

## WHO WAS TIMOTHY OF THE BIBLE?

Timothy, the recipient of the two New Testament letters bearing his name, was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. He joined Paul during one of Paul's later missionary journeys. Paul addresses Timothy as "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). He was probably no older than late teens/early twenties when he joined Paul but had already distinguished himself as faithful, and the elders noticed him. He probably heard and responded to the gospel when Paul came through the area of Derbe and Lystra on his first missionary journey, but we don't know for sure. Timothy served as Paul's representative to several churches (1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19), and he was later a pastor in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Timothy is also mentioned as being with Paul when Paul wrote several New Testament letters—2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

Paul says Timothy had a "genuine faith," the same as that which lived in his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:1–5). Eunice and Lois prepared Timothy's heart to accept Christ by teaching Timothy the Old Testament Scriptures and preparing him "from infancy" to recognize the Messiah when He appeared (2 Timothy 3:15). When Paul came preaching Christ, all three accepted his teaching and committed their lives to the Savior. We, too, must prepare our children to be ready when Christ moves in their hearts. They must know how to recognize that pull on their spirits as coming from the Savior, and the only way to do that is to follow the example of Eunice and Lois and teach our children the Word of God.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he gave him instructions and advice for leading the church. He also exhorted Timothy not to let others look down upon him due to his youth, but to set an example for other believers "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul told Timothy to be devoted to reading Scripture, exhorting, and teaching, and to not neglect the gift that he had been given. Paul also counseled Timothy to keep a close watch on himself. These instructions remain pertinent to believers today. We, too, are called to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:11–12).

It seems that Timothy had a chronic illness that required some attention (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul counseled him on a change of diet to aid the relief of his condition. From this example we learn that it is not always God's will to heal a person miraculously; sometimes, healing comes through more "natural" means, if it comes at all.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul warned Timothy about the false teachers that he would encounter and tells him to continue in the things he has learned because he knows the character of those he learned them from, namely Paul himself and his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 3:14–15). The truths Timothy was taught from infancy—truths about sin and our need for a Savior—were able to make him "wise for salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15). As parents, we are to prepare our children to distinguish truth from error. And as believers, we are to stand firm in the truth we have learned, not being surprised or swayed by opposition and false teachers.

Paul also told Timothy, to "do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). This advice is crucial for all Christians. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Paul counseled Timothy, his "dear son" (2 Timothy 1:2), from a heart of love, wanting Timothy to stand firm in his own faith and to lead the other believers well. Timothy certainly seems to have been faithful; we should follow his example.

## HOW DID TIMOTHY DIE?

Timothy's death is not recorded in the Bible. According to extrabiblical church tradition, Timothy remained in Ephesus for the rest of his life, until he was martyred for his faith. Some of this does seem to correlate with a detail found in Paul's final letters to Timothy. In 1 Timothy, Paul urged his young protégé to stay in Ephesus and battle the false teaching that was occurring there (1 Timothy 1:3).

Infamous for its idolatry and temple to Diana, Ephesus is the traditional burial place of Timothy. In spite of the consensus that Timothy was martyred in Ephesus, there are different accounts regarding his martyrdom. Foxe's Book of Martyrs states that Timothy's death occurred in AD 97 during the reign of Domitian (Claxton, 1881, p. 20). This would place Timothy's martyrdom shortly after the exile of the apostle John to the island of Patmos, which occurred around AD 95. According to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, "as the pagans were about to celebrate a feast called Catagogion, Timothy, meeting the procession, severely reproved them for their ridiculous idolatry, which so exasperated the people, that they fell upon him with their clubs, and beat him in so dreadful a manner, that he expired of the bruises two days after" (op. cit., p. 20).

Another source, the apocryphal Acts of Timothy, gives a similar account, except it records that Timothy's martyrdom happened under the reign of Nerva instead of Domitian. According to this source, Timothy tried to put an end to a pagan festival in honor of Dionysus called Katagogion, in which the participants would dress in costumes, masks, and partake in sexual immorality and murder. It is recorded that Timothy exhorted them, saying, "Men of Ephesus, do not be mad for idols, but acknowledge the one who truly is God." Instead of listening to Timothy, the revelers attacked and beat him. While Timothy was still barely alive, some fellow Christians took him away from the mob, and when he died, they buried him in a place called Pion in Ephesus. Although both accounts are similar in their description of Timothy's death, and both show the disciple standing firm for his faith, it is not known with certainty how Timothy died.

The Bible does not record the happenings of Timothy's later life and death, but it does include some of Paul's final exhortations to his friend. Paul urged Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:11). We can be confident that Timothy took this to heart and proclaimed the gospel boldly in Ephesus, spreading the good news of Christ's death and resurrection, and it is likely that Timothy, like the apostles, suffered for his faith.