

## The New Testament, Book 17

### Titus

The small book of Titus, the third and last of the Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament, is Paul's letter of guidance and encouragement to his young Gentile protégé in Crete. Strangely, there is no mention of Titus in Acts; what we know of Titus must be drawn from II Corinthians, Galatians, II Timothy and this epistle.

Chronologically, Titus seems to appear first in Galatians 2:1-10, traveling with Paul and Barnabas from Antioch to Jerusalem, where it was determined that Paul would evangelize the Gentiles, while Peter, James and John evangelized the Jews (Acts 15). This would mean that Titus was closely associated with Paul and Barnabas in the early days of the church at Antioch.

Titus accompanied Paul on the Second Missionary Journey, where Paul was disappointed in not finding him at Troas. It was there, on that occasion, that Paul saw the vision of the Macedonian man, asking him to come there and help the people (II Corinthians 2:12-13). Titus later joined Paul in Macedonia, having been on a mission to Corinth. Titus must have been a strong personality with a mighty anointing, for the Corinthians had received him "in fear and trembling" (II Corinthians 7:6-7, 13-15). Titus was sent back to Corinth, bearing Paul's Second Letter to that church, and to receive the money that had been collected for the impoverished Judaeans Christians (II Corinthians 8:6-7, 16-17).

Between Paul's first and second imprisonments, he and Titus traveled to Crete, where Paul left him to establish churches on the island, and where Titus was when he received this letter from Paul. We learn from this letter (1:4-5) that it was Paul who had brought Titus to the Lord. On Crete, Titus was to finish the work which Paul had begun there.

It appears that Titus was with Paul during his second and final imprisonment in Rome; and, for a reason not explained, Titus had traveled from there to Dalmatia, probably sent there by Paul on a mission (II Timothy 4:10). According to tradition Titus continued the work on Crete as bishop, and died there at an advanced age.

#### **NOTES:**

*a. Although Titus follows II Tim in the canon, it was written several years earlier, at about the time of the writing of I Tim. This was before Paul's re-*

*arrest and second imprisonment; thus the difference from II Tim in tone and urgency.*

*b. It is generally believed that the Phoenicians, a seafaring people who settled the Mediterranean coast of Israel and Lebanon (Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Gaza), had migrated from Crete. The Phoenicians were the ancestors of the Philistines. Present day Palestinian Arabs claim to be descended from the Philistines, thus their claim to Palestine. But it is a false claim. They are not descended from the Phoenicians/Philistines; they are Semitic--Arabs, descended from Abraham and Hagar.*

**A. Author.** The author of this epistle is Paul, as he says in the first verse.

**B. Place and Date.** This letter to Titus was written ca 65 AD, probably from Corinth, where Paul was on his way to Nicopolis (3:12).

**C. Occasion.** Paul had been released from his first imprisonment in Rome. He has traveled with Titus to Crete, and left him there to complete the work. Zenas and Apollos are on their way to Crete, apparently to assist in the work. There are serious problems on the island that need correcting, it is a large area, and it seems that Titus will need help.

**D. Theme.** The theme of Titus, like that of I Timothy, is correct church government and order. Paul repeats the qualifications for the office of elder (not for the office of deacon here--just for elder), and writes of proper behavior for teachers in the church (both men and women). I Timothy and Titus were written at about the same time, for the same purpose, and are similar in content; in this way, the two books are companion pieces.

A secondary theme in Titus is the necessity of maintaining good works. As in the book of James, there is expressed here the balance of the gracious gift of salvation by God, with the requirement for our performance of good works.

**E. Highlights.** Highlights in Titus include the following:

1. Titus Is Paul's Spiritual Son. In the opening salutation Paul reveals an important fact, revealed nowhere else in the New Testament. It is that Titus, like Timothy, is Paul's spiritual son, a convert of the great apostle. (1:1-4)
2. Qualifications of Elders. Paul expresses the need for ordaining elders in every city on the island. This, he says, is the reason that Paul left him on the island. He then lists a summary of an elder's qualifications. Here, Paul goes into less detail than in I Timothy, but the picture he paints is no less clear. The aptitude for teaching is not specified, but it may clearly be inferred from verse 9, and in the necessity for sound teaching that follows in

verses 10 and 11. Paul does not mention qualifications of Deacons here. (1:5-9)

**NOTE:** *In verses 5 and 7 we can see clearly that the offices of elder (Greek, “presbuteros”), and bishop (Greek, “episkopos”), are the same. The two titles are synonyms for the same office.*

3. Sharply Rebuke the False Teachers. There is a serious problem in the church on Crete, and it needs to be dealt with immediately and severely. The source of the problem lies in Jewish believers who are confusing the people with their false, legalistic teachings and, it appears, making money in the process. Not only that, but they do no good works to demonstrate their faith. (1:10-16)

**NOTE:** *Verses 12 and 13 cannot be passed by without a comment. They are a commentary--and an extremely negative one--on the nature of the people of Crete. As a group, he says, they are typically dishonest, brutally cruel, lazy, and are gluttons. Paul says that even one of them, a Cretan prophet, speaks of his own countrymen in this way; Titus has a difficult job before him, even with Apollos and Zenas to help him. I know of no comparably unflattering description such as this, of the people in any other place where Paul ministered.*

*In Acts 28:2 Luke describes the people of Malta as “barbarians”; but he also speaks of their kindness to Paul and his shipwrecked companions. And we must remember that, in the ancient world, “barbarian” was used to apply to all who were not acquainted with the Greek culture and language (and Luke was a Greek)<sup>1</sup>.*

*No, this emphatic, blanket denigration of an entire people seems to stand alone--in a class all its own.*

4. Rules for Christian Behavior. Titus is to teach the people basic rules for Christian living. The older men are to be sober, sound in the faith, temperate, patient and loving. The rules for the older women in the church are the same and, in addition, he charges the older women to engage in teaching the young women in the way that they should behave. The young men are to be taught to be restrained and to exercise self-control. Servants are to be respectful, obedient, and faithful to their masters; in so doing, Paul says, the servants (and, by implication, all groups referred to above--everyone in the church) will “adorn the doctrine of God,” i.e. make the gospel more appealing by being positive examples<sup>2</sup>. (2:1-10)

<sup>1</sup> See in this regard the study guide to Acts, Highlight 105, **NOTE a.**

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word rendered “they may adorn” is a form of the verb *kosmeo*, from which we derive the English words “cosmetize” and “cosmetic.”

5. Let No Man Despise Thee. Paul goes on to say that the gracious gift of redemption has arrived in Christ, available to all men, and that believers are looking forward, in hope, to the blessed day of “the glorious [second] appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” He says that Christ came to redeem us and purify for Himself a peculiar people--a people zealous for good works, distinctly different from the unredeemed world around us.

Titus is to teach, preach, and rebuke “with all authority.” And, reminiscent of the advice that he gave Timothy about his youth, Paul tells Titus to “let no man despise thee<sup>3</sup>.” He doesn’t mention the youth of Titus, but the wording here suggests it. Some of the men most in need of sharp correction are the Jewish men; some of them may be older in years than Titus, and this will make them feel superior to him. On top of that, he is an uncircumcised Gentile. Paul reminds Titus that it is he who is in charge<sup>4</sup>. (2:11-15)

6. The Combination of Grace and Good Works. Paul urges that the believers there be models of law-abiding citizens, living peacefully with one another, and behaving as model citizens, rightly related to the civil authorities. He reminds Titus that they both once lived in sin, out of fellowship with God and in conflict with others; but, he says, God had saved them out of his kindness and love. And, when God had saved them, He did it because of his kindness and mercy, not because of the good things they had done. He did it by the life-giving, cleansing work of redemption, and the ongoing renewing, all the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Paul then summarizes this matter of what God has done for us, and the way we should live because of what He has so graciously done for us. And, when we live godly lives, seeking to maintain good works, we will benefit from living that way. (3:1-8)

7. A Final Warning: Don’t Tolerate False Teachers. An ongoing problem in the apostolic beginnings of the Church was the arising of teachers with appealing, but heretical, doctrines, leading sincere Christians astray. At best, the result of such false teaching is division among the brethren; at worst, it could mean leading sincere believers to another gospel. Regrettably, it is still a problem today; and, it seems, it will be a problem until the Lord returns and makes everything right. Paul reminds Titus not to tolerate such a teacher. He is to be rebuked; and, if he persists in his error

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<sup>3</sup> I Timothy 4:12.

<sup>4</sup> In light of the impact that he had on the Corinthian church, Titus probably had no trouble in establishing his authority (II Cor 7:13-15).

after two admonitions, he is to be publicly rejected, for he has obstinately persisted in his perverted error, condemning himself. (3:9-11)

*NOTE: It has been my experience, over and over, that the most sincere seekers after God, the most spiritually hungry, the ones who most desire to know and please Him, sincerely, are the ones most susceptible to false, legalistic teachings. These are the ones most likely to be deceived and taken into cultic Christian groups and cults. It is an ongoing tragedy that must break the heart of God.*

8. Final Instructions. Paul closes his letter with his usual final instructions and personal matters. He tells Titus to expect Artemas, or Tychicus (apparently to take over the duties of Titus); and he urges Titus to join him at Nicopolis, where he intends to spend the Winter. He tells him also to do his utmost to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they have what they need. And, with a final exhortation that the Christians on Crete “maintain good works,” providing for themselves and their families, and helping others, Paul ends the letter with a brief closing salutation and benediction. (3:12-15)

*NOTE: Even in his closing instructions and salutation, Paul gets in one more reminder of the necessity for maintaining good works. This must have been heavily on his mind; and it must have been heavily on the mind of God, who inspired him to write this epistle.*