

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

The Plan of Salvation in the Letters to Timothy and Titus¹

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This thesis launches from two notable weaknesses in scholarship around the letters addressed to Timothy and Titus (LTT). First, they are commonly known as ‘The Pastoral Epistles’, but it is increasingly recognised that an unfortunate effect of this designation is that the distinctive contents of each of the three LTT are eclipsed by their combined teaching and outlook. Secondly, narrative analyses, which have proven fruitful in exploring theological aspects of Pauline letters, have largely not been applied to the LTT.

This thesis employs a narrative approach to analyse the salvation-historical outlook found in each of the LTT. Taking one letter at a time, the various elements of a narrative ‘plan of salvation’ are delineated through careful exegesis. Next, the relationships between these elements are analysed for their contribution to the salvation-historical aspects of the theology and to the letter’s rhetorical purpose. The conclusions demonstrate the fruitfulness of examining the distinctiveness of the three LTT and serve to highlight areas where earlier scholarship has misconstrued the theology of the epistles individually and collectively.

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis, situating it amongst earlier work, especially that of Lewis Donelson and George Wieland. After setting out an approach to the letters which is, for the sake of argument, author-agnostic, there is a discussion of narrative approaches to the Pauline letters, particularly the

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nature of the narrative seen in salvation-historical and apocalyptic approaches to Paul. This leads to three research questions:

1. What narrative elements, particularly events and characters, are found in the texts? (This provides an inventory of items, grouped under four areas, that emerged: the period before Christ, the Christ event, the present age, and the eschatological end.)
2. To what extent and in what ways do the elements relate to one another within a narrative substructure? (This examines relationships between elements and determines to what extent they fit together as a whole, drawing especially on the varying construals of Pauline salvation history. In particular, the thesis considers whether there is a single, coherent story, the significance of history before Christ, and the place of the future within the narrative substructure.)
3. How do the narrative elements and substructure function rhetorically within the letters?

The next three chapters apply these questions to 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus respectively.

In terms of the narrative elements, let us take the period before Christ as an example. In 1 Timothy the plan of salvation operates within God's good creation, whereas 2 Timothy and Titus expand this into the pre-temporal realm, rooted in God's eternal plan. Thus all three LTT root salvation in divine activity. However, the emphasis on creation highlights the significance of godliness in this life, while the emphasis on eternity offers confidence that the plan will be completed.

The story of Israel does not receive much attention in 1 Timothy, though there is a passing mention of the giving of the law, which serves to highlight discontinuity between the law and the gospel at a salvation-historical level. For 2 Timothy, on the other hand, there is more of an emphasis on continuity, since Paul is described as continuing to worship God as his ancestors had done, and affirming the enduring significance of the Jewish Scriptures for salvation. Titus is different again, offering no direct reference to the period between God's eternal promise and the arrival of Christ. Nonetheless, it employs scriptural imagery to depict God's actions through Christ, framing the Christ event as the eschatological realisation of earlier prophetic ideas.

The second question, about narrative substructure, can be sampled through the discussion of whether the narrative elements fit together as a single, coherent story. In 1 Timothy, several themes highlight the unity of God's plan of salvation. One key aspect is the recurring language of goodness, which is found through the entire narrative – from initial creation through to the eschatological future. This pattern indicates that for believers good actions

are shaped by God's creative purposes, align with his redemptive work, and look forward to eternal life. Another dimension of coherence appears in the connections between creation and salvation, seen in the language of 'life' and the centrality of Christ's human existence within God's salvific plan. Thirdly, God's control over history, marked by his appointed times, underscores this unity. For 2 Timothy, coherence emerges through a network of verbal and conceptual ties that link God's plan, his saving actions, the promise of life, the identity of his people, and the messianic reign of Christ Jesus. In Titus, the theme of hope serves as a unifying thread, stretching from before the beginning of time to its ultimate fulfilment in the eschatological future.

Across all three LTT, the narrative elements are situated within a shared cosmic and temporal framework. While the connections are not always explicit, the underlying assumption is that life unfolds within a space and time governed by God. His saving plan, purposes, promises, and will were established in and before creation, fully revealed in the Christ event and the apostolic witness, actively realised in the life of the church, and destined to be completed in the eschatological future. Together, these elements form a coherent story that encompasses all of human existence, providing a context in which each narrative element finds its place. While the LTT do not recount this narrative in an orderly manner, the argument demonstrates the presence of a cohesive narrative structure that shapes how the elements are presented and interrelated.

The third question explores rhetorical function. For 1 Timothy, correctly coordinating creation, law, and Christ is essential for preserving sound teaching, which is Timothy's primary task. Godliness comes from the revealed mystery of the gospel, when it is rightly narrated and configured. In 2 Timothy, the letter's rhetorical design underscores the importance of enduring in ministry despite hardships, with the selected narrative elements and underlying structure reinforcing this message. The eschatological framework is particularly significant, not only by depicting the present moment as part of the perilous last days, but also by pointing to an imminent day when God will vindicate his faithful people, granting them eternal reign with Christ.

The letter to Titus addresses false teaching, as 1 Timothy does, but approaches it with an argument rooted in the fulfilment of Scripture. References to several biblical texts highlight Titus's view that believers in Christ embody the fulfilment of God's promises and purposes revealed in the OT. This suggests that the false teaching in question involves a misinterpretation of the relationship between the OT and Christ, with Titus emphasising fulfilment through Christ's work, while the opponents seem to lean toward a law-based

framework. In Titus, the work of Christ and its application to believers are presented as the transformative forces that accomplish God's intentions, both for mission and for eternal life. Each of the LTT employs the overarching narrative of salvation in unique ways to achieve distinct rhetorical purposes, showing how the plan of salvation is adapted to address varying challenges and goals.

The concluding chapter summarises the key findings and then lays out some implications of the research. The thesis demonstrates that considering the narrative plan of salvation offers a fruitful lens for analysing the theology and purpose of the LTT. Furthermore, familiarity with the Scriptures, including the stories they tell, is vital for understanding the LTT themselves, as well as the kind of ministry they are seeking to produce. This offers insight into early Christian identity formation, due to the established links between narratives and group identity. Implications are also set out for the variegated evidence of Christology, soteriology, and eschatology in the LTT. Finally, I offer some closing reflections on the hermeneutical approach employed to authorship, and how the findings might contribute to our wider understanding of Pauline theology.