

**BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

**A SERIES OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES**

**By Bob Young**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE PASTORAL EPISTLES**

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## ***Introduction to the Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus***

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### **How to Use These Study Guides**

To describe these brief publications as study guides says something of their intended purpose. These guides do not pretend to answer every biblical question that can arise in your study of the biblical text. The focus of these guides is distinct.

I have as a primary goal to encourage you to do your own study of the biblical text. To guide your study, keeping in view the purpose of the original author, you should first read the introduction to each book. In some cases, there is one introduction for multiple books, as in the case of the Pastoral Letters. The second step in the study is to read the book to understand what it contains. Then you are ready to begin your study of individual chapters. The process is this: read a section of the text (probably a chapter) until you have a good understanding of it. This is not an in-depth reading to resolve every question but is a general reading to understand the content of the passage. The fourth step is for you to write your own outline, with paragraphing that reflects major thought patterns, divisions, and topics. The study guide for each book has a section with suggested paragraphing based on a comparison of various translations. While it is possible to skip the step where you do your own analysis and paragraphing, moving directly to the paragraphing provided in the study guide, this is not the recommended approach. You will benefit from taking the time and investing the energy to do this work in initial reading and understanding.

Finally, the study guides have a section of study helps that will help you keep the intent of the original author in mind as you do more focused study. The content and purpose of the study helps is explained below.

The series of study guides of which this introduction is a part is designed to assist the Bible student with preliminary and basic exegetical work. A major focus of these guides is the intent or purpose of the original author. The intent of the original writer should inform our understanding of the text and its application today. It is hard to think that the message and meaning of the text today would be significantly different than the message and meaning of the original document.

The desire to keep the purpose of the author in mind has informed the content of these study guides. Many study guides exist and there is no need to add more that include the same basic information. Generally, the information included in these guides relates to the purpose of the original document. In some cases, information has been included that is not readily available in most of the guides that the intended readers of these guides would have access to or use.

What was the purpose of the author in writing the books we know as Pastoral letters? An important part of answering that question is to understand the answer to another question, what was the situation he addressed?

## Locations and Dates

Several specific geographic locations are mentioned in the letters. (1) Timothy to remain at Ephesus when Paul went to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3); (2) a later visit to Ephesus by Paul (1 Tim. 3:14); (3) Paul mentions being in Asia and Rome (2 Tim. 1:15-17); (4) Paul had been at Troas (2 Tim. 4:13); (5) a visit to Miletus, and considering a parallel construction in the verse, a visit to Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20); and (6) a visit on Crete (Tit. 1:5). From the text of the letters, we know that Timothy was at Ephesus and that Titus was on Crete.

These internal geographic references in the Pastorals do not fit nicely into the chronology of Acts and Paul's other letters. If the first reference above is a part of the third missionary journey, the second does not fit since Paul chose not to go to Ephesus but to greet the elders on Miletus (Acts 20). Obviously, Paul had already visited Rome (or was in Rome) when he wrote according to the third reference, but that does not occur in Acts until the end of the book. Acts and the other letters have no reference to a visit to Crete and describe Titus as involved in other travels. Paul wrote in Romans of his desire to minister in points west of Rome, even to Spain, so as not to build on another's foundation.

As a result of these factors, and also based on church tradition, many think that Paul was released from the Roman imprisonment mentioned in Acts 28 and continued to travel (a fourth missionary journey?), until he was arrested, imprisoned again, and eventually killed around the year A.D. 68. Clement, near the end of the first century, wrote of Paul's release. Eusebius also mentions Paul's release. This means that the Pastoral letters fit into the time frame of the '60s after the events of Acts 28, where we learn that the Roman imprisonment lasted at least two years. The book of 2 Timothy is usually assigned a date near the end of Paul's life.

Internal references to the date of Titus do not exist. The book is included with 1 and 2 Timothy due to vocabulary (but consider the similar subjects of 1 Timothy and Titus), because of the focus on false teachers, and because the Crete visit does not fit into the chronology of Paul's ministry and the other references to Titus. There is nothing in the text to demand a late date. Crete was near enough to Paul's other travels that he could have gone there with Titus in a visit not recorded by Luke in Acts.

The following provides a timeline of approximate dates (A.D.) and locations:

50	Jerusalem assembly	Acts 15	Gal, 1-2 Thess written around this date
51-52	Paul in Corinth 18 months	Acts 18	
53-56	Paul in Ephesus 3 years Overland trip	Acts 19 Acts 19-20	1-2 Cor, Rom written during this time
58-60	In Jerusalem and Caesarea	Acts 21-26	a little over 2 years
60-62	First Roman imprisonment	Acts 27-28	wrote Eph, Phil, Col, Philm
63-66	Additional travels	after Acts	wrote 1 Timothy, Titus
66-68	Last imprisonment	after Acts	wrote 2 Timothy

## **Purpose**

Understanding how the letters fit into the chronology of the New Testament is important for determining what was happening in the churches in terms of doctrine and teaching, leadership, and church development. Although the book of 1 Timothy addresses church administrative and organizational matters such as worship, leadership, and the function of various groups within the church, the first chapter mentions the need to combat false teaching. Paul mentions the need for healthy church function in 1 Tim. 3:14. A clear focus of 2 Timothy is the need for Timothy to endure suffering and hardship as Paul anticipates his own death, but again there are several references to false teachers. A part of the work of Titus was to appoint leaders to help deal with opponents. On Crete, the admonition to appoint leaders included first correcting some things that had been left undone. Besides these admonitions, one notes in Titus frequent references to false teachers and false teaching. The presence of false teachers demands capable church leaders, effective servants, keeping the believers busy in the work, and organized worship assemblies that do not give the false teachers an opening.

Therefore, a primary purpose of the letters seems to be to address the false teachers. This is seen in the content of the teaching, the organizational instructions, and the desire to give both Timothy and Titus authority. Early on, there were in the churches those who desired to deviate from the form of the apostolic teaching (kerygma). The false teaching described in the Pastoral letters has elements of Roman philosophy, Judaism, and early Gnosticism. There is a strong emphasis in these three books on sound words-teaching-doctrine, and godliness,

## **Author and Recipients**

A brief word about authorship is in order in any introduction. The text of the letters mentions Paul as author. None of the factors that have been cited in opposition to Pauline authorship are beyond reasonable explanation in the context of what we know of first century history. While the letters bear the name of specific individuals who were Paul's coworkers in ministry, the letters were written to be read in the churches. This is seen in the final plural greetings, the formal introductions, and various internal references that include a wider audience than Timothy and Titus.