

# The Epistle to the Philippians

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# The Epistle to the Philippians

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction – January 15, 2012</b> .....	<b>3</b>
By Bryan Gibson .....	3
I. Author.....	3
II. Location.....	3
III. Place of Writing and Date.....	4
IV. Occasion and Purpose of Letter .....	5
V. Theme .....	5
VI. Tone .....	5
By L.A. Mott.....	6
The Epistle to the Philippians Chart .....	7
Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22) .....	8
Introduction Questions: .....	9
<b>Lesson 1- January 22, 2012</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Salutation, (1:1-2).....	10
Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians, (1:3-11).....	10
Paul's Prospects, (1:12-30) .....	11
Exhortation to Unity, (2:1-11) .....	12
<b>Lesson 2 - January 29, 2012</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Exhortation to Obedience, (2:12-18) .....	13
Timothy and Epaphroditus, (2:19-30).....	13
The Excellence of Christ, (3:1-16).....	14
<b>Lesson 3 – February 5, 2012</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Heavenly Citizenship, (3:17-21) .....	16
Exhortation to Firmness, (4:1).....	16
Exhortations to Some Individuals, (4:2-3) .....	16
Prohibition of Anxiety, (4:4-7).....	17
Things Excellent and Praiseworthy, (4:8-9).....	17
The Secret Paul Learned, (4:10-20).....	17
Closing Salutations and Benediction, (4:21-23) .....	17

# The Epistle to the Philippians

## Introduction – January 15, 2012

### By Bryan Gibson

#### I. Author

Paul was the author of this epistle. He names his colaborer Timothy in the salutation of 1:1 because Timothy was evidently in Paul's vicinity when he wrote the letter.

#### II. Location

##### A. The city of Philippi

The opening verse of Philippians identifies its location as a congregation of the city of Philippi. Let's first take a look at the city itself.

##### 1. Geography

- a) Philippi was a city of the province of Macedonia.
- b) The city is just inland (about ten miles) from the coastal town of Neapolis. (See Acts 16:11-12)
- c) Philippi is located on a major overland route of Macedonia called the Egnatian way. When Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi from Rome (2:25), the trip was probably via the Appian Way through Italy, followed by an eighty-mile boat trip across the Sea of Adria, then the land journey on the Egnatian Way.

##### 2. Name

In 350 B.C. the city was named Philippi, after Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. Its former name was "Krenides" (Little Fountains).

##### 3. Political Status

The city became a Roman colony in 42 B.C. Some commentators have called it a "miniature Rome", because it was modeled after the capital city. It was exempt from taxation. Luke recognized its importance by calling Philippi "the chief city of that part of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12).

##### 4. Population

Estimates range from 200,000 to 500,000 residents, as of Paul's time. Most of these were Greeks, with a smaller contingent of Jews and Romans. Read Acts 16:13 and observe where Paul held his first public meeting. May this suggest that there was no synagogue in the city?

One writer has described the typical citizen of Philippi in this manner: "The Macedonians, like the old Romans, were manly, straight-forward and affectionate.

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

They were not skeptical like the Philosophers of Athens, nor voluptuous like the Greeks of Corinth. (Quoted in J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book, 6:181.)

### **5. Economy**

Philippi was a relatively wealthy city, known for its gold mines and exceptionally fertile soil. A reputable school of medicine was located there. This may be why some hold the view that Philippi was Dr. Luke's hometown.

## **B. The church at Philippi**

When Paul wrote the Philippians, the congregation at Philippi was about ten years old. Let's look at some facts about this congregation.

### **1. Origins**

The first converts were Lydia, a dealer in purple, and the town's jailer. Read Acts 16:13-15 and 16:23-34 for the account of these conversions. Observe among other things that the other members of the two families were also saved at this time. Luke identifies Lydia as one who "worshipped God", which indicated that she was a proselyte to the Jewish religion when Paul first met her. The first meeting place of the new Christians at Philippi was probably the home of Lydia (cf. Acts 16:15,40).

### **2. First Church of Europe**

Philippi is commonly referred to as "the birthplace of European Christianity", since the first converts of missionary work in Europe were gained here. The occasion was Paul's second missionary journey of A.D. 49-52, as recorded in Acts 15:36-18:22. The year of Paul's first contact at Philippi was around A.D. 50.

### **3. Membership and Organization**

Most of the congregation were Greeks, though the fellowship included some converted Jews. By the time Paul wrote the epistle, the church was properly organized with bishops (elders) and deacons (Phil. 1:1).

### **4. Early Days**

When Paul left the new Philippian converts after his first ministry in Philippi, his companion Luke remained behind, and no doubt helped to instruct and encourage the new Christians. (Read Acts 16:10-13; 16:40; 17:1-4; 20:5-6.)

## **III. Place of Writing and Date**

Paul wrote Philippians from his prison quarters at Rome around A.D. 61-62. Philippians seems to have been the last written of the four prison epistles. Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were all delivered on the same trip by Tychicus.

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

### **IV. Occasion and Purpose of Letter**

The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians was in large part a response to a gift sent to the apostle by the Philippian church. The gift was brought by the hand of Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus had decided to stay with Paul to serve and comfort him during the days of his imprisonment. However, Epaphroditus had been taken seriously ill. For a time Paul despaired of his life. Word of his illness had reached the Philippians and they were worried about him too. On his recovery Epaphroditus, as well as Paul, desired to relieve the friends in Philippi of their fears. Therefore, Paul sent Epaphroditus back home and took the opportunity of dispatching with him this letter. It was intended to express to the Philippians his thanks for their gift. Paul naturally gave his friends information as to his own situation and experiences, and offered them such advice as seemed necessary in view of the report brought by Epaphroditus as to the condition of the church (2:1-11; 4:2; 3:2ff; 3:18-19). The main purpose of the letter, however, was to convey to the Philippians the grateful recognition of their gift, while the immediate occasion was the return of Epaphroditus to Philippi.

### **V. Theme**

The Philippian letter is a revelation of the Christian mind. Notice the occurrence of the word mind or forms of that word (1:7, 2:2, 2:3, 2:5, 3:15, 3:16, 3:19, 4:2). The mind of Christ is described to give us a model for what our mental attitude should be. There are many other passages, aside from 2:5-11, that also tell us what our mental attitude should be. ( see 1:9-11, 2:1-4; 3:15 ) Joy in Christ is also a major theme of this book. Paul speaks of his joy in Christ and the reasons for it; and he also instructs these brethren over and over again to rejoice in the Lord. (The word "rejoice" and "joy" appear seventeen times in the epistle.) In fact, this epistle has been called "The Epistle of Joy".

### **VI. Tone**

Philippians has been called Paul's love letter to the saints at Philippi because of its informal, personal style reveals so much of the apostle's character. The epistle contains less censure and more praise than does any other epistle.

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

**By L.A. Mott**

Read the sixteenth chapter of Acts for background. The church at Philippi had been planted by Paul on his second journey. The epistle to the Philippians was written by Paul as a prisoner (1:7, 12-30), most likely in Rome (judging from the references to the praetorian guard in 1:13 and Caesar's household in 4:22).

A close and special relationship had been maintained between Paul and the Philippian disciples all through the intervening years. He speaks of their "fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now" (1:5). They had been partners in Paul's afflictions, sending to his need more than once from the time he left Philippi (4:15-16), and lately had sent to him in Rome by means of Epaphroditus, their messenger (2:25-30; 4:10-20).

Epaphroditus had become seriously ill, "nigh unto death," while ministering to Paul in his confinement, but "God had mercy on him" and he had recovered, so that Paul was able to send him back to the Philippians both to relieve their minds about Epaphroditus and also as the bearer of news about the latest developments in his own case. Paul planned to send Timothy to Philippi "so soon as I shall see how it will go with me" and hoped to follow that with a trip of his own to Philippi after his release (2:19-30). The entire epistle glows with the tender feeling and concern of the apostle for the Philippian disciples.

The epistle also brims with joy. The word joy and its cognates appears sixteen times (1:4, 18 twice, 25; 2:2, 17 twice, 18 twice, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4 twice, 10). R. C. H. Lenski has done a good job of expressing this note of joy:

Joy is the music that runs through this epistle, the sunshine that spreads over all of it. The whole epistle radiates joy and happiness. ...Philippians shows us a prisoner whose appeal to the emperor is finally in process of being heard, and this prisoner ringing all the joy bells in the cathedral!

Perhaps our most important challenge will be to understand the sources of such unconquerable joy, that we may have it too.



## The Epistle to the Philippians



### Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)

c. a.d. 49–51

Paul and Silas revisited the places in Asia Minor where Paul had preached on his first journey, while Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus. Paul and Silas visited Derbe, Lystra, and Antioch in Pisidia. From there Paul and Silas traveled to Troas, where Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia calling to them. Crossing into Europe, they passed through several towns along the Egnatian Way and traveled to the cities of Athens and Corinth in southern Greece. Then, sailing to Ephesus and Caesarea, they visited the church in Jerusalem before returning to Antioch of Syria.

## The Epistle to the Philippians

### Introduction Questions:

1. Locate Philippi on the map.  
What province is it in?  
Philippi is \_\_\_\_\_ miles inland from \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What was Philippi's political status?
3. What was the population of Philippi?
4. Philippi had a reputable school of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Name the first two converts of Philippi.
6. Philippi is commonly referred to as \_\_\_\_\_?
7. Who was left in Philippi to instruct and encourage the early church?
8. When and from where was Philippians written?
9. What was the purpose of the letter?
10. What are the two major themes of Philippians?

## The Epistle to the Philippians

### Lesson 1- January 22, 2012

#### Salutation, (1:1-2)

1. Who joins Paul in writing this letter?

What phrase is used to describe Paul and Timothy?

2. How much may be learned about the organization of the local church from this salutation?

#### Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians, (1:3-11)

3. Identify some of the phrases that indicate how Paul feels about the Philippian brethren.

vs. 3

vs. 4

vs. 6

vs. 7

vs. 8

4. Explain verse 5. (see also 4:10)

5. "...inasmuch as both in my \_\_\_\_\_ and in the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_, you are \_\_\_\_\_ with me of \_\_\_\_\_.

6. How does Paul describe his longing for the Philippian brethren?

7. What was Paul's prayer for the Philippian brethren?

8. "...abound still \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ and all \_\_\_\_\_ . What, if attained, will this enable them to do?

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

### **Paul's Prospects, (1:12-30)**

9. T F Paul's imprisonment had greatly hindered the spread of the gospel.

What two results are mentioned?

a) vs. 13

b) vs. 14

10. According to verses 15-17, what were the motives of some who were preaching?

What was Paul's attitude toward this preaching?

11. What was Paul's earnest expectation and hope?

12. Explain verse 21,

13. Paul was having a hard time deciding between two things. What are they? ( vs. 22-24)

14. Do you think Paul expected to be released from Prison? (vs. 25,26)

15. What was granted to them on behalf of Christ?

16. What instances of conflict does Paul refer to in verse 30?

## The Epistle to the Philippians

### Exhortation to Unity, (2:1-11)

17. What the Philippians had already experienced in Christ (vs.1) provides a strong basis for Paul's appeal for unity. List these things the Philippians had already experienced in Christ.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

18. Describe this unity Paul desires. (vs. 2)

19. What attitudes might be detrimental to unity? (vs. 3)

20. What is the solution that Paul offers for maintaining unity?

21. What is the purpose of Paul's reference to the example of Jesus? (vs. 5-11)

What did Christ take the "form of" after making "...Himself of no reputation"?  
What significance does this have in our lives?

\_\_\_\_\_ God has \_\_\_\_\_ Him.  
Why did this occur?

22. What should every tongue confess?

What is the reason for this?

What would this confession result in?

## The Epistle to the Philippians

### Lesson 2 - January 29, 2012

#### Exhortation to Obedience, (2:12-18)

1. How may we "work out" our own salvation? (Note the appeal in vs. 5-11.)

Why with fear and trembling?

2. "... for it is \_\_\_\_\_ who \_\_\_\_\_ both to \_\_\_\_\_ and to \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_. ( see 1 Thess. 2:13, Eph. 3:14-19 )

3. What attitudes must one avoid if one is to be a good worker for God?

4. T F The world around us is so sinful that it is impossible for us to live as God would have us to.

5. How could the Philippians cause Paul to have "run in vain" or "labored in vain"?

6. How could Paul be "poured out as a drink offering"?

Would he be depressed about this?

#### Timothy and Epaphroditus, (2:19-30)

7. But I \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ to send \_\_\_\_\_ to you \_\_\_\_\_.

Why would he do this? (vs.19)

When would he do this? (vs. 23)

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

8. What qualities did Timothy possess that fitted him for this mission?

9. Describe Epaphroditus.

What was he doing in Rome with Paul? (see also 4:18)

10. Why did Paul send Epaphroditus to Philippi?

Why should such men be held in esteem?

11. Remember Paul's situation at this time. Do you think it was a sacrifice for him to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi?

## **The Excellence of Christ, (3:1-16)**

12. T F Paul knew that the Philippians did not need to hear the same thing over and over.

13. Of what were they to beware?

To whom does he refer?

14. Who are the real circumcision? (vs. 3)

15. Was Paul what you might call an "average Jew"? Explain. (vs. 4-6)

16. How did Paul regard all the things he formerly had as a Jew? (vs. 7-8)

17. List the goals of Paul found in verses 8-11.

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

18. Read verse 12 carefully. What was Paul's attitude toward the future?

Did he think he had done enough for the Lord?

19. What does Paul mean in verse 13 when he says, "forgetting those things which are behind?"

20. For what does Paul press toward?

What does this mean?

21. What exhortation is given in verses 15-16 with regard to the Christian life?

a) let us....

b) let us....

c) let us....

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

### **Lesson 3 – February 5, 2012**

#### **Heavenly Citizenship, (3:17-21)**

1. To whom should Christians look for a life pattern? (vs. 17)
2. Others, described as "enemies of the cross of Christ", walk in a quite different manner. What are their characteristics? (vs. 18,19)
3. What is meant by "our citizenship is in heaven"?

(Think what this might mean to a city that was a Roman colony.)

What are the implications with regard to the Christian life?

4. According to verse 21, what will happen when Christ comes again?

#### **Exhortation to Firmness, (4:1)**

5. What does verse 1 suggest about the relationship between Paul and these brethren?
6. What does it mean to "stand fast in the Lord"?

#### **Exhortations to Some Individuals, (4:2-3)**

7. What does Paul implore Euodia and Syntyche to be?

He urges someone else (true companion) to help them. What reasons does he give for this?

## **The Epistle to the Philippians**

### **Prohibition of Anxiety, (4:4-7)**

8. How often should we rejoice in the Lord?
9. What is the solution for anxiety or worry?

### **Things Excellent and Praiseworthy, (4:8-9)**

10. What is recommended as to the proper use for the mind?
11. These \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ will be \_\_\_\_\_.

### **The Secret Paul Learned, (4:10-20)**

12. In verse 10, Paul rejoices that the Philippians are again supporting him. Is he happy only because his need had been provided for? (see also vs. 17-19)
13. What important secret had Paul learned? (vs. 11-13)
14. What had been the relationship of the Philippian church to Paul since he had left them? (vs. 14-16)
15. What had Paul received from Epaphroditus?
16. What assurance does Paul give the Philippians? (vs. 19)

### **Closing Salutations and Benediction, (4:21-23)**

17. What indication is given of how much influence Christianity had at this time?