

Read the New Testament in a Year

Supporting Notes & Questions

Bangor & Holyhead Circuit

Paul's letter to Titus starting 9 June 2021

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Though not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, Titus was a companion whom Paul trusted greatly, as we see in his letter to the Galatians (2:1-3) and his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, for which Titus was both bearer and Paul's spokesman, even ambassador (2:13, 7:6-7, 8:6, 8:16-19, 8:23 and 12.18). Though Paul's visit to Crete also gets no mention in Acts, it may have occurred between Paul's 2 late visits to Rome; it seems that Titus accompanied Paul there, and stayed in Crete to continue his work, possibly for Titus's lifetime.

Wednesday 9 June – Titus Chapter 1: Titus's work in Crete

vv1-4: Paul starts this letter more theologically than those to Timothy – by proclaiming that he is servant of God, apostle of Jesus Christ, & bearer of the news that God's chosen people will inherit eternal life. Compliment to Titus?

vv5-9: Paul's job description and person specification for Cretan elders and bishops is even more demanding than those he directed Timothy to apply in Ephesus. Another compliment to Titus? Or criticism of the Cretans?

vv10-16: Paul cites a Cretan prophet who describes all Cretans as liars. Is that a Pauline joke? Or severe criticism of the "circumcision party" (as some translations interpret v10) who believed that all Gentile converts to Christianity should be circumcised? Paul himself believed that the Jerusalem conference reported in Acts 15 had eliminated that form of discrimination. What forms of discrimination should we guard against in the 21st Century?

Thursday 10 June – Titus Chapter 2: Christian behaviour & teaching

vv1-10: Paul demands that Christian families provide consistent models of excellent behaviour for Cretan society. How easy was that to achieve in the 1st Century when Christians were in a small but growing minority? How easy is that to achieve in the 21st Century when Christians are in a small but hitherto decreasing minority?

vv11-15: Paul strengthens this case by reminding his Cretan readers that the saving grace of God requires them to be sober, just and devout; and that, because Jesus Christ has ransomed them from evil, they are ready to live in his new world where all are eager to accomplish good works. Has the pandemic not encouraged generous and helpful acts that benefit our entire community? Can we build on that widely acknowledged but incipient revival?

Friday 11 June – Titus Chapter 3: Christian conduct

vv1&2: Paul asks Titus to remind the Cretan Church to obey the civil authorities, and show behaviour that commends the Gospel, notably consideration and humility. Should our attitudes to political institutions reflect Paul's advice? Or do the current climatic and epidemiological crises require us to be more critical, as many young people advocate?

vv3-8: Through Titus Paul reminds Cretans how badly he and they behaved before conversion, baptism and rebirth in the Holy Spirit – a rare restatement of Jesus's discussion with Nicodemus (John 3:3-7). Useful reminder to us?

vv9-11: Enthused though Paul is by this eloquent creed, he cannot close this important pastoral letter without a further warning about false teaching, apparently directed at the circumcisionists again. In a growing church, Paul judges that these false teachers need only two warnings before Titus excludes them. As the shrinking Christian Churches in North Wales come closer together, how do we cope with those who profess Christianity but act in ways that diverge from our own firmly held beliefs, for example about inclusivity?

vv12&13: Paul discusses staff changes and travel plans difficult to reconcile with our knowledge about the end of his life. To avoid leaving too many loose ends, I refer readers to Rt Revd Tom Wright's detailed but speculative "Paul: a biography", published by SPCK (ISBN 9780 281 078 776). This describes Paul's career from "zealous persecutor of the fledgling Church, through journeys as the world's greatest missionary theologian, to his likely martyrdom at the hands of Nero". To what extent should that influence our interpretation and application of Paul's writing?

vv14&15: Paul ends with a further call to the good works that characterised the early Church and spread the Christian faith so rapidly. Is that the way to revive Christianity in the United Kingdom, increasingly secular till Covid?