

# Titus - Introduction & Background

## **Authorship**

*External* evidence favors Pauline authorship of the letter to Titus. Support for Pauline authorship of this letter is found in statements of various church fathers including Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Theophilus, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr. Titus is also listed in the Pauline section of the Muratorian Canon. *Internal* evidence also supports Pauline authorship. Paul identifies himself as the author (1:1). The same combination of affection and authority that is prevalent in Titus is also found in Paul's writings. Paul often uses the word "savior" and this word is found 6x in Titus.

## **Destination**

*Titus* is the recipient of the letter. Unlike Timothy, who was half Jewish and half Greek, Titus was fully Greek. Titus was probably converted under Paul's ministry since Paul refers to him as "my own son after the common faith" (1:4). If Titus was one of the disciples mentioned in Acts 11:26, it is likely that he was converted during Paul's ministry in Syrian Antioch. Titus' hometown was probably Syrian Antioch. Because Titus was saved by faith alone without submitting to circumcision, Paul took him to Jerusalem for illustrative purposes in helping resolve the question whether Gentiles needed to submit to the Mosaic Law in order to be saved (Gal 2:1-3; Acts 11:27-30). Paul had a high view of Titus' character and conduct (2 Cor 7:13-15; 8:16-17). Paul refers to Titus as his brother (2 Cor 2:13), partner and fellow worker (2 Cor 8:23), and son (1:4). Although Titus' name is not mentioned in the Book of Acts, there are 13 references to Titus in Paul's writings. The books where Paul makes mention of Titus are 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 2 Timothy, and Titus.

Titus figures prominently in Paul's various contacts with the Corinthian church. Titus carried the "severe letter" from Ephesus to Corinth (2 Cor 2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18). He also demonstrated concern for the Corinthians (2 Cor 8:6, 16-17, 23). Paul wanted to meet Titus at Troas (2 Cor 2:12-13) but instead joined him in Macedonia (2 Cor 7:15-16). There Titus gave Paul a good report on the reaction of the Corinthians to Paul's "severe letter." Thus, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and sent this letter to Corinth via Titus. Titus also played a role in managing Corinth's financial collection (2 Cor 8:16-23).

Titus also traveled with Paul during his ministry between his Roman imprisonments. Paul left Titus in charge of the work on Crete (1:5). After leaving Crete, Paul wanted Titus to join him in Nicopolis (3:12). However, we are not sure if this reunion ever took place. Because Paul indicated that Titus had left him for Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10), Titus was also with Paul in his second Roman imprisonment. Apparently, Titus returned to Crete. According to

tradition, he spent his waning years as an overseer of the work on Crete and died naturally there.

Crete is an island located in the Mediterranean Sea. It was 150 miles long and varied from 6-35 miles in width. It was located southeast of Greece and had a well-established civilization. Because of its mountainous terrain, Cretans depended upon the sea for their living. Thus, fishing and shipping were important industries for Cretans. Because Cretans were present during Peter's sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:11), the island enjoyed at least some kind of Jewish, monotheistic influence even before Paul's arrival. While being shipped to Rome, Paul briefly visited the island (Acts 27:7-21). There probably was not enough time for Paul to have started a church during this brief stay. However, it is possible that some kind of Christian work had already begun through the influence of the Cretans present on Pentecost. Thus, Christian churches may have been in existence even before Paul's return to Crete between imprisonments. Cretans exhibited a low moral character. Ancient poet Epimenides depicted them as "liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons" (1:12). Interestingly, the Greek verb *kreitzein* meant, "to act as a Cretan" or "to play the liar."

### **Occasion, Place of Writing, and Date**

Paul briefly visited the island of Crete while being shipped to Rome (Acts 27:7-21). This brief visit probably created within Paul a desire to return to the island in order to evangelize it. This desire was realized when Paul returned to the island in between Roman imprisonments in order to establish several works in Crete's major cities. Upon leaving Crete, Paul left Titus in charge in order to complete the work that he had begun (1:5). Two factors prompted Paul to write to Titus after leaving. First, Titus needed encouragement and instruction in order to complete the awesome task of organizing the church in Paul's absence. This was especially true because, unlike Timothy, Titus had to do the primary work of organizing rather than simply overseeing a work that had already been organized. Second, the house churches that Paul had established had been overrun by false teachers (1:11). According to the way the book describes them, these false teachers were Judaizers who stressed Jewish fables and commandments of men (1:14). They devoted an exorbitant amount of time toward questions and disputes about genealogies and strife about the Law (3:9). Their Jewish origin is evident since they are depicted as "of the circumcision" (1:10).

The letter was written from Macedonia (1 Tim 1:3). Commentators speculate as to the exact location for the place of writing. Nicopolis (3:12), Ephesus, and Corinth are among the suggestions. If Zenas and Apollos (3:13) were already traveling to the island, Paul may have used the occasion to send the letter along with them. If Zenas and Apollos were already on the island, then the bearer of the letter is unknown. The letter was probably written in 62-66 AD after Paul had penned 1 Timothy. Because Paul seems to indicate that his plans were more established when he wrote Titus (3:12) and less established when he wrote Timothy

(1 Tim 3:14), it is likely that Paul wrote Titus after he wrote 1 Timothy. Thus, Titus represents Paul's second pastoral letter.

### **Purpose and Structure**

According to Titus 1:5, Paul wrote to Titus in order to give him instruction and encouragement regarding how to finish the work Paul had begun at Crete (1:5).

Specifically, Paul's instruction dealt with two areas. First, Titus was to provide appropriate leadership for the house churches. Such leadership was necessary because Titus could not be in every house church in order to refute the false teachers. Thus, others had to be appointed for this task. Second, Titus was to complete what was lacking in the Cretan believers. In other words, Titus was to correct their moral and doctrinal deficiencies. Such correction was necessary given the prominence of Judaistic false teachers in Crete as well as the general immorality of the Cretan culture.

Paul gives instruction in furtherance of the first task in chapter 1. There he furnishes information regarding the qualifications for spiritual leadership as well as explaining why such spiritual leadership is necessary. Paul gives instruction in furtherance of the second task in chapters 2–3. In this section, Paul places a special emphasis upon the grace of God. He includes various doctrinal sections (2:11–14; 3:4–7) in an attempt to show that orthodoxy precedes orthopraxy. In other words, a proper view of God's grace naturally creates within the believer an ambition to be zealous for good works.

In addition to these two purposes, Paul also seems to have written in order to accomplish several other sub-purposes. First, Paul wanted to warn against the Cretan false teachers (1:10–16). Second, Paul wanted to explain appropriate domestic behavior among believers (2:1–10). Third, Paul wanted to explain why grace leads to good works (2:11–15). Fourth, Paul wanted to explain the believer's relation to civil authorities (3:1). Fifth, Paul wanted to encourage the imposition of church discipline (3:9–11). Sixth, Paul wanted to explain to Titus his future ministry plans (3:12–13). Seventh, Paul wanted to extend a greeting to the Cretan believers (3:15).

### **Message**

In order for the church to flourish in the midst of a pagan society and the encroachment of false teachers, it is necessary to appoint Godly leadership and to stimulate God's people to good works through a proper understanding of His grace.

### **Unique Characteristics**

The letter to Titus boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, it places an emphasis upon good works emanating from God's grace. The need for good works as a consequence of salvation is mentioned six times in three chapters (1:16; 2:7,14; 3:1,8,14). Some pit Paul's theology of justification by faith alone against James' theology of vindication of faith through works. Here, however, Paul resembles James. Both the letters of James and Titus teach that a proper view of God's grace should naturally lead to good works. Second, the

epistle represents Paul's last letter as a free man. Paul would write his final letter (2 Timothy) during Roman confinement. Third, after Philemon, Titus represents the second shortest of Paul's letters. Fourth, the letter emphasizes "soundness." Both the elders and Titus are expected to preach "sound" doctrine and to be characterized by "sound" speech (1:9; 2:1,8). Older men are to be characterized by "sound" faith (2:2). Fifth, the letter stands out as an example of how to bring about ecclesiastical order and discipline in a pagan culture.

Sixth, the letter touches upon numerous basic doctrines of the Christian faith, such as election (1:1), eternal life (1:2; 3:7), Christ as deity and savior (1:3-4; 2:13), inspiration (2:5), God's grace (2:11), the universal nature of salvation (2:11), the second advent (2:13), the substitutionary atonement (2:14), total depravity (3:3), God's love and mercy (3:4-5), regeneration (3:5), cleansing (3:5), the Holy Spirit (3:5), justification (3:7), and heirship (3:7). Seventh, the letter contains three unique doctrinal sections (1:1-4; 2:11-14; 3:4-7) demonstrating that orthodoxy precedes orthopraxy. Eighth, the letter stands out as possessing numerous similarities and differences with another canonical letter. Numerous similarities and differences can be drawn in between Titus and 1 Timothy. Titus and 1 Timothy have the following similarities: date, circumstances, purposes, qualifications of leaders, dealing with false teaching, need of sound doctrine and behavior, encouragement and exhortation to Paul's representatives, written after imprisonment, and responsibility of Paul's representatives of organizing his work in his absence. However, Titus and 1 Timothy are also dissimilar. Titus is briefer, more official, and less personal. Also, the situation of 1 Timothy primarily involved doctrine. However, in Titus, the situation revolved more around doctrine and conduct.

## **Outline**

### I. Assignor, assignee, and assignment (Titus 1:1-5a)

- (1) Assignor: Paul (1:1-3)
  - (A) Servant of God (1:1a)
  - (B) Apostle of Christ (1:1b)
  - (C) Ministry given by Christ (1:1c-2)
  - (D) Entrustment from Christ (1:3)

- (2) Assignee: Titus (1:4a-c)
  - (A) Paul's son (1:4a)
  - (B) Sharer in the common faith (1:4b)
  - (C) Benediction (1:4c)

- (3) Assignment of (1:5a)

### II. Assignment described (Titus 1:5b—3:11)

- (1) Specifically: establishment of leadership (1:5b-16)
  - (A) Duty to appoint elders (1:5b)

- (B) Personal qualifications of elders (1:6-8)
  - (a) Marital relationships (1:6a)
  - (b) Family relationships (1:6b)
  - (c) Interpersonal relationships (1:7-8)
- (C) Doctrinal qualification of elders (1:9)
- (D) Reason for appointing elders: dealing with false leaders (1:10-16)
  - (a) False teachers' character and conduct (1:10-12)
  - (b) Recipe for dealing with false teachers (1:13-14)
    - (i) Rebuke them (1:13a)
    - (ii) Cause them to adhere to proper doctrine (1:13b-14)
  - (c) Description of false teachers continued (1:15-16)
    - (i) Unbelieving and corrupt (1:15)
    - (ii) Known through their works (1:16)
- (2) Specifically: elimination of moral and doctrinal deficiencies among believers (2:1—3:11)
  - (A) Certain groups (2:1-10)
    - (a) Titus' charge (2:1)
    - (b) Groups enumerated (2:2-10)
      - (i) Older men (2:2)
      - (ii) Older women (2:3)
      - (iii) Young women (2:4-5)
      - (iv) Young men (2:6)
      - (v) Titus (2:7-8)
      - (vi) Servants (2:9-10)
  - (B) Role of grace in promoting proper behavior (2:11-15)
    - (a) Provided by God to all men (2:11)
    - (b) Promotes godly living (2:12)
    - (c) Promises hope (2:13)
    - (d) Provided by Christ (2:14)
    - (e) Proclaimed by Titus (2:15)
  - (C) Believers' responsibility to the world (3:1-8)
    - (a) To civil authorities (3:1)
    - (b) To the world generally (3:2)
    - (c) Reasons for proper behavior before the world (3:3-8)
      - (i) Past condition of believers (3:3)
      - (ii) Believers saved by God's grace (3:4-7)
        - (a) Salvation (3:4-5a)
        - (b) Sanctification (3:5b-6)

- (c) Justification (3:7a)
- (d) Glorification (3:7b)
- (iii) Believers are called to manifest good works (3:8)
- (D) Handling false teachers (3:9-11)
  - (a) Description of false teachings to avoid (3:9)
  - (b) Prescription for handling false teachers (3:10-11)

### III. Conclusions (Titus 3:12-15)

- (1) Requests (3:12-14)
  - (A) Titus to join Paul in Nicopolis (3:12)
  - (B) Titus to assist Zenas and Apollos (3:13)
  - (C) Admonish the Cretans toward productivity (3:14)
- (2) Greetings (3:15a-b)
  - (A) Those with Paul send greetings (3:15a)
  - (B) Greet those who Paul knows (3:15b)
- (3) Benediction (3:15c)

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### Introduction

While Timothy was laboring in metropolitan Ephesus, Titus was on the island of Crete. Titus was a Greek Gentile (Gal 2:3). He had probably become a Christian under the influence of Paul, and subsequently became one of the Paul's protégés (Titus 1:4). Titus had been with Paul since the apostle's early ministry. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their mission of mercy to the Jerusalem church, when Paul was laboring in Antioch of Syria, Titus' home. That happened before Paul's first missionary journey (Gal 2:1; Acts 11:27-30).

Titus also served as Paul's special representative to the Corinthian church during Paul's third missionary journey. He carried the "severe letter" from Ephesus (2 Cor 12:18; Cf. 2 Cor 2:3-4; 7:8-12) and, returning to Ephesus through Macedonia, met Paul in Macedonia (2 Cor 7:6-16). He was, in addition, the leader of the group of men whom Paul sent to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, to pick up the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:6,16,23).

### Crete

Crete was not an easy place to work. There was a great deal of mythology and tradition on the Greek island. According to tradition, Minos was the source of their laws. He conquered the Aegean pirates who were there and established a navy.

After the Trojan War, the principal cities of the island formed themselves into several independent republics, including Knossos, Cydonia, and Gortyna. There were apparently churches in all of these places. Crete was annexed to the Roman Empire about 67 BC.

Paul had assigned Titus to set things in order. Jews from Crete were present at *Shavout* (the Feast of Pentecost; Acts 2), and these may have been the core group who had returned to their land. This letter is a condensed version of Paul's 1st letter to Timothy, written about the same time, about 64-67 AD.

### **The Message of Titus**

In 1 Tim, Paul wrote that the purpose of the local church is to be the "pillar and foundation" of God's truth. To fulfill this function, each church needs proper organization. In Titus, Paul emphasized the importance of church organization. In 2 Tim, he emphasized the importance of church leadership.

It is significant that Paul's epistle to Titus deals with a church in a very difficult place: Crete (1:12-13a). Paul revealed that Christians in this difficult place could "adorn the doctrine of God" (2:9-10). Even those Christians who were in the most trying of circumstances (i.e., slaves), in that difficult place, could adorn the doctrine of God. To show the true spiritual power of the church, God selected the most difficult soil. In this way, the Holy Spirit teaches us that the church can fulfill its purpose in the most dark, desolate, and difficult places on earth. God can do so even through people whose situations in life are the most trying.

The subject of revelation in this epistle is *the true church of Jesus Christ*. What Paul said about the church is that it must be orderly. We could write, "Let everything be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40) over this book. The means by which the church becomes orderly is by the oversight of competent overseers (1:7). An overseer (elder) is, by definition, one who sees clearly what is going on. An overseer in the church needs to see three things clearly:

- (1) He must see God's truth clearly (1:9). He must know the Word of God.
- (2) He must also see the conditions in which the people under his care live. An elder who does not know what is going on in the lives of the Christians in his church cannot exercise oversight effectively (1:9).
- (3) He must also see clearly the method of oversight that God has prescribed. His duties include enunciating the truth (teaching), applying the truth (exhorting), and urging obedience to the truth (reproving; 2:15).

Paul also revealed what the church has that enables it to be orderly (2:11-14). The power of an orderly church lies in two "appearings." The first is the appearing of grace at the first advent of Jesus Christ. The second is the appearing of glory at His second advent. The revelation of the grace of God in the Cross of Christ should motivate the church. The revelation of the glory of God, when Christ returns for us at the Rapture, should also motivate the church. We gain motivation as we look backward and forward at our Lord's two "appearings." Christians do this whenever they celebrate the Lord's Supper. We look

back on the Cross, but we also remember that we will only celebrate this memorial until He comes.

### **Application**

First, the church will be powerful in the world to the extent that it reveals God's truth. Its influence does not lie primarily in its ability to lobby for political change. Its influence lies mainly in its ability to proclaim and demonstrate God's truth to the world. This is much needed in the world today.

Second, Titus teaches that church leaders must be people who live under the authority of God's truth. We should not select them primarily because of their business experience, social influence, or wealth. It is the spiritual life of a person, mastered by the truth of God, that qualifies him or her for church leadership.

Third, this epistle teaches that the power of an overseer is that of God's truth, not that of his office. No real power comes because a person fills an office. Real power comes as a result of a person's works and words. A church's elders should be its most spiritually influential men.

Fourth, Titus teaches that the measure of the success of a church's overseers is the extent to which the church members fulfill their function in the world. Its measure of success is not the number of people attending services. It is the number and effectiveness of people proclaiming God's truth in the world by their godly lives and verbal witness. How much ministry are the saints carrying on during the week (personal evangelism, Bible studies, etc.)?

### **Outline of Titus: Maintain Good Works**

- Titus 1: As to Elders in the Assembly
  - Put things in order
- Titus 2: As to Classes in Particular
  - Adorn in sound doctrine
- Titus 3: As to Members in General
  - Perform and maintain good works

Paul reminded Titus of three responsibilities he had to fulfill:

- Preach God's Word (v1-4)
- Ordain Qualified Leaders (v5-9)
- Silence False Teachers (v10-16)