

Philippians Background

There are many clues in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians that show us the occasion that Paul had in writing this letter. The main purpose for this letter seems to be to send thanks for a monetary gift. Paul seems to be referring to this gift when he calls the Philippians partners in verse 1:5. Paul also directly thanks them for their gift in verses 4:10-19. Paul also uses this epistle to admonish and teach this church in several areas such as unity, humility, contentment, proper conduct and proper views of self and citizenship. He tells them of his personal situation and feelings. He also encourages them with his peace and joy that he has in his situation. Paul also exercised his authority over the church in asking for a settlement of a dispute in the church between two women named Euodia and Syntyche in verses 4:2-3.

The Apostle Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter as he says in verses 1:7,13,14,17. Most likely, he was in Rome in or near the Imperial Palace because he had a lot of contact with Caesar's household (4:22) and the whole palace guard (1:13). He seems to be in danger of execution at any time as seen in verses 1:22-25.

The Philippine Church seems to be healthy because Paul has very few remarks of correction but mostly of encouragement and instruction in greater personal holiness. A few situations, however, can be seen such as the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche. There also seems to have been some false teachers in contact with the church such as the Judaizers mentioned in verses 3:2-3 and the Libertines mentioned in verses 3:18-19.

Paul also tells us about two other people, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy is trusted and loved by Paul and is working with him. Timothy would stay with Paul a little while longer until Paul learns his situation but hopes to go soon to Phillippi.

Epaphroditus is the messenger sent by the Philippians to Paul with the gift. He became ill almost to the point of death but God spared his life and he recovered. Epaphroditus is sent with this letter back to Phillippi as the messenger and because he was anxious to see the Philippians.

The city of Phillippi itself was a chief city in Western Macedonia. It was a Roman colony with its citizens enjoying full citizenship of Rome. The Philippians were very proud of their Roman citizenship and they were very loyal to Rome. Paul used this idea of citizenship to show his idea of citizenship in heaven in verse 3:20. Women had high standing in this city. There were very few Jews in Phillippi and there was no synagogue. Paul uses no Old Testament references in this letter.

The Church itself was founded by Paul responding to a divine call. It was the first church planted in Europe. This church seemed to be growing and flourishing. This church is one of Paul's personal favorites and this letter is one of his most personal.

This letter was written by Paul about A.D. 61-63. It was most likely written from Rome, but there is also good evidence that it was written from Ephesus. Paul is in prison and his judgement seems eminent and his death is very possible.

The occasion for writing this letter may be to commend Epaphroditus to the church as one who had fulfilled his responsibility fully and should be received. It may also serve to explain Paul's situation to those who were scared by his imprisonment. Paul says that his hardship was for a purpose to spread the Gospel and so encourages these people.

Paul also stresses the adequacy of Christ in all areas of life, including privation, persecution, hardship, suffering as well as prosperity. Paul also stresses the Joy and Triumph of serving Christ.