

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE TO TITUS

by

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Note: Author's introduction in his *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, First and Second Timothy and Titus, and the Epistle to Philemon* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.

Sketch of the Life of Titus

The name of Titus does not occur in the Acts; we know him only from the Epistles. To explain this, it has been conjectured that Titus is the same person as Silas, or Sylvanus. To this, however, it seems an insuperable objection, that Silas, as a deputy from the church at Jerusalem to the church at Antioch, was most probably a Jew, or if of Gentile origin was at least a circumcised person, whereas Titus was a Gentile and uncircumcised. He is commonly supposed to belong to Antioch in Syria and was probably converted under Paul's ministry, as the apostle calls him his "own son after the common faith" (1:4). For he went up with Paul to Jerusalem when a delegation from Antioch was sent thither on the question of Gentile circumcision; and it was here the apostle refused to yield to the demand of the Judaizers for his circumcision, apparently making the case of Titus as an uncircumcised Gentile Christian a test, the decision of which would plainly prove Gentile freedom from the bondage of Judaism (Gal. 2:1-3).

Nothing further is known of him until, on Paul's third missionary journey during the long residence at Ephesus, Titus is sent from that city to Corinth to ascertain the state of the church there, and especially the effect on them of the apostle's first epistle sent to them not long before. He was well received at Corinth, and his labors there were productive of much good (2 Cor. 7:13-15). Paul, on leaving Ephesus, expected to meet Titus at Troas; and not finding him there, in his great anxiety for intelligence from Corinth, he hastened to Macedonia to meet him (2 Cor. 2:13). Thither at length Titus came, and reporting the condition of the Corinthian Church, greatly relieved the apostle's heart (2 Cor. 7:6,7). Paul then wrote his second epistle to Corinth, and intrusting it to Titus, sent him again to that city with "the brother whose praise is in all the churches" to hasten the collection "for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem" (2 Cor. 8:6, 16-23).

At what time he went with Paul to Crete is not fully settled. But, as before shown, it was probably near the close of Paul's life. When the apostle left the island, he left Titus there to complete the work begun, especially in giving additional organization to the churches and correcting false tendencies; and after his departure, he wrote to him this Epistle, both as attesting his authority to act in the apostle's stead and as directing Titus in the responsible work committed to him. Whether, as the Epistle directs, he met Paul the following winter in Nicopolis is unknown. The only further notice of him is in the apostle's last epistle (2 Tim. 4:10). When writing of his lonely position as a prisoner in Rome, he

speaks of Titus as "departed to Dalmatia"-- sent, as we may hope, by the apostle himself on some mission for the gospel.

Tradition, as usual, has sought to fill up the gaps of history and in the hierarchical interest has made him "the first bishop of Crete," of which the Epistle furnishes no evidence whatever. Alford well remarks: "Not the slightest trace is found in the Epistle of any intention on the part of Paul to place Titus permanently over the Cretan churches; indeed, such a view is inconsistent with the data furnished us in it." The Epistle plainly represents him, as in the case of Timothy, simply as an evangelist acting as Paul's assistant, and temporarily left in Crete in the apostle's place to complete a service which Paul himself was not able to finish by reason of exigencies calling him elsewhere. Tradition also depicts him in glowing colors as the apostle of the gospel to Dalmatia, and as then taking up his abode in Crete where he lived to a good old age and died in great honor; of all which we have no trace either in authentic history or in archeological remains.

The Time and Occasion of Writing

The date of the Epistle, as already shown, must probably be placed about A.D. 66 or 67, near the close of the apostle's life. The correspondencies in style and in the state of Christianity, as seen in the Pastoral Epistles, compel us to refer them to the same period. Where it was written remains uncertain. It is variously referred to Macedonia and to Ephesus.

The island of Crete, or Candia, covers the southern entrance of the Archipelago, extending in length about one hundred and fifty miles from Cape Salmone on the east to Cape Criumetopon on the west; but in width varying from six to thirty-five miles. It is rocky and mountainous, with fertile valleys producing cotton, olives, grapes, oranges, lemons, silk, and wool. The lofty form of Mount Ida appears about the middle of the island, rising to the height of 7,674 feet. Anciently Crete was crowded with cities and covered with a dense population estimated at 1,200,000. At present its chief city is Candia, and the whole population of the island is about 210,000.

Crete is celebrated in ancient mythology especially as the place where Jupiter was born and buried. In the Trojan war, Idomeneus, king of Crete, embarked his troops in a fleet of eighty vessels and led them in the long conflict. At a later period its chief cities became centres of little republics. The Cretan constitution and laws, originated by Minos, are said to have been the model from which many features of the constitution and laws of Lycurgus were derived. The island was subjected to Rome by Metellus, B.C. 67, and at the time of Paul was united to Cyrenaica on the African coast opposite, forming one Roman province. In Paul's voyage to Rome, the vessel, sailing round Cape Salmone and under the lee of the island, reached Fair Havens, a harbor near the city of Lasea; and then, loosing thence, it attempted to reach Phenice, a port near the western end of the island. But a typhoon, rushing furiously down from Mount Ida, drove the ship out to sea, and after many days it grounded, a hopeless wreck, on the coast of Malta. The circumstances of Paul on this voyage plainly forbid the supposition that he performed much, if any, evangelical labor in Crete at this time.

Philo and Josephus both testify to the large number of Jews in Crete. Some of these were present in Jerusalem at the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given, and these received the gospel. It seems probable, therefore, that Christianity had been introduced into the island from this source before the visit of Paul. The gospel thus brought, however, would be in a very imperfect form, mixed with much misconception and error; and, coming through a wholly Jewish channel, the errors would be largely Jewish in character. Christianity, as thus introduced, would also be very imperfectly organized. The apostle, at his coming, would naturally seek to remedy these defects by a more complete unfolding of the gospel and a more perfect organization of the churches. But the character of the Cretans, and especially of the Cretan Jews, rendered the task one of great difficulty. As a people they were noted for their fickleness, avarice, sensuality, licentiousness, and mendacity; and they are thus characterized by even the heathen writers of that period.

For some reason Paul is compelled to leave while in the midst of the work, and the difficult and delicate task of completing it was devolved on Titus. Consequently, the apostle, after his departure, writes this Epistle at once to certify the authority of Titus as acting in the apostle's place in the superintendence of the work in Crete, and to give explicit directions to him respecting the manner of performing the duties of his position. In this, as in the Epistles to Timothy, the subjects treated belong, for the most part, to all ages, and have therefore a universal interest and importance. The Epistle was probably sent by the hands of Zenas and Apollos, to whom it served as a letter of introduction and commendation (3:13). Some, as Hofmann, regard this as the primary occasion of sending it. But as these persons are not mentioned till the close of the Epistle, and then only in a single verse, it seems more natural to think that Paul was moved to write it by the needs of Titus and the Cretan Christians, and simply availed himself of the journey of Zenas and Apollos as a favoring opportunity to send it to the island.

The Contents

Like the other Pastoral Epistles, this is a personal, familiar letter and is without formal plan. The leading topics occur in the following order:

Chapter First -- Address and greeting (1-4); directions to Titus as to church order, particularly the qualifications of elders (5-9); the Cretan false teachers described (10-16).

Chapter Second -- Titus is instructed how to apply the gospel to different classes in the church, as the aged, the young, and the slaves (1-10); the ground of the foregoing exhortations to holy living is shown in that the grace of God has for its end the sanctification of men (11-15).

Chapter Third -- The conduct to be required of Christians toward rulers and society in general (1,2); the duty of showing such disposition and conduct toward others is enforced and illustrated by God's kindness and mercy to us (3-7); the doctrine of a gratuitous salvation is to be insisted on in order to incite believers to good works (8-11); closing directions and salutations, with the benediction (12-15).

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