

Who was Epaphroditus in the Bible?

Epaphroditus played a key role in biblical history, even if his name is not immediately recognizable. He is mentioned by name twice in the book of Philippians, one of Paul's Prison Epistles. Epaphroditus is the one who delivered the original manuscript of Philippians to its original recipients, the church in Philippi.

Paul was under house arrest in Rome, and the church in Philippi desired to send Paul what we might call a "care package." The Philippian believers gathered supplies and sent them to Rome by the hand of one of their own, a man named Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus faithfully delivered the gift from his home church and then went above and beyond the call of duty. In his fervor to serve the Lord by serving Paul, Epaphroditus became seriously ill and, in fact, almost died. God graciously granted Epaphroditus health, and Paul sent his friend back home with the newly penned book of Philippians. This is part of what Paul wrote: "I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me" (Philippians 2:25-30).

To the Philippians, Epaphroditus was a messenger who delivered a package. To Paul, however, he was so much more: a "brother" (belonging to the same family), a "co-worker"

(laboring toward the same goal), and a “fellow soldier” (sharing the same trials). Epaphroditus was a man of obvious devotion, faithfulness, and self-sacrifice. He put “the interests of others” before himself and so modeled the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:4-5). He labored on Paul’s behalf until his own health broke, and, even when he was sick, Epaphroditus took no thought of himself; rather, he was distressed because his church had heard of his illness, and he didn’t want them to worry.

Paul mentions Epaphroditus again near the close of his letter: “I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18). The very next verse is the oft-quoted promise that God takes care of those who put God first: “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Interestingly, Epaphroditus’s name is of pagan origin. It means “belonging to Aphrodite”—the name of the goddess is actually incorporated into the name Epaphroditus. Such is the power of the gospel that a man is set free from dead paganism to serve the living God. When Epaphroditus received the gospel, he was “belonging to Jesus,” and the idol had no more claim on him, regardless of his name. The new birth trumped the birth name.

When a man like Epaphroditus gives of himself for the sake of God’s kingdom, many people benefit. Such a man is worthy of honor, and his presence is cause for rejoicing (Philippians 2:29).