

Introduction to Philippians

NIV Study Bible

AUTHOR, DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

The early church was unanimous in its testimony that Philippians was written by the apostle Paul (see 1:1). Internally the letter reveals the stamp of genuineness. The many personal references of the author fit what we know of Paul from other NT books.

It is evident that Paul wrote the letter from prison (see 1:13–14). Some have argued that this imprisonment took place in Ephesus, perhaps c. a.d. 53–55; others put it in Caesarea c. 57–59. Best evidence, however, favors Rome as the place of origin and the date as c. 61 (see chart, p. 2261). This fits well with the account of Paul's house arrest in Ac 28:14–31. When he wrote Philippians, he was not in the Mamertine dungeon as he was when he wrote 2 Timothy. He was in his own rented house, where for two years he was free to impart the gospel to all who came to him.

PURPOSE

Paul's primary purpose in writing this letter was to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him upon learning of his detention at Rome (1:5; 4:10–19). However, he makes use of this occasion to fulfill several other desires: (1) to report on his own circumstances (1:12–26; 4:10–19); (2) to encourage the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and rejoice regardless of circumstances (1:27–30; 4:4); (3) to exhort them to humility and unity (2:1–11; 4:2–5); (4) to commend Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church (2:19–30); and (5) to warn the Philippians against the Judaizers (legalists) and antinomians (libertines) among them (ch. 3).

RECIPIENTS

The city of Philippi (see map, p. 2445) was named after King Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. It was a prosperous Roman colony, which meant that the citizens of Philippi were also citizens of the city of Rome itself. They prided themselves on being Romans (see Ac 16:21), dressed like Romans and often spoke Latin. No doubt this was the background for Paul's reference to the believer's heavenly citizenship (3:20–21). Many of the Philippians were retired military men who had been given land in the vicinity and who in turn served as a military presence in this frontier city. That Philippi was a Roman colony may explain why there were not enough Jews there to permit the establishment of a synagogue and why Paul does not quote the OT in the Philippian letter.

CHARACTERISTICS

1. Philippians contains no OT quotations (but see note on Job 13:16).
2. It is a missionary thank-you letter in which the missionary reports on the progress of his work.
3. It manifests a particularly vigorous type of Christian living: (1) self-humbling (2:1–4); (2) pressing toward the goal (3:13–14); (3) lack of anxiety (4:6); (4) ability to do all things (4:13).

4. It is outstanding as the NT letter of joy; the word “joy” in its various forms occurs some 16 times.
5. It contains one of the most profound Christological passages in the NT (2:5–11). Yet, profound as it is, Paul includes it mainly for illustrative purposes.

OUTLINE

- Greetings (1:1–2)
- Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians (1:3–11)
- Paul’s Personal Circumstances (1:12–26)
- Exhortations (1:27–2:18)
 - Living a Life Worthy of the Gospel (1:27–30)
 - Following the Servant Attitude of Christ (2:1–18)
- Paul’s Associates in the Gospel (2:19–30)
 - Timothy (2:19–24)
 - Epaphroditus (2:25–30)
- Warnings against Judaizers and Antinomians (3:1–4:1)
 - Against Judaizers or Legalists (3:1–16)
 - Against Antinomians or Libertines (3:17–4:1)
- Final Exhortations, Thanks and Conclusion (4:2–23)
 - Exhortations concerning Various Aspects of the Christian Life (4:2–9)
 - Concluding Testimony and Repeated Thanks (4:10–20)
 - Final Greetings and Benediction (4:21–23)

© Zondervan. From the Zondervan NIV Study Bible. Used with Permission.