


ARAMAIC BIBLE COMPANION

COMMENTARY NO.50

PHILIPPIANS



WE MEET AT PHILIPPI-JULIUS CAESAR

This is a genuine ABC production  authored by *Bob Coffey* and may not be reproduced or transmitted in any manner for financial profit

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

*We were tired & it was late when my wife and I drove from Neapolis just past Philippi's eastward gate – reaching Lydia; that was in 1997. The city had been a very great city – and nestled below the cliffs to the south of the Acropolis where the Egyptian tradesmen had carved their gods. Philippi in Paul's day was a Roman "Colonia" on the Via Egnatia. In the arable plain stretching to the north Julius Caesar strove in battle with Octavian and so the Roman Republic died & the Roman Empire was born. From here in Europe the Faith of Jesus in its 50th year became world-wide. Amid the ruins of Philippi we were shown the rare "heart pillar bases" only otherwise seen in Ephesus. This city was host under Paul in 49-50AD to a church which experienced and exemplified **the love of Jesus**. The Philippian letter is a prison epistle written from Rome – yet Paul rejoices (there are no fewer than 16 references to **JOY**) to Paul joy is a bird unchained. During our visit we came armed with an introduction from the Church in Athens to the assistant administrator of the historic site at Philippi – she was one of the continuing Church at Philippi today – a member of the evangelical church that meets there much in the character of the first church in Lydia's house. She happened to be on leave but the Administrator himself kindly took time off to help us explore the extensive archaeological site in depth. An inventory was in progress taking account of every detail of the site which, as we observed, had been very well preserved. The demarcation of roads, forum, bema, market area, and toilets and even the prison walls and entrance were easily evident to the visitor.*

The church – its life & leadership

Paul the apostle is writing from Rome – circa AD61, some 3-10 years after the church was founded. The "saints" were "living"(ZAO) in Philippi – theirs a "new spring like life" As in Acts 17.28 they were "moving" (KINOMAI) – shaking society like an earthquake – and "holding their being"(ESMEN) as "sons of God". The Bishops (EPISCOPOI) like their secular counterparts were involved in regulating what was agreed – especially in barter. Their other pre-occupation was spiritual warfare – so they were strategists. The "deacons" (DIAKONOI) were an organised body of servants, characterised by expectation (DIEKEO) and expeditious in work – literally "dusty through running" – they were concerned that the church be a place of "filled vessels" not only practically supplied but spiritually too. Paul opens with the great blessing which every Jew put first – nothing better is imaginable – first in Numbers 6.24 now applied to the Face of Christ shining upon us as High Priest of His people. "Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the LORD Jesus Christ" he says. This blessing is ever the hallmark of Paul's letter writing.

Thanksgiving Pauline style

In Romans Paul gives thanks for “evangelisation”, in Corinthians for the work of the Holy Spirit “Gifts” – secondly for “Partnership” and “Comfort”, in Ephesians for “The sovereignty of Christ”, in Philippians for “partnership”, in Colossians for the “fruitfulness” of the word in character & Life, and in Thessalonians for “Virtue from biblical motivation” and secondly for “Growth” and increase of faith.

Partnership

Paul composes his prayers for the needs of Philippi with the sharing of the Philippians in mind – how they cared for him when first converted and washed his wounds and fed him – and doubtless sent him on his way with adequate support as he proceeded to Amphipolis. It was a partnership stretching “into” the gospel– i.e. each giving more and more for the Glory of Christ in a desire for the promotion of the gospel and the salvation of souls. Paul envisaged the work at Philippi in continuance *till the day of Christ*. The word until ACHRIS or AKRIS in Greek speaks of *the “peak” of the day of Christ*. “Olivet” is the peak where the returning LORD will one day stand but Paul in his Roman prison can envisage also the “Philippian Acropolis” and as he thinks of that soaring peak above the city he thinks long term of that great peak of prophecy when the LORD shall return. For the more immediate the Philippians were apologists too – the idea of APOLOGIA & BEBAINOS(BAINO) is based on Christ’s statement about a man who must calculate before he marches to war. The Philippians had done the calculation. They, like Paul, had known the wonder of the partnership of GRACE – which bonds to Christ – and leads the apostle to interject how he misses them – before bursting into one of his remarkable prayers.

Paul’s Prayer for the church – links to a Herculean struggle

1. Paul prays that love may increase like outflanking troops (PERISSO).
2. That you may be an instructed army of teachers (EPIGNOSIS) literally “knowing so as to teach”.
3. Perceiving how to move (AISTHESIS) knowing your objectives.
4. Tested by vigorous standards (DOKIMAZO) literally tested by flogging – for ability to bear the burden of war sincerity & stumbling.
5. Filling yourselves with the fruits of righteousness – John the Baptist required this plus repentance – even from soldiers.

So to be an effective Christian one must have love joy peace longsuffering gentleness good shared with Him trustworthiness humbleness and mastery of self. The empire of Christ would be forwarded at Philippi as was Rome if such an army emerged.

Paul adds 3 war reports: –

1. What has been happening to me has “cleared away forests standing in the” (PROSKOPEN) of gospel progress. This is a strategy like that of Booth who during acute illness heard a voice say “go back” – while in vision he saw an army marching for God.
2. My bonds are clear to the whole Praetorian Guard – these elite troops are divinely targeted.
3. A greater number of brothers are throwing in all reserves boldly –fearlessly – preaching the word. On the other hand some jealous of the gods diminish Christ – others strive about words – they are declaring war – for them it is “Christians to the lions”.

Paul the leader then stirs like a lion-“And they see I am set for APOLOGIA – to meet Nero. In every change of position on the field (TROPE) Christ is declaring himself in the war – at the centre of it all – whether in the slow shifts or in the sudden unveiling of truth. He rejoices – like Joshua pitted against Amalek he seeks prayer – he will be bold – and will magnify the Lord.

The commission of Acts 9

The fuller exposition of Acts 13.47 reveals that Paul was to go to the limits of the known world – cf Spain also. He witnessed how the Holy Spirit was providing a *follow through* of growth – what we would call “the second course” or “dessert” for the church (EPICHOREGIAS) v.19 in the shape of his ministry (cf Epistles) – the gospel being the main course

The auto-posthumous statement

Always I will be free-spoken – bold – in my body by life or death Christ *will have been magnified* – and his final thrust on the battle theme – “death to me is “trophy from the battle” – there will be no happier man in heaven! This is his desire! He writes as if this letter were to be his last. But if he lives to be older – there will be fruit to enjoy from this toil. He adds “I will not explain” GNORIZO –however he quotes Job 13.16 in v19 “Though he slay me I will trust him” with “He is my salvation”& “He knows the way He takes”.

The Parousia of Paul

The apostle would in returning “cut down further forests that oppose”. He wished to find them “good citizens” yet standing in the field of spiritual warfare un-cowed. Like athletes also (v27) as a team contesting for the faith of the gospel – not perturbed – and he reminds them of grace that has already been given for suffering and of his own AGONY in Philippi at the first and now in Rome

Footnote

J. B. Meyer whose gracious and practical ministry deeply affected the Leicester of his day spoke of the grades of Christian consecration in this way; he said, “In all His people Christ is “present” – in “some” “prominent” in a few “Pre-eminent”. *Hanley Moule* classed this book as among “the fairest & dearest regions of the book of God”. Here we cannot but recognise that where our faith is concerned grace makes soldiers and Paul as *C. C. Studd* would have said was no “chocolate soldier”

CHAPTER 2

This chapter is world famous among Christians for Paul’s treatment of Christ’s humiliation and Exaltation. Finlayson’s truism states the doctrine in a kernel “He remained what He was when He became what He was not.” Dean Farrar has it that the epistle sets out the basis of witness – humility & unselfishness. C. M. Noel put the humiliation of Christ most memorably into verse

*“Humbled for a season to receive a name,
From the lips of sinners unto whom He came
Faithfully He bore it spotless to the last
Brought it back victorious when from death He passed”*

Wesley wrote “And can it be “with those memorable words which have attracted debate viz. ”Emptied Himself of all but love and died for Adam’s helpless race”.

Lightfoot’s felicitous phrase gets the theology just right when he says “He stripped Himself of the insignia of majesty”

Joy in the church through the quality of life Christ gives and supports

*If there is any coming alongside any advocacy in the circle of Christ.

*If there is any stimulant or lighted torch of love or any *legend* of love in that circle of Christ (behold how these Christians love)

*If there is any partnership of the Holy Spirit – any “joint engagement”

*If there is any sacrificial compassion or inward tenderness – i.e. “heart longings” coming from union with Christ

Make my joy complete – think alike kindly of one another (Chrysostom), have a grip on the same love, being alike in warmth of soul – think as one or stay wise, pragmatic and united in mind

Negative thinking to be strenuously avoided – cf Christian athleticism 1.27

Do nothing in party spirit or for empty glory. Here Paul is using two words which relate – KENODOZIA and KENOSIS. The first describes man who has lost the glory of God and tries to substitute for it by material glory. Christ by contrast left it behind and came in utter humility and plain humanity to redeem us to God. In “carpet humility TAPEINOS count others “head & shoulders” above yourself.

Not a mere housekeeper – looking at his own affairs – look also at the need of others – SKOPEO – “sceptic” – one who gives thought to.

The mind of Christ-and his humiliation

The word PHRONEO speaks about thinking of “new” things. Look at how Christ was prepared to think. He had the beautiful form of God ISA – equal in rights rule & force. Yet He became man. He thought it not “robbery” to be equal with God. The word ARPAGMON speaks of plunder – its root is akin to drawing water from a well .The bucket water is not stolen – the well is still full.

Parallels in John17...v5 Parallel in glory, v5 Parallel in past eternity, v8 parallel love for us, v14 parallel in word etc.

Yet He emptied Himself – EKENOSEN. This is an aorist-a once-for-all act. He is still man in the glory. It is not just that He emptied Himself– Isaiah 53.12 “He poured out His soul unto death” [Isaiah 57.6] “A drink offering”.

He **became** a servant – every inch a servant, “essentially” a servant – with intent “to stay” a servant – even in eternity.” Even in glory He will rise “Joseph like” to serve his brothers – He **became** like man – continuing thus as well – “exalting manhood for ever. The theological debate has raged over the word HOMOI-OUSIOS – that strange combination of “being” and “likeness” This generic likeness to Man does not, however, entail the post-fall sinful nature.

He **became** obedient to death – “In this supremely He makes our lives comfortable – he obeyed till death – till the very point – though it drew Him through blackest passion – strenuous obedience – glad obedience – surest sign of the head of the second race.

He continues to serve – to represent men as man, to comfort as he listens to our prayer

His exaltation

Christ did not grab for deity *as an exile coming home* (Eusebius) – it was his own – he seized the station of a servant – that was his vow – his mission – his great undertaking – cf Isaiah 53 Wherefore God gave him a name or “cheerfully named him” CHARIZO. Tyndale calls this “the investiture of Christ”. God’s purpose was that every knee shall bow to Christ KAMPO – the turning post in a chariot race was half way stage – so even now this acceding to His purposes – this change is under way. Its ultimate is that angels, men and demons will humbly acknowledge His purposes and cede their own. This is called Hyper-exaltation v9 – what the hymn-writer calls exaltation to “the central height”.

The three estates bow to Him – EPOURANION (the heavenly) – even demons EPIGEION (the demonic) – more and more KATACHTHONION (the dead) – buried ones – confessing in full the Lordship of Christ.

Practical implications of this high doctrine – Homer wanted men to “*think*” – the battle is to *think* like Christ & win. Paul wants us to become Christ-like thinkers

1. **Have the same mind** – unity in getting alongside others; holding love’s torch aloft; working with the Holy Ghost, being compassionate.

2. **Put others first** – add comfort and tapestry to life *Lord help me live from day to day in such a self-forgetful way*. Let there be no party spirit intrigue canvassing or vain glory. *That even when I kneel to pray – my prayer shall be for others*.

3. **Work out your salvation with fear & trembling** –The cup of Christ and the way go evoke trembling and joy – God is at work within. The Christian life is based on obedience and characterised by work – and attended by inner fear & trembling – at the implications of being a servant – “I was with you in fear weakness & much trembling(1Corinthians 2.3) “I will look on him who trembles at my word” Isaiah 66.2, Habakkuk3.16 &18. The prophet’s lips tremble in famine – as he records Gods judgment – but rejoices as he remembers mercy – ever thus.

4. **Do everything without murmuring or complaining** –Take care in speech so that nothing can be alleged against you AMOMOS and see that words are not mingled like wine – truth along with error AKERIOI – so that you may be genuine sons of God without brand of Satanic rebuke amid a generation that turns back. You shine like stars holding forth the word of life so that I may boast I neither ran nor toiled in vain.

Then Paul says “If I pour out my life (he expects to do it – the word “if” and the word “when” in Hebrew are interchangeable) it is a drink-offering on top of their sacrifice & ministry. We are reminded of David when his worthy followers were ready to imperil their lives to obtain the desired drink from the well by the gate of Jerusalem. Two worthies were equally at the ready to assist Paul – they were Epaphroditus and Timothy – one coming from Philippi to Rome – the other going in the reverse direction. The two stalwarts Timothy, who is

described as “precious as life” ISOPSUCHON, and Epaphroditus of whom Paul says “he gambled with his life” PARABOLEUSAMENOS to bring the support and care of Philippi” to the apostle.

Progress in joy

We **rejoice** in our mediator 1.3; in Christ victorious preached 1.8; in Christ overruling for example in prison 1.12; in the condescension of Christ 2.1; in the prospect of meeting the Lord 2.17; in His keeping power 2.29; in Christ enthroned 3.1-3; and in Christ near at hand 4 4-5.

CHAPTER 3

The true knowledge of Christ is the theme here. There are also three dimension of thinking. One respects what life offers; one self-appraisal – what we think of ourselves – and the last wise & noble thinking. Following Paul’s teaching on Christ’s servant nature this chapter gives us some safety rules for the Christian life.

The overall mood of the believer’s soul

Paul uses the expression TO LOIPON – which refers not so much to the rest of his material but to “the whole future time”. He tells the Philippians to be a joyful people. Then he adds that to write these things he is proceeding to write as footnotes to the great principle of SERVICE is as “a guarantee of safety in the spiritual sense for believers” and it is not pointless.

Far from Pointless

The word Paul uses here would have been recognised as one of some humour. It was associated with an old joke or folk story of a man who twisted a rope of straw which at the other end a she ass was eating. Paul believed the advice of this chapter was vital and would not be lost on Christians.

1 The “dogs” (evil workers and the externalists) are to be carefully watched

Paul in v2 is making reference to Psalm 22.16 & 20. No era is free of these three factors. The officers that act with great callousness, the legislative groups like the Sanhedrin that condemned our Lord and the religious bigots emphasise what is wholly secondary. True purists in faith are the believers who yield the largest service possible – in accordance with Romans 12 (LATREUO).

2 The three modes of thought to be advised

A. In v8 and the text that follows the apostle “believes” and “commands in this thinking” that all else but the knowledge of Christ is ZEMIA – loss and damage.

B. In v13 he emphasises that he has not suddenly become “perfect”. This is a salutary and absolutely clear statement. Paul “calculates” and reckons with great care and precision – and this is his confirmed position. He is now persecuting Christ in a new sense – to overtake that for which he was overtaken by Christ on the Damascus road. He means to accomplish the purpose Christ set out for him – and meet the master. This “thought” is LOGIZO.

C. In v15 Paul uses the third concept in v15. He says “If you think you are complete” follow my way – which is to stretch forward toward the distant SKOPOS – the distant mark of a runner who once he obtains it receives a prize.

3 The stamp of apostolic approval

Paul now addresses himself to another area where failure threatens.

A. It is in the area of Roman cuisine. The belly can become like God – demanding all the time and all the care

B. Philosophic opinion and imagination can become the shame of a man – duped from the simplicity in Christ

C. Things only of the earth can totally preoccupy

All of these or any one can exercise undue influence on the life and cause an eternal soul to end in destruction – through essentially being at odds with the cross and its way of humiliation and submission in dying to self.

Our Government

Our administration – POLITEUMA is in heaven. Christ shall return and “change” METASCHEMATIZO – our lowly bodies purposing that they become like His body of Glory – according to the mighty power – the increasing dynamic by which He is able to bring all things into order – or into line under himself.

Paul's ambition

The apostle wants to enjoy the “surpassing greatness” of knowing Christ – i.e. that which holds good above all other personal acquaintance. He wants to have personal experience of the power of resurrection – that must mean that he die – so he wants to become in his heart and mind personally conformed to the death of Christ – if somehow he might attain to the “out-resurrection” of the dead.

The “if” in this context is not a word of dubiety. He has two options – to live till the rapture or to die and experience “out-resurrection”. The only way to reach the second option is to “share in death as a Christian”.

Bodily change

The word METASHEMATIZO speaks of a remarkable change. Aristotle wrote a book on the subject of change in respect of the senses. Our bodies of “lowliness” will be totally re-designed after the prototype of Christ. They will be bodies and have many of the highest power enjoyed now retained – though set in unfailing bodies absolutely governed by spiritual laws and so not subject to natural earthbound corruption. In Corinthians Paul makes mention of the digestive and stomach system as one casualty of the change. Our “knowing capacity” is immensely different too – “as known” i.e. a far deeper and more gigantic conceptuality. THIS CHANGE will be sudden and for good – it is the experience that Paul longs for – especially as he is afflicted with a “thorn” and his sight appears to have worsened. This hope is a well of rejoicing for him and for us besides.

CHAPTER 4

Westgate Bible Commentary was exactly at this point immediately upon the destruction of the world trade centre in Manhattan

This chapter concludes the letter with various exhortations, with gratitude and final greetings. Paul's letter writing excels in uniquely practical exhortation that enables this “colony of heaven” to brace for their faith battle. Tenacity, unity, and felicity are of the essence in Christian life along with votive praying and imaginative practice of the faith.

The five commendations

In using the term “Beloved” Paul addresses them as “one & only”. Philippi is distinguished at this moment of deep need as the one & only church supporting the apostle 4.15. “Longed for” – this reminds us of 1.8 where the strongest word in Greek is used by Paul. This word was also used by the Lord of “shepherd-less crowds”. Paul had a feeling for these new believers with little pastoral help. Yet they are “His joy” – he and they share “the joy of the gods” (CHARA) as the Greeks would have put it – but in this instance it is in Christ though the apostle is in prison. *Henrietta Mears* says “Joy is a bird – free in the air”. In Neh.8.10 we read “The joy of the Lord is our strength” – in the epistle “joy” and “rejoice” recur 16 times. Fourth they are “His crown” – not the laurel of the *Pythian* nor the parsley of the *Nemean* or the ivy or pine of the *Isthmian* games but the crown of olive leaves worked in gold worn by a public figure – so here of a Church apostle. They are called on to stand as soldiers boldly holding their ground.

Euodia and Syntyche

Paul speaks now of two ladies-“miss fragrance” and miss fortunate” and wants them to know he is trying to encourage them both. He urges that they live in a sage and wise way with Christ at the centre. He commends the bringing together of other women for mutual help reminding his yokefellow how they fought alongside himself earlier. Clement and their husbands once worked with Paul – now they are cared for by Christ – as being numbered in his heavenly kingdom. The genuineness of the believer is tested by his or her care for those in need.

The right size of Christian

In v5 we are taught to live as servants – literally EPIEIKES we might say “in balance” or “well proportioned” We are to concentrate on what is true & open what is stately & majestic and righteous/well ordered and pure and what promotes friendship and what is virtuous or courageous – give these detailed thought – because Christ is nearby. Though Paul is distant, Christ is nigh.

Paul's theme is worked out here in simplicity “**Keep rejoicing**, keep humble, keep praying”. A lovely illustration of this joy coupled with seeing Jesus is “old glory face”, the radiant man who responded “Yes, yes, that will be glory for me” at the meetings where Charles Gabriel preached on the “return of Christ”.

- (1) Paul then emphasises that there is the mathematics of spirituality – “calculate”, he says.
- (2) Then there is the economics of spirituality – “buy this way of life”, he says again.
- (3) Then there is the “obedience” of spiritual children.
- (4) Then there is the “negotiation” that is required in a statesman following a new policy initiative. It is in just such a way that we are to follow Christ and the apostle. This builds a peaceful church.

Care has new shoots

Paul is perhaps writing in spring and here he refers to the “springtime” in Philippian care. The word “think” PHRONEO – especially refers to “fresh” “new” “innovative” thinking. Paul did not want to refer to his lack but to emphasise their “timely” thought by the springtime metaphor ANATHALLO.

Wide experience

Paul is a man content AUTARKES – “independent” This is his advice to the Thessalonians (1 Thess.4) He knows – he has the experience of being humbled and others have walked over him – he has had the abundance of a flowing river and been able to succour others. In each case and in all circumstances he has been independent whether having a feast of food or pining for bread – whether overflowing or lacking. “I can do all things through Christ who constantly empowers me – still it was lovely that you had share in my tribulation – being the heightened pressure that Christ predicted His followers faced.

The Philippian account

Paul now reiterates how they sent to his credit and debit account once or twice when he left Macedonia. Now, Paul was not seeking a gift but rather the fruit that continues to fill their account (before God). This takes us away from spring to the harvest time – Gods harvest. He speaks of Epaphroditus’ coming and the “scent of fragrance”.

God’s bounty

“My God shall supply all your need” God is represented as extraordinarily rich and able to meet all “need”. This is a world of need. The idea of CHREIAN is of “deeply desired wants necessities” This does not mean God will “cut down” your debts – or “pay your debts”. It is exactly the opposite word to KENOSIS – it is PLEROSION. God will make you complete full-orbed believers through Christ who emptied Himself for you – Paul believed in Jehovah Jireh. It is the Christ in Glory of whom the apostle speaks – and He will not fail His church.

The Father & the family

Finally with three warm verbally embraces the letter finishes. Christ brought the love of heaven to earth – we are to continue the embracing depths and lengths and expanses of that heavenly love. Before the Celtic cross this epistle expresses the world embrace of the faith.

1. Embrace each saint who is in the circle of Christ – wherever
2. The brothers with me embrace you in their arms of greeting
3. All the saints (in Rome) embrace you in fellowship – especially the Caesarian soldiery – joying in Philippian counterparts in Christ.

FINIS

Bob Coffey Aramaic & Greek Bible Companion
L’shuvkha Marya (To the glory of the Lord)