

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. V.

SEPTEMBER, 1925.

No. 9.

The Chronological Sequence of the Pauline Letters.

PROF. PAUL E. KRETZMANN, St. Louis, Mo.

In chapter XXVII of his excellent book *Archeology and the Bible* Professor Barton remarks: "The chronology of the life of Paul cannot be fully determined from the Bible itself. Such chronological data as the New Testament affords helps us only to a relative chronology. Could the year of one of the dates given by the New Testament be determined by a date of the Roman Empire, it would enable scholars to affix with approximate certainty the other dates." (Page 439.) Since the discussion has always been based on a relative chronology, the various systems differ from one another by from four to five years, and as a result there has been quite a little bit of confusion pertaining to the chronological data of Paul's letters.

So far as the relative chronology of the Pauline letters is concerned, we have the following passages of Scripture to aid us in forming a picture of this section of history. In Gal. 1, 18 Paul writes: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter." This period of time is evidently to be reckoned from the date of his conversion and includes the time of the so-called Arabian sojourn. In Gal. 2, 1 the Apostle, connecting up with the last date mentioned by him, writes: "Then fourteen years after, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus with me also." This trip is evidently identical with the one described in Acts 15, the occasion being that of the so-called Apostolic Council. In Acts 18, 11 we are told that Paul continued in Corinth a year and six months, and afterwards it is stated that Paul after this tarried there yet a good while. This was after he had been brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. In the same chapter we are told that, before Paul had started on his third missionary journey, he spent some time in Antioch before his departure for Galatia and Phrygia. In chapter 19, 8 we find that Paul went into the synagog at Ephesus and spoke boldly for the space of three months. The Jews having turned from him,

he continued his work in the school of one Tyrannus, this continuing by the space of two years. Some further time was used by Paul in work at Ephesus, for we read that he stayed there even after the tumult of Demetrius. The total length of Paul's sojourn at Ephesus is indicated by his remark in Acts 20, 31: "Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." At this point we must insert from 1 Cor. 5, 8 the remark of Paul: "Let us keep the Feast," evidently the Passover. And from 1 Cor. 16, 8: "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost." Continuing in the account of Acts, we find that Paul spent three months in Corinth, after reaching this city by way of Macedonia. On his return to Jerusalem, Paul sailed away from Philippi with his companions after the days of unleavened bread, Paul's purpose being to reach Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost. Of later chronological data we have only the reference in Acts 24, 27, stating that after two years Porcius Festus became the successor of Felix, and Acts 28, 30, where we are told that Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house.

From this material alone an absolute chronology of the events connected with the journeys and the letters of Paul is obviously impossible. But fortunately we have recently come into possession of certain information which enables us to fix the exact date of certain events mentioned in Scriptures and thus to give a clearer picture of the sequence of incidents in the life of Paul. In Acts 18, 2 we find the statement that a certain Jew named Aquila, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, was living in Corinth, and the significant explanation is given: "because that Claudius had demanded all Jews to depart from Rome." The date of this decree of expulsion may be gained with reasonable certainty from three secular writers. Suetonius (Claudius 25) writes: *Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit*. This statement is supported by Josephus, according to whose account the date of the edict of Claudius must be placed between the year 50 and 52 A. D., during the absence of Herod II from Rome, who was a friend of the Jews. (*Antiquities*, XXVI, 3.) Basing his remarks on the account of Josephus, found in a book which has been lost, Orosius writes: *Anno ejusdem nono expulsos per Claudium Urbe Judaeos Josephus refert*. Since Claudius reigned from 41 to 54 A. D., this would place the date of the decree in either 49 or 50 A. D., and, if, with Ramsay (*St. Paul*, 68), we suppose that the statements of Orosius have evidently dated events

of Claudius a year too early, we may safely place the date at 49 A. D. This would explain the expulsion of Aquila and Priscilla from Rome.

The next point concerns the date of Gallio's proconsulship of Achaia. Fortunately this has been fixed with great definiteness on the basis of a fragmentary inscription which has come to light from Delphi. The inscription is given by Deissmann (*St. Paul*, 261. 262) from the article published by Bourguet. It has recently been reproduced a number of times and reads as follows: "Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Pontifex Maximus, of tribunican authority for the 12th time, imperator the 26th time, father of the country, consul for the 5th time, honorable, greets the city of the Delphians. Having long been well disposed to the city of the Delphians. . . . I have had success. I have observed the religious ceremonies of the Pythian Apollo . . . now it is said also of the citizens . . . as Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and the proconsul of Achaia, wrote . . . on this account I accede to you still to have the first. . . ."

The importance of this inscription, as Barton points out, lies, first, in the fact that it mentions Gallio as proconsul of Achaia, and, second, in the reference to the twelve tribunican years and the twenty-sixth imperatorship of Claudius. As Appel remarks, in his *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, this inscription clearly shows the letter of Claudius to have been written between January and August of the year 52 A. D. If Gallio was then in office and had been in office long enough to give information to Claudius of material importance to the purpose of the letter to the Delphians, Gallio must have arrived in Corinth not later than the year 51. Now, according to Dio Cassius (LX, 17. 3), Claudius in January of the year 43 had decreed that all new officials should start for their provinces not later than the middle of April. Accordingly Gallio must have entered upon the duties of his office, according to Barton, by the new moon of the month of June in the year 51. In any event he must have been in Corinth before the middle of that year.

These two points having been considered, the date of Paul's entrance into Corinth may easily be deduced. In the first place, the Jews left Rome in the year 49/50 A. D. This was a flight, an expulsion, and therefore it is evident that Aquila and Priscilla made the journey from Rome to Corinth in a short time. In the second place, Paul entered the house of Aquila and Priscilla when

they had *lately* come from Italy. We are compelled, then, to accept as the date of Paul's entrance into Corinth the latter part of the year 50 A. D. (Cp. Barton, *Archeology and the Bible*, 439. 440; Cobern, *The New Archeological Discoveries*, 494. 502.) It is true that an objection has lately been voiced by Larfelt in *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* (Heft 10, 1923), for he wishes to show that Paul entered Corinth in the autumn of 51 A. D., or after Gallio became proconsul. But he entirely ignores the edict of Claudius and the arrival of Aquila and Priscilla after their expulsion from Rome, and therefore his argumentation is not conclusive.

A further factor in establishing the chronology of the Pauline letters is the reference to Aquila and Priscilla in the various letters written by the great Apostle. From Acts 18 we note that they were in Corinth, and from 1 Cor. 16, 19, where Paul sends greetings from them, it is clear that they were then still in Ephesus. But in Rom. 16, 3—5 Paul sends greetings to Aquila and Priscilla while they were in Rome, while in 2 Tim. 4, 19, the letter which Paul addressed to Timothy at Ephesus, it is evident that Priscilla and Aquila were once more in Ephesus, where they had gone with Paul in the first place. From these references it is clear that Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome after the death of Claudius in 54 A. D., but that, after winding up their affairs in the capital, they once more returned to the city which they had determined to make their permanent home, that is, Ephesus.

After thus having established some of the chief events of chronological importance in the life of Paul, we are in a position to fix the time in which he wrote the various letters. The first letter to the Thessalonians was clearly written during the first sojourn in Corinth. Now, since he arrived in this city in the latter part of the year 50, and we must allow some time for the return of Timothy from Thessalonica (Acts 17, 15; 1 Thess. 1, 1), and since we must also take into consideration the fact that the good report concerning the Thessalonian Christians had spread throughout the two provinces (1 Thess. 1, 8), therefore we may conclude quite definitely that this letter was written in the latter part of the year 51 A. D. (Cp. 1 Thess. 3, 1. 2. 6.) The Second Letter to the Thessalonians was clearly written not very long after the first letter, and if we assume an interval of three or four months, we may readily conclude that it may be placed at the very end of the year 51 or in the beginning of the year 52 A. D.

So far as the letter to the Galatians is concerned, its date depends upon the fact whether one would insist upon the North Galatian theory or accept the South Galatian theory. In the one case we should have to assume that the letter was written from Corinth in the year 51, and in the other that it was written during the third journey, from Ephesus, or again, also during the third journey, from the city of Corinth, but in the spring of the year 57 A. D. So far as the First Letter to the Corinthians is concerned, circumstances point to Ephesus as the place where it was written and to the early part of the year 55 as the time, about Easter. Second Corinthians, as the entire letter shows, was written while Paul was on the way to meet Titus, whom he had sent to Corinth. It was evidently not written in any city of Asia Minor, because Paul had gone to Troas in the hope of meeting Titus, and had not found him. 2 Cor. 2, 12. 13. This letter was therefore written from some city in Macedonia, very likely Philippi. As to the time when it was written, this may be determined from two facts. In the first place Paul had intended to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, very likely of the year 55 (or 56). From 1 Cor. 16, 1—3 and 2 Cor. 9, 2 one may infer that a full year had elapsed since Paul had written the First Letter to the Corinthians. The date would therefore be about autumn of the year 56. The Apostle continued his journey, reaching Corinth a few months later and remaining there for at least three months. Acts 20, 2. 6. The letter to the Romans was therefore written about the first part of the year 57 A. D., in March, before shipping opened, for we find him sailing from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread. Acts 20, 6.

So far as the other letters of Paul are concerned, there is now no longer so much dispute as in times past. There are still some scholars who would place the so-called captivity letters into the time of Paul's stay at Caesarea or even at Ephesus, but on the whole it is now conceded that his later letters were written in about the following order: Colossians during the first Roman captivity, about the year 61 or 62, Ephesians shortly afterward, followed by Philemon, and Philippians toward the end of his captivity, about the end of 62 or the beginning of 63. The Pastoral Letters were written after the release of Paul from his first captivity, Titus and First Timothy being written from Macedonia about the year 65, and Second Timothy during the second captivity of Paul at Rome in the year 66 or early in 67.