



Work patiently

1 & 2 TIMOTHY, TITUS, PHILEMON AND HEBREWS

Aim of the lesson

To place these books in their historical context and to consider how prevailing conditions in the churches and the political situation necessitated the tone and message of the letters.

Bible background

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews

Preparation required

There is a map in the students' books (lesson 32) which shows places relevant to this lesson. You will need to be familiar with the relevant epistles beforehand.

Outline of lesson

Philemon

Lesson 32 dealt with letters that Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30-31). Paul had freedom to receiving visitors, who carried letters to the churches including this one to Philemon. Discuss the letter noting the reason for writing and the character of Philemon as assessed by Paul (v5-7). Students will be interested to look at verse 10, and realise that the name 'Onesimus' means unprofitable (or useless) but he later becomes profitable (or useful) to Paul.

The end of Paul's life

It seems that Paul was released from his house arrest - presumably his appeal to Caesar was successful. He now spent time strengthening the churches, placing over them faithful brethren: Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete. In AD 64 the great fire of Rome was blamed on Christians and resulted in terrible persecution. At some point (maybe in Troas - 2 Timothy 4:13), Paul was sought out and brought to Rome and he was in prison again awaiting execution. Conditions will have been much harder than in his first imprisonment.

The Pastoral¹ epistles

Get the class to find out from the first verses of each book who is writing, and to whom. It is obvious that the first 3 books are different from the letters to the churches because in each case the recipient is one person. Get the students to look at one or two verses (for instance 1 Timothy 1:3, 2 Timothy 2:14 or Titus 2:1) to get the tenor of why Paul wrote.

Dating these letters has to be approximate but you could note that Paul was writing to encourage and guide the churches and individuals right up until his death. It will also become apparent which letters were written during the two different imprisonments at Rome. Paul would have been about 70 years old during his second imprisonment.

It will probably be best to work through the letters individually allowing the students to complete the relevant section of the worksheets before moving on to the next letter. How much detail you want to go into will depend on the previous knowledge of your class. Although it is tempting to go into detail with the doctrines, try not to lose the overall point of why the letters were written at this time.

Timothy

Timothy may have witnessed the stoning of Paul (Acts 14:19-20) at a young age, and was probably baptised in his mid to late teens. At the time of Timothy's appointment as elder at Ephesus he would be about 40. Revelation 2:1-3 gives testimony to Timothy's good work here. Look at verses that indicate the character of Timothy, as assessed by Paul eg. 2 Tim 1:2,5 and 2 Tim 3: 10.

The main themes of the letter are indicated by the following references:

- No other doctrine – 1 Tim 1: 3-4
- Prayer – 1 Tim 2: 1-3
- Men and women – 1 Tim 2: 8-14
- Leaders/elders – 1 Tim 3: 1-13

1 'Pastoral' means 'portraying or the life of shepherds or of the country' - think of 'pasture' - so it implies the care of shepherds for their sheep.

- Doctrine and leadership -1 Tim 4:13-16

In 2 Timothy doctrine is again emphasised. You could discuss the prophecy of the last days given in Chapter 3. Point out that this is the last writing of Paul that we have.

Titus

Titus was a Greek, and one of Paul's closest companions. He was left by Paul to consolidate the apostles' work in Crete. Crete was probably one of the first places to hear the Christian gospel. It is first mentioned in Acts 2: 11. Cretans were unruly, hot-headed and needed firm handling (Titus 1:12-13).

Build up a picture of Titus' character as assessed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:13, 2 Corinthians 7: 6, 2 Corinthians 8: 23 and Titus 1: 4. Consider his position and mission in the church at Crete.

The main points of the letter are:

- The qualities of an elder – Titus 1: 7-9
- Sound doctrine – Titus 1: 13-16
- Behaviour of Church members – Titus 2

Bring out that Paul had an overriding care and concern for the churches above his own personal suffering. Does this remind us of anyone? How does this help us in following Christ?

Hebrews

The students will have noticed that Hebrews doesn't have an opening salutation. It isn't certain who wrote this letter but it could possibly be Paul. The date of writing is also uncertain but it would have been before AD 70.

Who were the Hebrews? Explain how large numbers of Jews (often called Hebrews Genesis 14:13, Philippians 3:51) accepted the gospel and were baptised. However, in so doing they were cast out of the Synagogue and, in effect, became outcasts of society, finding it difficult to get employment etc. Also, they had to have a complete change of approach to The Law, to that which they had previously known. The purpose of the letter was to replace what the Jews felt they had lost in accepting Christianity by comparing Judaism and Christianity to show the superiority, in every respect, of Jesus to Moses. He shows how Jesus came to fulfil the old covenant, and that the new is better.

Looking up the references, show how Jesus is presented as 'greater than':

- The prophets – Hebrews 1:1-3
- Angels – Hebrews 1:4-11
- Moses – Hebrews 3: 3
- Joshua – Hebrews 4: 8-10
- Aaron – Hebrews 10: 11-14

Show how Christ is now the focal point in worship and sacrifice:

- High Priesthood of Jesus – Hebrews 4:14-16
- New or better covenant – Hebrews 7: 22-28
- Perfect sacrifice of Christ – Hebrews 9: 12-15

Relevance to our lives

Scan down the list of Old Testament faithfuls in chapter 11, picking out any notable or surprising entries. Bring out that none of the faithful received the promises, the writer thereby leading us to the present day in v39-40. Bring out the relevance to us today, emphasising that faith is the essential ingredient for salvation. Show how we get faith (Romans 10:17) and look at the teaching of Paul in 2 Tim 3:15-16, which shows us how we can grow and develop our faith.

Extension activities

- Using a concordance or Bible dictionary, the students could look up other references to Timothy, Titus and Philemon to find out where they were and when. Similarly with other helpers of Paul, who visited him and delivered his messages to churches many miles distant. Some you could look at are:
 - Tychicus (2 Timothy 4:12),
 - Epaphras (Philemon:23),
 - Aristarchus (Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24)
 - Luke (Lucas in AV) (2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon:24)
 - Mark (2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon:24).