

# Introduction



Philippians has been one of the best-loved letters of Paul because of its emphasis on joy that grows out of the apostle's good relations with the church in Philippi. The style and theology of the letter support the consensus view that Philippians was written by Paul. However, interpreters are divided about its provenance. Ephesus, Rome, and Caesarea<sup>1</sup> are the leading candidates for its place of origin. None of these hypotheses is without its problems, but recent commentators have favored Rome, the site named as early as the second century.<sup>2</sup> This option has in its favor that we know of a time when Paul was imprisoned there; but since the letter reflects numerous exchanges between Paul and the Philippians, some interpreters think it is unlikely that Paul is that far away. A strong case can also be made for Ephesus, since its location would have more easily allowed the travel of envoys between Paul and the Philippians.<sup>3</sup> We have, however, no clear evidence that Paul suffered imprisonment there.

Many readers have questioned the integrity of Philippians, with some finding three letters within the canonical text. The most problematic questions for those who maintain its integrity are the sudden discussion of "the dogs" in 3:2 after saying "finally" in 3:1 and the late appearance of what some identify as the thank you note (4:10–20) for the gift the Philippians had sent him.<sup>4</sup> Again, there are strong

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<sup>1</sup>Those who favor Caesarea include Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon*, 13th ed., KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 3–4; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), xxxvi–xliv.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 24; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 34–37; Morna Hooker, "The Letter to the Philippians; Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *NIB*, L. E. Keck, editor (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11: 474–75.

<sup>3</sup>A. Deissmann, "Zur ephesinischen Gefangenschaft des Apostels Paulus," *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir William Ramsay*, W. H. Buckler and W. M. Calder, editors (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1923), 121–27; G. S. Duncan, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929); Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 493–96.

<sup>4</sup>Those who argue against the letter's integrity include Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, 2–5, 24–25; Jean-François Collange, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians*, trans. A. W. Heathcote (London: Epworth, 1979), 5–15; Joachim Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 5–11; Helmut Koester, "The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment (Philippians III)," *NTS* 8 (1961/1962): 317–32; John Reumann, "Philippians 3:20–21—A Hymnic Fragment?" *NTS* 30 (1984): 593–609;

arguments on each side that preclude complete certainty; however, several things support the integrity of the letter. First, *λοιπόν* (3:1), that some see as a device to signal the end of a letter, may function as a transitional word rather than signaling that the conclusion to the whole document has been reached (see the comments in the text).<sup>5</sup> There are also several themes (e.g., suffering, humility, and joy) that run all through Philippians, and language from the poetic material in chapter two also recurs throughout the whole text.<sup>6</sup> Recently, rhetorical critics have also asserted that an outburst such as that in 3:2ff. is common for speeches in the period.<sup>7</sup> Finally, some argue that Paul's thank you for the gift comes so late in the letter because this is where he takes the pen from the secretary and writes for himself. Writers in the ancient world did at times append paragraphs of a personal nature after their secretaries had completed the rest of the letter. Thus, the "thank you" would be made more important, not less, by waiting until this point to include it.<sup>8</sup> These and other considerations make it more likely that Philippians is a unity.<sup>9</sup>

Paul has several purposes for writing this letter. Not only does he want to thank them for their gift, he also wants to assure them about the health of Epaphroditus. He also takes this occasion to interpret his imprisonment for them, indicating that it is not inconsistent with being an apostle and that it is advancing

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Pheme Perkins, "Philippians: Theology for the Heavenly *Politeuma*" in *Pauline Theology Vol I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, ed. Jouette Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 89-104; Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Philippenerbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1984).

<sup>5</sup>Victor Furnish, "The Place & Purpose of Phil III," *NTS* 10 (1963/1964): 80-88; Loveday Alexander, "Hellenistic Letter-forms and the Structure of Philippians," *JSNT* 37 (1989): 90, 94-95.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Jewett, "The Epistolary Thanksgiving and the Integrity of Philippians," *NovT* 12 (1970): 40-53.

<sup>7</sup>See David Garland, "The Composition and Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Literary Factors," *NovT* 27 (1985): 141-73; Duane F. Watson, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question," *NovT* 30 (1988): 57-88; Stanley K. Stowers, "Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven: Reading Theology in Philippians," in *Pauline Theology; Vol I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, ed. Jouette Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 89-104. See also G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, New Century Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 130-33; Michael White, "Morality Between Two Worlds; A Paradigm of Friendship in Philippians," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians; Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, eds. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, W. A. Meeke (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 201, 206; Ronald Russell, "Pauline Letter Structure in Philippians," *JETS* 25 (1982): 295-306.

<sup>8</sup>See the discussion of letter closings in Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Neglected Endings; The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, JSNTSup 101 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup>Others who favor the integrity of the letter include: Josef Ernst, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an Philemon, an die Kolosser, and die Epheser*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1974); Berthold Mengel, *Studien zum Philippenerbrief*, WUNT 8 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1982); Christopher Mearns, "The Identity of Paul's Opponents at Philippi," *NTS* 33 (1987): 194-204; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians; A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 1991), 10-18.

the Gospel. Some interpreters have taken the many references to joy and rejoicing in Philippians to indicate that this church is not experiencing significant problems. However, both the message to Euodia and Syntyche in chapter 4 and the application of the hymn in chapter 2 show that there were tensions and arguments, perhaps over leadership. Paul faces opposition from other Christian evangelists in the city where he is imprisoned, but there is no indication that those teachers have been or are influencing the Philippians. Paul's rejection of the "dogs" in 3:2ff. seems to be an advance warning rather than a response to their success in the Philippian church.<sup>10</sup> So Paul calls upon this church, which has been supportive of his mission from its founding, to live in unity and humility, wanting to be certain that they remain faithful to the Gospel in their relationships within the church and that they hold fast to his understanding of the way Gentiles should live as the people of God.

The text of Philippians is fairly secure. It is well attested in multiple manuscripts, and there are fewer significant variants than we find in many New Testament texts. Fee notes that there are only ten "translationally significant" differences between the NA<sup>27</sup> and the *Textus Receptus*.<sup>11</sup> Our earliest witness to the text is the Chester Beatty Papyrus, P<sup>46</sup>. It comes from about the year 200 and contains all of Philippians except for a few missing lines from the bottom of pages. P<sup>46</sup> belongs within the Alexandrian family of manuscripts, generally considered to be the closest to the original text. It contains less grammatical and stylistic polishing and fewer insertions of other sorts than other families of manuscripts. P<sup>46</sup> is our oldest extensive representative of this grouping for the Pauline Corpus. Other papyri that contain parts of Philippians include P<sup>16</sup> and P<sup>61</sup>. P<sup>16</sup> contains Phil 3:9-17 and 4:2-8. It comes from the third or fourth century. P<sup>61</sup>, produced around the year 700 C.E., has Phil 3:5-9, 12-16 among its sections from various Pauline letters.

The entire text of Philippians is found in eighteen uncials, according to Hawthorne.<sup>12</sup> Among these are the two extremely important fourth-century codices  $\aleph$  (Sinaiticus) and B (Vaticanus). Both of these also belong to the Alexandrian group, and while later than P<sup>46</sup>, they seem to have been copied with great care. Codex B may be a bit earlier because it lacks the Eusebian canons, designations to help the reader locate passages. Codex A (Alexandrinus), a fifth-century manuscript, also contains all of Philippians. It belongs to a bit later branch of the Alexandrian group. The fifth-century Codex C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) is a palimpsest, a manuscript from which the original text was erased to make room for something new. In this case the biblical text was erased, and the sermons of Ephraem the Syrian were

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<sup>10</sup>For discussion of the opponents of Philippians see Jerry L. Sumney, "Servants of Satan," *False Brothers and Other Opponents of Paul*, JSNTSup 188 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 160-87.

<sup>11</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 24.

<sup>12</sup>Hawthorne, *Philippians*, liii.

written on the pages. The recovered biblical text is regarded as less valuable than that of Codex A because its readings more often belong to the Koine (or Byzantine) group, also referred to as the Majority text. This group, despite being widespread, is generally acknowledged to be the least valuable, being not only late but often containing additions and stylistic, grammatical, and theological corrections. The Codex D<sup>p</sup> (Claromontanus) is a sixth-century bilingual manuscript, with the text in Greek and Latin. It belongs in the Western grouping that is generally regarded as earlier than the Koine type but nonetheless has many editorial additions and some omissions. In the comments on textual problems throughout this volume, other manuscripts will be mentioned. Those not commented on here are later and of less consequence than those discussed above. The particulars of their dates and tendencies are available in the explanation of the textual apparatus of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament and in Bruce M. Metzger's *The Text of the New Testament; Its Translation, Corruption and Restoration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992).