

Paul's Trial and Release (AD 63)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Dec. 23, 2012

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Thanks for that great introduction to the program, Larry!
- B. Let's ask God for His blessings on our study together --

The One and Only True God who created all things, and sustains all things by your indomitable and sovereignly powerful Word – we give you all praise, glory, and honor. Your splendor fills all the infinite heavens. May you reign forever for all generations of the Age of the Ages. We humble ourselves before You and ask for your guidance upon this nation who has forsaken Your Ways. Help us to turn back to You and follow your ways again with a whole heart. And be with us now as we study Your Holy Word. Help us understand it better, and apply it to our lives in a way that help us grow spiritually, so that we can teach others Your Ways and build Your Kingdom in their hearts. It is for Your Glory and in the matchless Name of your Son Jesus that we pray. Amen.

- C. As you can imagine, it takes a lot of time and effort to do the research and produce these historical reconstruction podcasts. We do this as a service to the whole preterist community, to help us understand our Bible better, and to see how the endtime events were actually fulfilled in the first century at the destruction of Jerusalem. If you have benefited from these studies, and our gracious Lord has blessed you with the desire and the ability to help us financially in this teaching ministry, please send me an email letting us know of your interest in doing that. You can make a one-time donation or contribute monthly, either by PayPal or Credit Card. When you contact us here at IPA, we will help you make those arrangements. Our email address is: <preterist1@preterist.org>
- D. In our last session, we set dates for the writing of **Luke and Acts**, as well as for three of the prison epistles of Paul (**Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon**). Since the last podcast, I have done a lot more study of Paul's prison epistles and the circumstances under which they were written. My dating and sequencing for those five epistles has had some minor tweaks. I will explain that in this session.
- E. We are looking at the events that were happening about the time Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome in the Winter and Spring of AD 62-63. Keep in mind that Paul was released just a year and a half before the Neronian persecution broke out in the summer of AD 64, and only three and a half years before the Jewish war with Rome began in the summer of AD 66. They were getting close to the end. The birth pangs (signs of the times) were becoming more frequent and intense.

- F. One thing I need to point out here in our studies of this time period is that we are looking at a lot of historical connections between Apostle Paul, John Mark, and Barnabas. This is probably just as new and strange to you as it was to me when I first started studying the Epistle of Barnabas. But be patient. The strangeness will eventually be replaced by amazement when you see how intricately involved Barnabas is with Mark, Luke and Paul and their writings. We are going to be looking at a lot more of the historical traditions about Barnabas and Mark in our next two lessons, trying to see how they might connect with Biblical facts. The scenario I am constructing here is simply one possible way to put the pieces together. It is certainly not the only way, but it does fit all the NT facts together in a way that makes sense, and gives lots of new meaning to some of Paul's epistles in ways that we would never have suspected before. It is perfectly okay to remain skeptical about these historical reconstructions here. I certainly am. And I am always on the lookout for a better way of understanding it. If you spot a defect in my chronology, or the historical narrative that I am building, please let me know. I only want the truth, just like all of us do.
- G. And there is a disclaimer here. Please do not think that I consider Barnabas to be an inspired apostle on the level of Apostle Paul or Peter. He absolutely was not. He was sent out by the church at Antioch to do mission work with Apostle Paul, and was an apostle or missionary of the Antioch church. The Greek word "apostle" simply means "one who is sent out" like an ambassador or messenger. The Latin equivalent is missionary or emissary. The inspired apostles like Peter and Paul were sent out by Jesus Himself. They were apostles of Christ, whereas Barnabas was only sent out by the Jerusalem and Antioch churches. Furthermore, that means that anything written by Barnabas was probably not inspired like the writings of our New Testament. It is simply uninspired Christian literature, on the same level as a commentary or the Old Testament Apocryphal books between the testaments. They are interesting reading, and have some moral and ethical value, but they are not authoritative or inspired. So please don't go away from these studies thinking that I believe the Epistle of Barnabas is inspired scripture, or that Barnabas himself was an inspired and authoritative apostle. When we look at some of the things he wrote in his book, you will see real quickly why I say this. His epistle has numerous statements that are questionable and out of character for inspired writers. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that Barnabas was mistaken on a number of points. We will see that clearly as we get into his book. And we will also see how Apostle Paul seems to correct some of those mistakes in his epistles to the Romans and the Hebrews. So, buckle your seatbelt and hang on as we get back into our study of the things that were happening while Paul was in prison in Rome awaiting the outcome of his trial.

Paul's Trial and Release (AD 63)

Early 63 – Final phase of Paul's trial in Rome, and Paul's release from his first imprisonment. We noticed in our comments about the writing of **Luke-Acts** in AD 61-62 that these two books appear to have been written for Paul's defense before Nero. Theophilus was evidently some kind of court official or defense attorney for Paul, who needed to know the details of Paul's case. Luke wrote the two books for Theophilus, so that Theophilus would know the exact truth about Christianity and Paul, in preparation for defending Paul in court.

Evidently the first year and a half was consumed by the production of Luke-Acts and the book of Hebrews. No other prison epistles seem to have been written until near the end of his imprisonment when his trial began.

It is interesting that the book of Acts contains many court cases, which could easily be used as precedents to influence Nero's acquittal of Paul. So, the two-volume work of Luke (Luke-Acts) must have been extremely helpful when Paul's case went to trial before Nero. The fact that Paul was a Roman citizen, was a huge factor in his favor. Furthermore, the evidence from the Centurion who guarded Paul during the voyage to Rome would have helped Paul's case immeasurably (Acts 27:43), as well as the fact that the Jews in Rome had received no letters from Judea about Paul (Acts 28:21). The whole Praetorian guard was kindly disposed toward Paul, which also helped his case (Phil. 1:13). And according to Phil. 4:22, there were fellow Christians there in Rome who were "of Caesar's household."

Paul mentioned in his letter to **Titus** (written after his release) that Apollos and Zenas the lawyer had been in Rome with him at the time of his trial (Tit. 3:13). Apollos was a great orator, and Zenas was a lawyer. The implication is that they helped Paul in his defense before Nero. So, Paul had lots of things going for him when his case went to trial before Nero's court. It is therefore no surprise that he was exonerated and released. Now, let's talk about Paul's epistle to the Philippians.

Early 63 – Philippians was written just before the end of Paul's trial in Rome. Even though our focus is on the book of Philippians, we will have to look at the other four prison epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Hebrews), since they were all written about the same time, and provide the evidence we need to nail down the date of Philippians.

All five of these prison epistles need to be studied in close relation to each other in order to determine not only their dates, but their sequence of writing as well. When we do that, we will see that there were three short periods of time near the end of Paul's imprisonment when these five prison epistles were written: (1) Late 62 or Early 63 just before or as the trial was beginning, (2) Early 63 when the trial was nearly over, and (3) Early 63 right after Paul was released. In this session, we will show that Ephesians and Colossians were written in that first time period, with Philemon and Philippians in the second, and Hebrews in the third.

Last time we dated the first three prison epistles of **Ephesians**, **Colossians**, and **Philemon** about the middle of his imprisonment in early 62. Now, however, after a lot more analysis, it seems that those first three epistles were written late in 62 or very early 63, not long before the epistle of **Philippians** and the end of Paul's Trial

and release. That will be more apparent to us as we look more closely at the other two epistles that Paul wrote near the end of his imprisonment (**Philippians** and **Hebrews**).

The travel of **Tychicus** (the courier for those first three epistles) is a key factor in arriving at these dates. Knowing that he was the courier assigned to take **Ephesians**, **Colossians**, and **Philemon** to Asia Minor, greatly helps us pinpoint the dates for all five of the prison epistles (including **Philippians** and **Hebrews**). Tychicus is mentioned in **Ephesians**, **Colossians**, and **Philemon** as being **present with Paul in Rome** at the time of writing, and leaving soon to carry these three letters to Asia Minor before the outcome of the trial was known. And since both **Philemon** and **Philippians** were written near the end of Paul's trial when things were looking less uncertain and more promising, it helps us see that **Ephesians** and **Colossians** must have been written not long before **Philemon** and **Philippians**.

Since **Ephesians**, **Colossians**, and **Philemon** went together with **Tychicus**, this is double confirmation that they were written shortly before or about the same time as **Philippians** (near the end of the trial when the outcome was expected soon).

As we noticed last time, in our study of Paul's first three prison epistles (**Eph**, **Col**, **Philemon**), particularly in **Philemon**, the outcome of the trial was uncertain, but Paul was optimistic in his hope for acquittal and release, and was already making contingency plans to come visit the **Colossians** and stay with **Philemon** if and when he was released. That implies that **Philemon** was written late in his imprisonment, while the trial was underway, and Paul was hoping for a favorable outcome.

In **Philippians**, the outcome of the trial was likewise still uncertain, but Paul expresses more of an expectation (not just a hope) that he would be acquitted and released "soon," with the final decision being expected "shortly." Here in **Philippians**, Paul says he is sending **Epaphroditus** to them with this letter, and that if he (Paul) is released soon, he would come with Timothy to visit them.

Epaphras (shortened form of Epaphroditus) is another key figure in all this. Studying his evangelistic work and courier movements greatly helps us nail down the dates and sequence of these prison epistles, especially for **Philippians**. Note that Epaphras is mentioned five times in three of Paul's prison epistles (**Phil**. 2:25; 4:18; **Col**. 1:7; 4:12; and **Phlm** 23). He appears to have been taught by Paul (possibly while Paul was in Ephesus) and then sent by Paul to establish churches in nearby **Colossae**, **Laodicea**, **Hierapolis**, and the other cities in Asia Minor. This appears to be why Paul lays claim to those churches in the Lycus valley, since they were established as a result of the work of Epaphras whom Paul had trained. Epaphras was from **Colossae** originally (**Col**. 4:12), and evidently traveled through **Philippi** on his way to visit Paul in Rome. The **Philippians** sent some support with Epaphras to give to Paul. He probably visited the church in **Philippi** on his way to Rome, hoping that they might help him on his way. Apparently they did help him, along with providing for Paul's needs as well.

Paul evidently had been in prison in Rome for quite a while before he wrote his letter to the **Philippians**, since he mentions that the **Philippians** had sent Epaphras to Rome with funds to help Paul. Because those funds were not sufficient to cover all of Paul's needs, Epaphras had worked on the side there in Rome to raise the rest of the needed support. He almost worked himself to death, and now that he had recovered

his health, Paul was sending him back to the **Philippians** with this letter. All of this activity presupposes that Paul had been in prison for quite a while by the time he wrote to the Philippians.

At the time of writing Philippians, Paul did not know for sure what the outcome of his trial would be (Phil. 1:20-25), but he saw the definite need for more mission work and believed that God would somehow allow him to be released to do that work. We know the **trial was underway**, since he planned to send Timothy to them "shortly" and "immediately" as soon as he "sees how things go" (Phil. 2:19-30). He could not have had this kind of expectation of release, and plans to visit Philippi, earlier in his imprisonment. This language clearly points to a time late in his imprisonment after the trial had begun, when the final decision was expected soon. This would have been near the end of his two years of house-arrest, since it implies that the outcome would most likely be known "shortly".

It should be no surprise to us that **Philippians** (4:21) does not name the "brethren" who were with Paul in Rome at the time of writing, since his epistle to **Philemon** (1:1; 1:23-24) had already named them: Timothy, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. This helps us date both of the epistles (Philemon and Philippians) as early in 63, since in both epistles **Epaphras** (Epaphroditus) was still there in Rome with Paul and had not yet been sent to the Philippians.

Furthermore, both Philemon (1:1) and Philippians (1:1) mention **Timothy** as being there with Paul at the time he wrote, whereas in Hebrews it says that Timothy had been released just like Paul, but was on a trip somewhere and was expected back from that trip shortly. This indicates that both Philemon and Philippians were written about the same time, while the trial was in progress, before the outcome was known, but with Paul being hopeful and expectant.

When Paul said that he planned to send Timothy shortly (Phil. 2:19-24), it sounds very much like the same trip referred to in Heb. 13:23. There are several points of similarity between them. Combining the two accounts, assuming that they are talking about the same trip of Timothy, it means that **Paul sent Timothy to Philippi** right after the trial was over, and waited in Rome for him to return before leaving with Timothy on another trip to visit the churches addressed in Hebrews.

In **Philippians**, Paul indicates that he was still in prison, but believed he would be released, possibly soon, and would come with Timothy to visit the Philippians (see Phlm. 22; Phlp. 1:19-26; and 2:23-24). Heb. 13:23 also mentions Paul's plan to come with Timothy to visit the churches addressed in the Hebrews epistle (which evidently included the church in Philippi).

As we can see, these similarities between **Philippians** and **Hebrews** not only supports the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, but fixes the date of all three books (Philemon, Philippians, and Hebrews) as being near the end of Paul's trial and release from Roman imprisonment (Early 63). And if Philemon was written near the end of his trial, then Ephesians and Colossians could not have been too much earlier, since all three epistles (Eph, Col, and Philemon) were delivered at the same time by the same courier to the churches in Asia Minor.

In **Hebrews**, Epaphroditus is not mentioned at all, implying that the letter to the Philippians had already been sent via Epaphroditus by the time Hebrews was written. Also, in **Hebrews** Paul has already been acquitted and released and was about to

come with Timothy to visit the churches that were addressed in the book of Hebrews, just as he said he would earlier in Philippians. According to Phil. 1:19-26, it appears that one of the stops that Paul and Timothy would make along their way to Colossae would be the church in Philippi.

Furthermore, neither epistle (Philippians or Hebrews) mentions any other co-workers by name as being with Paul in Rome other than Timothy and Epaphroditus. However, **Philippians** does mention "the brethren who are with me" and some other saints, "especially those of Caesar's household." This also indicates a date of writing for Philippians late in Paul's imprisonment, after his evangelistic efforts there had produced much fruit even among the Praetorian guard and in Caesar's household.

Even though the greetings at the end of Philippians and Hebrews are not the same, the greeting at the end of Philippians is identical word for word with Philemon, suggesting that **Philemon** was written about the same time as **Philippians**. So the sequence of writing for these last three prison epistles of Paul appears to be:

(1) Philemon, (2) Philippians, and then (3) Hebrews.

These comparisons between Philemon, Philippians and Hebrews indicate that **Philemon and Philippians** were written just before the end of Paul's imprisonment, when the outcome of the trial was still uncertain but optimistic, whereas **Hebrews** was written after the trial was over and Paul had been released.

So, here is how we would date and sequence these five epistles in relation to the three periods of time that we mentioned previously:

- (1) **Eph and Col** -- Late 62 or early 63 just before or as the trial was beginning
- (2) **Philemon and Philippians** -- Early 63 when the trial was nearly over
- (3) **Hebrews** -- Right after Paul was released

Right after Philemon was written, **Tychicus** left with all three epistles (Eph, Col, and Phlm) to deliver them to the churches in Asia Minor. Philippians was written not long after Philemon, before the trial was over, and was then sent to Philippi using **Epaphroditus** as the courier.

Now let's talk about the epistle to the **Hebrews**. You will note that I start out with the assumption that it was written by Paul. There is no doubt in my mind about that. Paul was the author of the book, and we will see why that is so important to understand as we go along here in our study. I will not spend a lot of time here on the podcast arguing for his authorship, since that has been thoroughly established in the various commentaries on Hebrews. However, I do have some of that material in the PDF for this podcast. [See it copied down below the next section on "About the Book of Hebrews".] So, if you get the PDF, you will have that information. Simply email me and request it (the PDF on the authorship of Hebrews). My email address is: <preterist1@preterist.org>

About the Book of Hebrews

AD 62-63 – Hebrews -- Here at the beginning of our discussion on Hebrews, I want to point out something which should be obvious, but which many of us have overlooked. We know that the epistle to the Hebrews was **SENT** to the churches right after Paul was released from prison in early 63. However, that does not automatically mean that it was **WRITTEN** in that short space of time between his release and his leaving Rome with Timothy "soon" afterwards (Heb. 13:23). The book is **too sophisticated** in its argumentation and exhortation to have been hastily thrown together at the last minute after Paul was released. The **complexity and sublimity** of its theology demands an **extended period of time for its composition**. That is why I am suggesting that it was most likely written during the last year of Paul's imprisonment, after Luke had finished his two-volume work of Luke-Acts, but before the other four prison epistles were written, and pretty much finished by the time Paul's case went to trial. Then, after the trial was over and he was released, he added the closing verses of chapter 13 and sent it out by courier. If this is correct, then it means that Hebrews was actually **WRITTEN** before the other four prison epistles, during the year of 62, but not sent by courier until after the trial was over in early 63.

Further evidence that this is the correct dating for Hebrews comes from its similarities and connections with the book of Revelation. It is not without significance that the similarities between Hebrews and the book of Revelation do not show up in Hebrews until late in the book (chapters 12 and 13). This gives us a clue as to when the book of Revelation was written in relation to the book of Hebrews, and vice versa. The book of Hebrews was probably started before a copy of the Apocalypse reached Paul. Then later in 62, after Paul received a copy of the **Revelation**, he included some material in chapters 12 and 13 of Hebrews which show his awareness of Revelation. Paul would have received his copy late in the writing process of Hebrews, probably after the first eleven chapters were already finished. That explains why the similarities with the book of Revelation do not show up in Hebrews until chapters 12 and 13, just as Paul was putting the finishing touches on it in late 62.

Paul added the final verses to Hebrews (13:22-25) just after his release, and before he left Italy to travel with Timothy toward Colossae in the Spring of AD 63. The epistle was evidently sent via courier to his network of churches in Greece, Macedonia, and Turkey while he was waiting for Timothy to return, at which time they would leave Rome to go visit the churches addressed in Hebrews. We will talk more about who that courier was for the book of Hebrews, after we look at some of the traditions about Barnabas and Mark, and how that relates to Paul and his epistles.

Well, that will just about wrap it up for this session. Next time I want to get back into the historical traditions about Barnabas and Mark a lot more, so we can connect more of the dots between Paul and Barnabas and Mark. I think you are going to be amazed at what we discover in all this. You will never read the book of Hebrews the same way again.

Down below is the summary of the reasons why many scholars through the centuries have assigned Paul as the author of the book of Hebrews.

Who Wrote the Book of Hebrews? (more info)

Many have questioned **Paul's authorship of the book of Hebrews**. However, after examining the arguments both pro and con for all the possible writers that have been suggested throughout church history, the internal evidence appears to be heavily weighted toward Paul. Here is what John Owen said about it in his Introduction to Calvin's commentary on the book of Hebrews:

From the earliest times, the Eastern Church acknowledged Paul as the Author. ...Jerome and Augustine in the fifth century ... ascribed to Paul the authorship; and since their time the same opinion has prevailed in the Western, as it did from the beginning in the Eastern Church...

As far then as the testimony of history goes, almost the whole weight of evidence is in favor of Paul being the Author.

With regard to modern times, the prevailing opinion has been that it is the Epistle of Paul. ...Beza ...regarded Paul as the writer; and such has been the opinion entertained by most of the successors of the Reformers, both in this country and on the Continent, as proved by their confessions of Faith.

About the middle of the seventeenth century there seems to have been a revival of the controversy; for in the year 1658 the younger Spanheim wrote an elaborate treatise on the subject, in which he canvasses the whole evidence, both historical and internal, and affords the strongest ground for the conclusion that Paul was the writer of this Epistle. Since that time, till late years, his arguments were regarded by most as conclusive. But some of the German divines, who seem to have a taste for exploded opinions, have again revived the question, produced afresh the old arguments, and added some new ones to them. But a second Spanheim has appeared in the person of Professor [Moses] Stuart, of America, who has published a learned Commentary on this Epistle, and prefixed to it a long Introduction, in which he has fully entered into the subject, and more fully than his predecessor. The labor and toil which this Introduction must have cost its author, were no doubt very great; for every argument, however frivolous, (and some of the arguments are very frivolous indeed,) is noticed, and everything plausible is most clearly exposed.

The evidence both external and internal is so satisfactory, that an impression is left on the mind, that Paul was the author of this Epistle, nearly equal to what his very name prefixed to it would have produced. Indeed the writer [John Owen] can truly say, that he now entertains no more doubt on the subject than if it had the Apostle's own superscription.

As to the date of this Epistle, it is commonly supposed to have been written late in 62 or early in 63, about the time that Paul was released from his first imprisonment at Rome.

There seems to be especially two reasons why Paul did not commence this Epistle in his usual manner: first, because he was not specifically an Apostle to the Jews, but to the Gentiles; and secondly, because the contents of the Epistle are such that it was not necessary for him to assume his Apostolic character; for the arguments are founded on testimonies found in the Old Testament, and not

on his authority as a commissioned Apostle.... [John Owen, Introduction to *Calvin's Commentary on Hebrews*]

My main arguments supporting Pauline authorship of Hebrews comes from the following five sources:

1. Arguments against Paul's authorship are weak (Heb 2:1-4)
2. Arguments for Paul's authorship are clear and strong (Heb 13)
3. John Owen's introduction to Calvin's commentary on Hebrews
4. Peter Leithart's exposition of 2 Peter (*The Promise of His Appearing*)
5. The context of Hebrews 13 leaves no doubt about Paul's authorship

Special Offers: We urge you to partner with us in supporting this teaching ministry. Those who support this teaching ministry with a gift of \$25 or more per month, get a CD each month with four of the podcasts and their corresponding four PDF lesson outlines. Those who sign up to support us with a gift of \$50 or more per month, will receive a DVD with all of the past podcasts and their corresponding PDF lesson outlines that we did at AD70.net, plus a monthly CD with four more recent podcasts from Covenant Key with their PDF lesson outlines. If this is something you would like to take advantage of, simply email me and I will get it set up for you: <preterist1@preterist.org>

If any of this material has raised any questions for you, or if you need more information, do not hesitate to email me at: <preterist1@preterist.org>

There are a lot of great supplementary articles posted on our website, plus books and audio/video media for purchase. Go there and browse all you want. Here is the link: <http://preterist.org>

If you would like a couple of great books which detail all of these events, I would recommend **ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS** by F. F. Bruce, which is available for order at our website (www.preterist.org), and **JEWISH BACKGROUNDS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT** by J. Julius Scott, which is available from Amazon.com. Be sure to get a copy of my book, **First Century Events**, which deals with the Roman, Jewish, and Christian events of the first century. We will be using it as a study guide here in our studies of the first century. You can purchase it from our website: www.preterist.org

Some further recommended reading:

Josephus *Antiquities* and *Wars* (sections which deal with the Herodian rulers)