

# Epaphroditus

## INTRODUCTION

I should like to introduce you to one of Paul's circle of friends and valued co-workers—to a 'lovely man', by name Epaphroditus. And I say 'lovely man' deliberately, not so much because that is what his name means (which it does<sup>1</sup>), but because that is what he was.

We know Epaphroditus only from what Paul says of him in his letter to Epaphroditus's home assembly—in the apostle's letter 'to the saints ... in Philippi'.<sup>2</sup>

## SCRIPTURE

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. For indeed he was ill, coming near to death.

But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

I am sending him more eagerly (or, probably, 'speedily', 'urgently'<sup>3</sup>), therefore, that seeing him again you may rejoice, and that I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy; and hold such in honour, because for the work of Christ he drew near even to death, risking his life to complete the ministry you could not give to me.

Philippians 2. 25-30.

You did well that you had fellowship with my affliction. And you yourselves know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.

For even in Thessalonica once and again you sent to my need ... I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things you sent, a fragrant odour, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.<sup>4</sup>

Philippians 4. 14-18.

## THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI

In the opening section of chapter 2, Paul had exhorted the believers to consider, not only their own interests, but also the interests of others,<sup>5</sup> and through the remainder of the chapter he sets before us four examples of those whose attitudes and actions provide us with living commentaries on those words: (i) first and supremely, the example of our Lord, 'Christ Jesus';<sup>6</sup> (ii) his own example;<sup>7</sup> (iii) the example of Timothy<sup>8</sup> and (iv) finally, the example of Epaphroditus.<sup>9</sup>

But although our two biblical passages focus particularly on Epaphroditus, they paint for us the most beautiful picture of selfless care and consideration displayed, not only by him but also by the church at Philippi and by the apostle Paul himself.

I note:

1. First, the thoughtfulness shown **by the church**: (i) for Paul, in that (not for the first time) they had felt moved to forward financial support to him when was in need of it<sup>10</sup> and (ii) for Epaphroditus, in their heartfelt concern for him when they heard of his serious illness.<sup>11</sup>

2. Secondly, the deep care shown **by the apostle** for Epaphroditus in the way that he speaks of how God, in healing Epaphroditus, had shown mercy, not only to him (Epaphroditus) but also to himself (Paul), lest, as he says, 'I should have sorrow upon sorrow'—that such was his attachment to Epaphroditus that for God to spare his (Epaphroditus's) life was, at one and the same time, for God to spare him (the apostle) yet more sorrow.

And we can hardly miss the consideration which Paul shows for the Philippian church in 'speedily' ('urgently') sending Epaphroditus back to them that they might rejoice at seeing Epaphroditus back safe and sound. And I note that Paul sends Epaphroditus, even though Epaphroditus would doubtless have proved an ongoing source of help and encouragement to Paul—much as, shortly before, and for entirely different reasons, he had sent Onesimus back to Philemon, even though this newly converted runaway now proved 'profitable' to him.<sup>12</sup>

3. Thirdly, the tender concern shown **by Epaphroditus** for his home assembly both (i) in his great longing for them and (ii) in the deep distress he experienced on learning that they had been informed of his illness<sup>13</sup>—a response far removed, indeed, from the sense of satisfaction which some get from being the centre of attention and who would be distressed rather if others had not heard of their sickness!

And we cannot miss the selfless care which Epaphroditus shows for Paul in putting his own life at risk to minister to the apostle by carrying a monetary gift from his home church to help meet Paul's 'need' (as the apostle himself expresses it twice<sup>14</sup>) ... even though this involved him in a journey of upwards of 830 miles, largely by road<sup>15</sup> but partly by sea—across the Adriatic straits<sup>16</sup>—which journey would have taken him in excess of a month of non-stop travel,<sup>17</sup> from which there was the serious risk to his own life of associating himself with a man awaiting trial before no less than the then-Emperor Nero.

Yes, indeed, the passages in Philippians 2 and 4 paint for us a beautiful picture of Christian thoughtfulness and consideration, as all those mentioned there look not only to their own things but also to the things of others.<sup>18</sup>

## EPAPHRODITUS

Turning now to Epaphroditus, I want to consider him briefly under three simple headings.

### (i) Epaphroditus's relationship both to Paul and to the Philippian church.<sup>19</sup>

'My brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier', Paul says<sup>20</sup>—that is, (i) one in faith, (ii) one in labour and (iii) one in conflict. (i) One common faith binds them as brothers in the same great family, (ii) one common work occupies them as they labour in the same great cause and (iii) one common conflict faces them as side-by-side they contend for the same great gospel.<sup>21</sup>

Paul describes Epaphroditus, not only as sharing the same spiritual life as he did, but also as his 'fellow-worker'<sup>22</sup>—the apostle's usual way of speaking of who laboured with him.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, I note that, of the thirteen times the Greek word is used in the New Testament,<sup>24</sup> all but one<sup>25</sup> come from the pen of Paul.

But Paul and Epaphroditus not only worked together—they also warred together. They stood together, so to speak, with trowel in one hand and sword in the other.<sup>26</sup>



In that Epaphroditus chose to join the apostle in the firing line, he fully merits the title 'fellow-soldier', or 'comrade in arms' as the word here signifies.<sup>27</sup> Scholars assure us that 'only those who had been through experiences of battle together greeted one another in this way'.<sup>28</sup>

But if this man is 'my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier', he is also, Paul reminds the Philippians, 'your messenger and minister to my need'. The word 'messenger' indicates that Paul views Epaphroditus as their envoy and representative ... as someone who had been delegated by the church to carry out a task for them.<sup>29</sup> And, clearly, if the assembly at Philippi had selected Epaphroditus to bring their gift to Paul, they must have had great confidence in him and trusted him implicitly.

When the apostle writes of Epaphroditus as their 'minister to my need', the word he uses which we translate 'minister'<sup>30</sup> differs from the word<sup>31</sup> we normally render that way and which is used to describe others of his companions—for example, Tychicus, Epaphras and Timothy.<sup>32</sup>

The word which Paul uses of Epaphroditus here is closely related to the word used throughout the Greek Old Testament in connection with the function and ministry of the Jewish priesthood.<sup>33</sup> And, with my eye on what we read in verse 18 of chapter 4 (namely, that Paul describes the monetary gift which Epaphroditus brought from the Philippian assembly as 'a fragrant odour, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God') I can only conclude that Paul looked on the service of Epaphroditus as a priestly service.<sup>34</sup> What dignity this bestows upon our financial giving!

We noted earlier that the generous gift which the Philippians had forwarded to Paul through Epaphroditus was not the first support which had sent to him. We know, for example, that,

subsequent to Paul's first visit to their city, they had more than once sent him timely assistance when he later laboured at Thessalonica (another city in Macedonia)<sup>35</sup> and that, when he passed from Macedonia into Achaia, they sent further support to him while he worked at Corinth.<sup>36</sup>

And I note that, when writing to the Corinthians, he highly praised the self-sacrificing generosity of the churches of Macedonia (including, needless to say, the church at Philippi), in contributing toward the relief of the poor saints of Jerusalem and Judea.<sup>37</sup>

But I note with sadness that, a little over fifty years later, the fame of the same church was sullied by the sin of covetousness. For then, Polycarp, a Christian leader from Smyrna, had occasion (in writing) to denounce repeatedly the sin of avarice and to express great grief over the scandal brought on the gospel by the greed of one couple in Philippian church—the greed of a former elder (a certain Valens) and his wife<sup>38</sup>—a couple who one commentator well described as 'the Ananias and Sapphira of the Philippian community'.<sup>39</sup>

But here in his letter, the apostle cannot speak highly enough (i) of 'the sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God' which Epaphroditus had brought him and (ii) of the whole-hearted way in which Epaphroditus had performed his sacred, priestly duty.

### **(ii) The circumstances surrounding Epaphroditus's return to Philippi.**

In the section immediately before that in which he speaks of Epaphroditus in chapter 2, Paul expresses his hope that he would be able to dispatch Timothy to them 'soon', so that Timothy could both inform them how things had gone with him at his trial and bring back word to him of how things were going with them.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, he trusted that a favourable outcome before Nero would mean that he would soon be able to come to them himself.<sup>41</sup>

But now, in our section, Paul turns from his future plans to one of his present purposes in writing, namely, to make it clear to the Philippians that, in his eyes, it was 'necessary' for him to 'send' Epaphroditus 'speedily' ('as quickly as possible').<sup>42</sup>

And the apostle explains what led him to this conclusion. At some point and for some reason, Epaphroditus had been taken seriously ill.<sup>43</sup> We do not know whether this was on the way to Rome or while he was there. We do not know whether Epaphroditus had simply succumbed to some dangerous disease—perhaps the notorious 'Roman fever', which sometimes swept through the city<sup>44</sup>—or whether it was the effect of his long journey or of his exertions at Rome.

What we do know is that in His 'mercy',<sup>45</sup> God does for Epaphroditus what he had done for King Hezekiah some seven and a half centuries before<sup>46</sup> and grants him an extension to his life.

We know (i) that Doctor Luke had spent between five and six years at Philippi after the assembly began (and so may well have come to know Epaphroditus there)<sup>47</sup> and (ii) that Luke was with Paul when he first arrived at Rome.<sup>48</sup>

But we have no way of knowing if Luke was with Paul during Epaphroditus's illness. Even if Luke were there and even if (as we may reasonably expect) Luke did all he could to help, it is not to any physician or medication that Paul attributes his fellow-worker's recovery. In Paul's book, it is God and His mercy which brought Epaphroditus through.<sup>49</sup>

But Paul is well aware that the healed Epaphroditus eagerly longed to see his brethren back home and that, indeed, he was greatly distressed ... 'distressed', not that he had been sick but that news of his earlier illness was still causing great sorrow among the believers there.<sup>50</sup> 'Distressed' did I say? I note that the word translated 'distressed'<sup>51</sup> is found elsewhere in the New Testament only where Matthew and Mark use it to describe our Lord's deep anguish and distress when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane!<sup>52</sup>

Scholars point to a somewhat similar case of unselfish concern revealed by a second-century letter. The mother of a soldier had heard that her son was ill and he wrote to her to tell her that she should not have been troubled by the report she had heard. It was true, he admitted, that he had not written to her for some time, but this had not been on account of his sickness, he said, but on account of the pressure of his military duties. 'Do not be distressed about me', he wrote, 'I was deeply grieved to hear that you had heard about me, for I was not seriously ill'.<sup>53</sup>

But, of course, the case with Epaphroditus was very different. For the report that had reached the Philippians was no ill-founded rumour and it was certainly no exaggeration. On the contrary, Paul assures them, 'indeed he was ill, coming near to death' ... he, that is, lay at death's door ... humanly speaking, his life had been hanging by a thread.

But that was all history now. For 'God had mercy on him'.

Paul is aware that the surest way to put the minds of the Philippian saints at rest is for them to see Epaphroditus face to face and to satisfy themselves that he is indeed recovered from his sickness. Paul can only imagine what joy that reunion would mean for them but, such is his affection for them, that their relief and rejoicing would then have the effect of lessening his ongoing sorrow.<sup>54</sup>

The threat of the additional sorrow which Paul would have experienced if Epaphroditus had died had been lifted by God's mercy to Epaphroditus—for, if Epaphroditus had died, the apostle would, as his language suggests, have had sorrow piled upon sorrow—'sorrow coming upon sorrow, as wave after wave'.<sup>55</sup>

But, even after Epaphroditus's recovery, Paul isn't free from sorrow. He still faces sorrow on account of his continuing imprisonment. But the apostle's anticipation of the Philippians' joy in seeing Epaphroditus home again in good health would, he said, lighten His remaining burden and anxiety.

And easing the mind of his 'beloved' Philippians<sup>56</sup> and giving them cause for joy means far more to Paul than any further service Epaphroditus might have rendered him. No doubt about it, the apostle had drunk deeply at the well of verse 4—looking not so much to his own interests as to the interests of others.

From the way that Paul expresses himself, I have no doubt that Epaphroditus had the joy (and the privilege) of bearing this precious 'Thank you' letter from Paul back to his own assembly. Just think how much you and I owe, under God, to the sickness of Epaphroditus—whatever that sickness was and whatever occasioned it. Where would we be, for instance, without verses 5 to 11 of this very chapter? It would be hard not to see God's hand at work behind the scenes.

And then Paul adds what I think I can safely call 'a brief word of commendation'. For I note that the first half of verse 29 ('receive him ... in the Lord') reads almost identically to the first half of Romans 16 verse 2 ('receive her in the Lord'), where Paul writes, as he says in verse 1, to 'commend' Phoebe of Cenchrea to the saints at Rome. And we remember that Phoebe also carried a most important item of the apostle's correspondence. And where would we be without his epistle to the Romans!

But, in the case of Epaphroditus, Paul has an important addition to make. Having said, 'Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy', he adds 'and hold such in honour'.<sup>57</sup> 'Give my fellow-soldier', that is, 'a hero's welcome ... never cease to hold such in honour, for this good soldier of Jesus Christ<sup>58</sup> distinguished himself in battle, not counting his life dear to himself'.<sup>59</sup>

And the mention of the honour due to Epaphroditus bring me to my last heading ...

### **(iii) Epaphroditus's contribution to 'the work of Christ'.**

It would be true to say that this 'lovely man' man had lost his health and almost his life in serving both his church and the apostle. But ultimately, as Paul makes clear, Epaphroditus's drawing so near to death was the result of his engaging in the work of Christ. He had undertaken the journey to Rome to bring the Philippians' gift to Paul and since Paul's imprisonment was directly related to the work of Christ, anyone who brought a gift to support him was thereby contributing to the same work – the work of Christ.

I said at the beginning that Epaphroditus's name means 'lovely' (and it does) but, for all that, it was derived from the name of a Greek goddess. And I was interested to learn that Aphrodite was the goddess, not only of sensual love and of fertility but also of gambling. Scholars tell us that when a pagan Greek threw the dice he would cry out 'Epaphroditos', which means 'Favourite of Aphrodite'—hoping to be favoured by her with gambler's luck.<sup>60</sup>

When Paul told the Philippians that Epaphroditus 'drew near even to death, risking his life', the word he used translated 'risking' was often used outside the Bible as a gambler's word ... used when somebody staked all on the throw of the dice.<sup>61</sup>

And Paul may well have permitted himself a smile when he commended back to the Philippian church one of its own number who bore a name<sup>62</sup> which to many pagans suggested the goddess of gambling and who chose to 'gamble' (so to speak) with his own life—to venture his life (i) for the apostle's sake, (ii) for their sake ('to complete the ministry you could not give') and (iii) ultimately for Christ's sake ... and who won ... indeed, as you and I know, who won for himself honourable mention<sup>63</sup> in a letter which God's people have treasured for almost two thousand years.

## **CONCLUSION**

Unquestionably, Epaphroditus was marked by great loveliness of character.

Unlike many, he truly lived up to his name ...

**He was a 'lovely' man.**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Ἐπαφρόδιτος: ‘favourite of Aphrodite’, ‘comely’, ‘graceful’, ‘lovely’. (See (i) H. Cowan, ‘*Epaphroditus*’, in ‘Dictionary of the Apostolic Church’, edited by James Hastings, Volume 1, page 342, and (ii) the article ‘*Epaphroditus*’ in ‘Easton’s Bible Dictionary’.)  
‘The name ... was very common in the Roman period’, J. B. Lightfoot, ‘*Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*’, page 122.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. 1. 1.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word, ‘σπουδαιοτέρως’ ... ‘the haste with which something must be done’, G. Harder, the Kittell/Friedrich ‘*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*’, Volume VII, page 561.

<sup>4</sup> An exposition of Phil. 4. 10-23 was annexed to the ‘Musings’ for 17 February 2025 (from the bottom of page 5 of the ‘Musings’). The full document can be accessed at <https://voicesforchrist.org/writings/1228>.

<sup>5</sup> Phil. 2. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Phil. 2. 5-11.

<sup>7</sup> Phil. 2. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Phil. 2. 19-24.

<sup>9</sup> Phil. 2. 25-30.

<sup>10</sup> Phil. 4. 15-16; 2 Cor. 11. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Phil. 2. 26, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Philemon 10-13. Paul was never so lost and immersed in his own troubles to have no time to think of the troubles of his friends.

<sup>13</sup> Phil. 2. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Phil. 2. 25; 4. 16.

<sup>15</sup> ‘From Philippi to Dyrrachium on the Adriatic, travellers would take the Egnatian Way; then, after crossing the Adriatic straits to Brundisium in Italy (which crossing would take about a day), they would continue on the Appian Way to Rome. It is about 370 miles along the Via Egnatia from Philippi to Dyrrachium, and 360 miles along the Via Appia from Brundisium to Rome. (See the map on page 7 below.)

<sup>16</sup> It is 100 miles by sea from Dyrrachium to Brundisium. (See the map on page 7 below.)

<sup>17</sup> A journey of a little more than eight hundred miles of actual travel, from east to west.

(i) ‘A month would probably be a fair allowance of time for the journey between Rome and Philippi’, J. B. Lightfoot, *ibid.*, page 38.

(ii) ‘The journey in either direction between Rome and Philippi required about forty days’, F. F. Bruce, ‘*Philippians: Good News Bible Commentary*’, page xxv.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Paul wants the Philippians to understand that Epaphroditus fulfilled and has completed the ministry he was sent to Paul to undertake’, Ben Witherington III, ‘*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*’, comment on Phil. 2. 19-30.

<sup>19</sup> Phil. 2. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Phil. 2. 25.

<sup>21</sup> See Phil. 1. 30; cf. 1 Thess. 2. 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> The Greek word, ‘συνεργός’—‘co-labourer’, ‘co-helper’.

<sup>23</sup> For example: *Urbanus*, Rom. 16. 9; *Timothy*, Rom. 16. 21; 1 Thess. 3.2; *Titus*, 2 Cor. 8. 23; *Philemon*, Phm. 1; *Mark*, *Aristarchus*, *Demas*, and *Luke*, Phm. 24.

- <sup>24</sup> Rom. 16. 3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3. 9; 2 Cor. 1. 24; 8. 23; Phil. 2. 25; 4. 3; Col. 4. 11; 1 Thess. 3. 2; Phm. 1, 24; 3 John 8.
- <sup>25</sup> 3 John 8.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Each of the builders had his sword girded by his side while he built', Neh. 4. 18.
- <sup>27</sup> The term fellow-soldier, written as it is to a Roman colony city (Acts 16. 12) where soldiers mustered out, may convey something of the sense of Epaphroditus's serving in the right army, the army of the Lord, as opposed to Caesar's army', Ben Witherington III, *ibid.*, comment on Phil. 2. 19-30.
- <sup>28</sup> O. Bauernfeind, the Kittell/Friedrich '*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*', Volume VII, page 704.
- <sup>29</sup> The word is literally 'apostle'—the word being used in the same sense in 2 Cor. 8. 23. 'The term '*apostolos*' is likely the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew '*shaliach*', an agent given a specific commission and authority', Ben Witherington III, *ibid.*, comment on Phil. 2. 19-30.
- <sup>30</sup> The Greek word, '*λειτουργός*'.
- <sup>31</sup> The Greek word, '*διάκονος*'.
- <sup>32</sup> Eph. 6. 21; Col. 1. 7; 4. 7; 1 Thess. 3. 2; cf. Archippus, Col. 4. 17.
- <sup>33</sup> The Greek word, '*λειτουργία*'—"λειτουργία" is always used of the ministry of the priests and Levites in and at the sanctuary, especially the ministry of the priests at the altar', H. Strathmann, the Kittell/Friedrich '*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*', Volume IV, page 221.
- <sup>34</sup> Paul also describes his own ministry in terms of priestly service ('*λειτουργία*', Rom. 15. 16).
- <sup>35</sup> 'In Thessalonica once and again you sent to my need', Phil. 4. 16.
- <sup>36</sup> 'When I left Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only', Phil. 4. 15; 'when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia', 2 Cor. 11. 8-9.
- <sup>37</sup> 2 Cor. 8. 1-5.
- <sup>38</sup> 'I have been exceedingly grieved on account of Valens, who was sometime an overseer among you, because he so forgot the office that was given him. I warn you, therefore, to refrain from the love of money and be pure and truthful. Shun evil of every kind. If anyone does not refrain from the love of money he will be defiled by and so be judged as if he were one of the heathen who are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord ... I am, therefore, very grieved indeed for that man and his wife. May the Lord grant them true repentance', Polycarp, '*The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*', in J. B. Lightfoot, '*The Apostolic Fathers*', 1889, Part II, Volume III, page 316.
- <sup>39</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *ibid.*, page 314.
- <sup>40</sup> Phil. 2. 19-23.
- <sup>41</sup> Phil. 2. 24.
- <sup>42</sup> Phil. 2. 25, 28.
- <sup>43</sup> 'He was ill, coming near to death', Phil. 2. 27.
- <sup>44</sup> "'Roman fever" refers to a particularly deadly strain of malaria that affected the Roman Campagna and the city of Rome throughout various epochs in history', '*History of Malaria*', Wikipedia.
- <sup>45</sup> 'God had mercy on him', Phil. 2. 27.
- <sup>46</sup> 2 Kings 20. 1-6.
- <sup>47</sup> Luke dropped the use of 'we' from Acts 17. 1 through to Acts 20. 4; we can conclude that Luke stayed at Philippi.

<sup>48</sup> 'When we came into Rome', Acts 28. 16.

<sup>49</sup> Phil. 2. 27.

<sup>50</sup> 'He has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill', Phil. 2. 26.

<sup>51</sup> The Greek word, 'ἀδημονέω'.

<sup>52</sup> Matt. 26. 37; Mark 14. 33.

<sup>53</sup> 'The mother of a soldier had heard that her son was ill, and he wrote to her to tell her that she should not have been troubled by the report she had heard.

'A rumour had reached her that he was ill, and he is annoyed to think that her mind has been disturbed. The rumour seems to have been caused or at any rate made more credible by the fact that she had not heard from him for some time; but he explains that this was due to military duties ... "do not be distressed about me. I was deeply grieved to hear that you had heard about me, for I was not seriously ill" ... Here is a soldier, vexed that his mother had heard he was ill, and annoyed with the person who told her', James Moffatt, 'Philippians 2. 26', *Journal of theological Studies*, Volume 18, Number 72, July 1917, pages 311-312.

<sup>54</sup> Phil. 2. 28.

<sup>55</sup> 'The accusative implies motion. Sorrow coming upon sorrow, as wave after wave', M. R. Vincent, 'Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament', comment on Phil. 2. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Phil. 2. 12; 4. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Phil. 2. 29.

'The apostle doesn't want Epaphroditus to appear to have been shamed, or to appear to have failed in his mission, hence the strong endorsement ... Paul uses present continual tense verbs to stress that Epaphroditus should be received, held in honour ('έντιμος'), and rejoiced over on an ongoing basis', Ben Witherington III, *ibid.*, comments on Phil. 2. 19-30.

<sup>58</sup> See the expression in 2 Tim. 2. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Phil. 2. 30. Compare Paul's words concerning himself: 'neither do I count my life dear to myself', Acts 20. 24.

<sup>60</sup> 'Aphrodite (or Venus) was the goddess of gamblers, and whenever a Greek made the highest cast he cried out, "Επαφρόδιτος" ("Epaphroditos")—"favourite of Aphrodite (Venus)", hoping by this "invocation" to be blessed with gambler's luck in the throw of the dice', G. F. Hawthorne, 'Philippians: Word Biblical Commentary', comment on Phil. 2. 29-30.

<sup>61</sup> 'Parboleusamenos: having gambled ... From *paraballesthai*, to throw down a stake, to make a venture ... to play the gambler', J. B. Lightfoot, *ibid.*, page 124.

'Paul might be saying that Epaphroditus rolled the dice, risking his very life to supply Paul's needs and the service that the Philippians had been unable to provide for a while', Ben Witherington III, *ibid.*, comment on Phil. 2. 19-30.

<sup>62</sup> Compare Paul's play on the name 'Onesimus' ('profitable') in Philemon 11.

<sup>63</sup> So that, Epaphroditus has been 'honoured', not only by the first-century church at Philippi but also by saints over some twenty centuries.

**A map of the journey between Rome and Philippi.** (See Notes 15 and 16 above.)

