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The Place and the Time of the Captivity Letters.*

Four letters ascribed to the Apostle Paul have from ancient times been called the Captivity Letters, namely, those to the Colossians, to Philemon, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians, and the traditional view is that they were written during Paul's first captivity in Rome, from 61 to 63 A. D. But some recent scholars in the field of New Testament isagogics are inclined to reject the traditional view, preferring to assume that either Caesarea, between 58 and 60, is to be accepted or Ephesus, between 54 and 57. The proponents of Caesarea have some difficulty in adjusting historical data, however, while those who would speak in favor of Ephesus seem to have a much stronger case. For that reason it may be profitable to make a somewhat more careful examination of the theory which attempts to place the Captivity Letters in the time of the Ephesine sojourn. The investigation is not a mere bit of pastime in the field of introduction, but touches upon certain critical questions which may impugn the veracity of certain statements in various books of the New Testament. *Which view, then, may most safely and correctly be held concerning the place and the time of the Captivity Letters, that which ascribes them to the Ephesine sojourn of Paul, between 54 and 57, or the traditional account, which states that they were written in Rome, during the first captivity?*

Before we take up the arguments for the writing of the Captivity Letters during the Ephesine sojourn of Paul, it ought to be noted that Feine places both Colossians and Ephesians in the time of the Caesarean captivity, chiefly on the basis of negative, subjective reasons. On that account even Appel brushes Feine's contention aside when he writes: "Caesarea as the place of writing Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians is excluded by the traveling plans of Paul. According to Acts 19, 21 Paul, even in Ephesus, had the definite intention to travel to Jerusalem via Achaia and thence to Rome. This intention he also expresses in the letter to the Romans, written from Corinth, chap. 15, 23, and in a dream he receives the assurance from the Lord, Acts 23, 11, that this intention should be realized in spite of his arrest. Now, indeed, this realization was considerably retarded by his arrest, but that very fact would be a stimulus for the apostle to lose no time in carrying it out after his release. Thus he cannot have written Philippians from Caesarea, for according to chap. 2, 24 he intends to visit Philippi immediately after his release, nor the other letters, for according to Philemon 22 he

* Although in the isagogical question here treated absolute certainty cannot be attained, a study of its various aspects will prove stimulating and helpful. — EDITORIAL NOTE.

plans a journey to Colossae. He might still have determined to make a trip to Rome in a roundabout way if the condition in those congregations to which he addressed letters had been one to cause him apprehension. But that was not the case (cp. Phil. 1, 3 ff.; 2, 12; 4, 1; Col. 1, 3 f.; 2, 5, and all of Ephesians)." (*Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 52.)

The reasons for assuming an Ephesine captivity of Paul are found entirely in a number of passages contained in the two letters to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor. 15, 32 the apostle writes: "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not?" This is interpreted as a reference to a gladiatorial combat in which the apostle was forced to take part after being arrested by the Roman authorities. In further support of this contention several passages in Second Corinthians are adduced, such as chap. 1, 8—10: "For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life; but we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver."

The reasons for placing Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians at Ephesus are given by Appel (p. 54) as follows: "1. The statements made concerning the captivity; for the tribulations referred to in Phil. 2, 27; 4, 14; Eph. 3, 13 remind one of 1 Cor. 4, 9; 15, 30 ff.; 2 Cor. 1, 8 ff.; and in any event the apostle, during a captivity associated with so many tribulations, could not preach the Word of God, Phil. 1, 13 f.; Col. 4, 3; Eph. 6, 19. — 2. The local circumstances presupposed in the letters. From Ephesus the apostle could easily make the short trip to Colossae, Philemon 22, and even Philippi was located so near that the trip there and back would not consume very much time, to which the further consideration must be added that the sojourn planned for that place, according to 2, 24, could be carried out during the trip to Achaia, which was announced in 1 Cor. 16, 5. If Paul was in Ephesus, he might have the intention to send Timothy to Philippi and to await his return and yet give them the prospect of his early arrival in Philippi, chap. 2, 19 ff. Moreover, the news of the concern of the Philippians over the condition of Epaphroditus might have gotten back from Philippi before it had been possible to send a report of his recovery, Phil. 2, 25 ff., just as Paul might have sent Onesimus to Colossae, even if he intended to use his service during his captivity, and he could have made arrangement for quarters at the house of Philemon, Philemon 11 ff."

The reasons for placing the letter to the Philippians in the alleged Ephesine captivity are enumerated by Feine as follows (*Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 150 ff.): "1. Chapter 3 is an arraignment

of Judaism, . . . but we may not think of these Judaists as being present in Philippi. . . . 2. In language, literary form, and presentation of thought Philippians is closer to the older letters than to the Captivity Letters. . . . 3. The case against Paul (Phil. 1 and 2) cannot be the same as the one which was brought against him according to Acts 23. . . . 4. The local statements of the letter fit not only Rome, but may be claimed also for Ephesus. . . . 5. The assumption that Paul wrote in Ephesus will more easily explain certain statements in Philippians (the travel plans of Paul, the conflict of Phil. 1, 30, the exchange of communications between Paul and the Philippians).” Such are the points which are adduced by Feine in support of the hypothesis concerning the writing of the Captivity Letters during an alleged captivity in Ephesus, sometime between 54 and 57, preferably in 56.

Before we take up the counter-arguments from the historical data of the Book of Acts and the epistles themselves, let us register the objections made recently by other scholars in the field. Barth writes (*Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 67 f.): “Concerning Paul’s experiences during his Roman captivity we learn in the Captivity Letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon. These are not written in Caesarea (as Schneckenburger, Thiersch, Haupt, Feine—in part—assume), since Paul intended to travel from there to Rome and therefore would hardly have announced visits in Asia Minor and in Macedonia, as he does in Philemon 22 and Phil. 2, 24, since furthermore the escaped slave Onesimus could much more easily hope to remain undiscovered in populous Rome than in Caesarea, and since the complaint of Paul that he had only a few fellow-workers of the circumcision in his neighborhood would not fit for Caesarea, where, among others, Philip lived. On the other hand, all these references are easily explained if Paul wrote the letters in Rome. There he was not altogether alone, but he was visited by disciples, who came and went, such as Timothy, Luke, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus Justus. Through these and by his daily intercession before God he remained in fellowship with his congregations. He felt the bodily absence from them as a distinct interference with his activity; sometimes presentiments of death came upon him, Phil. 1, 20 f.; 2, 17 f.; he felt that he had become older (Philemon 9) and occasionally resented the fact that some preachers of the Gospel in Rome believed that they no longer owed the captive any consideration, Phil. 1, 15 f.; 2, 21. But stronger than all such impressions was the joy over the successes which he as a captive had, for example, among the soldiers, Phil. 1, 13, which made his sufferings appear as a continuation of the saving sufferings of Jesus by virtue of the communion of his life with the exalted Lord; but joy also over the powerfully advancing evangelization of the Orient and the Occident, through

which he saw the joyful message even now proclaimed in the whole world, yea, almost to every creature which is under heaven, Col. 1, 6. 23." And Knopf writes (*Einfuehrung in das Neue Testament*, 80): "When Paul, soon after writing Romans, made the trip to Jerusalem, he was there taken captive and at first kept in captivity in Caesarea, then, after a tedious journey, two years in Rome. To the time of this captivity, and very likely that of Rome, are to be ascribed these letters."

Let us now take up the points which have been adduced in favor of Ephesus as the place of the Captivity Letters and see whether they are tenable in view of the historical data presented in the Book of Acts and the historical sections of the epistles.

1. As to the Ephesine captivity, on which the entire theory is based. The assertion that 1 Cor. 4, 9; 15, 30 ff.; 2 Cor. 1, 8 ff., especially when compared with Phil. 2, 27; 4, 14; Eph. 3, 13, refer to a captivity, and in particular 2 Cor. 1, 8 ff. even to a gladiatorial combat, is not warranted by the content of the passages. The tribulations and afflictions of which Paul speaks there may well have been such as pertained to the spirit alone, having their basis in the difficulties with which the apostle was battling, not only in establishing the congregation in Ephesus on a sounder basis, but also in removing the obstacles which had arisen in the congregation at Corinth, as his two letters to Corinth so amply demonstrate. If 1 Cor. 15, 32 is to be taken as referring to an actual physical encounter with wild beasts in the arena at Ephesus, then we should practically be compelled to construe the word of 2 Tim. 4, 17, in the same manner, for there Paul speaks of being delivered out of the mouth of the lion. There is no evidence for assuming either a local or a general persecution of the Christians on the part of the Roman government as early as the year 56, and if Paul had at any time been condemned to a gladiatorial combat, it is more than likely that at least one of the early Christian writers would have given us an account of that encounter. That the apostle frequently had to deal with the hostility of the Jews and that there might occasionally have been a sudden flare-up of the authorities, is shown by the experience which he had at Philippi and his almost casual reference "in prisons more frequent" of 2 Cor. 11, 23. — But the case of the alleged Ephesine captivity becomes still weaker if we carefully read the account given in Acts 19 and 20. In these chapters there is not one word to indicate that Paul was imprisoned by the Roman authorities for as much as one day. The account gives him an uninterrupted activity, and even the tumult of Demetrius did not stop the work. It can hardly be called an exaggeration when Paul says of himself, Acts 20, 31: "Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Cp. v. 18. Moreover, when the town clerk of Ephesus

addressed the assembly in the theater, he did not intimate with one syllable that any gladiatorial combat of Christian leaders had been held or was contemplated, and this man can certainly not be accused of a bias in favor of Paul. And the probability becomes still stronger against the Ephesine captivity of Paul, especially one instigated by the Roman authorities, if we remember that some of the Asiarchs sent word to him, warning him not to go out among the people, Acts 19, 31. Whether these Asiarchs were religio-political officers who presided over the annual assembly of civic deputies, as Mommsen, Lightfoot, Ramsay, and others think, or municipal delegates of individual cities to the provincial assembly, as Brandis insists, would make little difference in the significance of the incident alluded to. It is clear that some of the most prominent men in all of Proconsular Asia were deeply concerned for the welfare of the apostle, a solicitude which would have been impossible if Paul had at this period been under suspicion from the Roman government or had been in prison or in the arena shortly before. For if he had been vindicated at this time, he would certainly not have continued his complaint about the afflictions which continued to bother him, even after he left Ephesus and traveled northward along the coast, first to Troas and then over to Macedonia. Cp. 2 Cor. 2, 13; 7, 5—7. Every reason of probability and historical background speaks against an Ephesine captivity of Paul.

2. But what about the long array of points of probability offered by Appel and Feine, not to mention others, who offer little or no evidence for their placing the Captivity Letters at Ephesus? Surely the proposed visit of Paul at Colossae, Philemon 22, could be made from Rome after the release of the apostle; for a trip of this length would hardly hold terrors to one who had traveled so often and so far. And as for the trip to Philippi, Phil. 2, 24, the difference in the journey between Ephesus and Philippi, on the one hand, and Rome and Philippi, on the other, was by no means as great as has been implied. The roads along the Aegean Sea north of Pergamos were not of the best kind, and the trip by coastwise vessel could well consume more than a week. On the other hand, the roads leading from Rome toward the southeast and connecting with the famous Via Egnatia, which crossed Macedonia, would take a traveler to Philippi in less than two weeks. And, as a matter of fact, such a comparison was not even necessary; for Paul might well, after his release, have made a trip through the entire East, through Achaia and Macedonia as well as through Proconsular Asia and all of Asia Minor.—The argument brought by Feine, based on style and vocabulary, is admittedly always tenuous, if not entirely unreliable. Since the occasion for writing to the Philippians was of a different nature than that which incited the apostle to write to the congregations at Colossae

and Ephesus, since also the circumstances by this time had taken on an entirely different character, one could well expect a different style. The assertion that the congregation at Philippi was not bothered with Judaistic teachers is entirely subjective, even if it is not based upon a false conception of the nature of this menace to the Apostolic Church.— Even the statement of Feine, based apparently upon careful research, that the word *πραιτώριον* in Phil. 1, 13 and the expression *ἐν τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας* in Phil. 4, 22 does not necessarily refer only to Rome, is not decisive for concluding the argument. For even if the palaces of the proconsuls in the senatorial provinces were also designated as *praetoria*, and even if the expression *domus* or *familia Caesaris* was used for the servants in charge of imperial property or possessions throughout the empire, this does not change the fact that the designations were eminently correct in Rome, where they had originated, and could therefore be used with the highest propriety. Besides, it is most fitting that Rome should be thought of in connection with Phil. 1, 19—25 and 2, 23; for these passages, as compared with Acts 28, 16, 30, clearly show that Paul enjoyed the *custodia libera* for two years, until his case came up for its hearing in the imperial court. He was then removed to the pretorium of Rome, in the immediate neighborhood of the imperial palace, where he had an opportunity to do more extensive mission-work among the soldiers of the imperial barracks.

3. However, our investigations would not be complete without an examination of the many passages referring to Paul's companions during the captivity in question, men whose whereabouts give us a number of clues as to the circumstances of Paul's life at this time. Let us take *Aristarchus* first. It is true that this man is mentioned in Acts 19, 29 as Paul's companion in travel, whence we conclude that he was with Paul during the latter's Ephesine sojourn, at least for some time. But this same Aristarchus, of Thessalonica, who was one of the delegates that brought the collection of the Macedonian brethren to the needy Christians in Jerusalem and Judea, Acts 20, 4, was a companion of Paul on the voyage from Caesarea to Rome, Acts 27, 2, and he may have been a fellow-prisoner even then, as he is called by Paul in Col. 4, 10. These facts surely point with great definiteness to Rome, also for the writing of the letter to Philemon; for Aristarchus is mentioned in v. 24 of that epistle as a fellow-laborer of the great apostle. In the case of Ephesus a captivity of Paul and Aristarchus is conjecture, pure and simple; in the case of Rome the four passages concerned agree in making Aristarchus a fellow-laborer and a fellow-prisoner.— *Timothy* may well be taken next, for he is named by Paul in the address of three of the four Captivity Letters, namely, Col. 1, 1, Philemon 1, and Phil. 1, 1. He was clearly with Paul during the time when these letters were written.

But if the Ephesine theory is to be accepted, there is a difficulty on account of Acts 19, 22; for according to Luke's account, Paul, during the Ephesine sojourn and before the tumult of Demetrius, sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, the final goal of this trip being Corinth, 1 Cor. 16, 10. It is also clear that Timothy was again with Paul toward the end of the summer or in the fall of the year 57, when he wrote Second Corinthians from some station in Macedonia, very likely Philippi. See 2 Cor. 1, 1. But all these references greatly complicate matters if we place the letter to the Philippians in Ephesus, for in Phil. 2, 19 Paul announces the early coming of Timothy to the congregation at Philippi. If the theory should stand, we are obliged to place Second Corinthians, or at least First Corinthians, into the same period of Paul's labors as Philippians, and there the discrepancy offers obstacles which defy harmonization. But if the letter to the Philippians is placed at Rome, there is no such difficulty.—The case of *Tychicus*, who apparently hailed from Ephesus, is very much like that of Aristarchus. He was among the men who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem, Acts 20, 4, and he was clearly in Paul's company when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians, for the apostle testifies that Tychicus was a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, Eph. 6, 21, 22. He was the bearer of this letter, as he may have been of that to the Colossians. That he was with Paul in Rome at least during the second captivity appears from 2 Tim. 4, 12. The only way in which we could straighten out this difficulty according to the Ephesine theory is by making the letter addressed to the saints at Ephesus an encyclical sent from Ephesus, a procedure which is hardly tenable on a number of counts, as we shall indicate below. But the entire difficulty disappears if we consider Tychicus a companion of Paul during the first captivity in Rome; for in that event he becomes the bearer of the letters to Ephesus and to Colossae (also to Philemon), and the recommendation given by Paul, after an interval of approximately four years, is one which might be expected in the circumstances.—It would be interesting to place Onesimus and Epaphras into the picture, since they were both associated with Paul in the captivity here concerned, the former according to Col. 4, 9 and the letter to Philemon, the latter according to Philemon 23; Col. 1, 7; 4, 12; but we have no reference to these men in the Book of Acts and hence have no means of telling the connection on the basis of parallel accounts.—But there is one more name that must be added in this part of our discussion, namely, that of *Luke*, the beloved physician. This man was clearly in the company of Paul at the time when the Captivity Letters were written; for Paul refers to him in Col. 4, 14 as one who sends greetings to the brethren at Colossae, and in Philemon 24 as a fellow-laborer who saluted Philemon. Here the Ephesine theory breaks

down completely; for, as the "we" sections show, Luke was not with Paul during the Ephesine sojourn, since the first section of this kind closes with Acts 16, 17, during the apostle's stay at Philippi. Luke does not again join the apostle till Acts 20, 4, evidently being one of the delegates from Macedonia, specifically Philippi, and a companion of Paul on the way to Jerusalem, Acts 20, 4—16; 21, 1—18. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that Luke was a companion of Paul during the latter's journey to Rome, and the indication is that he remained in Rome with the apostle, according to Acts 27, 1—28, 16. Thus Luke, being a companion of Paul during the latter's first Roman captivity, was with him when the Captivity Letters were written, at least Colossians and Philemon and, by implication, Ephesians, which is so intimately related to Colossians.

Thus the evidence of the books concerned, if carefully analyzed, clearly disposes of the theory that the Captivity Letters were written during an alleged captivity of St. Paul in Ephesus and decidedly strengthens the traditional view of their composition during the first Roman captivity, between the spring of the year 61 and the early summer of 63. While little depends upon the exact chronological sequence of these letters, a study of the internal factors concerned will very likely lead to the following conclusions: Epaphras, the founder of the congregation at Colossae and its first pastor, having learned that the apostle was in Rome awaiting the adjustment of the charges against him in the emperor's court, came to the capital and brought Paul news of the Colossian congregation, Col. 1, 7. 8. Thereupon Paul, late in 61 or early in 62, wrote the letter, which he intended to send to Colossae at the earliest opportunity. A certain degree of agitation and the adjustment to the situation in Colossae mark it as being the first of the Captivity Letters. After this letter was finished, and most likely before it was sent off, the apostle had leisure to plan and write the letter to the Ephesians, a more formal epistle, almost a doctrinal essay, whose language of lofty and sustained eloquence gives it a position among Paul's letters second only to the letter to the Romans. This letter was also written in 62. Meanwhile the runaway slave Onesimus had somehow found his way to Paul or had been found by the apostle. He was gained for the Gospel, and Paul, desiring to return him to his master, wrote the remarkable letter to Philemon. His own circumstances had meanwhile so shaped themselves that he was looking forward to his release at a not distant date. Therefore this letter may well be placed late in 62. In the same year Epaphroditus, one of the pastors of the congregation at Philippi, made the journey to Rome, partly to give the apostle news of this Macedonian congregation, partly to be the bearer of the gifts of the Philippian to the beloved and honored apostle, Phil. 2, 25 ff.; 4, 10. 11. 15—19. Paul then, late in 62 or early in 63,

wrote the letter to the Philippians, which was most likely delivered by Epaphroditus upon the latter's return to his home town.

In conclusion it may be well to list the arguments against the theory which has attempted to make the letter to the Ephesians an encyclical epistle.

1. The introductory sentence of the epistle surely did not read *τοῖς ὄντι . . . καὶ πιστοῖς*, for that would be almost nonsensical in view of the careful manner in which the apostle at other times designates his readers. If the Holy Ghost had intended this letter for an encyclical epistle, He would undoubtedly have given the names of all the congregations concerned, just as He does in 1 Pet. 1, 1 and with regard to the seven letters of the Apocalypse.

2. Though the words *ἐν Ἐφέσῳ* are missing in Codices \aleph , B, and in Codex 67, of the twelfth century, they are found in all other ancient manuscripts as well as in the most ancient translations, some of which antedate the most ancient manuscripts now known.

3. The entire ancient Church has designated the letter as that addressed to the Ephesians, as, for instance, the Canon Muratori, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Ignatius, and others.

4. The testimony of Tertullian, formerly thought to have been adverse to the traditional view, has upon closer examination been found to speak in favor of the letter as directed to Ephesus. Further witnesses are Jerome and Basilus the Great. In short, the external proofs for Ephesus as the address of the letter outweigh other, supposedly negative proofs nine to one. Let us not forget that the argument *e silentio* can at best be only a supporting argument and should never be admitted as primary. Since Ephesus is excluded as the place of the Captivity Letters, one of the main reasons for suggesting the possible encyclical character of the letter to the Ephesians has dropped away. The simple acceptance of the transmitted data is not a blind bowing to tradition, but is thoroughly scientific in the best sense of the word.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

Sermon Study on Eph. 2, 19—22.

(Eisenach Epistle Lessons for Pentecost.)

Pentecost, 1930 A. D., which reminds us that the nineteenth-hundredth anniversary of the great day described Acts 2 is upon us. And the Lord, who sent His Holy Spirit in accordance with His promise, has not yet returned "from thence" in His glory, as He has also promised. Faithful is He that promised, and He it is who calls to us even now: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

But from the Word of our God, which shall stand forever, what shall I choose for the message to my church on the solemn occasion