

Titus 1:14

Pastor: Titus 1:14: The Old Testament law is to be regarded as nothing more than Jewish myth.

[N]ot paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

1:14 What the troublemakers in Crete are said to have been pushing were “Jewish myths or...merely human commands” (Titus 1:14, TNIV).¹ This would not be referring to the Torah itself, nor to mainline synagogue Judaism of the First Century, as the Torah as Holy Scripture is hardly something that the Apostle Paul would refer to as a “myth.” This is not the first time that human ordinances have been spoken against by him (Colossians 2:22),² which may be the closest clue we can see as to what kind of false teaching circulated in Crete. I. Howard Marshall & Philip H. Towner inform us that the main thrust here is that “the false teaching [is] human and therefore inferior to the apostle’s teaching which is truth from God.”³

David H. Stern renders Titus 1:14 with “Judaistic myths or to the commands of people who reject the truth” (CJB/CJSB). His interpretation of what is said is, “I do not believe these myths were part of normative non-Messianic Judaism, but rather that they expressed the Circumcision faction’s preoccupation with the trappings of Judaism...that is, imitative of Judaism without actually emanating from normative Judaism.”⁴ He goes further and argues that the “circumcision” group was largely non-Jewish. From his perspective, the problem present in Crete was that non-Jewish people were trying to act Jewish, but were not really so. We should appreciate his assertion that the myths present were not the standard Judaism one would find in the Synagogue of the time, but it is doubtful that the actual problem in Crete was the circumcision status of the non-Jewish Believers, with myths somehow being representative of the troublemakers’ misinterpretation of Jewish teaching—and not representative of speculative elements instead.

In referencing *loudaikois muthois* (Ἰουδαϊκοῖς μύθοις) Paul is not criticizing Judaism in general, especially given the rich heritage of the Tanach (Old Testament), religious liturgy and worship style, and leadership style that the First Century *ekklēsia* directly inherited from the Synagogue. Instead, whatever *muthos* (μῦθος) is, is to be viewed as being outside the mainstream, and perhaps the later reference to “genealogies” (Titus 3:9) is similar to its usage in 1 Timothy 1:4, where exaggerations and embellishments on various Tanach figures are in view. George W. Knight III suggests, “It is likely...that the ‘myths’ here are concocted stories related to the ‘genealogies’ spun out from those given in the OT.”⁵

The kinds of myths that the Cretan troublemakers would have been introducing could have been along the lines of the kind of speculative stories that one can find in some parts of the Pseudepigrapha.⁶ William D. Mounce thinks that this “refers to stories the opponents had created around minor OT characters, stories that contained their secret knowledge,”⁷ which would primarily be figures who are only mentioned once or twice in the Tanach, but for whom there was a large amount of data in various works compiled long after the time period they lived. Philip H. Towner further observes, “it is probable that the Jewish-Christian opponents were creating speculative doctrines based on stories of ancient OT heroes and using them to lend the weight of antiquity to certain questionable practices that Paul regarded as ungodly.”⁸ Far be it from using the Torah or Tanach properly as a guide for ethics and living holy (1 Timothy 1:7-11), the Cretan troublemakers used it inappropriately to promote their own interests.

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.

² “which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?” (Colossians 2:22).

³ Marshall & Towner, 206.

⁴ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 655.

⁵ Knight, 300.

⁶ James D.G. Dunn, “The First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al. *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11:866.

⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 400.

⁸ Towner, 705.

As various myths and made up stories about Biblical figures would be pushed, so would *entolais anthrōpōn* (ἐντολαῖς ἀνθρώπων), various “commandments of people” (*WBC*).⁹ Mounce states that this “refer[s] to human-made laws in distinction from what God intends,”¹⁰ and one can see echoes of the *mitzvat anashim* (מצוות אנשים) of Isaiah 29:13 present here (cf. Colossians 2:22; Mark 7:7; Matthew 15:9). The troublemakers, then, were not pushing “Torah observance” onto the Cretans, but instead their own rules and regulations that ultimately subtracted from the real purpose of God’s Law. Their human commandments replaced the far more important ordinances of God, and as Knight describes, “commandments of humans’...[are] put in place of obedience to God and what he requires.”¹¹

What so-called “commandments” were actually pushed by the Cretan troublemakers? Towner notes how “Jesus employed the term [‘commandments of men’] in order to contrast the Jewish obsession with rites of purification with the real thrust of God’s law (Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7).”¹² Ben Witherington III similarly thinks, “It would appear that the commandments have to do with purity rules...”¹³ In Mark 7:3-4 the issue in play is a rigorous man-made ritual handwashing, rigidly enforced at the expense of other, more critical Torah instructions of respect. *Testament of Asher* 7:5 may shed some light on the circumstances in Crete: “For I know that you will be thoroughly disobedient, that you will be thoroughly irreligious, heeding not God’s Law but human commandments, being corrupted by evil.”¹⁴

⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 394.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 401.

¹¹ Knight, 301.

¹² Towner, 705.

¹³ Witherington, *Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John*, 124.

He considers it to be “Jewish halakah, the so-called tradition of the elders.”

¹⁴ Kee, “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 1, 818.