

Timothy: A Biographical Sketch

Timothy, the son of a gentile man and a Jewish woman, lived in the town of Lystra in south-eastern Asia Minor; his mother was a believer, but his father was not (Acts 16:1). Timothy embraced the Christian faith, and Paul recruited him as a companion for his second missionary journey, circumcising him so as not to offend the Jews (Acts 16:3). Toward the end of that journey, Paul sent him back to Macedonia to strengthen the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:2). Timothy then rejoined Paul in Corinth, bringing him good news about the Thessalonian church (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6) and helping him to evangelize the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:19). Later, he accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey and thus was with Paul during his lengthy stay in Ephesus (Acts 19). Paul sent him once again to Macedonia (Acts 19:22) and repeatedly to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). Timothy later spent a winter with Paul in Corinth (from which Romans was written; see Rom. 16:21) and then went on to Troas, where Paul spent a week with him on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4–5).

After this we lose track of Timothy. He may have continued ministering in Troas, where Paul's own work had been cut short due to crises in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12–13). Later on he may have gone to Rome to be of service to Paul during his imprisonment there (see Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 4:10; Philem. 1 [but were these letters written from Rome?]). He himself may have been imprisoned at some time (see Heb. 13:23), but we have no information as to when or where this would have been.

The two letters addressed to Timothy add only minor details to this portrait: his mother's name was Eunice, and his grandmother, also a believer, was named Lois (2 Tim. 1:5); he was young in comparison to Paul (1 Tim. 4:12; 5:1); he suffered from frequent illnesses (1 Tim. 5:23); and he had received a spiritual gift through prophecy and the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

In artwork, Timothy is often depicted as holding a rod or bat because, according to one church tradition, he was beaten to death by opponents at the age of eighty.