

# Timothy (1)

John Benson

*With the possible exception of Luke, there was surely nobody closer to the Apostle Paul than Timothy. The first article in this short series looks at Timothy's background and circumstances, which prepared him to go with Paul. It would not be long before he experienced first-hand the bitter opposition of those opposed to the gospel, but he was not deterred.*

**O**N FIVE OCCASIONS Paul referred to Timothy as his son in the faith: twice in each of the two letters which Paul wrote to Timothy and once in the first recorded letter to the Corinthians, where Paul described Timothy as "my beloved and faithful son in the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:17, NKJV).<sup>1</sup>

As far as we know, Paul first met Timothy on his Second Missionary Journey, when, passing first through Syria and Cilicia "confirming the churches" (Acts 15:41), he continued into Asia Minor, arriving at Derbe and Lystra. These were cities of Lycaonia, where the gospel had been preached during Paul's First Missionary Journey, and it may have been on this occasion that the young Timothy responded to the preaching of the gospel and was baptized. Before leaving the region, Paul had returned from Derbe "to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith" (14:21,22), and ordaining elders in every ecclesia (v. 23). Evidently this provision had produced a good spiritual atmosphere in which the young Timothy could grow and be active in the faith, for, by the time Paul arrived in the region five to six years later on his Second Missionary Journey, possibly in the autumn of A.D. 51, Timothy was "well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium" (16:2).

## Paul selects Timothy

It would seem that Timothy had been a worker in the Lord's service beyond his home town of Lystra to the neighbouring town of Iconium approximately twenty miles north. Maybe it was this missionary zeal which marked Timothy out as a suitable candidate for accompanying Paul and Silas on the remainder of their journey. On

his First Missionary Journey, Paul had taken a young disciple with him to assist in the work. This was John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), who so disappointed Paul by returning to Jerusalem when they were about to journey into Asia Minor that Paul refused to consider him for the Second Missionary Journey (Acts

13:13; 15:38,39). It would seem that Timothy was able to fulfil the role for which Paul considered Mark to be unsuitable.

Paul's decision to take this young and zealous disciple with him was a wise one. Other examples from Scripture include Moses and Joshua, and Elijah and Elisha. There is no substitute for being trained on the job in the company of an older person with knowledge and experience. The same principle is true in ecclesial life and missionary work today. Our younger brethren should be encouraged to share the yoke whenever possible, although this is not always easy in our present society, where the young are often burdened with the pressure to work long hours while the older members enjoy good health and early retirement and therefore time and opportunity to serve.

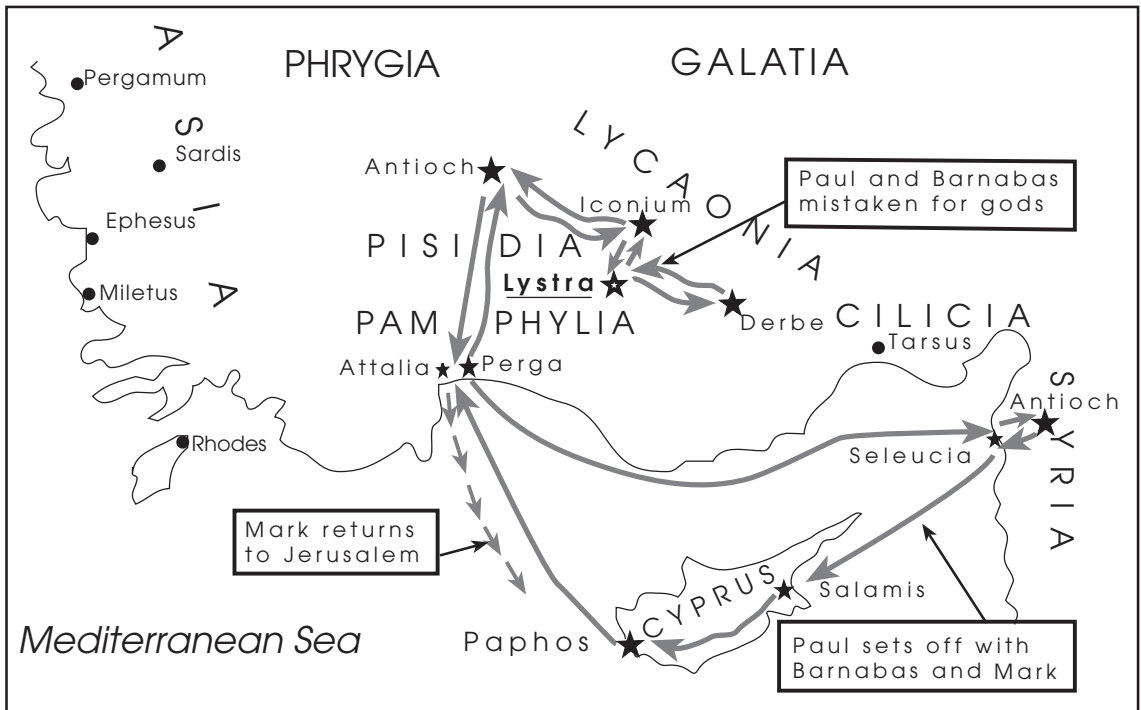
It is this first mention of Timothy in Acts 16 which provides us with some information about Timothy's background and circumstances. Luke records that he was "the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek" (v. 1).

## Timothy's godly upbringing

We know nothing of the circumstances which led to Timothy's mother being married to a Greek. Marriage outside the faith is never a wise move. Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:39 is to marry "only in the Lord", reflecting the principle given to Israel that they should not take Gentile partners. However good the relationship between husband and wife, a couple can never be "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7) if one partner is an unbeliever.

---

1. The other occasions are: 1 Timothy 1:2,18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1.



### Paul's First Missionary Journey

One problem arising in this situation concerns the bringing up of children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Happily, the relaxed attitude of an unbelieving partner sometimes allows the believing partner to take the lead in the spiritual development of the children. Such was the case in the home in which Timothy grew up.

Paul mentioned this in his second letter to Timothy, where he wrote of the "unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (1:5). Later in the letter Paul reminded Timothy "that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (3:15).

Several matters arise from this information. Firstly, we can take note of the vital influence of Timothy's mother and grandmother in his upbringing. In our present society, which has promoted women's liberation and the pursuit of careers, the honourable 'career' of providing a loving and stable environment for the family has often been sadly neglected. All too often, even in Christadelphian families, careers, education and leisure pursuits relegate spiritual development to second or third place.

Timothy was brought up from childhood to know the Holy Scriptures. The daily reading of the Scriptures should be a prominent feature of daily life. There can be no excuse for neglecting it. There is an abundance of well-written and attractively presented children's Bible story books available these days, which are ideal for bedtime stories for very young children. This is a useful means of establishing a routine of Bible reading as part of a family's daily activities. We do not have to wait until our children are fluent readers before they can join us with reading a portion from the Bible itself, the first stage of which might be to use the children's Bible reading chart produced by the Sunday School Union.

'Doing the readings' in this way will not only help to develop a good knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures from an early age; it will have the spin-off of helping our children's reading skills.<sup>2</sup> Later it will be possible to progress to reading one of the three *Bible Companion* portions, then two portions, until finally the reading of all three portions becomes part of the family routine.

2. Not many years ago, 'shared reading' was widely promoted in primary schools as the best way for parents to help their infant children read.

Paul made special mention of Timothy's grandmother Lois and the unfeigned faith which dwelt *first* in her. This clearly implies that Lois was personally known to Paul, and it seems reasonable to suppose that she was living with the family at Lystra. Lois's faith had influenced her daughter Eunice, and it would seem that both of them had been instrumental in nurturing Timothy's faith. Parents' responsibilities do not end when their children leave home and start their own families. Moses commanded Israel: "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: *but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons*" (Deut. 4:9).

### Preparing to serve with Paul

Timothy's willingness to join Paul on his missionary journey is commendable. It would not have been easy to leave the family home where he had been so faithfully nurtured in the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother. It is possible that Timothy was still a teenager at this time, for Paul was to write, possibly fifteen or so years later, "Let no man despise thy youth" (1 Tim. 4:12). Furthermore, Timothy was doubtless aware that serving and travelling with the "apostle to the Gentiles" was no adventure trip. In almost every place Paul's preaching provoked violent opposition, particularly from the Jews. Whether or not Timothy had been converted on Paul's first visit to Lystra five years previously, he must surely have been aware of what Paul had suffered when the Jews from Antioch and Iconium stirred up hatred and Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city as dead (Acts 14:19).

Before Timothy joined Paul and Silas on their onward journey, Paul "took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters" (16:3). Although Timothy had a Jewish mother and had been brought up to "[know] the holy scriptures", he had not been circumcised, presumably because his Greek father had not given his consent. Given that Paul was so uncompromisingly opposed to circumcision in a number of his letters, one might wonder why he appears to compromise his position by circumcising Timothy. Indeed, on this very journey he was circulating to the ecclesias the decree agreed by the apostles in Jerusalem in answer to the Jewish believers who were insisting that "Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law" (15:1,5,24,25). The apostles' decree was to be delivered at Lystra and beyond, for

Luke records that, once Paul and his companions left Lystra, "as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" (16:4).

Paul's adamant opposition to circumcision was, of course, directed at those who were insistent on circumcision being essential for salvation. The message Paul wished to convey to the Judaisers was that "in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). Therefore, as far as Timothy's salvation was concerned, it made no difference whether he was circumcised or not. But Paul realised that having in his company an uncircumcised man whose father was a Greek would antagonise the Jews in the region and hinder the progress of the gospel. After all, from Lystra they would be travelling to Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, the very cities from which the Jews came who had instigated the stoning of Paul on his previous visit to Lystra.

Whereas, therefore, Timothy's circumcision was not necessary for salvation, it was expedient under the circumstances. There are situations where principles have to be modified to accommodate higher motives. It is to Timothy's credit that he was willing to comply with Paul's wishes, despite personal discomfort, rather than offend Jewish consciences and hinder the preaching of the Word.

### Experiencing opposition to the gospel

From Lystra, Paul, Silas and Timothy travelled "throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia" (Acts 16:6), after which they were guided by the Spirit to cross over to Macedonia, eventually arriving at Philippi. Evidently Luke had joined the company at Troas, for he records: "*we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia" (v. 10). Therefore Timothy would not have been left alone when Paul and Silas were so ignominiously beaten and thrown into prison in Philippi. Timothy witnessed the truth of the Lord's words to Ananias concerning Paul: "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (9:16); but he was not deterred from continuing in Paul's company when they left Philippi to continue the journey into Macedonia.

Luke must have remained in Philippi, for from the beginning of Acts 17 the pronouns change from 'we' to 'they': "Now when *they* had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica . . ." (v. 1). Jewish opposition made

it impossible for Paul and his company to remain in Thessalonica for long, and they made a hasty departure to Berea under cover of darkness (v. 10). Although the gospel was well received by the Bereans, it was not long before the Jews from Thessalonica caught up with them and stirred up opposition. At this point Timothy again is spe-

cifically mentioned in the record, for, while Paul was sent away by the Berean brethren, "Silas and Timotheus abode there still" (v. 14).

Meanwhile Paul arrived in Athens. Those who conducted him there were sent back with the urgent request that Silas and Timothy should join him without delay.

[\(To be continued\)](#)