

## INVITATION TO PHILIPPIANS

On his second journey to bring the good news about Jesus to the people of the Roman empire, the apostle Paul helped establish a community of Jesus-followers in the city of Philippi (see pp. 1549–1550). The people of that community became his friends and supporters for the rest of his life. When they heard he'd been taken to Rome as a prisoner, they collected money to assist him and sent it with one of their members, a man named Epaphroditus, who stayed in Rome to help take care of Paul. Unfortunately, Epaphroditus became very sick and nearly died. When he recovered, Paul decided to send him back to Philippi because he knew how concerned his friends were for him. Paul sent a letter with Epaphroditus to thank the Philippians for the friendship and support they'd always shown him, and particularly on this occasion. In his letter, Paul also offers some challenges and encouragement. He knows that the Philippians are experiencing a lot of opposition, just as he is, so he appeals to his own life as an example of how they should respond. He reports that throughout the whole palace guard—that is, right in the center of Caesar's realm—he's been able to make the royal announcement boldly that Jesus is Lord. Paul's desire is that the Philippians will be encouraged, like most of the brothers and sisters around him, to become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. Paul also knows that some people in the community at Philippi are having trouble getting along, so he urges them to stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. Composing or quoting an amazing song of praise right in the middle of his letter, Paul urges the Philippians to have the same servant attitude that Jesus had. Jesus didn't use his high position for

his own advantage, but humbled himself even to the point of death—all for the sake of others. This is the new way of life in God's kingdom. Paul reminds the Philippians that they don't need to be circumcised, as some people were apparently teaching they did, and he warns them that they shouldn't live like those who are controlled by their desires. All of these themes are interwoven throughout the letter, which doesn't develop systematically the way some of Paul's other letters do, but flows freely, as one friend writes to another. The dominant note in this letter is joy. Even though Paul is a prisoner, and even though he and his friends are experiencing strong opposition, he's rejoicing. So he urges the Philippians to rejoice, too, in the partnership they have in helping others meet Jesus and in the reward they can anticipate when their work is finished. Our citizenship is in God's realm, Paul says, and so we eagerly await the Savior's return to us. Then he will transform our lowly bodies to become like his glorious resurrected body.