

## INTRODUCTION

Before we actually begin a serious study of any New Testament book of the Bible, it's always best to consider the author, the audience, the aim of the book, and the date and place of writing. It's always best to first get a broad picture of a book because it helps to get a better and more accurate interpretation of the book. After all, isn't that what we are required to do: "Rightly divide the word of truth"?

So in way of introducing the Book of Philippians let's first consider...

### THE AUTHOR

We immediately discover from the greeting that the apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi. As a matter of fact, Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament (Romans-Philemon). But please keep in mind, these books we call epistles are actually letters—that's what the word "epistle" means. In fact, when writing, Paul followed the ordinary letter-form of his day. As you read Paul's letters you discover he first identifies himself, addresses his audience, and concludes his greeting by giving a variation of: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The greeting was then followed by the body of the letter. Each letter then had a particular closing or "blessing."

The point is this: each New Testament Epistle is a real letter, written by real men, to real people, who had real and specific needs. As Paul writes to the Philippians, you can easily detect that they had a special place in his heart. The letter to the Philippians is deeply personal. Also keep in mind, upon receiving these letters, they were also meant to be read aloud to the congregation. But what particularly makes these letters exceptional is that they are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Let's get back to the author, Paul the apostle.

- Saul was his Hebrew name. Being from the tribe of Benjamin (the smallest tribe of Israel), no doubt, he was named after Israel's first king who was also a Benjamite.
- Paul was his Greek name, which means "little" or "small." A second century writer described Paul as "a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked and full of friendliness."

The false apostles, who tried to get the Corinthian church to question Paul's apostleship, said of Paul: "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10).

There is a really good possibility that Paul didn't have much of a commanding presence. But although he may have been small in stature, he was a spiritual giant. And although his bodily presence may have been weak, it is obvious the power of God was on his life and ministry. Christ was truly magnified in and through his life and even in his death (Phil. 1:20). That was Paul's earnest expectation.

- Paul was a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, the capital city of the province of Cilicia.
- One of the duties of the Jewish father was to teach his son a trade. The trade Paul learned was tent making. Dr. Robert Picirilli writes:

[The people of Tarsus] traded in leather goods and *cilicium*, a cloth made from the hair of the black goats of the region. This cloth was the basic stuff of the well-known tents of Tarsus that were popular across the empire. Because a son usually followed his father's trade, we can safely assume that Paul's father was a tentmaker too, no doubt prospering in that business. (Robert Picirilli, *Paul The Apostle*, Moody Press, 1986, p. 3).

- Paul was not only a citizen of Tarsus (Acts 21:39), but also he was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28). As a missionary, Paul's Roman citizenship got him into areas of the Roman Empire where the other apostles might not have had access. That's why when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel of Christ, he was able to appeal his case before Caesar in Rome (Acts 25:10-12).
- Although Paul was born in Tarsus, a city with strong Greek and Roman influence, Paul maintained the Jewish traditions and customs of his ancestors. In Philippians 3:5 Paul refers to himself as "a Hebrew of the Hebrews."
- Paul's father was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).
- Perhaps at the age of thirteen (after he received his *bar mitzvah*), Paul began to attend a rabbinic school in Jerusalem under the teaching of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).
- Paul, himself, became a Pharisee—the strictest sect of Judaism.

Paul wrote to the Galatians, "I [was] advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14).

When Paul went before King Agrippa, as always Paul used it as an opportunity to share his testimony. And share his testimony, he did! (See Acts 26:4-18; cf. Acts 9:1-19).

## CONCLUSION

Paul never got over his conversion and God's call upon his life. How could he? When writing to young Timothy, pastor of the church at Ephesus, Paul said:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:12-17)

The point is this, and I thank the Lord for it: no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. If God could save Paul (and He did), then He can save anyone who comes to Him in repentance and faith. To use Paul's own words, he became a "new creation" through faith in Christ.

The very one who had once persecuted the church began preaching the very faith he had once tried to destroy (Gal. 1:23). That zeal he once had *against* Christ and His church was now turned inside-out *for* Christ and His church. Although he was not part of the original twelve (1 Cor. 15:8), the risen and glorified Lord directly commissioned and sent Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Rom. 11:13). It was John Phillips who said it was Peter in Acts 10 who opened the doors of the church to the world, but it was Paul in Acts 13 who opened the doors of the world to the church.

I love how Dr. Robert Picirilli describes the apostle Paul on the very first page of his book in *Paul The Apostle*:

Except the Lord Himself, no other single figure has done so much for the Christian faith. His missionary travels set the tone for the expansion of the church. His letters form the keystone of Christian theology. (Robert Picirilli, *Paul The Apostle*, Moody Press, 1986).

In light of Paul's conversion; and in light of God's grace, mercy, and love; and in light of God's patience; I believe it's good to end this particular message with this particular verse:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise [the promise of His return], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any [individual] should perish but that all [everyone] should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

Although God *is* patient, we still only have an allotted time to trust Christ as Savior and Lord. No one knows the day or the hour of His return. No one knows when they will breathe their final breath—so TODAY is the day of salvation. And although no one is beyond the reach of God's grace, there is a way however, an individual can put themselves beyond the reach of God's grace: simply refuse and reject God's offer of grace.

