
The Book of Titus

The Reading of the Book¹

The letter we read today was sent to Titus. He was ministering on the Island of Crete.

What about Crete?

The following is adapted from Jirair tashjian in Discovering the Bible and Discovering the New Testament.

Crete is an island southeast of Greece along the imaginary boundary between the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The island is about 150 miles long from east to west, and its width ranges from 35 miles at its widest point and 7.5 miles at its narrowest.

Crete is extremely mountainous, with mountain ranges as high as 8,000 feet covering the length of the island. Since the mountains drop down steeply to the southern shores of Crete, there were fewer cities along the southern coast, such as Gortyna, Fair Havens, Lasea, and Phoenix mentioned in Acts 27:8, 12. Crete's northern coast was more heavily populated because the mountains slope down to the shoreline much more gradually.

The Old Testament refers to Crete as Caphtor. It was the original home of the Philistines who migrated to the land of Canaan some time before the Israelites began to enter the land (Deuteronomy 2:23; Jeremiah 47:4; Amos 9:7).

The Romans began to dominate the Mediterranean world in the second century BC. It wouldn't be long before Crete would also be brought under Roman domination. In 67 BC Rome occupied Crete and made it part of a Roman province that included Cyrene in North Africa, which is in modern Libya. The Roman governor, who had the title proconsul, ruled the province from the Roman capital of Gortyna on the southern coast of Crete. Thus in the time of Titus Crete was a Roman province ruled by a Roman governor.

The only other writing in the New Testament that mentions Crete is the book of Acts. Cretans were present among the people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). And in Acts 27 we find the story of Paul's eventful journey to Rome as a prisoner. After sailing along the south coast of Crete with some difficulty, the ship was caught in a violent storm and was shipwrecked on the island of Malta west of Crete. However, all 276 persons aboard managed to escape harm.

While we do not know for certain when Paul and Titus were in Crete, we do know that they were both there. Paul had to return to the mainland. But the ministry there was incomplete. So, with upwards of 20 substantial cities and towns on the island, Titus was left to finish the work.

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Reading a Book

It has been our custom at the Chapel to sometimes take a sermon time and read the text of a book of the Bible. I have done so for a book we are getting ready to preach through.

I am sometimes asked why we do that. I thought tonight, before we do that, to give you some of the reasons that I do so.

Scriptural Examples

First, an indication from the Bible itself.

1 Timothy 4:11–13

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. [ESV]

¹¹ Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them. ¹² Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. ¹³ Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. [NLT]

The historical setting

It was rare for person to have a copy of even one book of the Old Testament much less the whole Bible. It was the Levites, the Scribes and the King who were to ensure that the Scriptures were maintained, copied and made available.

During the exile in Babylon, the Jewish people expanded the synagogues. Over time and into the New Testament time, most synagogues had the Pentatuch, that is, the first five books of the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Proverbs and one or two prophetic books. The synagogues shared the other books of the Old Testament.

Part of any gathering at a synagogue on the Sabbath was a reading of a major section of Scripture. This allowed the people to hear the Word. Often they took dictation and transcribed what they heard. Early in Jesus' ministry and in Paul's ministry, they would go to the synagogues to teach. Paul in particular had scribal credentials from the Pharisees and so was regularly invited to speak. It also seems, that he had personal copies of the Scriptures, and often quoted from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint.

The invention of the printing press around 1440 changed all of this. Up till that time books were copied by hand by monks, scribes or copyists. Most of this copying was of the Scriptures. The Catholic church went to great lengths to ensure the accurate copying of the Latin translation of the Bible called the Vulgate. A few important books were copied. However, once again, the ordinary person did not have a copy of the Scriptures.

The first German translation of the Bible by Luther was published in 1534. The first French translation of the Bible was published by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples in 1530 in Antwerp, Belgium and was revised in 1535 by Pierre Robert Olivétan. The first Spanish translation of the Bible by Cassiodoro de Reina was published in Switzerland in

1569. The first English translation of the Bible by Tyndale was printed in 1535 by Coverdale.

Until the early 1500's, the public reading of the Scriptures was an important part of the gatherings of believers. In the Catholic religion during the middle ages, when the Bible was read, it was in Latin. Very few of the common people spoke or read Latin. The common Catholic attending a religious meeting may have heard the Bible read, but would have understood very little of it.

Unfortunately, we have few written records of the meetings of God's people before the 1500's. All over Europe, believers met to sing, pray and hear the Bible taught. The records, books, sermons and letters of that period were largely destroyed by Catholicism. What we do know is that the pastors/elders teaching the Bible were doing so from the Latin or the original languages. They were reading large sections of the Bible so that those who could read and write were able to copy down what they heard.

As the Bible was translated into the spoken languages and was being published, more and more families were able to own a Bible or at least a portion of the Bible. The advance of the gospel into new people's groups has always, without exception, brought literacy with it. We are a people of the Book. Missions has emphasized the importance of reducing spoken languages to writing so that the people could within the 2nd generation of becoming Christians, have the Bible in their own language.

Practical Wisdom

What we see in the Bible was driven by a cultural necessity. That does not make it a moral imperative. However, when possible, it is beneficial for us, as a church, to hear the Bible read to us.

- Sometimes, we just need to hear the Bible in the midst of all the noise, clamor and confusion of our day.
- It highlights the centrality and importance of the Word. It is the Word of God that primarily will shape and transform your life.
- We hear the whole book (or a major section) all at once. This lets us hear the repeated words, the surprising structure, the flow of logic and rhetoric.
- We hear it read in way that we usually do not read it to ourselves. Too many people read the Bible in a monotone voice in their heads. Too many pastors read the Bible in a monotone or in a rush as though it is something to get done instead of something to relish.

The Book of Titus

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began ³ and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;

⁴ To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you – ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹² One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

2 But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. ² Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. ⁶ Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷ Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. ⁹ Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

3 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ⁹But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

¹²When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

¹⁵All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.