

# Philippians: Life *Lived* Well



## BACKGROUND

This is one of Paul's most informal letters. With this church he did not feel the need to assert his Apostolic authority. His overflowing love for them is obvious. He even allowed them to send him money (cf. 1:5,7; 4:15), which was very unusual for him. Paul is imprisoned, yet he uses the term for joy (noun and verb) over sixteen times. His peace and hope were not based on circumstances.

There is an element of false teaching that concerns Paul (cf. 3:2, 18-19). The heresy seems to be similar to those in the churches of Galatia, by Judaizers. They insisted that one had to become a Jew before one could be a Christian. Yet there is no direct example or reference to a group per se in this letter. Perhaps there was a general threat to orthodoxy for which Paul was always ready to warn.

This letter includes an example of an early Christian hymn, creed, or liturgical poem (cf. 2:6-11). It is one of the finest Christological passages in the entire New Testament (cf. John 1:1-14; Col. 1:13-20; Heb. 1:2-3). Paul uses it as an example of Christ's humility to be imitated by every believer (cf. 2:1-5), not primarily in a doctrinal sense.

In a book of just 104 verses, Jesus' name or title occurs 51 times. It is obvious who is central in Paul's heart, mind, and theology.

The city of Philippi, in 356 BC, was captured and enlarged by Philip II of Macedon, Alexander the Great's father. The original Thracian village was named Krenides (springs). The city was important because of the gold ore in the region.

At the battle of Pydna in 168 BC the region became a Roman Province and later one of four in Macedonia.

In 42 BC Brutus and Cassius (who advocated a Republican form of government) fought Antony and Octavian (who advocated an Imperial form of government) near Philippi, over governmental reform in Rome. After that battle, Antony settled some of his victorious veterans here.

In 31 BC after the battle of Actium in which Octavian defeated Antony, Antony's supporters in Rome were deposed and exiled here. In the same year Philippi became a Roman Colony (cf. Acts 16:12). The townspeople were declared citizens of Rome. Latin was spoken and the city became like a little Rome. It was located on the Egnatian Way, the major east-to-west Roman highway. The special privileges they enjoyed as Roman citizens were:

- no poll taxes and no land taxes
- the right to buy and sell property
- all protection and rights of Roman law
- special local governmental leaders (praetors and lictors)

## THE GOSPEL COMES TO PHILIPPI

On Paul's second missionary journey he wanted to turn north to enter north central Asia (modern Turkey, biblical Bithynia). Instead, in a vision he saw a man (possibly Luke) of Macedonia (northern Greece) calling to him to come and help them (Acts 16:6-10). By this vision the Spirit directed Paul to Europe. Paul was accompanied by his helpers:

### a. Silas (Silvanus)

- Silas was a leader from the Jerusalem church and a prophet who replaced Barnabas as Paul's missionary co-worker (cf. Acts 15:15:22,32; 36-41).
- Silas and Paul were both imprisoned at Philippi (Acts 16:16-26).
- Paul always called him Silvanus (cf. II Cor. 1:19; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1).
- It is possible that Silas later became a companion of Peter, as John Mark did (cf. I Pet. 5:12).

### b. Timothy

- He was a convert from Paul's first missionary journey (cf. Acts 16:1-2; II Tim. 1:5; 3:15)
- His grandmother and mother were Jewish, but his father was Greek (and not a Jew) (cf. Acts 16:1; II Tim. 1:5).
- Because he was well spoken of by the brothers (cf. Acts 16:2) and Paul saw the gifts of ministry in him (cf. I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6), he chose him as a helper to replace John Mark (cf. Acts 13:13).
- Paul had Timothy circumcised so that he would be accepted by the Jews (cf. Acts 16:3).
- Timothy became Paul's trusted apostolic representative (cf. Phil. 2:19-22; I Cor. 4:17; 3:2,6; II Cor. 1:1,19).

### c. Luke

- He was the anonymous, but probable, author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts.
- He was apparently a Gentile physician (cf. Col. 4:14). Some think the term "physician" meant "highly educated." It is certainly true that he was informed in several technical areas besides medicine, such as sailing. However, Jesus used this same Greek term for "physician" (cf. Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17; 5:26; Luke 4:23; 5:31)
- He was Paul's traveling companion (cf. Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16; Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24).
- It is interesting that the "we" sections of Acts begin and end at Philippi. In *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (p. 219), F. F. Bruce suggests that Luke stayed on at Philippi to help the new converts and collect the Gentile relief fund for the Jerusalem church.
- Luke may have been, in a sense, Paul's personal physician. Paul had several physical problems due to his conversion (cf. Acts 9:3,9), his ministry (cf. II Cor. 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-29) and his special weakness (cf. II Cor. 12:1-10).

Paul returned to Philippi on his third missionary journey (cf. Acts 20:1-3,6). He had sent Silas and Timothy earlier (cf. Acts 19:19-24; Phil. 2:19-24).

## PHILIPPI AS A ROMAN COLONY

(cf. Acts 16:12)

1. Paul used the status of this city as a Roman colony in his terminology
  - "praetorian guard," 1:13
  - "citizenship," 3:20 (Acts 16:22-34, 35-40)
  - "Caesar's household," 4:22
2. The city was populated by retired and exiled Roman soldiers. In many ways it was "a little Rome." The fads of Rome could be seen on the streets of Philippi (cf. Acts 26:21).
3. Both Paul (Acts 22:25; 26:32) and Silas (Acts 16:37) were Roman citizens, which allowed them legal rights and social standing.
4. Women had more social freedom and economic opportunities in Macedonia than anywhere in the Roman Empire. This is illustrated by
  - presence of many women worshiping by the river outside Philippi (cf. Acts 16:13)
  - the business woman Lydia (cf. Acts 16:14)
  - women co-workers in the gospel (cf. 4:2-3)
  - several leading women mentioned at Thessalonica (also in Macedonia, cf. Acts 17:4).

## AUTHOR

This highly personal letter has always been attributed to Paul. The first person pronouns "I" and "my" appear 51 times.

Gordon Fee, in his NICNT commentary (Eerdmans) majors on the idea that Paul's letter writing here fits the ancient practices of written correspondence between true friends separated by circumstances.

It is quoted or alluded to by early authors (for a complete list of citations see H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Philippians*, pp. 20-21, published by Kregel):

- Clement of Rome in I Clement, written to the Corinthian church about a.d. 95
- Ignatius, in Letters of Ignatius, about a.d. 110
- Polycarp, the Apostle John's companion, in Letter to the Philippians, about a.d. 110
- a Marcionite prologue (a follower of the heretic Marcion) to Paul's letter to the Philippians about a.d. 170
- Irenaeus, about a.d. 180
- Clement of Alexandria, about a.d. 190

- Tertullian of Carthage, about a.d. 210

Although Timothy is mentioned along with Paul in 1:1, he was a co-worker, not a co-author (although he may have acted as a scribe for Paul from time to time).

## DATE

The date is contingent on where Paul was imprisoned (cf. II Cor. 11:23)

1. Philippi, Acts 16:23-40
2. Ephesus, I Cor. 15:32; II Cor. 1:8
3. Jerusalem/Caesarea, Acts 21:32-33:30
4. Rome, Acts 28:30 (stated in Marcionite Prologue to Philippians)

Most scholars believe that a Roman imprisonment fits the context of Paul's life and Acts best. If so, a date in the early 60's seems most likely.

This book is known as one of Paul's "prison epistles" (Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, and Philippians). From internal considerations it appears that Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon were written early during Paul's Roman imprisonment and taken together to Asia Minor by Tychicus (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21). Philippians has a different tone. Paul seemed confident he would be released from prison (1:17-26) and would get to visit them (2:24).

This structure also provides a period of time for: (1) Paul's influence to have reached the Imperial soldiers (cf. 1:13; Acts 28:16) and servants (cf. 4:22) and (2) several trips between Paul and messengers from the church at Philippi.

## PURPOSE

A clear purpose is to communicate Paul's thanksgiving to this loving church that helped him monetarily several times and even sent a helper, Epaphroditus (cf. 1:3-11; 2:19-30; 4:10-20). The letter also may have been written to explain Epaphroditus' early return home while Paul was still in prison. It also seeks to encourage the Philippians concerning his circumstances. The gospel was actually progressing in prison. Paul was bound, but the gospel was unbound!

The letter also seeks to encourage the Philippians amidst the false teachings which were very similar to the Judaizers of Galatians. There is no clear reference to heretics present, but the heresies Paul thought a threat to them demanded that new converts become Jewish first and then Christian (cf. Acts 15).

However because the list of sins in 3:19 might fit Greek false teachers more than Jewish, the identity of the heretics is uncertain. It is possible that some believers had reverted to their previous pagan lifestyle.

To encourage the Philippian believers to joy even amidst internal and external persecution. Paul's joy was not dependent on circumstances but on his faith in Christ. This joy amidst problems was not a Stoic resignation, but a Christian worldview and a constant struggle.

Paul drew metaphors from several areas of life to communicate the tension of the Christian life:

- athletic (cf. 3:12,14; 4:3)
- military (cf. 1:7,12,15,16,17,22,28,30);
- commercial (cf. 3:7,8; 4:15,17,18)

## CONTEXT AND OUTLINE

It is difficult to outline Philippians because it is so personal and informal. Paul was talking to friends and trusted co-workers in Christ. His heart overflowed before his mind could organize the thoughts. In wonderfully transparent ways this book reveals the heart of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul felt "joy" in Christ, in any and all circumstances and in service to the gospel!

### Literary Units

1. a typical Pauline introduction, 1:1-2
  - a. greeting
    - (1) from Paul (and Timothy) 1:1
    - (2) to saints at Philippi (including overseers and deacons), 1:1
    - (3) Paul's stylized prayer, 1:2
  - b. prayer, 1:3-11:
    - (1) co-workers in the gospel from the first, 1:5
    - (2) supporters of Paul's ministry, 1:7
    - (3) Paul's request for:
      - (a) abundant love, 1:9
      - (b) abundant knowledge, 1:9
      - (c) abundant discernment, 1:9
      - (d) abundant holiness, 1:10
2. Paul's concern for them over their concern for him, in prison, 1:12-26
  - a. God had used his time in prison to spread the gospel
    - (1) to the Imperial guard, 1:13
    - (2) to others of Caesar's house, 1:13; 4:22
    - (3) Paul's imprisonment also emboldened preachers, 1:14-18
  - b. Paul's confidence for release because of
    - (1) their prayers, 1:19
    - (2) Holy Spirit, 1:19
  - c. Paul's confidence whether in release or in death, 1:20-26
3. Paul's encouragement, 1:27-2:18
  - a. call to Christlike unity amidst persecution, 1:27-30

- b. live in Christlike selflessness, 2:1-4
  - c. Christ our example, 2:5-11
  - d. in light of Christ's example to live in peace and unity, 2:12-18
- 4. Paul's plans related to Philippi, 2:19-30
  - a. send Timothy, 2:19-24
  - b. return Epaphroditus, 2:25-30
- 5. stand firm against false teachers, 1:27; 4:1
  - a. the dogs, the false circumcisers, the Judaizers (Acts 15, Galatians), 3:1-4
  - b. Paul's Jewish heritage
    - (1) in light of the false teachers, 3:5-6
    - (2) in light of Christ, 3:7-16
  - c. Paul's grief for them, 3:17-21
- 6. Paul repeats his admonitions
  - a. unity, 4:1-3
  - b. Christlike characteristics, 4:4-9
- 7. Paul repeats his gratitude for the Philippians' help
  - a. their recent gift, 4:10-14
  - b. their previous gift, 4:15-20 (1:5)
- 8. a typical Pauline closing, 4:21-23

## RECOMMENDED COMMENTARIES

Frank Thielman — Philippians (NIV Application Commentary, 1995).

- Preachers and teachers will find the NIVAC commentary by Thielman to be particularly useful in the preparation of sermons and lessons. Thielman gives equal attention to the original context and to contemporary application. Very helpful.

Gordon Fee – Philippians NICNT (Eerdmans, 1995)

- <https://www.amazon.com/Letter-Philippians-International-Commentary-Testament/dp/0802825117>

J. Alec Motyer — The Message of Philippians (The Bible Speaks Today, 1984).

- This is one of the more useful introductory level commentaries on Paul's epistle to the Philippians.

Ralph Martin – NIBC (Hendrickson Publishers, 1995)

- [https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Philippians.html?id=ppspNgAACAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Philippians.html?id=ppspNgAACAAJ&redir_esc=y)

## SERMON SERIES SCHEDULE

Date	Readings	Topic	Preacher
04/Sep/16	Phil 1:1-11	Life Lived Well - Philippians #1 a loving heart	Steve W
11/Sep/16	Phil 1:12-30	Life Lived Well - Philippians #2 priorities & purpose	Chris A
18/Sep/16	Phil 2:1-11	Life Lived Well - Philippians #3 overhauling attitudes	Hannah C
25/Sep/16	Phil 2:12-18	Life Lived Well - Philippians #4 who's responsible?	Dianne S
02/Oct/16	Phil 2:19-30	Life Lived Well - Philippians #5 forging friendship	Melanie L
09/Oct/16	Phil 3:1-11	Life Lived Well - Philippians #6 true confidence	Chris W
16/Oct/16	t.b.a.	Reconciliation	Helen Dwyer
23/Oct/16	Phil 3:10-21	Life Lived Well - Philippians #7 be ambitious	Steve W
30/Oct/16	Phil 4:1-9	Life Lived Well - Philippians #8 your resource map	Steve W
06/Nov/16	Phil 4:10-23	Life Lived Well - Philippians #9 generosity & joy	Chris Appleby