

Titus (October 11)

Reading Titus

The rich man grips his belly in pain, pleading for the physician to explain what is wrong. “Too much rich food! Too much wine!” the physician complains. “Excesses will kill you. No wonder your body is not sound.”

Like a sincere physician, the apostle Paul warns Titus about the excesses that affect the congregation of Cretans, who were proverbial for gluttonous excess and who craved new and different doctrines. Paul teaches that soundness comes from modest living in accordance with the truth. The wholeness of the Gospel brings salvation and leads to self-controlled living.

Author and Date

Paul possibly wrote from Corinth, for he had not yet reached Nicopolis (on the west coast of Greece). The letter was written after his release from the first Roman imprisonment, probably between AD 63 and 65 – or possibly at a later date if he wrote it after his assumed trip to Spain.

Recipient, Setting, and Purpose

The letter is addressed to Titus, one of Paul’s converts and a considerable help to Paul in his ministry. When Paul left Antioch to discuss “his” gospel with the Jerusalem leaders, he took Titus with him; acceptance of Titus (a Gentile) as a Christian without circumcision vindicated Paul’s stand there. Presumably Titus, who is not referred to in Acts (but is mentioned 13 times in the rest of the New Testament) worked with Paul at Ephesus during the third missionary journey. From there the apostle sent him to Corinth to help that church with its work.

Following Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment, he and Titus worked briefly in Crete, after which he commissioned Titus to remain there as his representative and complete some needed work. Paul asked Titus to meet him at Nicopolis when a replacement arrived. Later, Titus went on a mission to Dalmatia (modern Croatia), the last word we hear about him in the New Testament. Considering the assignments given him, he obviously was a capable and resourceful leader.

Crete is the fourth largest island of the Mediterranean and lies directly south of the Aegean Sea. In New Testament times, life in Crete had sunk to a deplorable moral level. The dishonesty, gluttony, and laziness of its inhabitants were proverbial.

Apparently Paul introduced Christianity in Crete when he and Titus visited the island, after which he left Titus there to organize the converts. Paul sent the letter with Zenas and Apollos, who were on a journey that took them through Crete, to give Titus personal authorization and guidance in meeting opposition, instructions about faith and conduct, and warnings about false teachers. Paul also informed Titus of his future plans for him.

Blessings for Readers

As you read Titus, reflect on the excesses in your life. Our world today offers excesses of every variety. Yet, as Paul demonstrates, the basics in life and in doctrine are God’s greatest gifts. The simple purity of the truth is the hope of our salvation.