
EPISTLE OF PAUL TO TITUS

Approximate date: 63-65 C.E.

Time period: growing pains of new Messiah followers in Mediterranean basin

Author: the Apostle Paul with Luke (secretary)

Location of author: Macedonia or Nicopolis

Target audience and their location: Titus in Crete

People:

Paul, Titus, Artemas, Tychicus, Zenas, Apollos

People mentioned:

Yeshua the Messiah, Cretans, poet Epimenides (1:12)

Places:

Crete

Key Themes:

establishment of proper elders and overseers / silencing of rebellious people in the assembly / proper teachers in the assembly / proper examples to demonstrate for women, young men, and slaves / avoiding unnecessary disputes

Key Scriptures: Titus 1:5; 3:4-8 / **Greeting** (1:1-4); **Qualifications for Congregational Officials** (1:5-9); **False Teachers and the Need to Refute Them** (1:10-16); **Regulations for Proper Behavior** (2:1-10); **Doctrine and Life for Believers in Yeshua** (2:11-3:7); **Closing Admonitions** (3:8-11); **Conclusion** (3:12-15)¹

Theological Summary: The author of the Epistle to **Titus** is identified in the text as being the Apostle Paul (Titus 1:1). Genuine Pauline authorship is not challenged by conservatives, neither was it doubted by the Second Century Church. Pauline authorship is doubted by liberals, who often believe that Titus was composed by second or third generation Christians (authorship issues of the **Pastoral Epistles** are summarized at the beginning of the entry for **1 Timothy**). This letter is addressed to Titus (Titus 1:4), who was one of the first non-Jews successfully evangelized by Paul. Titus was very important to him, as Paul took him to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-3). While there, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised as a

¹ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 658-659.

proselyte to Judaism (Galatians 2:3-5), as he was accepted by the Jewish Believers as a part of the Body of Messiah even though he was a Greek. We may safely assume that when Titus accompanied Paul to Jerusalem he was a rather young Believer, and Paul wanted to show him the holy city. By the time Paul composes this letter, Titus undoubtedly matured in his spirituality, being able to serve as Paul's authorized representative for the growing community of Messiah followers on Crete.

While "We hear nothing further of Titus till the time of Paul's ministry at Ephesus on the third missionary journey" (*EXP*),² Titus probably worked with Paul during his time in Ephesus for a while, emerging as one of the Apostle's most trusted ministry associates. Titus was given the responsibility by Paul to deliver the letter of 2 Corinthians to Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:3). Later, we see that Paul and Titus worked together on the island of Crete helping to see congregations established (Titus 1:5), and Titus remained there to continue the work when Paul left (Titus 1:5; 2:15; 3:12-13). The last we see about Titus is that he went on a mission to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10).

The letter to Titus was almost assuredly written before 2 Timothy, in approximately 63-65 C.E. The text of Titus indicates that Paul asked him to meet him in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12-14), a town on the west coast of Greece—and Titus presumably met Paul at his request, then being able to move northward to Dalmatia. Titus was on Crete when the letter was sent to him, and by extension Paul's instruction was not only to Titus, but to the Cretan Believers. Crete, being an island in the Southern Aegean Sea, was at a deplorable moral level in the First Century, even worse than other bad places. Paul actually quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12),³ in pointing out that Titus had his work cut out for him. Titus was given Paul's authorization to see that the congregations of Crete were well cared for, and to expect the arrival of Apollos and Zenas (Titus 3:13).

As with the other Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy, no one in the scholastic world has ever proposed a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for Titus (*Titos*, Τίτος). Contrary to what a few in the Messianic movement might want to believe, a Greek composition for Titus is absolutely certain. Titus "was a Greek" (Galatians 2:3), and would have spoken Greek as his native language. Titus was operating on Crete when Paul wrote him from Nicopolis, all areas where Greek was spoken as the primary language, including in the local Jewish community.

The Epistle to Titus includes a strong emphasis by Paul on loving and performing good works (Titus 1:8, 16; 2:3, 7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14), as true sanctification was needed on Crete. One explanation is that the letter was written by Paul because "Titus was directed to appoint morally and doctrinally qualified elders in the various" assemblies (*EXP*),⁴ persons whose character was decidedly different than the troublemakers who are mentioned. There appear to have been some degree of proto- or incipient-Gnostic and/or mysterious influences circulating around Crete as well, which had affected some of the Jews.⁵ Ellis contends that the

² D. Edmond Hiebert, "Titus," in *EXP*, 11:422.

³ Cf. Callimachus *Hymn to Zeus* 1.8.

⁴ Hiebert, in *EXP*, 11:423.

⁵ Beker, "Pastoral letters," in *IDB*, 3:673.

troublemakers Paul refers to would have been “gnosticizing judaizers,”⁶ as they would not necessarily represent mainline Synagogue Judaism.

That there was some kind of false teaching circulating on the island of Crete, which Titus had to beware of, is easily detected from the letter. Paul tells him, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you...For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain” (Titus 1:5, 10-11). The various elders whom Titus will appoint will help to steer the Cretan Believers back on a proper course of faith, as various families and/or home fellowships were disrupted. The troublemakers were likely advocates of the non-Jewish Cretans becoming Jewish proselytes, and they pushed both “Jewish myths” and various “human commands” (Titus 1:14, TNIV). Involved with their false teaching was a significance on “controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law” (Titus 3:9), but things that were ultimately of little use. They also advocated some kind of ascetic purity (Titus 1:15).

Because of the unorganized and undisciplined nature of the ideas advocated by the Cretan troublemakers—other than them being described as foolish myths that stirred up controversy—one is left concluding that while being Jewish, they were ultimately opportunistic and fell prey to the stereotyped Cretan in ancient classical society. “There were...disputes about the law although it is not clear what form these took. The absorbing interest in genealogies gives some indication in view of contemporary Jewish speculations centred mainly around the Pentateuchal genealogies” (Guthrie).⁷ While in Timothy’s situation (1 Timothy 1:4) the various “genealogies” focused around speculations associated with obscure Tanach figures, in Titus’ situation the troublemakers being labeled as “the circumcision” may have involved genealogies related to their Jewish pedigree. “According to Tit. 1:14 the myths were Jewish, which suggests that the false teachers were probably Judaizers...Paul’s exhortation that Titus himself avoid arguments about the law (3:9) may indicate the practice of the false teachers” (Guthrie, *ISBE*).⁸ Paul notably informs Titus that “Zenas the lawyer and Apollos [are] on their way” (Titus 3:13), and with the former being a *nomikos* (νομικός),⁹ he was likely a Diaspora Jew with extensive knowledge in the Torah, being able to correct any of the errors that the troublemakers had circulated on Crete—because there was a proper usage of God’s Torah (cf. 1 Timothy 1:8).

Simply because there were various disputes that had erupted on Crete, as the troublemakers had been promoting false ideas associated with the Torah, the Cretan

⁶ Ellis, “Pastoral Letters,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 663.

⁷ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 628.

⁸ Guthrie, “Pastoral Epistles,” in *ISBE*, 3:682.

⁹ *BDAG*, pp 675, 676 defines *nomikos* with, “**pert. to being well informed about law, learned in the law,**” noting how “**Tit 3:13** mentions a certain Zenas the *v.*, but it is not clear whether he was expert in Mosaic or non-Mosaic (in the latter case most prob. Roman) law.—Elsewh. in the NT only once in Mt and several times in Lk, always of those expert in Mosaic law.”

While interpreters are not agreed if Zenas was a lawyer in the Mosaic Torah or Roman law, the CJB calls Zenas “the *Torah* expert”

Believers were to have their attention focused on being obedient to God. Paul takes key concepts of Ancient Israel's original calling, applying it to Messiah followers, by informing Titus,

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:11-14; cf. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:6; 14:2; Ezekiel 37:23).¹⁰

The reality that the Lord has called redeemed people out to be His own, comes with it the imperative of being a conduit of good deeds, reflective of His goodness and grace toward others who likewise need salvation. The Epistle to Titus definitely has a missional thrust to it, as forgiveness from sins is available to all people. “The letter is clear evidence that the [*ekklēsia*]...is not intended to function only in cozy, respectable, middle-class environments. The gospel is for the most unpromising of people....[T]eachers are to press on with their task of evangelism and of leading converts into a lifestyle that brings glory to God” (Carson and Moo).¹¹ Titus 2:13 also represents a very high Christology, where Yeshua the Messiah is referred to as “our great God and Savior.”¹²

One of the important points of contrast, between the letters of 1 Timothy and Titus, is that while Timothy was to appoint both elders and deacons in Ephesus (1 Timothy 3:1-13), Titus was to only appoint elders (Titus 1:5-9). This is probably only reflective of how the Ephesian congregation(s) was much larger and more established, and that the much smaller grouping of Believers on Crete did not yet require deacons. Ultimately in one's reading of the Pastorals, what we see is that while its qualifications for congregational leaders must surely be heeded by us today, they need to be read within the context to which they were originally delivered. They are to serve as important guidelines, but not rigidly so.

It is easily observed that among the three Pastoral Epistles, the letter to Titus is the least examined and considered by today's Messianic Believers. There is often a struggle with statements that are sometimes perceived as being either anti-Torah (Titus 3:9) or anti-Jewish (Titus 1:14). Yet, when it is recognized that the Jewish troublemakers on Crete were likely not your average, synagogue-attending Jews—but rather opportunists who abused Moses' Teaching and used it as a means *to confuse* the Believers via some kind of esoteric or just made up ideas—Titus becomes much easier to understand. This would mean that Titus was overseeing the spiritual maturity of many new Believers, who needed to be rooted in a lifestyle of holiness and demonstrating good works, contrary to the behavior modeled by the opponents. Apollos, who was strong in the Tanach (Acts 18:24), and Zenas who was trained in the Law (Titus 3:13), would be able to further assist. The Epistle to Titus presents no major

¹⁰ Aland, *GNT*, 735.

¹¹ Carson and Moo, pp 584-585.

¹² Grk. *tou megalou Theou kai Sōtēros hēmōn Iēsou Christou* (τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

challenges for the Messianic community today when placed in its historical context, although we are surely admonished to beware of any Cretan-type troublemakers we may encounter.¹³

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON TITUS:

- 1. What point or points most impacted you from Paul's letter to Titus? Is there anything you need to seriously rethink or reevaluate from a Messianic perspective?**

- 2. What would have been some of the possible emphases of the teaching of the opponents/troublemakers? Why do you think Paul does not give Titus that many specific details on what they said?**

- 3. How significant are good works/deeds within Paul's instruction to Titus for the Cretan Believers?**

- 4. Have you ever encountered a Messianic fellowship or congregation like the one(s) Titus oversaw in Crete? If so, what were its strengths and weaknesses?**

¹³ Consult the author's commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic* for a more detailed examination of 1&2 Timothy and Titus. Do note that this resource follows the order of 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy, following some other commentaries. This has been done, more than anything else, to emphasize that 2 Timothy was the last Pauline letter composed.

REFLECTION ON TITUS' PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading Paul's letter to Titus: