, inside the church, false teaching was spreading and many people seemed to like what they heard.

It would be easy to panic in a situation like this—or to go into survival mode: keep your head down and do as little as possible to antagonize your opponents or confront the false teachers. But Paul knew that the only way to guard the precious gospel of Jesus Christ was to teach it to the next generation of leaders and teachers, who, in turn, could pass it on to the succeeding

generations. So Paul writes this deeply personal letter to Timothy, the man who was to become his spiritual “heir”, and would take the gospel to the next generation.

He writes to both challenges and encourage Timothy—to preach the word, to keep his head in all situations, to endure hardship, to fight the good fight and run the race to the very end.

The church today is still only one generation from extinction. The world is opposed to Jesus Christ, and false teachers seem to run rampant, destroying faith and denying God’s power. Inside and outside church, people ridicule, intimidate and oppose anyone who sticks to the Bible. And like Timothy, we all feel the pressure to be ashamed of the gospel. We can all be disturbed by the Word of God, which rebukes and corrects us—we can all be attracted to false teaching that suit our own powerful desires instead.

This letter has been written to help Christians who feel demoralized, cowardly, and tempted to be ashamed of the gospel. As we look closer at this letter, we can stand in Timothy’s shoes, listening to the encouragements and the commands of the battle-scarred apostle. During our time in this letter, we will learn the boldness of his plan for the gospel and the boldness of his attitude to opposition, even when he was right in the thick of it. We will be reminded of the utter faithfulness of Jesus Christ, the wonder of the gospel, the centrality of Christ’s return and judgment, the power of Scripture to save us and equip us for every good work, and the joy of what we look forward to—the unique Christian hope.

NOTE: Background information mostly taken from ESV Study Bible. *Why Study 2 Timothy?* taken from The Good Book Guide to 2 Timothy.