

General information about Philippians:

- Lectionary readings for worship include over 50% of Philippians. It's a letter that is highly usable in worship.
- Philippians is a letter in the common sense of the word.¹ It's not a Gospel or else it would have stories about Jesus. It's not a document that was originally intended to be circulated – it was for the people at Philippi.
- Paul did a lot of ministry by mail. This was common for his time – to communicate via mail. If Paul lived in our day, he probably would have been an avid e-mailer.
- Paul's letters fall somewhere between a note scribbled on napkin that was very personal and the formal letter essay that you might get from a statesperson.
- Components of the Pauline letter:
 - Salutation or greeting – identifies the sender and recipient.
 - Thanksgiving for the recipients – all of Paul's letters except Galatians have this thanksgiving.
 - Body of Letter – usually includes three elements:
 - Theological, ecclesial, and practical matters that point to the reason for writing.
 - Autobiographical references – ways Paul connects with the recipients.
 - Travel plans – regrets for not being there or plans to visit.
 - Moral and ethical instructions – here Paul is often responding to questions that have moral or ethical implications.
 - Closing – a wish for good health and a farewell.²
- In no other epistle does the relationship between Paul and the recipients (Philippians) shape the letter as strongly as it does in Philippians. Paul seems connected to these people and deeply loves them.

Authorship of Philippians and date of writing

- Authorship is not disputed. There are only two debates about Philippians: (1) is the phrase in 1:1, "...with the bishops and deacons..." Paul's or a later addition? and (2) is our present Philippians a single letter or a collection of a few different notes? – Some have argued there are abrupt changes in mood and thought – see 3:1 for example.
- Two choices for a date of Philippians seems most likely. First, around AD 54-55 in the winter while Paul was a prisoner in Ephesus. Second, around AD 61-63 while Paul was a prisoner in Rome.

¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Philippians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 2.

² Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Philippians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 4.

The City of Philippi

- It was a leading city of the region (see Acts 16:12).
- It was probably not the capital city. Thessalonica probably held that distinction.
- The city was given its name by Philip II of Macedon about 360 BC. In 167 BC the city became part of the Roman Empire.
- In Paul's day, the city was very Roman.

The church at Philippi

- There was a Jewish community there at Philippi before the Gospel took hold (see Acts 16:13).
- The beginning of a church at Philippi marks the entrance of the Gospel into Europe.³ See Acts 16:12-40.
- Most likely the church at Philippi was a house church. Most likely, it was Lydia's house (Acts 16:40). The term, "house church," was not simply describing where the church met, but also described how the early church functioned – it was modeled after the social institution of the home.⁴
- The church had a number of women leaders (see Philippians 4:2-3).
- The church was seeing conversions of Gentiles (see Acts 16:16-18 for the conversion of a slave girl; see Acts 16:19-34 for the conversion of a jailer).

Why did Paul write Philippians?

- Paul wants to commend his co-worker Epaphroditus to the Philippians (see Philippians 2:25ff). There may have been criticisms against Epaphroditus and Paul wants to dispense of that.
- Paul wants to pay tribute to the generosity of the Philippians (see 1:3, 5; 4:10-14). The Philippians were not rich (see 2nd Corinthians 8:1ff) yet they still gave. Paul singles out the overseers and deacons (see Philippians 1:1) for being instrumental in the collecting of this gift.
- There are some various troubles at Philippi that Paul needs to address.
 - There were differences of opinion and internal disturbances (see 2:2-4, 14; 4:2; 1:27). Paul wants to stress unity among the people.
 - Paul stresses humility of the highest variety for the Philippians (see 2:5-11).
 - There seems to be a "perfectionist" group among the Philippians. Some believed they had "arrived" spiritually. See 3:15 about some who "...think differently..." There were probably some Gnosticism features in the Philippian circles.

³ Ralph P. Martin, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), p. 17.

⁴ Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Philippians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 7.

- Paul wants to encourage the people not to give up in the midst of tough times (see 1:27-30; 2:15; 4:1). Remember the Philippian church was young in an established pagan world. Paul wants to rally the people in Philippi.

Outline of Philippians⁵

- I. Address and Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Paul's thanksgiving and confidence (1:3-7)
- III. Apostolic Prayer (1:8-11)
- IV. Paul's great ambition and joy (1:12-26)
- V. Exhortations to the community (1:27-2:18)
- VI. Future plans (2:19-30)
- VII. Warnings and Encouragements (3:1-21)
- VIII. Appreciations and Greetings (4:1-23)

⁵ Ralph P. Martin, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), pp. 54-55.