

**The Book of Titus:
A Pastoral letter**

This little work is in a group of three letters, two others to Timothy, so called because they were Paul's co-workers to whom he wrote instructions for the conduct of their ministries. The letters largely address the appointment of elders in the churches, dealing with false teachers, and the general promotion of godly living.

The Recipient: Titus

He initially appears in the Scriptures in Galatians 2 accompanying Paul and Barnabas from Antioch to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15, 49 AD). It seems that he was a member of the church in Antioch, clearly a Gentile, a man that Paul saw come to Christ ("my true child in the faith (Tit. 1:4).") The same phrase is used of Timothy who was of Jewish/Gentile descent (I Tim. 1:2). Paul circumcised the mixed-breed Timothy so as not to offend his Jewish audience; he would not Titus because of the issue of the unity of Jew/Gentile in the Body of Christ.

Titus was Paul's test-case before the Jerusalem Council that a Gentile could come into the church, the covenantal promises, without circumcision (Gal. 2: 4-5). (Titus does not appear anywhere in the Acts account by Luke, which is unexpected).

Titus seems to have accompanied Paul and Silas on the second and third missionary journeys since he is described as "my partner and fellow worker (II Cor. 8:23)." He was sent by Paul to Corinth to straighten out the misperceptions that was troubling the church, a very difficult assignment, yet Titus succeeded to Paul's comfort ("But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus (II Cor. 7: 5-6").

It is likely that he accompanied Paul in his desire to go to Spain after his release from the first Roman imprisonment. He left Titus in Crete on the return, later to rejoin him in Nicopolis, the port near Philippi. He remained on Crete to "amend what was defective in the churches and appoint elders in every town as I directed you (Tit. 1:5)." He apparently joined Paul in Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12), journeyed with the apostle to Rome, and was then sent to Dalmatia (southern Croatia today, on the Adriatic Coast) from Rome in the apostle's final days (II Tim. 4:10).

The Location and Date of the Writing:

It is most reasonable that Paul was released after two years from Roman imprisonment (60-62 AD) when no formal charges were brought against him. It seems more likely that Paul came to Crete on his return from Spain (ca. 66-67) and evangelized across island since the time was initially brief and he was under Roman restriction. As was often his pattern, he left a fellow servant behind to strengthen the new converts (Luke at Philippi., Silas and Timothy at Thessalonica). "The reason I left you in Crete... (Tit. 1:5). It seems logical that Paul would not have left Titus on Crete in his desire to go to Spain; he certainly would most likely need him there. So, on the return from Spain Paul labored on the island and left Titus to bring order in the churches. "...do your best to come to me at Nicopolis,

because I have decided to winter there (Tit. 3:12).” From Nicopolis, Paul and Titus traveled to Rome and later sent him to Dalmatia (II Tim. 4:10). This would place the writing of the letter from Ephesus (Nicopolis Paul’s later location) in 67.

The Purpose of the Writing

The purpose of the letter is that of instruction, various duties that the apostle waits to implement in the churches across Crete. These include the appointment of leadership in the churches, warning the believers of the danger of false teachers and teachings, and the general promotion of the spiritual life among the believers.

The Outline of the Writing.

This little letter is structurally easy to discern; it is composed of three chapters. Each chapter has instruction followed by a stated reason for the instructions (“for,” vv. 1:5, 2:11, 3:3).

A Commentary on the Writing.

I. Introduction, 1:1-4

The emphasis in the introduction seems to be more on the content of Paul’s preaching than on the authority of his apostleship. His message is in continuity with the message of the Hebrew Scriptures, perhaps a jab against the false teachers who claim he is teaching a contrary message to the prophets.

A. Author, vv. 1-3

1. Position, v. 1a

Paul, which means small (Saul his Jewish name), is described in two ways: a bondservant and an apostle. The former looks at his relation to Christ, a voluntary subjection, and the latter his authority in Christ.

2. Service, vv. 1b-4

a. The purpose, v. 1b

“For” suggests a reason to follow. It is for the church, the body of believers, the elect of God, that Paul was sent out. He was called to call the elect of God, a message that is true and results in a godly lifestyle.

b. The end, vv. 2-3

In, literally “Resting on,” explains the goal of Paul’s message, the hope of eternal life. Life promised through the Hebrew prophets centuries ago and now revealed, faith in the Christ, who is “our Savior.”

Faith rests in the claims and promises of God, His unchanging character. He cannot “lie.” Promises are only as sure as the integrity and power of the one who makes them!

B. Addressee, v. 4a

C. Salutation, v. 4b

Grace and peace are gifts that come through God, who is the “father,” the head of the family, and Christ Jesus, “our Savior,” who paid the price of our entrance into the family of God.

II. The Appointment of Elders for the churches, 1:5-16

A. Stated, vv. 5-9.

1. The assignment, v. 5

Paul, writing from either Ephesus instructs Titus to bring order and safety to the churches across Crete, the manner being to appoint elders (plural) in the churches (as he and

Barnabas did in returning to the Galatian churches [Acts 14:23). The word “elders” looks to spiritual maturity. In v. 7 the word, “bishop” or shepherd-overseer looks at the elders’ function. Elder and bishop are interchangeable terms.

2. The qualifications, vv. 6-8

a. Family qualifications, v. 6

Five external qualifications are cited for the office:

Male

Above reproach or without fault - The term is used in the letter three time having reference to legal disputes.

“One-wife man” -This seems to mean a man loyal to his wife. The only clue to this meaning is the qualifications for widows to be supported by the church (“one husband” [I Tim 5:9]). If she must be over sixty years old, it seems that she would not be disqualified should a husband die, or she experienced the trauma of abandonment as the innocent party.

“Believing” children - Since no family has the guarantee that all our children will come to faith, does that disqualify one from the office of eldership who has no children or have rebellious children? In 1:9 the same word occurs, and it means faithful, compliant, submissive,” or obedient. See also 3:8 where a saying is said to be trustworthy. Thus, here it seems to refer to home-management with the father as head, control without being controlling.

Not obstinate or possessive of power, an autocrat

b. Personal qualifications, vv. 7-8

Paul lists twelve public qualifications for elder/bishop qualification, five negatives and seven positives. The first, above reproach is a general summary of the other eleven.

As stewards, custodians of the flock of God, they must be concerned for others, not demanding of their opinions in their leadership capacity (not self-will, not given to burst of anger, not an alcoholic, not given to physical outbursts, not in it for the money [of course elders were not paid, but it can lead to fringe benefits]).

Positively, they are to be hospitable (“lover of strangers”), predisposed to benefiting others, able to avoid extremes (a balanced life), just in dealings, godly in deportment, and self-controlled.

3. Functional qualifications, v. 9

The duties of the shepherds of a flock are three-fold: they must be men that know the Holy Scriptures, the Apostolic Truth; they must have a teaching gift and so guide the flock; and they must be able to defend and protect the Faith.

It is interesting to me that in qualifications the emphasis is upon character, while function is stated briefly. It does not say that elders should be adroit businessmen; perhaps the church is far more than a business. It is an office of care, not material success and numbers!

B. Reasoned, vv. 10-16

The “for” tells us the reason for qualified leadership: dangers abound.

1. The presence of false teachers, v. 10

The danger is found in teachers of falsehood that can lead a flock astray. They accomplish this through speech that is not apostolic. "Those of the circumcision" are Jews that were Paul opponents in the Jerusalem Council, and throughout his missionary journeys who taught that to become a Christ follower they must become Jewish obeying the Mosaic Law.

2. The duty toward false teachers, v. 11a
They must be silenced, gagged, muzzled by not allowing them a platform in the flock. See I John 2:29.
3. The reason for silencing false teachers, v. 11b
They are upsetting families, perhaps flock, with the sordid motive of personal enhancement.
4. The evidence of the danger of false teachers, vv. 12-13a
The proof is cited from a sixth century BC Cretan, Epimenides (he was known as one of the wisest men of Crete). Paul quotes pagan sources three times (see Acts 17:28, I Cor. 15:13) in his recorded ministry. This tells us that the opponents were Cretan Jews. The term, "cretinous," meant a liar (like "to corinthianize" meant to be sexual permissive)! In this context, Paul is referring to false teachers characterized greed ("lazy gluttons").
5. The rebuke of the false teachers, vv. 13b-14
The command literally means "cut off with a knife." The purpose of the rebuke is punitive; though the end of clarify truth might be corrective leading to repentance (hopefully).

"Jewish myths" refers to speculation as to the origin and character of the Messiah;
"commandments of men" refers to oral tradition.

6. The personality of false teachers, v. 15
Being of passive voice, the verse describes a settled state ("defiled and unbelieving"). This type of person perverts and twists everything for personal interest ("nothing is pure").
7. The judgment of false teachers, v. 16
They claim to be religious, but they do not know God; they are monotheists but do not know Jesus Christ. The evidence is found in their deeds ("disobedience and worthless").

Applications:

1. If God is incapable of either being deceived or deceiving, is there any basis for doubting the promises that He has spoken? Is distrust or doubt unwarranted since He cannot lie? If it is so that God cannot lie, then it must be the natural duty of all His creatures to believe Him?
2. "... the faith, knowledge of the truth, and godliness (1:1)" captures Paul's message, "the faith" is rooted in truth, truth that leads to godly behavior. This is the essence of Christian profession.
3. The only way I know to preserve ourselves from falsity and false teachers is to be knowledgeable of the Holy Scriptures. You can find the fake by becoming a student of the authentic! There are two tests: the nature of the teaching and the character of those who teach.