

## History

The island of Crete has been inhabited since prehistoric times. There is evidence of organized habitation which dates back to 8000 BCE, and the excavations of the 20th century have revealed a splendid civilization which ruled the island and much of the Aegean during the Bronze Age. The Minoan civilization, as it was named, is credited as the first civilization of Europe, it began around 2000 BCE and it lasted for about two millennia before it was replaced on the island by Mycenaean civilization circa 1375, and then by Classical and Hellenistic Greeks, which in turn were replaced by the Romans. The Byzantine empire and the Venetians controlled the island for a few hundred years before the Ottoman empire invaded the island.

The Ottoman empire ruled the island from 1645 until 1898 when the Greeks revolted and finally re-united the island with Greece in 1913.

### FOCUS ON: THE GREEK ISLAND OF CRETE

Minoan Crete maintained an extensive network of trading links that brought influences drawn from Egypt and Mesopotamia to Crete. The Minoans exported pottery, grains, wines, and oils, and tended to import luxury materials such as precious metals, jewels, and ivory. Minoan culture gave rise to several great cities that featured stone buildings and provision for a water supply and drainage. The city adjacent to the great Palace of Knossos was home, at its peak, to almost one hundred thousand people. Knossos was thus one of the first major cities in human history!

In the New Palace Period the trade routes between other places and Crete increased. Minoan trading stations existed in various Aegean Islands such as Kythera, Milos, Kea, Thira, Karpathos, Rhodes as well as in Asia Minor (Miletos), in Syria, and in Egypt (Faros).

As the "crossroads" for several trading routes, culture of Crete became blended with those from empires of all directions. This contributed significantly to the cosmopolitan nature of contemporary Crete.

#### A. Consider Crete:

1. For a few hundred years, this region was known for its piracy--in different ages, first the Greeks and then the Romans, had to suppress the piracy.
  - a. They had an earned, deserved bad reputation.
  - b. Paul quoted one of their own poets, Epimenides, who lived about 600 B.C., who wrote, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."
  - c. Paul only stated the prevailing opinion of Cretans in his day.
    - i. Cicero wrote: "Indeed, moral principles are so divergent that the Cretans consider highway robbery to be honorable" (*The Republic*, 3.4.15).



of Cretians, the Artemis they worshipped was not the Greek variety, but the Ephesian.

In reading this, I thought it noteworthy that, in every other passage in scripture that talks about a husband/wife relationship, the husband is told to love his wife. Here, we see the precise opposite. Why??

Perhaps Cretian women needed this special encouragement because the male population of first-century Crete was particularly unlovable. If one looks at what the likes of Cicero, Polybius, Livy, and other Roman historians said of the people of Crete, it looks as though the people of that island had given themselves over to all sorts of excesses, and had thoroughly established a reputation as the scum of the earth. It is not by coincidence that we in modern times adorn particularly distasteful types with the label, "cretin."

Does this passage, seen in that light, begin to make sense? Absolutely! Lesbianism has always been strongly associated with Artemis, and it seems that on Crete in particular, homosexuality was not only tolerated, but celebrated. What's more, its impact on families was known and acknowledged at the time. No wonder the women of Crete needed to be specially enjoined to act in ways that would, throughout much of the rest of the Roman Empire, be considered normal behavior! Thus, it seems to me that Paul is not concerned with trying to outline the way relationships should be, set in stone for all eternity. It appears that he is once again (as in Corinth, Colossae, and Ephesus) trying to ensure societal stability, so that the gospel doesn't fall into a black hole on Crete, as the ancient, once-grand civilization on the island destroys itself.

Certainly Paul was consumed with this very very singular mandate of evangelism when he wrote this letter to Titus. And he is very concerned that the people living in the pagan culture of Crete which was utterly pagan, without any Christian influence at all, not get

engaged in trying to moralize cultural behavior, that they not get involved in trying through the political avenues to create some kind of Christian culture. What he was concerned about was that they be able to demonstrate to their society that God saves people from sin. And that the primary way to do that was to demonstrate a saved life. If I'm going to tell you that Dr. So-and-so cures people from cancer, you're going to say to me, "Oh, who did he cure, let me see him." And if I'm going to say to you, "Dr. So-and-so over here makes blind people see," you're going to say, "Oh, who did he give sight to?" And if I'm going to say to you, "God is a saving God who delivers men from their sin and all that goes with it of hopelessness and helplessness and emptiness," you're going to say to me, "Show me what a saved person looks like then I'll know whether your God can do that." That is the mandate of the church. We do not attempt to change culture externally, we preach the gospel and it changes men internally. We don't even belong to this culture, we are simply aliens, our land is heaven.

Crucial then to the effort of evangelization is this entire text of chapters 2 and 3 in Titus because here he is calling for Titus to teach the churches how to live. The issue of evangelization is not cleverness and gimmickry, it's not entertainment, it's not marketing strategy. It's not figuring out what the cultural hot buttons are and punching them all. That is not it. All of the money and time and energy and effort going to that is just so much uselessness. People are saved because a sovereign God redeems them upon the hearing of a powerful testimony of the gospel. That's how salvation works. It's not a matter of gimmickry or technique or whatever, ingenuity. Most churches think that that's the way you reach the world, Paul is saying the way you reach the world is to demonstrate what a saved person looks like. And it's so stark and it's so dramatic and it's so marvelous and it's so exciting and it's so unique and it's so different and so compelling that people come to find out whether God will save them the way He saved those whose lives And so, in this wonderful little epistle, Paul is calling on Titus to make sure the church is in the position to do that. Chapter 1 he says you've got to have the right leadership. Obviously if people are to live godly lives, you've got to have godly leaders. So he gives them all of the qualifications for godly leaders starting there in verse 5, ordaining the right kind of elders, taking all the way down through verse 9, these who are godly leaders then lead in proclaiming the truth and the people follow them. In contrast to that you have the false teachers in verses 10 to 16, their doctrine is wrong and their lives are detestable and disobedient and worthless. They are rebellious, empty talkers. Over against the false teachers who demonstrate nothing but the wrong thing and all their followers who demonstrate also the wrong thing is the true church preaching the true gospel and living transformed lives.

Now what is the character of these lives to be? Chapter 2 tells how Christians are to live in the church. Chapter 3 how they are to live in the world. Chapter 2 he says older men are to live a certain way, younger men, older women, younger women, slaves, everybody is to live in a certain way to put God's saving power on display in order to, verse 5 says, make the Word of God not be dishonored, verse 8 to silence the opponents who want to criticize your faith and in order, verse 10 says, to adorn the doctrine of God as a saving God in every respect. As the Christian lives a holy life in the church, as the life of the church is pure and holy and undefiled and all that God wants it to be, the watching world

sees transformed lives. And since the end of chapter 2 says God is a saving God and brings salvation to all men, He wants to put His saving power on display and that's why He has redeemed us, verse 14, and purified us and made us zealous for good works so that people can see what a saved life is like.

Then he comes into chapter 3 and says here it's also important not only how you live in the church but how you live in the world. And you remember verses 1 and 2, we studied them last week. He says you remind them, be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

they've seen. That's evangelization God's way.

Crete is an island about 150 miles long and 7 to 30 miles wide in places. It was a huge place. Cretans were mentioned as being present on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:11. Cretans were famously known for being proverbial liars and shameless dishonest people. It was a place of shams and scams. False doctrine was a virtual cottage industry, circulated by men who wanted to make a fast buck. Does any of that sound familiar to us today? Today, do we not have people on television and radio teaching every sort of heresy and fantasy imaginable whose ultimate objective is your wallet?

The culture of Crete was no different. It was a land immersed in the Greek Mythology culture. They believed that it was the birthplace of the Greek god Zeus. We can derive from the superstition of the place that it was probably a lot like Athens was, when Paul and Barnabas preached there.

I don't think it is a stretch of the imagination to believe that all sorts of false heresies abounded on the island of Crete, with people welcoming more heresy as fast as they could be imagined.