

Article of the Month – July 2012

Missiological Observations in the NT (11) – Titus

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1 Timothy and Titus were written in the same period. A better order for Paul's last four letters would be: Philemon (from his 1st Roman imprisonment), 1 Timothy and Titus (from after his release) and 2 Timothy (from his 2nd and last incarceration). 1 Timothy and Titus were written around 64-65 AD during a travelling period.

We know less about Titus than we do about Timothy. The latter is mentioned twice as much in the NT, compared to the former. The Greek Titus, although he was one of Paul's co-workers, was not forced by the leaders in Jerusalem to be circumcised.¹

They ministered in Crete together.² Since we read nothing about this journey in Acts, we depend on Paul's letters for our data. After the ministry in Crete, Paul travelled on and Titus stayed. It may have been either man's 2nd visit – depending on who planted the churches and when – seen that *between* these visits churches were damaged by opponents of the Gospel.³ Titus had to repair the damage and appoint leaders who could care for the flock, preventing such things to happen again.⁴

Paul was in Miletus and Troas, respectively south and north of Ephesus at the Turkish west coast,⁵ possibly during the same trip. He asked Titus to come to Nicopolis,⁶ in the northwest of Greece. It is as if we see a fourth, post-Acts, missionary journey develop; what lacks however, is the order in which places were visited and the length of stay in each. Again, no mentioning is made of Spain.

It was logical from a cultural perspective to let the Greek Titus minister in the Greek island of Crete: communicational differences would be minimal; a condition for sorting out the problems, described in chapter 1. For Titus this was E-1 ministry: local and mono-cultural. His effectiveness would not be hindered because of foreignness.

The households Paul mentions were probably house churches, as we see in several references.⁷

¹ Gal. 2:1-3. Also see my article on Galatians, of August 2011, in which this issue is explained

² Tit. 1:5 'I left you in Crete' (italics mine)

³ 1:11,10

⁴ 1:15,16

⁵ 2 Tim. 4:20,13

⁶ Tit. 3:15

⁷ 1:11 and also e.g. Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon :2 and implied in several other places

Paul was sufficiently acquainted with Cretan culture to be knowledgeable about its poets, quoting Epimenides (6th century BC), as *prophet*.⁸ This indicates the importance of studying language and culture by the missionary of his or her target-people.

Teaching would be of little help if it had not been backed up by Titus setting a godly example.⁹ *Doing* is nothing without *being*. The latter is a more effective weapon against opponents than the former.

The most common people (slaves) can be successful evangelists in that they are *trustworthy*, and so make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.¹⁰

The verse about Jesus, purify[ing] for Himself a people,¹¹ is placed in the eschatological context of ‘the glorious appearing of ... Jesus Christ’¹² and reminds us of the ultimate vision for cross-cultural missionaries to keep in mind, namely the ‘multitude ... from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing ... in front of the Lamb’.¹³ That is where we are heading and if we want our ministries to be strategic, that must be our measuring rod for deciding for or against certain ministerial activities.

Paul encouraged Titus to remind the church members ... to show true humility toward all men because ‘at one time *we too* ... were foolish’.¹⁴ ‘We too’ includes missionaries. Some walked in faith for decades, ministered on foreign fields for a long time and gradually adopted an attitude of pharisaic arrogance toward sinners.¹⁵ We must always remember our origin and not succumb to an ‘us and them’ outlook when we try to reach people.

In one chapter Paul speaks three times about being ‘ready ... devoting ... to doing what is good’.¹⁶ What 21st century, lukewarm Laodicea-Christendom lacks most is true commitment to Christ, His Kingdom and the ministry. It is seen in the perpetual shortage of workers not only on the mission field,¹⁷ but also in the church at home.

Titus likely made it to Nicopolis to spend the winter.¹⁸ Later, after being imprisoned again, Paul wrote ‘Titus [has gone] to Dalmatia’.¹⁹ This area, Croatia’s west coast, was the logical next step on a trip from Crete, via Greece’s mainland, farther north than Illyricum (Albania) where Paul preached before.²⁰ It probably was their last winter together, before Paul was beheaded at Nero’s command.²¹

⁸ Tit. 1:12; Richards, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 1984:9,22; quoting the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, 15th edition, vol. 3, p. 924

⁹ 2:1-8

¹⁰ 2:10

¹¹ 2:14

¹² 2:13

¹³ Rev. 7:9

¹⁴ Tit. 3:1-3 (italics mine)

¹⁵ See e.g. Luke 15:1,2; 18:9-14

¹⁶ Tit. 3:1,8,14

¹⁷ Matt. 9:37,38

¹⁸ Probably 65-66 AD

¹⁹ 2 Tim. 4:10b

²⁰ Rom. 15:19

²¹ Probably in AD 68

