

# Philippians - Introduction & Background

## Authorship

Numerous *external* sources favor Pauline authorship. They include not only the Muratorian Canon but also various church fathers such as Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Marcion. Interestingly, Polycarp "admonishes the Philippians to carefully study the letters that Paul had written."

*Internal* evidence also favors Pauline authorship. The writer identifies himself as Paul (1:1). The writer also indicates his association with Timothy (1:1; 2:19-23). This association favors Pauline authorship since Paul is commonly associated with Timothy elsewhere in Scripture. Timothy was a member of the group that originally helped Paul evangelize Philippi (Acts 16). Moreover, the autobiographical information (3:4-6) matches what is known of Paul's life before his conversion. In addition, the reference to the writer's imprisonment (1:7,13) and imminent expectation of release (1:25-27; 2:24) also harmonizes well with what is known of Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Finally, the numerous first person pronouns found throughout the letter fit with Paul's intimate association with the Philippian church since he was the church's founder and spiritual father. The assumption of Pauline authorship was virtually unanimous until radical higher criticism of the 19th century.

## Unity

Some have attacked the unity of Philippians instead postulating that the book included addendums from anonymous writers. However, most of the arguments used by those seeking to discredit unity are answerable. Some refer to the "letters" of Philippians spoken of by Polycarp. However, the references to "letters" could refer to a lost letter to the Philippians rather than attributing Philippians to multiple authors. Others refer to the abrupt change of topic and tone at 3:2. However, such a transition could be attributable to the personal nature of the letter as well as the switch in subject to Paul's opponents. Still others have speculated that 3:1 and 4:4 fit so well together that 3:2—4:3 were inserted. However, this argument fails to acknowledge commonalities between the authentic and disputed sections (1:21 and 3:7; 1:27 and 3:7; 1:29-30 and 3:10-11; 1:7 and 4:10; 2:6-11 and 3:7-11). Finally, some think it odd that the thanksgiving appears at the end of the letter (4:10-20). Therefore, they speculate that it must have been an addendum of an anonymous writer. However, Paul offers a thanksgiving at the beginning of the letter as well (1:5-7). In addition, the thanksgiving at the end may be attributable to Paul's desire to conclude the letter on a warm note. In sum, it is best to take the letter as the compilation of a single writer. Such a conclusion is in harmony with the earliest manuscript evidence, which treats Philippians as a single and intact unit.

## Destination

The letter is addressed to the saints at Philippi (1:1). The city of Philippi was located 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. The city was situated on a fertile plain in the Roman province of Macedonia. Neapolis served as the city's port. Philippi was near gold mines in the nearby mountains as well as on the nearby island of Thasos. The city was originally named Krenides, which means "springs."

In 356 BC Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, took the city from the empire of Thrace and expanded it. He ended up renaming the city after himself. In 168 BC, the Romans captured the city. In a battle West of Philippi in 42 BC, Octavius and Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius. Octavia, also known as Augustus, converted the city into a colony and military outpost (Acts 16:12). This status granted the citizens at Philippi the right to be autonomous and self-governing. It also entitled them to certain privileges such as an exemption from taxation. In 30 BC, Octavia forced some in Italy to leave their homes and migrate to Philippi. These migrants did this in exchange for the "Italic right," which allowed them to live in Philippi and still be treated as citizens of Italy. All of this furnishes an appropriate background for understanding Paul's emphasis upon spiritual citizenship throughout the letter (1:27; 3:20).

The city did not have a synagogue. This absence explains why Paul did not pursue his normal custom of entering the synagogue when evangelizing at Philippi. The lack of a synagogue has been attributed either to an inherent anti-Semitism amongst the Philippian citizens or the fact that Philippi was a military outpost. The city was located on the *Via Egnatia* highway connecting Rome to the East. Thus, when going to and from Rome, one had to pass through Philippi. This strategic location allowed the city to become prominent. Thus, in Paul's day, Philippi was the chief city in Macedonia.

The founding of the church at Philippi is recorded in Acts 16. On Paul's second missionary journey, he was forbidden to evangelize in Asia and Bithynia. In Troas, he received the vision of the Macedonian man inviting him to evangelize in Macedonia. Thus, Paul left for Neapolis thus causing the gospel to penetrate Europe for the first time. Paul and his missionary team entered Philippi in 51 AD, roughly eleven years before Paul penned the letter to the Philippians. Paul's missionary team consisted of himself, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Because there was no synagogue in the city, Paul ended up ministering to a group of Jewesses and Gentile proselytes on the river on the Sabbath. This resulted in the conversion of Lydia and her household. Lydia was a merchant woman from Thyatira. Lydia's house became a meeting place for the new Philippian church as well as a base of operations for Paul during his Philippian ministry (Acts 16:15,40).

During Paul's stay in Philippi, he cast out a demon from a slave girl. The girl's owner, distraught over the loss of revenue that she brought to him through fortune telling, dragged Paul and Silas before the city rulers on false charges. In prison, Paul had the

opportunity to pray, sing and evangelize. An earthquake miraculously opened his prison door and loosed his chains. This turn of events allowed Paul to lead the jailer to Christ. After rebuking the authorities for denying his rights as a Roman citizen, Paul returned to Lydia's house and eventually departed for Thessalonica. Paul left behind the new church, which probably consisted of a converted businesswoman, a former demoniac, a jailor, and other prisoners. Paul also left Luke in Philippi, probably for the purpose of building up the new converts in their knowledge of Christ. The Philippian church sent Paul gifts on two separate occasions while he was in Thessalonica (4:14-16). Paul visited the church again on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-6).

It is evident from the epistle that Paul faced at least four opponents. First, he had to contend against fellow believers in Rome who were also preaching Christ, yet out of a spirit of competition and rivalry (1:15-17). Second, he contended with those in Philippi who were persecuting the infant church (1:27-28). Third, Paul dealt with Judaizers in Philippi (3:2). Fourth, it is likely that Paul had to contend with a libertine, antinomian element within Philippi as well (3:19).

### **Place of Writing and Date**

Several factors indicate that Paul wrote the letter during his first Roman imprisonment. First, he refers to his imprisonment throughout the letter (1:7,12-13,17). Second, the reference to the Praetorian guard (1:13) as well as Caesar's household (4:22) make Rome the most likely locale for the place of writing. Third, because Philippi was on the *Via Egnatia* highway, swift travel was possible between Philippi and Rome. Such swift travel was necessary because of the letter's indication of numerous contacts between Rome and the Philippian church. Fourth, Paul's life was jeopardized as he was waiting the outcome of a verdict (1:20-26). This scenario fits well with his first imprisonment where he was awaiting the decision of the imperial court. Fifth, the Marcionite prologue written in 170 AD refers to Paul writing Philippians from Rome. Sixth, 1:14-17 indicates an active church was present in the very area where Paul wrote. This description fits well with a Roman locale. Seventh, according to Acts 28:30, Paul was under house arrest for two full years. This amount of time allows for the numerous contacts between Rome and Philippi that are indicated in the letter.

Some have proposed Ephesus as the place of writing for the epistle (Acts 19:20). Some favor this view because Timothy was with Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:22). Moreover, it is argued that the references to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) could describe provincial cities like Ephesus or Caesarea. However, there is no record that Paul was ever imprisoned in Ephesus. In addition, the Ephesus location is further away from Rome than Philippi making it less likely that the numerous contacts between Rome and Philippi as recorded in the letter could have transpired. Others have proposed Caesarea as the place of writing (Acts 23-24). However, the Caesarean location is improbable. Not only

is it removed further geographically from Rome, but Paul never experienced imminent martyrdom and the prospect of imminent release in Caesarea. These absences contradict the situation presented in the letter (1:20-26; 2:24). In addition, there was no vibrant church in Caesarea. The existence of such a vibrant church seems to be indicated in Philippians (1:14-17).

Several pieces of information make it likely that Philippians was written at the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Unlike the other prison epistles, he expects his soon release (1:24; 2:24). In addition, the letter indicates that Paul had been in prison for an extended period of time (1:12-20; 4:22). Therefore, it seems likely that Philippians represents Paul's fourth "prison epistle." Thus, a date of 62 AD for the composition of the letter seems likely.

### **Occasion for Writing**

The occasion of the letter can best be described by tracing five contacts between the Philippian church and Paul in Rome.<sup>5</sup> First, news of Paul's imprisonment reached Philippi. It is unknown how this news reached Philippi. Second, Epaphroditus came to Rome in order to acquire information regarding Paul's imprisonment as well as give to him a financial contribution from the Philippian church (4:18). Epaphroditus stayed with Paul in Rome. It seems that Epaphroditus worked in Rome in order to give even more money to Paul. However, in the process Epaphroditus almost died (2:25, 27, 30). Third, word of Epaphroditus' sickness reached the Philippian congregation (2:26).

Fourth, Epaphroditus discovered that the church knew he was sick (2:26). Apparently, some of the Philippian congregation had come from Rome to express concern over Epaphroditus' condition. Fifth, Epaphroditus returned to the church after the Lord healed him (2:27). Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi so the church would rejoice over his healing and no longer be concerned over him (2:28). However, Paul also took the opportunity to pen the epistle and send it along with Epaphroditus. In the letter, Paul responds to information he had learned about the church from Epaphroditus as well as those who came to express concern over Epaphroditus' sickness.

### **Purposes in Writing**

Paul seems to have had several purposes in mind when he wrote the letter. First, Paul wrote in order to relieve anxiety amongst the church regarding his own imprisonment (1:1-26). Second, he wanted to promote unity within the church by countering an attitude of pride that threatened such unity (2:1-8; 4:1-3). Third, he exhorted his audience to stand firm in the gospel in the midst of adversity (1:27-30). Fourth, he wanted to prepare them for an imminent visit by Timothy and perhaps himself (2:18-24). Fifth, he wanted to explain the circumstances surrounding Epaphroditus' sickness and healing (2:25-30). Sixth, he wanted to warn against the encroachment of the Judaizers (3:1-4:1). Seventh, he wanted to give them a prescription for countering anxiety (4:4-9). Eighth, he wanted to express his thanks for the money they sent through Epaphroditus (1:4-6; 4:10-20). Ninth, he wanted to

extend greetings (4:21-23). Tenth, he wanted to express his general affection for the Philippians as well as express his gratitude for their continued growth in Christ (1:3-8).

### **Message**

Because joy is referred to 18 times within the span of four chapters, this seems to be the dominant theme of the letter. At the same time, the letter's recipients were undergoing adverse circumstances (1:27-30). Thus, it can be concluded that Paul wrote the letter so that his audience could experience joy in the midst of adversity. Paul wrote so that the Philippians would have the information they needed to experience joy even in their trials. Each chapter of Philippians advances a different method for maintaining joy. In chapter 1, Paul explains that joy can be maintained even in the midst of adverse circumstances when it is understood that God uses adversity to bring about positive results. In chapter 2, Paul explains that believers can maintain joy when they follow Christ's example of a service-oriented attitude. In chapter 3, Paul explains that believers can maintain joy by avoiding legalism. In chapter 4, Paul explains that believers can maintain joy when they rely upon Christ's strength for daily life.

### **Unique Characteristics**

Philippians boasts several unique characteristics. First, it contains about 120 uses of the personal pronoun. Such usage demonstrates Paul's warm relationship and rapport with the Philippian congregation. Such warmth may be indicative of the fact that the Philippians were more responsive to his financial needs than were the other churches (4:15-18; 2 Cor 8:11). Second, the letter is unlike Paul's other letters in terms of the absence of specialized, theological vocabulary. Also, missing is Paul's use of the explanatory "for," which is common when Paul engages in heavy argumentation. The absence of such formality again shows the personal warmth of the letter. Third, the letter contains abrupt shifts from topic to topic. Strict adherence to an outline seems absent in the letter. However, one would expect such shifts in a personal, informal letter of this nature. Fourth, the letter emphasizes the word "gospel" through nine different constructions.

Fifth, the letter makes great contributions to Christology by explaining how a right view of Christ results in right living (2:5-11). In addition, in 104 verses there are 51 references to Christ by name. Sixth, the letter places a special emphasis on how believers are to think. The words "attitude" or "think" are used nine different times in the letter. Seventh, the letter transparently shows Paul's motivations (1:21; 3:10,14). Eighth, Paul employs numerous military concepts and terms. Examples include "palace guard" (1:13), "stand fast" (1:27), "be brave" (1:28), "fellow soldier" (3:14), "walk" (3:16), and "keep" (4:7). Such usage makes sense when it is remembered that Paul was chained to the palace guard when he wrote. Ninth, women leaders factor into the book significantly. Not only was Lydia instrumental in starting the church (Acts 16:14), but Euodia and Syntyche were also influential leaders who needed correction.

## Outline

### I. Introduction (Phil 1:1-11)

- (1) Salutation (1:1-2)
  - (A) Senders: Paul and Timothy (1:1a)
  - (B) Recipients: Philippians (1:1b)
  - (C) Salutation of grace and peace (1:2)
- (2) Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
- (3) Prayer (1:9-11)
  - (A) Progressive sanctification (v9a)
  - (B) Knowledge (v9b)
  - (C) Discernment (v9c)
  - (D) Approve what is excellent (v10a)
  - (E) Favorable ruling at the Bema Seat (v10b)
  - (F) Fruit of the Spirit (v11)

### II. Positive results of Paul's "negative" circumstances (Phil 1:12-30)

- (1) Theme: Paul's "negative" circumstances brought positive results (1:12)
- (2) Evangelism of the palace guards (1:13)
- (3) Boldness in evangelism (1:14-18)
  - (A) Greater boldness in evangelism (1:14)
  - (B) Mixed motives in preaching (1:15-17)
  - (C) Christ is preached (1:18)
- (4) Increase in prayer (1:19)
- (5) Not dying and therefore assisting the church (1:20-26)
- (6) Application (1:27-30)
  - (A) Worthy conduct (1:27)
  - (B) Do not fear suffering (1:28-30)
    - (a) Sign of spiritual status of persecutor (1:28a)
    - (b) Sign of spiritual status of persecutee (1:28b-29)
    - (c) Paul's example of suffering (1:30)

### III. Humility (Phil 2:1-30)

- (1) Introductory exhortations (2:1-4)
- (2) Examples (2:5-30)
  - (A) Christ (2:5-16)
    - (a) Humiliation (2:5-8)
    - (b) Exaltation (2:9-11)
    - (c) Accompanying exhortations (2:12-16)
      - (i) Progress in practical sanctification (2:12-13)
      - (ii) Do not grumble or dispute (2:14)

- (iii) Be blameless in the world (2:15)
    - (iv) Remain loyal to Christ (2:16)
  - (B) Paul (2:17-18)
  - (C) Timothy (2:19-24)
  - (D) Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
- IV. Warning against legalism (Phil 3:1-21)
  - (1) Safeguarding joy (3:1)
  - (2) What to avoid: Judaizers (3:2)
    - (A) Dogs (3:2a)
    - (B) Evil workers (3:2b)
    - (C) False circumcision (3:2c)
  - (3) What to follow: Paul's example (3:3-14)
    - (A) Characteristics of true believers (3:3)
      - (a) Genuine circumcision (3:3a)
      - (b) Worshipers of God in spirit (3:3b)
      - (c) Rejoicing in Christ (3:3c)
      - (d) Having no confidence in the flesh (3:3d)
    - (B) Paul's reasons for confidence in the flesh (3:4-6)
      - (a) General statement (3:4)
      - (b) Seven reasons for Paul's fleshly confidence (3:5-6)
        - (i) Circumcised (3:5a)
        - (ii) Israeli (3:5b)
        - (iii) Benjamite (3:5c)
        - (iv) Hebrew (3:5d)
        - (v) Pharisee (3:5e)
        - (vi) Persecutor (3:6a)
        - (vii) Blameless (3:6b)
    - (C) Paul's spiritual priorities (3:7-14)
      - (a) Rejection of fleshly things (3:7)
      - (b) Embracing spiritual things (3:8-14)
        - (i) Knowing Christ (3:8)
        - (ii) Christ's righteousness (3:9)
        - (iii) Resurrection (3:10-12)
        - (iv) Prize (3:13-14)
  - (D) Application (3:15—4:3)
    - (a) Maturity (3:15-16)
    - (b) Watchfulness (3:17-19)
    - (c) Eschatological perspective (3:20-21)

- (i) Heavenly citizenship (3:20)
    - (ii) Future transformation (3:21)
  - (d) Unity (4:1-3)
  - V. Enablement (Phil 4:4-19)
    - (1) Peace (4:4-9)
      - (A) Prerequisites for peace (4:4-6)
        - (a) Rejoicing (4:4)
        - (b) Gentleness (4:5a)
        - (c) Awareness of God's presence (4:5b)
        - (d) Prayer (4:6)
      - (B) Promise of peace (4:7)
      - (C) Maintaining peace through a positive thought life (4:8-9)
    - (2) Contentment (4:10-13)
      - (A) Paul's thanksgiving (4:10)
      - (B) Paul's lesson (4:11-12)
      - (C) Paul's source (4:13)
    - (3) Money (4:14-19)
      - (A) Paul's thanks (4:14-16)
      - (B) Promise of reward (4:17)
      - (C) Financial generosity is worship (4:18)
      - (D) God's promise to supply need (4:19)
  - VI. Conclusion (Phil 4:20-23)
    - (1) Doxology (4:20)
    - (2) Greetings (4:21-22)
    - (3) Benediction (4:23)
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## Introduction

Philippians is an unpacking of John 14:27, which Jesus told the disciples (most of whom would be martyred for their faith):

27 Peace I leave you, My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor fearful.

The theme of Philippians is "joy in the Christian life."

## Author



External: strong; 1900 years of church history (until German "critics" came along) consistently believed that Paul wrote Philippians

Internal:

- Paul (Phil 1:1)
- References to Timothy (Phil 1:1; 2:19-23)
  - Philippians fits in perfectly with what we know about Paul's life
  - Luke describes Paul's visit to Philippi when he birthed this church (Acts 16)
  - Timothy accompanied Paul on that journey and stay
- Pre-conversion life (Phil 3:4-6)
- 1st person pronouns throughout - Paul uses the first person pronoun "I" often in this epistle

Numerous external sources favor Pauline authorship. They include not only the Muratorian Canon but also various church fathers such as Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Marcion. Interestingly, Polycarp "admonishes the Philippians to carefully study the letters that Paul had written."

Internal evidence also favors Pauline authorship. The writer identifies himself as Paul (1:1). The writer also indicates his association with Timothy (1:1; 2:19-23). This association favors Pauline authorship since Paul is commonly associated with Timothy elsewhere in Scripture. Timothy was a member of the group that originally helped Paul evangelize Philippi (Acts 16). Moreover, the autobiographical information (3:4-6) matches what is known of Paul's life before his conversion. In addition, the reference to the writer's imprisonment (1:7,13) and imminent expectation of release (1:25-27; 2:24) also harmonizes well with what is known of Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Finally, the numerous first person pronouns found throughout the letter fit with Paul's intimate association with the Philippian church since he was the church's founder and spiritual father. The assumption of Pauline authorship was virtually unanimous until radical higher criticism of the 19th century.

## **Destination**

Phil 1:1: Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

- Paul is writing to saved people/believers in Philippi
- Philippians is not a book you would go to to lead someone to Christ; it doesn't present the gospel
- The epistle is directed at the progressive sanctification of believers, where Paul saw something that was deficient in the Philippian church: the absence of joy, peace, and tranquility in the midst of their circumstances
- This epistle does not address justification, but sanctification...what the believer need to do to grow in joy (one of the fruits of the Spirit)

Citizenship (Phil 3:20): For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

- From Acts 16, we learn that Philippi was a Roman colony (converted by Augustus in 42 BC), which made the city autonomous and self-governing
- Augustus forced some in Italy to migrate to Philippi in 30 BC in exchange for what is called the *Italic Right*, which allowed people to live in Philippi but still retain their Italian citizenship
- In writing to a people who understood this Italic Right, dual citizenship, they would immediately pick up on what Paul said in 3:20, that a believer also has dual citizenship...in heaven since we're saved, but we reside on the earth.
- Because Philippi was a special city, autonomous, exempt from taxation, a privileged city, they would also understand 2:20 where Paul talks about citizenship in a different city, that has privileges

No synagogue in Philippi

- As documented in Acts, whenever Paul went to a new city, he always began his preaching in the Jewish synagogue
- However, Philippi did not have a synagogue because they did not have a large Jewish population. There needed to be at least 10 men to start up a synagogue.
- So what Paul does (Acts 16) is convert Lydia, who was the first convert to Christianity in Europe, and the first person in the Philippian church
- Later, while imprisoned, the Philippian jailer asks Paul how to be saved (Acts 16:30-31) and he comes to Christ, as well as his household
- This is how the little church in Philippi began...
- As Paul moved on to Thessalonica and Berea, this little church in Philippi sent him gifts on more than one occasion (Cf. 4:15-19)



- Paul briefly visited Philippi on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:6)

## Audience

The letter is addressed to the saints at Philippi (1:1). The city of Philippi was located 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. The city was situated on a fertile plain in the Roman province of Macedonia. Neapolis served as the city's port. Philippi was near gold mines in the nearby mountains as well as on the nearby island of Thasos. The city was originally named Krenides, which means "springs."

In 356 B.C. Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, took the city from the empire of Thrace and expanded it. He ended up renaming the city after himself. In 168 B.C., the Romans captured the city. In a battle West of Philippi in 42 B.C., Octavius and Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius. Octavia, also known as Augustus, converted the city into a colony and military outpost (Acts 16:12). This status granted the citizens at Philippi the right to be autonomous and self-governing. It also entitled them to certain privileges such as an exemption from taxation. In 30 B.C., Octavia forced some in Italy to leave their homes and migrate to Philippi. These migrants did this in exchange for the "Italic right," which allowed them to live in Philippi and still be treated as citizens of Italy. All of this furnishes an

appropriate background for understanding Paul's emphasis upon spiritual citizenship throughout the letter (1:27; 3:20).

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During Paul's stay in Philippi, he cast out a demon from a slave girl. The girl's owner, distraught over the loss of revenue that she brought to him through fortune telling, dragged Paul and Silas before the city rulers on false charges. In prison, Paul had the opportunity to pray, sing and evangelize. An earthquake miraculously opened his prison door and loosed his chains. This turn of events allowed Paul to lead the jailer to Christ. After rebuking the authorities for denying his rights as a Roman citizen, Paul returned to Lydia's house and eventually departed for Thessalonica. Paul left behind the new church, which probably consisted of a converted businesswoman, a former demoniac, a jailor, and other prisoners. Paul also left Luke in Philippi, probably for the purpose of building up the new converts in their knowledge of Christ.<sup>4</sup> The Philippian church sent Paul gifts on two separate occasions while he was in Thessalonica (4:14-16). Paul visited the church again on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-6).

It is evident from the epistle that Paul faced at least four opponents. First, he had to contend against fellow believers in Rome who were also preaching Christ, yet out of a spirit of competition and rivalry (1:15-17). Second, he contended with those in Philippi who were persecuting the infant church (1:27-28). Third, Paul dealt with Judaizers in Philippi (3:2). Fourth, it is likely that Paul had to contend with a libertine, antinomian element within Philippi as well (3:19).

## Place of Writing and Date

- From Rome, during his 1st Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31)
  - Under house arrest, awaiting his trial before Caesar
  - He was under house arrest for about 2 years (Acts 28:30)
  - He had access to people coming and going from his rented home, but was being watched by an elite Roman guard
  - He wrote Philippians 10-11 years after founding the church during his 2nd missionary journey

Several factors indicate that Paul wrote the letter during his first Roman imprisonment:

- First, he refers to his imprisonment throughout the letter (1:7, 12-13, 17).
- Second, the reference to the Praetorian guard (1:13) as well as Caesar's household (4:22) make Rome the most likely locale for the place of writing.
- Third, because Philippi was on the *Via Egnatia* highway, swift travel was possible between Philippi and Rome. Such swift travel was necessary because of the letter's indication of numerous contacts between Rome and the Philippian church.
- Fourth, Paul's life was jeopardized as he was waiting the outcome of a verdict (1:20-26). This scenario fits well with his first imprisonment where he was awaiting the decision of the imperial court.
- Fifth, the Marcionite prologue written in 170 AD refers to Paul writing Philippians from Rome.
- Sixth, 1:14-17 indicates an active church was present in the very area where Paul wrote. This description fits well with a Roman locale.
- Seventh, according to Acts 28:30, Paul was under house arrest for two full years. This amount of time allows for the numerous contacts between Rome and Philippi that are indicated in the letter.

Several pieces of information make it likely that Philippians was written at the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Unlike the other prison epistles, he expects his soon release (1:24; 2:24). In addition, the letter indicates that Paul had been in prison for an extended period of time (1:12,20; 4:22). Therefore, it seems likely that Philippians represents Paul's fourth "prison epistle." Thus, a date of 62 AD for the composition of the letter seems likely.

## Occasion for Writing

- News of Paul's imprisonment in Rome reached Philippi
- Epaphroditus travels from Philippi to Rome to inquire about Paul's circumstances/status and to deliver a financial gift (4:18)
  - Epaphroditus stayed with Paul and worked alongside him to provide Paul with even more financial support (2:25,27,30)

- Epaphroditus worked so hard to provide for Paul that he almost worked himself to death
- Word of Epaphroditus' sickness reaches Philippi (2:26)
- Some Philippians came to Rome to express concern over Epaphroditus' condition
- Epaphroditus returns to Philippi after he was healed (2:27)
  - So the Philippians could celebrate his healing
  - So they wouldn't be worried about him any longer. Epaphroditus was more concerned about the worry of his health by the Philippian church than he was about himself or his health.
- Paul writes this epistles to the Philippians based on the things he learned about the Philippian church from Epaphroditus, while he was with Paul in Rome

The occasion of the letter can best be described by tracing five contacts between the Philippian church and Paul in Rome:

- First, news of Paul's imprisonment reached Philippi. It is unknown how this news reached Philippi.
- Second, Epaphroditus came to Rome in order to acquire information regarding Paul's imprisonment as well as give to him a financial contribution from the Philippian church (4:18). Epaphroditus stayed with Paul in Rome. It seems that Epaphroditus worked in Rome in order to give even more money to Paul. However, in the process Epaphroditus almost died (2:25,27,30).
- Third, word of Epaphroditus' sickness reached the Philippian congregation (2:26).
- Fourth, Epaphroditus discovered that the church knew he was sick (2:26). Apparently, some of the Philippian congregation had come from Rome to express concern over Epaphroditus' condition.
- Fifth, Epaphroditus returned to the church after the Lord healed him (2:27). Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi so the church would rejoice over his healing and no longer be concerned over him (2:28). However, Paul also took the opportunity to pen the epistle and send it along with Epaphroditus. In the letter, Paul responds to information he had learned about the church from Epaphroditus as well as those who came to express concern over Epaphroditus' sickness.

### **Purposes in Writing**

Paul seems to have had several purposes in mind when he wrote the letter:

- First, Paul wrote in order to relieve anxiety amongst the church regarding his own imprisonment (1:1-26).
- Second, he wanted to promote unity within the church by countering an attitude of pride that threatened such unity (2:1-8; 4:1-3).

- Third, he exhorted his audience to stand firm in the gospel in the midst of adversity (1:27-30).
- Fourth, he wanted to prepare them for an imminent visit by Timothy and perhaps himself (2:18-24).
- Fifth, he wanted to explain the circumstances surrounding Epaphroditus' sickness and healing (2:25-30).
- Sixth, he wanted to warn against the encroachment of the Judaizers (3:1-4:1).
- Seventh, he wanted to give them a prescription for countering anxiety (4:4-9).
- Eighth, he wanted to express his thanks for the money they sent through Epaphroditus (1:4-6; 4:10-20).
- Ninth, he wanted to extend greetings (4:21-23).
- Tenth, he wanted to express his general affection for the Philippians as well as express his gratitude for their continued growth in Christ (1:3-8).

### **Opponents (the "joy stealers")**

- Those in Rome preaching Christ out of selfish ambition (1:15-18)
  - People in Rome thought they could prosper in ministry while Paul was under house arrest; they looked at Paul's confinement as an opportunity to expand their ministry
  - Nothing destroys the joy of a Christian minister more than learning that someone is in competition with them
- Those in Philippi persecuting the new church (1:27-28)
- Judaizers had infiltrated Philippi, teaching legalism (3:2)
- Antinomians (against the Law) in Philippi, telling people that licentiousness is ok (3:19)

### **Message**

Joy during adverse circumstances is possible (not guaranteed) as believers:

- understand that God uses adversity to bring about positive results (Phil 1)
- follow Christ's example of servanthood (Phil 2)
- avoid legalism (Phil 3)
- as we draw upon divine resources for daily life (Phil 4)

Because joy is referred to 18 times within the span of four chapters, this seems to be the dominant theme of the letter. At the same time, the letter's recipients were undergoing adverse circumstances (1:27-30). Thus, it can be concluded that Paul wrote the letter so that his audience could experience joy in the midst of adversity. Paul wrote so that the Philippians would have the information they needed to experience joy even in their trials.

### **Structure**

Each chapter of Philippians advances a different method for maintaining joy:

- In chapter 1, Paul explains that joy can be maintained even in the midst of adverse circumstances when it is understood that God uses adversity to bring about positive results.
- In chapter 2, Paul explains that believers can maintain joy when they follow Christ's example of a service-oriented attitude.
- In chapter 3, Paul explains that believers can maintain joy by avoiding legalism.
- In chapter 4, Paul explains that believers can maintain joy when they rely upon Christ's strength for daily life.
- Phil 1
  - God can use negative circumstances to bring about positive results
  - Paul developed the mental discipline to instead of seeing the glass half empty, he saw the glass half full
    - He could find something positive that God was doing in every circumstance in his life
    - If we could develop this same outlook, we'll never be a prisoner of our circumstances because God is taking what is a negative and turning it around for a positive
    - In Phil 1, Paul gives four examples of this
- Phil 2
  - Christ's example of servanthood
  - The people in life who are most fulfilled are those who put themselves in the position of giver, not taker
  - When we give ourselves away as a servant in this life, we begin to discover a level of fulfillment and contentment that we didn't know before
- Phil 3
  - Avoiding legalism because it will suck every ounce of joy in the Christian life
  - Paul knew something about legalism...he was so legalistic that he murdered Christians in order to uphold his code of legalism
  - Paul gives the description and explanation of what happened in his life when he walked away from legalism
- Phil 4
  - Reliance upon Christ's strength (divine resources) for daily life
  - God never expected the believer to live their life under their own power
  - If a believer tries to live the Christian life under their own power, joy is gone and you're a perpetual failure because our flesh can never fulfill the expectations God has for us



- We must know and understand, become familiar with, our divine resources. These are resources that are available to us right now, that we can tap into at any moment, to reclaim joy:
  - Peace
  - Contentment
  - Provision

## **Unique Characteristics**

Philippians boasts several unique characteristics. First, it contains about 120 uses of the personal pronoun. Such usage demonstrates Paul's warm relationship and rapport with the Philippian congregation. Such warmth may be indicative of the fact that the Philippians were more responsive to his financial needs than were the other churches (4:15-18; 2 Cor 8:11). Second, the letter is unlike Paul's other letters in terms of the absence of specialized, theological vocabulary.

Also, missing is Paul's use of the explanatory "for," which is common when Paul engages in heavy argumentation. The absence of such formality again shows the personal warmth of the letter. Third, the letter contains abrupt shifts from topic to topic. Strict adherence to an outline seems absent in the letter. However, one would expect such shifts in a personal, informal letter of this nature. Fourth, the letter emphasizes the word "gospel" through nine different constructions.

Fifth, the letter makes great contributions to Christology by explaining how a right view of Christ results in right living (Phil 2:5-11). In addition, in 104 verses there are 51 references to Christ by name. Sixth, the letter places a special emphasis on how believers are to think. The words "attitude" or "think" are used nine different times in the letter. Seventh, the letter transparently shows Paul's motivations (1:21; 3:10, 14). Eighth, Paul employs numerous military concepts and terms. Examples include "palace guard" (1:13), "stand fast" (1:27), "be brave" (1:28), "fellow soldier" (3:14), "walk" (3:16), and "keep" (4:7). Such usage makes sense when it is remembered that Paul was chained to the palace guard when he wrote. Ninth, women leaders factor into the book significantly. Not only was Lydia instrumental in starting the church (Acts 16:14), but Euodia and Syntyche were also influential leaders who needed correction.

## **Structure**

### **I. Introduction (Phil 1:1-11)**

#### **A. Salutation (1:1-2)**

1. Senders: Paul and Timothy (1:1a)
2. Recipients: Philippians (1:1b)
3. Salutation of grace and peace (1:2)

- B. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
- C. Prayer (1:9-11)
- II. Positive results of Paul's "negative" circumstances (1:12-30)
  - A. Theme: Paul's "negative" circumstances brought positive results (1:12)
  - B. Evangelism of the palace guards (1:13)
  - C. Boldness in evangelism (1:14-18)
    - 1. Greater boldness in evangelism (1:14)
    - 2. Mixed motives in preaching (1:15-17)
    - 3. Christ is preached (1:18)
  - D. Increase in prayer (1:19)
  - E. Not dying and therefore assisting the church (1:20-26)
  - F. Application (1:27-30)
    - 1. Worthy conduct (1:27)
    - 2. Do not fear suffering (1:28-30)
      - a) Sign of spiritual status of persecutor (1:28a)
      - b) Sign of spiritual status of persecutee (1:28b-29)
      - c) Paul's example of suffering (1:30)
- III. Humility (Phil 2:1-30)
  - A. Introductory exhortations (2:1-4)
  - B. Examples (2:5-30)
    - 1. Christ (2:5-16)
      - a) Humiliation (2:5-8)
      - b) Exaltation (2:9-11)
      - c) Accompanying exhortations (2:12-16)
    - 2. Paul (2:17-18)
    - 3. Timothy (2:19-24)
    - 4. Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
- IV. Warning against legalism (Phil 3:1-21)
  - A. Safeguarding joy (3:1)
  - B. What to avoid: Judaizers (3:2)
    - 1. Dogs (3:2a)
    - 2. Evil workers (3:2b)
    - 3. False circumcision (3:2c)
  - C. What to follow: Paul's example (3:3-14)
    - 1. Characteristics of true believers (3:3)
      - a) Genuine circumcision (3:3a)
      - b) Worshipers of God in spirit (3:3b)
      - c) Rejoicing in Christ (3:3c)

- d) Having no confidence in the flesh (3:3d)
- 2. Paul's reasons for confidence in the flesh (3:4-6)
  - a) General statement (3:4)
  - b) Seven reasons for Paul's fleshly confidence (3:5-6)
    - i) Circumcised (3:5a)
    - ii) Israeli (3:5b)
    - iii) Benjamite (3:5c)
    - iv) Hebrew (3:5d)
    - v) Pharisee (3:5e)
    - vi) Persecutor (3:6a)
    - vii) Blameless (3:6b)
- 3. Paul's spiritual priorities (3:7-14)
  - a) Rejection of fleshly things (3:7)
  - b) Embracing spiritual things (3:8-14)
    - i) Knowing Christ (3:8)
    - ii) Christ's righteousness (3:9)
    - iii) Resurrection (3:10-12)
    - iv) Prize (3:13-14)
- 4. Application (Phil 3:15—4:3)
  - a) Maturity (3:15-16)
  - b) Watchfulness (3:17-19)
  - c) Eschatological perspective (3:20-21)
    - i) Heavenly citizenship (3:20)
    - ii) Future transformation (3:21)
  - d) Unity (4:1-3)
- V. Enablement (Phil 4:4-19)
  - A. Peace (Phil 4:4-9)
    - 1. Prerequisites for peace (4:4-6)
      - a) Rejoicing (4:4)
      - b) Gentleness (4:5a)
      - c) Awareness of God's presence (4:5b)
      - d) Prayer (4:6)
    - 2. Promise of peace (4:7)
    - 3. Maintaining peace through a positive thought life (4:8-9)
  - B. Contentment (Phil 4:10-13)
    - 1. Paul's thanksgiving (4:10)
    - 2. Paul's lesson (4:11-12)
    - 3. Paul's source (4:13)

C. Money (Phil 4:14-19)

1. Paul's thanks (4:14-16)
2. Promise of reward (4:17)
3. Financial generosity is worship (4:18)
4. God's promise to supply need (4:19)

VI. Conclusion (Phil 4:20-23)

- A. Doxology (4:20)
- B. Greetings (4:21-22)
- C. Benediction (4:23)