

NAME

The book gets its name from city it is addressed to (see below: Recipients).

AUTHOR

NASB - Introduction to Philippians:

The early church was unanimous in its testimony that Philippians was written by the apostle Paul (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 New Testament books. It is evident that Paul wrote the letter from prison (1:13,14).

DATE

Written in Rome 60-61 A.D. This date fits well with the account of Paul's house arrest in Acts 28:14-31. When he wrote Philippians, he was not in the Mamertime 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. Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome (60-62 A.D. and around 64-65 A.D.). Recently scholars have speculated that the prison epistles may have been written in Ephesus (53-56 A.D.).

THEME

Halley (page 44): *"A Missionary Epistle"*

Mitchell: *"The Worthy Walk - its passion, pattern, purpose, possessions"*

Key Word (Nelson's): To Live Is Christ - Central to Philippians is the concept of *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21)

Key Verses:

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21).

"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of Go din Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13,14)

"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:12,13)

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 2 - The grandeur of the truth of the New Testament seldom exceeds the revelation of the humility of Jesus Christ when He left heaven to become a servant of man.

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 in Rome (Philippians 1:5; 4:10-19). We know of four offerings which this church sent to Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. So far as is recorded they alone ministered to Paul in this way. Paul plainly states that he would not allow the Corinthians to give him anything in a material way. However, he makes use of this occasion to teach and encourage the Philippians in several other subjects.

Mitchell:

The most common theme centers around the concept of joy. But we submit another theme: The Worthy Walk. Interspersed in this very personal letter is a discussion of the very philosophy of the Christian life as it was lived by Paul himself. He discusses the passion that should motivate the Christian; the pattern of life necessary for spiritual success; the personal goal or purpose of the Christian life; and finally the possessions that are available to carry out our goals.

Nelson's:

The Book of Philippians teaches that the Christian life focuses on seeking Christ and the pursuit of intimacy with God. This pursuit consist of devoting oneself to knowing Jesus Christ, and one measure of spiritual maturity is the degree to which this pursuit becomes our consuming focus and desire.

Seek:

- Christ above all (1:21; 3:7,8) and FIND righteousness in Christ and the power of His resurrection (3:9-11)
- Christlike humility (2:5-7) and FIND God's will in the believer (2:12,13)
- A divinely appointed goal (3:14) and FIND the prize of eternal salvation (3:14)
- All things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy (4:8) and FIND the presence of the God of peace (4:9)

TNLT - Introduction to Philippians:

Paul writes from prison to Christians who are experiencing opposition, encouraging them to imitate his life and attitudes. By speaking of his own courage, commitment, confidence, and contentment even in prison, Paul encourages the Philippians to respond similarly as they face opposition. In doing so, he shows us that a Christian life of joy, peace, contentment, prayer, thanksgiving, and devotion to Christ can transcend all circumstances.

A "Mitchellism": *"A lot of people are called back sliders. But a lot of them haven't been front sliders."*

Outline:

- I. Introduction 1:1-11
- II. Passion of the Christian Life 1:12-26
- III. Pattern of the Christian Life 1:27-2:30
- IV. Purpose of the Christian Life 3:1-4:3
- V. Possessions of the Christian Life 4:4-19
- VI. Conclusion 4:20-23

RECIPIENTS

Mitchell:

This was possibly the favorite of all the churches Paul founded. It is obvious throughout the letter that Paul loved them deeply (1:8). They alone ministered to his needs while in prison. There

seem to be no serious doctrinal errors in the church (as with Galatians or Colossians). There is no indication of gross irregularities in life and conduct (as with Corinth). It was a strong virile church. His leading exhortation throughout is "rejoice." If the church had a peril it might possibly be self-sufficiency or independence (something we all are in danger of succumbing to).

Philippians was addressed to a mixed group of people, most of whom became converted from superstitious paganism to vibrant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippi was located in the country of Macedonia which today we know as northern Greece (Philippi is east of Thessalonica) along the coast and inland. A range of mountains separated it from the Aegean Sea and the seaport of Neapolis where Paul first landed in Europe (Acts 16:10,11). Philippi is about 10 miles inland. It was situated in a broad plain dotted with springs and crisscrossed with rivers, making it fertile and productive. It had also been a gold and silver mining center. It was also situated on the principal trade route which linked East and West (the Via Egnatia).

The city of Philippi was originally called Krenides, but in 356 B.C. the name was changed by Philip II, king of Macedonia (359-336 B.C.), father of Alexander the Great. Around 168 B.C., the Romans subjugated Macedonia, and Philippi came under Roman rule. About the time of Julius Caesar's assassination, Macedonia and Rome engaged in warfare. The people of Philippi preferred Roman rule by then and helped the Roman soldiers. To express its gratitude, Rome conferred upon Philippi the status of a Roman colony, elevating it to an equality with Rome itself. Those born there would automatically be Roman citizens, they were immune from tribute, the city had the right to elect its own magistrates and virtually to govern itself. The people of Philippi prided themselves on being Romans (Acts 16:21), dressed like Romans and often spoke Latin. This accounts for the magistrates concern when he discovered Paul was a Roman citizen and had been illegally imprisoned (Acts 16:38).

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 Old Testament in the Philippian letter. Near the city was the river Gangites (modern Angitis), where apparently the small Jewish population in Philippi congregated for prayer.

By the time of Paul's ministry, Philippi had become a strategic city which hummed with activity and commerce. 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. The language of this letter is highly colored by its local setting. Philippi was a military colony. Hence the letter abounds in military terms. By way of example: "stand fast" (1:27); "be brave" (1:28); "fellow soldier" (3:14), "walk" (3:16), and "keep" (4:7) are all military terms.

TNLT - Introduction to Philippians:

Philippi was the first town of Greece to hear the Good News of Christ from Paul on his second missionary journey (about 50 A.D.; Acts 16:11-40). From the beginning, there was opposition to Paul's preaching. During his brief stay there, he was thrown into prison and then asked to leave town, but not before a group of new believers had been established (Acts 16:35-40).

Perhaps six years later (56-57 A.D.) on his third missionary journey, Paul visited Philippi again (Acts 20:1-6). After that, it is possible that he never saw the Philippian Christians again (but see 1 Timothy 1:3, about 63 A.D.).

Paul later wrote Philippians while in prison. Epaphroditus had brought a monetary gift to Paul from the Philippians and was returning to Philippi, so Paul sent this warm letter of encouragement along for the church. Aware that the Philippians were being persecuted, he wanted to support and strengthen them, in part by sharing with them his experience as a prisoner for Christ's sake.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Adapted from NASB - Introduction to Philippians and Mitchell:

1. 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); and 4) Ability to do all things (4:13)
2. It is outstanding as the New Testament letter of joy; the words "joy" and "rejoice" in its various forms occurs some 16 times. Some have called this the "joy" letter of the New Testament. Paul's joy was always "in the Lord," because he certainly had nothing in his circumstances in which to rejoice.
3. It contains one of the most profound Christological passages in the New Testament (2:5-11). Although not a heavy doctrinal letter, it does contain the key passage on Christ's self emptying. When Christ became a man there is a sense in which He was divested of His glory. Philippians 2:5-11 discusses how Christ humbled Himself. It is actually a journey from eternity past (Christ before Bethlehem) to eternity future (Christ in full manifested glory). Yet, profound as it is, Paul includes it mainly for illustrative purposes. (Philippians 2:7 ἐκένωσεν (ekenosen) 3 person, singular, aorist, active, indicative from κενόω (kenao) - to empty, make empty, vain, of or no effect. During the incarnation, in humility, Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself by setting aside His prerogative to exercise His divine attributes.)
4. The role and prominence of women in the Philippian church is somewhat unusual. The first convert was a woman (Lydia); in 4:2 mention is made of two women by name (Euodias and Syntyche); finally in 4:3 mention is made of women who labored with Paul.
5. This is Paul's last letter to a church. The pastoral epistles came later but they are addressed to individuals. So Philippians is Paul's swan song to the church.

RESOURCES

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Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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