

TITUS: A COMRADE OF THE CROSS

by Florence M. Kingsley

INTRODUCTION

Historical fiction is a powerful medium to retell a particular period in history. Historical fiction uses fictional characters and stories to illuminate real events that happened in the past. *Titus: A Comrade of the Cross* uses fictional characters and stories to retell the most important historical event of all time: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Titus was written by Florence Morse Kingsley, in the late 1800s, in order to present the life of Christ anew to young readers. Kingsley describes her purpose in this way:

“To the readers of ‘Titus,’ I would say a word in regard to the book. Its purpose will, I hope, be evident to all. It is to present the life of Jesus upon earth in such a way as to give a fresh interest to the ‘old, old story;’ to bring the Jesus of nearly nineteen centuries ago into our lives today – a real, a living Jesus, as tender, as loving, as thoughtful of his children who are upon earth now, as he was with the dwellers in Palestine.”

Historical Background

Titus tells a fictional story of a few families living during the times of Christ, and how the stories of their lives intersected with Jesus. Thus, the book is set in first-century Palestine, during the time that the Romans occupied the region and ruled over the Jewish people.

Kingsley retells many stories from the Gospels, but adds additional fictional elements, and brings her fictional cast of characters into those stories, to further illuminate their meaning, and to bring the reader into the story, and give them a “feeling” for what it might have been like to witness those amazing events from the Gospels.

Kingsley’s narrative draws from all of the Gospels, but particularly from the Gospel of John, for the arrangement of her stories. The student reading *Titus* will have the opportunity to review many of the narrative accounts from the Gospels. The Scripture readings that accompany each chapter are designed to connect the chapter to the original events found in the Gospels.

Literary Features

Titus retells many of the Gospel stories, and therefore, many of the sayings of Jesus, and the actual events are sometimes drawn from the Gospel accounts word-for-word with minor alterations. The language style of the novel closely matches the language of the King James Version of the Bible.

The student should be aware that not all statements or events described in the chapters are found in the Bible.

Kingsley adds to these narratives to provide additional color, and to connect the stories to her fictional narrative. Therefore, the student should be careful to distinguish between what is actually found in the Bible, and what is fictional in Kingsley's novel.

Major Themes

Titus is a novel first and foremost about the person and work of Jesus Christ. The book primarily retells the life of Christ. But there are additional themes that emerge from the fictional characters and events that Kingsley has created.

Human Suffering

Titus contains many stories that refer to human suffering of various kinds. Kingsley includes many of the healing narratives from the Gospels to show the mercy and compassion of Christ upon those who suffer. Most of the main characters of *Titus* are those who have suffered some kind of loss or hurt.

Titus and Stephen both suffer under the abuse of Dumachus. Prisca also suffers in her marriage to Dumachus. Caiaphas and Anna suffer the loss of their only son when he is a small child. And these various stories of suffering come to a conclusion at the end of the novel. Jesus is presented as the solution to human suffering and to the greatest need of the human race: salvation from sin.

As Matthew 11:28-30 says:

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

The Compassion of Christ

Each time Jesus appears in the account, we see Him showing love and mercy to those He encounters. Stephen and *Titus* both come to know Jesus, and to love Him because of the compassion and mercy that He showed to so many. Each time someone is in need, when they encounter Jesus, they find that Jesus is able and willing to help them.

As Matthew 14:14 says:

"And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick." (Matthew 14:14)

The Opposition of Religious Leaders to Jesus

As with the Gospels themselves, *Titus* contains many accounts of how Jesus was opposed by the religious authorities of His day: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Jesus is opposed by the authorities but loved by many of the people who are recipients of His mercy and compassion.

This repeated theme in *Titus* and the Gospel stories illustrates the truth of John 1:11-12:

“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” (John 1:11-12)

About the Author

Florence Morse Kingsley was an American author who was born in Ohio in 1859. She attended Wellesley College from 1876 to 1879. She later married Charles Rawson Kingsley, a pastor. She became a writer early in her life and wrote a number of books while attending Wellesley College.

At the age of thirty-five, she submitted the manuscript of *Titus* to David C. Cook, an American publisher which held a contest to obtain a book manuscript that would inspire a child's faith in Christ. Kingsley's manuscript won the contest, and the book was published in 1894 and became very popular.

Within six weeks, 200,000 copies of *Titus* were printed to meet demand for the book. As a result of the popularity of *Titus*, Kingsley published later novels including *Stephen: A Soldier of the Cross* and *The Cross Triumphant*.

Before You Read

Chapter 1 Summary

In this chapter, we are introduced to the characters of Anna and Caiaphas as they face grief after a great loss.

Words to Know

1. **Gesticulate** - use gestures, especially dramatic ones, instead of speaking or to emphasize one's words
2. **Pall** - something regarded as enveloping a situation with an air of gloom, heaviness, or fear
3. **Sward** - an expanse of short grass
4. **Splendor** - magnificent and splendid appearance; grandeur
5. **Taciturn** - (of a person) reserved or uncommunicative in speech

Scripture Passage

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

After You Read

Vocabulary Exercises

Use each word in a sentence of your own construction.

1. Gesticulate
2. Pall
3. Sward
4. Splendor
5. Taciturn

Study Questions

1. What were the names of those missing described in this chapter?
2. Who was David?
3. How old was David?
4. How was the home of Caiaphas and Anna after these disappearances?
5. How does the author end this chapter?

Meditation and Application

Walking in the Truth

1. Read Psalm 147:3, 1 Peter 5:7, and Revelation 21:4. What do these biblical passages teach about grief?

Before You Read

Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter, the reader is introduced to Titus, his brother Stephen, his mother Prisca, and the baby Gogo.

Words to Know

1. **Embower** - surround or shelter (a place or a person), especially with trees or climbing plants
2. **Foliage** - plant leaves, collectively
3. **Huckster** - a mercenary person eager to make a profit out of anything
4. **Querulous** - complaining in a petulant or whining manner
5. **Aureole** - a circle of light or brightness surrounding something
6. **Parapet** - a low protective wall along the edge of a roof, bridge, or balcony
7. **Dimple** - a small depression in the flesh, either one that exists permanently or one that forms in the cheeks when one smiles
8. **Labyrinth** - a complicated irregular network of passages or paths in which it is difficult to find one's way

Scripture Passage

Matthew 4:12-17

After You Read

Vocabulary Exercises

Use each word in a sentence of your own construction.

1. Embower
2. Foliage
3. Huckster

4. Querulous
5. Aureole
6. Parapet
7. Dimple
8. Labyrinth

Study Questions

1. What lake is described at the beginning of this chapter?
2. What was the name of Titus' father?
3. How is Stephen described?
4. What events happened at the fountain?