

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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Titus

The church in Crete was full of new believers in a culture where conduct was very crude. By this time, Paul was an aged missionary. He skillfully applied the good news to the spiritual condition and circumstances of these believers in Crete as the church was beginning to grow.

Setting

A group from Crete was in Jerusalem during Pentecost when the Christian church began ([Acts 2:11](#)). Some of these people might have brought the Christian faith back to Crete at that time. But this letter to Titus suggests that the church there had been recently founded as a result of Paul's mission (see [Titus 1:5](#)). The only other mention of Crete in the New Testament is when Paul is transferred to Rome as a prisoner ([Acts 27:7-21](#)). Paul did not have an opportunity to do active ministry in Crete at that time. Most likely, Paul's work in Crete began after the events of [Acts 28:1-31](#) (AD 60-62) and before his final imprisonment in Rome (probably around AD 64~65).

Paul had established the church in Crete without appointing leaders. He had done the same during his first missionary journey out of Antioch of Syria. As with those earliest churches, he now wanted leaders to be appointed (compare [Acts 14:23](#)). Yet, in this case, Paul gave the responsibility of appointing leaders to Titus, a longtime coworker.

Paul was headed for Nicopolis (which is on the west coast of modern Greece), and he wanted Titus to join him there when Artemas or Tychicus arrived on the island of Crete ([Titus 3:12](#)). Paul's plan to stay at Nicopolis for the winter season suggests that he planned to sail westward from there when spring arrived (see [2 Timothy 4:21](#)). Paul was probably heading for Italy and possibly Spain (see [Romans 15:24, 28](#)).

On Crete, the culture had low moral standards and was negatively influencing the believers in the young church. False teachers were also troubling the community, seemingly like those mentioned in 1 and 2 Timothy. As Paul's representative to Crete, Titus had to set this church in order before the arrival of Artemas or Tychicus. Above all, he needed to assign elders in each city. When this was completed, he would depart and join Paul.

Summary

The letter to Titus is practical and sets guidelines for Titus himself to follow. Each section of the main part of the letter ([1:5-3:11](#)) is written in a pattern of command, reasons for the command, and charge. Paul consistently repeats this pattern—whether addressing the appointment of elders ([1:5-16](#)), right conduct among members of the household of faith ([2:1-15](#)), or right conduct in society ([3:1-11](#)). The reason for Paul's commands in the first section, on leadership, is that the community is threatened by false teachers and needs decisive leadership. In the next two sections, on right conduct, the commands are based on God's grace and mercy.

Date of Writing

Titus was written at about the same time as 1 Timothy. It is possible that Paul wrote these letters and 2 Timothy during the period before his arrest in [Acts 21](#). But a date sometime after his imprisonment in [Acts 28](#) is more likely (see 1 Timothy Book Introduction, "Date of Writing").

Situation on Crete

According to traditional stories from Crete, the god Zeus was once a mere human who lived and died on Crete. He changed into a god because of the good things he did for people (see study note on 1:12). The idea of a great human who helps others being exalted to the status of a god because of good deeds contradicts the good news. God graciously lowered himself to humanity in Jesus Christ—“our great God and Savior” ([2:13](#))—and offers salvation through pure mercy ([3:5](#)).

Comparison with 1 and 2 Timothy

Although Crete is far from the church in Ephesus (where 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy were sent), there are some interesting similarities between the two situations. The description of the false teachers and their teaching ([Titus 1:10-16](#)) suggests that quite similar teachings were being confronted in both places (see [1 Timothy 1:4-7; 4:1-4](#); [2 Timothy 3:1-7; 4:3-4](#)).

The situation on Crete as addressed in Titus is not identical to that of Ephesus in 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. The church in Crete was new, whereas the church in Ephesus was long established. Crete was in less civilized society than Ephesus. The newness of the church in Crete might explain the absence of a widows list ([1 Timothy 5:3-16](#)) and deacons ([1 Timothy 3:8-13](#)). The differences in those causing trouble might account for the silence on the subject of women teachers (see [1 Timothy 2:11-15](#)). The criteria for leaders ([Titus 1:6-9](#)), as well as the standards of conduct for members of the community (see [2:1-10](#)), might represent lower standards to be less strict for new believers from a rough background. Finally, the stress on guarding the deposit, so important in 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy is absent in Titus ([1 Timothy 1:18; 6:20](#); [2 Timothy 1:12-14; 2:2](#)).

Meaning and Message

The main message of this letter is the realization that the Christian community should act out God's saving grace, which has been shown to the world in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The community's behavior among its members, and with those outside, should be consistent with the way that God had dealt with them. Christians must give a visible form to God's grace in the world and toward the world. By doing this, they will spread the good news within their territory and culture ([2:10-11; 3:2-3, 8](#); see [Matt 5:14-16](#)).

God's plan to save humanity invites us to take part in it. As Christ's followers, we must actively live out this grace. Our communities should encourage godly lives because the appearance of grace, in the person of Christ, has taught us how to live and has made such living possible ([Titus 2:1-15](#)). As individual believers, we must also behave properly in a world affected by sin, focused on the salvation of others. We must remember our former lives—remembering how God has treated us, has given us salvation, and has provided for our godliness ([3:1-11](#)).