

Adam Clarke:

Preface to the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians

We have already seen, Acts 16:12, that Philippi was a town of Macedonia, in the territory of the Edones, on the confines of Thrace, and very near the northern extremity of the Aegean Sea. It was a little eastward of Mount Pangaeus, and about midway between Nicopolis on the east, and Thessalonica on the west. It was at first called Crenides, and afterwards Datus; but Philip, king of Macedonia and father of Alexander, having taken possession of it and fortified it, called it Philippi, after his own name. Julius Caesar planted a colony here, which was afterwards enlarged by Augustus; and hence the inhabitants were considered as freemen of Rome. Near this town, it is thought, the famous battle was fought between Brutus and Cassius on the one side, and Augustus and Mark Anthony on the other, in which the former were defeated, and the fate of the empire decided. Others think that this battle was fought at Philippi, a town of Thebes in Thessaly.

The Gospel was preached first here by St. Paul. About the year of our Lord 53, St. Paul had a vision in the night; a man of Macedonia appeared to him and said, Come over to Macedonia and help us. He was then at Troas in Mysia; from thence he immediately sailed to Samothracia, came the next day to Neapolis, and thence to Philippi. There he continued for some time, and converted Lydia, a seller of purple, from Thyatira; and afterwards cast a demon out of a Pythoness, for which he and Silas were persecuted, cast into prison, scourged, and put into the stocks: but the magistrates afterwards finding that they were Romans, took them out of prison and treated them civilly. See the account, Acts 16:9, etc.

The Philippians were greatly attached to their apostle, and testified their affection by sending him supplies, even when he was laboring for other Churches; and they appear to have been the only Church that did so. See Philemon 4:15, Philemon 4:16.

There is not much controversy concerning the date of this epistle; it was probably written in the end of a.d. 62, and about a year after that to the Ephesians. Dr. Paley conjectures the date by various intimations in the epistle itself. "œlt purports," says he, "œto have been written near the conclusion of St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome, and after a residence in that city of considerable duration. These circumstances are made out by different intimations; and the intimations upon the subject preserve among themselves a just consistency, and a consistency certainly unmeditated.

First, the apostle had already been a prisoner at Rome so long, as that the reputation of his bonds, and of his constancy under them, had contributed to advance the success of the Gospel. See Philemon 1:12-14.

Secondly, the account given of Epaphroditus imports that St. Paul, when he wrote the epistle, had been in Rome a considerable time. "œHe longed after you all, and was full of heaviness because ye had heard that he had been sick;" Philemon 2:26. Epaphroditus had been with Paul at Rome; he had been sick; the Philippians had heard of his sickness; and he again had received an account how much they had been affected by the intelligence. The passing and repassing of these advices must necessarily have occupied a large portion of time, and must have all taken place during St. Paul's residence at Rome.

Thirdly, after a residence at Rome, this proved to have been of considerable duration, he now regards the decision of his fate as nigh at hand: he contemplates either alternative; that of his deliverance, Philemon 2:23, Philemon 2:24: "œHim therefore, (Timothy), I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me; but I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly;" that of his condemnation, Philemon 2:17: Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all. This consistency is material, if the consideration of it be confined to the epistle. It is farther material, as it agrees, with respect to the duration of St. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, with the account delivered in the Acts, which, having brought the apostle to Rome, closes the history, by telling us that he dwelt there two whole years in his own hired house. "œ Hor. Paul., page 242.

On the agreement between the epistle and the history, as given in the Acts, Dr. Paley makes many judicious remarks, which I cannot insert here, but must refer to the work itself; and I wish all my readers to get and peruse the whole work as an inestimable treasure of sacred criticism on the authenticity of Paul's epistles.

The Epistle to the Philippians is written in a very pleasing and easy style; every where bearing evidence of that contented state of mind in which the apostle then was, and of his great affection for the people. It appears that there were false apostles, or Judaizing teachers, at Philippi, who had disturbed the peace of the Church; against these he warns them, exhorts them to concord, comforts them in their afflictions for the Gospel, returns them thanks for their kindness to him, tells them of his state, and shows a great willingness to be a sacrifice for the faith he had preached to them. There is a Divine unction in this epistle which every serious reader will perceive.