

Philippians: Rejoicing in Christ

Introduction

Traditionally, Paul's letter to the Philippians is set during the time of Paul's imprisonment in Rome. We cannot pinpoint the exact date of the letter. Some would argue that the imprisonment may have been in Rome during the late 50s or early 60s (Acts 28: 14-31). Others might feel he was in Caesarea (Acts 23:23--26:32; the mid to late 50s). Even Ephesus is suggested by Acts 20:18-19, 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.) Some commentators feel that the imprisonment was a good deal earlier than the Roman one, and that it was written from a city much nearer to Philippi than Rome was. Rome was 800 miles from Philippi. But Paul visited Philippi on more than one occasion and the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to visit and care for Paul while he was in prison. Paul's imprisonment in Rome was a long one, one much longer than he would have undergone in Ephesus so it may be well to assume that Paul is, indeed, writing from Rome.

Even though Paul's circumstances were different in each of the imprisonments, there were restrictions which were, at the very least, unpleasant. In Rome he was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him (Acts 28:16).

In each of these prison experiences, Paul continued preaching, teaching, and counselling people. However difficult things became, Paul used every opportunity for continuing to share the gospel.

Philippians was carried by Epaphroditus on his return to the Philippian church, of which he was a member. The letter is addressed to the church at Philippi, an ancient and historic city of Macedonia. Philippi took its name from Philip, the father of Alexander, who founded a new city on the site of an early settlement known as "The Springs". The position was of high strategic value and there were mines in the neighbourhood and a fertile stretch of country. However, even in Paul's day, when it flourished the most, it was only a small city and gradually it fell into obscurity. Only a few vestiges of it now remain.

In 42 B.C. it was the scene of the great battle between Brutus and Cassius on the one side and Anthony and Octavian on the other. It was this victory of the avengers of Julius Caesar which marked the beginning of the Roman Empire. When Octavian became the head of state, under the title of Augustus, he rebuilt Philippi and peopled it with his old soldiers. It henceforth held the rank of "colony", a military outpost of Rome. The people of Philippi were proud of their Roman connection.

Paul began his ministry in Philippi when he crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas in A.D. 52 as a consequence of a dream in which he saw a man of Macedonia calling to him, "Come over and help us" (Acts 16: 6-10) Paul sailed in company with Silas and Timothy and, apparently, with Luke.

When Paul first went to Philippi he found the Jewish community too small to have a synagogue. The Jews held their service at a "praying place" apparently in the open air

near the river and Paul went there on the Sabbath and proclaimed his message. He guided several persons to salvation in Christ. One of these was Lydia, a native of Thyatira in Asia Minor, who dealt in the purple fabrics for which that city was famous. Lydia was not a Jewess, but a “worshipper of God”. She may have been impressed by the lofty character of Jewish religion and attached herself to the Jewish community. She may have been a woman of some wealth and she opened her house to Paul and his companions as a center for their work.

Paul stayed in Philippi long enough for a church to have been formed and for basic teaching to have been done.

Paul’s authorship appears quite certain. The teaching in the letter to the believers in the city of Philippi is unmistakably that of Paul. It is everywhere in keeping with all we know of his life and character. In its language and sentiment and manner of thought it carries the signature of Paul in every verse. It may be confidently affirmed that not only the epistle is by Paul, but that it is one of the most characteristic of all his writings (See *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 11).

Paul loved the Philippian church and writes to them out of a heart of love. He is concerned that they, like he, may be suffering for their faith and assures them that that suffering will be worth it all. He warns against being overly influenced by Judaism. Judaism is seductive because it offers visible tokens of God’s favour; it calls on men to put their confidence in earthly things-social privileges, rites and ordinances, mechanical obedience to a written law.

Paul writes out of a full heart and it is difficult to trace a logical sequence to the letter. There are outbursts of tenderness and thanksgiving, warnings, profound reflections all mingled together.

Session 1	Look at Life Positively	Philippians 1:1-26
Session 2	Live a Life Worthy of the Gospel	Philippians 1:27—2:15
Session 3	Make a Difference with Your Life	Philippians 2:19-30
Session 4	Keep Focused on Knowing Christ	Philippians 3:2-14
Session 5	Live with Genuine Joy	Philippians 4:2-19