

Titus

Author and Title

As the first verse states, this letter was written by the apostle Paul to his coworker Titus. In the last two centuries the Pauline authorship of Titus (as well as 1 and 2 Timothy) has been called into question. However, the criticisms in the end cannot disprove Pauline authorship, and the arguments for the authenticity of 1 and 2 Timothy also apply to Titus, providing a good basis for affirming the straightforward claim that the book of Titus was written by Paul. The text clearly claims to be from Paul, its theology aligns with Paul's other letters, and the difference in style is certainly conceivable given the difference in situation.

Date

As with 1 Timothy, critics of Pauline authorship point out that the letter to Titus does not seem to fit into the narrative of Acts. There are no accounts in Acts or Paul's other letters of Paul doing mission work in Crete (Titus 1:5). However, neither Paul's letters nor Acts claim to be comprehensive in their account of Paul's ministry. The traditional understanding has been that Titus, like 1 Timothy, was written in the time between Paul's first imprisonment (Acts 28) and a second imprisonment which led to his death (see Introduction to 1 Timothy: Date). In this case, Titus would have been written in the mid-60s A.D., around the same time as 1 Timothy. This is plausible in light of the strong similarities between the letters.

Theme

The theme of Titus is the inseparable link between faith and practice, belief and behavior. This truth is the basis for its critique of false teaching as well as its instruction in Christian living and qualifications for church leaders.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

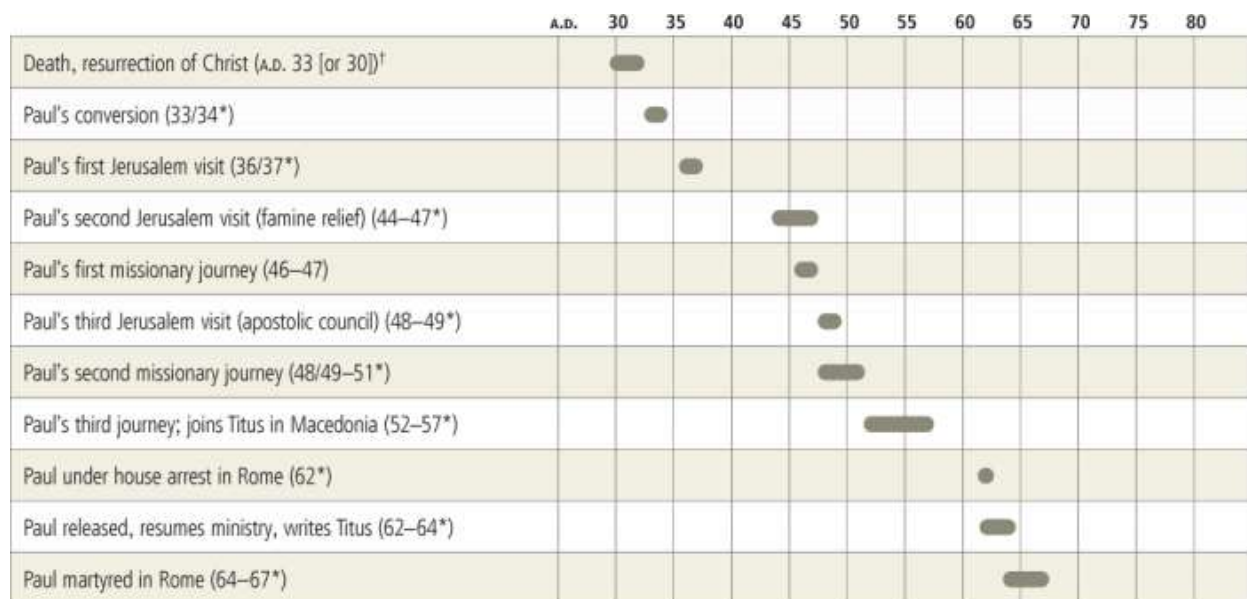
Paul had recently completed a journey to Crete, resulting in the establishment of new churches. In order to see that these churches were properly established (as was Paul's typical pattern, see [Acts 14:21–23](#)), Paul left Titus in Crete. The existence of false teachers ([Titus 1:10–16](#)) amid the fledgling churches heightens the intensity of the situation.

The false teachers appear to be the particular occasion for the writing of the letter. Discussion of the false teachers frames the heart of the letter (see [Outline](#)). Furthermore, the description of elders ([1:5–9](#)) as well as the descriptions of proper Christian living ([2:1–10](#); [3:1–3](#)) appear to be worded for intentional contrast with these opponents. The content of the false teaching is not made explicit (as in 1 Timothy). There appears to be a significant Jewish element to the teaching since the opponents arise from “the circumcision party” ([Titus 1:10](#)), and are interested in “Jewish myths” ([1:14](#)) and perhaps ritual purity ([1:15](#)). Paul's primary concern, however, is with the practical effect of the false teaching. In spite of their concern for ritual purity, the adherents of the false teaching did not live lives of godliness flowing out of the gospel but instead lived in a way that proved they did not know God ([1:16](#)).

This false teaching, which in some way allowed for ungodliness, would have found a welcome home in Crete, which was proverbial in the ancient world for immorality. But Paul expected the gospel, even in Crete, to produce real godliness in everyday life.

In dealing with the false teaching, Paul also provides Titus a portrait of a healthy church. He describes proper leadership (1:5–9), proper handling of error (1:10–16; 3:9–11), proper Christian living (esp. important for new believers in an immoral milieu; 2:1–10; 3:1–2), and the gospel as the source of godliness (2:11–14; 3:3–7).

Timeline



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

Literary Features

In form and content, Titus is readily identifiable as a NT epistle, with sections devoted to salutation, instruction, *paraenesis* (a body of moral exhortations), and closing. Like 1 and 2 Timothy, this is sometimes called a “Pastoral Epistle” because it is addressed to someone who

had pastoral leadership responsibilities, in this case with regard to a number of local churches in Crete. Paul gives directions pertaining to a pastor's work in a local congregation.

The distinctive rhetorical or stylistic feature of the letter is its concentration. In order to pack in all of the instruction that he can in a letter that is short by NT epistolary standards, Paul writes in a curt and businesslike manner. The authoritative and directive stance of the writer to his recipient is evident throughout. Most of Paul's advice is phrased in the imperative mood, producing a tone of urgency.

Key Themes

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| 1. The gospel by its nature produces godliness in the lives of believers. There is no legitimate separation between belief and behavior. | <u>1:1</u> ; <u>2:1, 11–14</u> ; <u>3:4–7</u> |
| 2. One's deeds will either prove or disprove one's claim to know God. | <u>1:16</u> |
| 3. It is vitally important to have godly men serving as elders/pastors. | <u>1:5–9</u> |
| 4. True Christian living will commend the gospel to others. | <u>2:5, 8, 10</u> |
| 5. Good works have an important place in the lives of believers. | <u>2:1–10, 14</u> ; <u>3:1–2, 8, 14</u> |
| 6. It is important to deal clearly and firmly with doctrinal and moral error in the church. | <u>1:10–16</u> ; <u>3:9–11</u> |
| 7. The gospel is the basis for Christian ethics. | <u>2:11–14</u> ; <u>3:3–7</u> |

The Setting of Titus

c. A.D. 62–64

Paul likely wrote Titus during a fourth missionary journey not recorded in the book of Acts. Writing from an unknown location, he

instructed Titus in how to lead the churches on the island of Crete. The churches there had apparently been founded by Paul.

