

Investigating the Word of God

Philippians



The Roman Forum at Philippi

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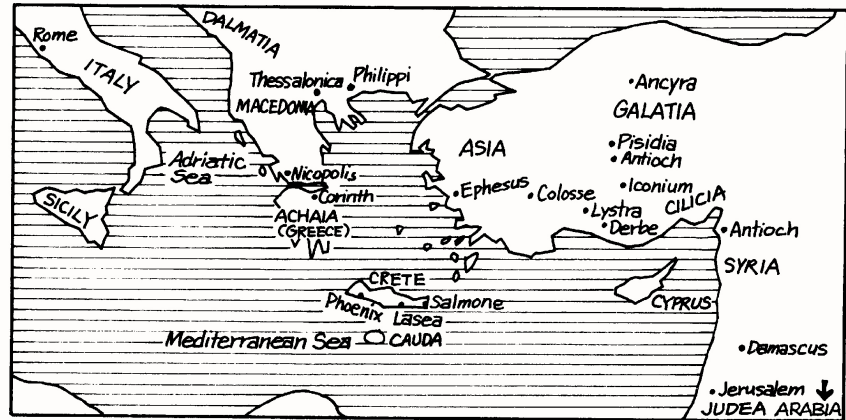
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An Introduction to Philippians

The City of Philippi

Philippi was located on a fertile plain about nine miles from the Aegean Sea, northwest of the island of Thasos. The city of Neapolis served as its seaport.

Philippi was in the midst of a very fertile territory. Originally it was a Phoenician mining town because it was close to the gold mine located in the mountains and on Thasos.



In 358 B.C., Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, from whom the city received its name, took the city from the empire of Thrace to whom it originally belonged. The Romans won it in battle from the Greeks. As a Roman colony, it grew in prominence because it was on the Via Egnatia, the main road from Rome to the province of Asia. Its inhabitants were Roman citizens who not only had the right to vote but also to govern themselves. In New Testament times it was regarded as “the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony” (Acts 16:12), even though the city of Thessalonica was actually the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. The status of being a Roman colony was a distinction in which its citizens took a great deal of pride which might explain their complaint against the apostle Paul for seeking to introduce customs and practices contrary to those of the Romans (Acts 16:21-26).

Evidently it did not have a large Jewish population. This is seen in the fact that there was not a synagogue there. Some scholars have suggested a strong anti-Semitic (A hatred of the Jews - GT) attitude existed there because large numbers of Jews were normally found in other Greek cities—Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth.

The Church in Philippi

The church at Philippi was established by the apostle Paul on his second preaching journey about 52 A.D. He had set out from Antioch of Syria and had traveled by land to revisit the churches he had established on his first journey. Timothy joined him at Lystra. Having gone through “Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days” (Acts 16:6-12).

God had guided Paul to Philippi. God had prevented him from speaking the word in Asia, Mysia, and Bithynia. He had given him the vision at Troas. A ship was immediately available. A favorable wind speeded them on their way. Sailing from Troas, they crossed the Aegean Sea to Neapolis, Philippi's seaport, in two days, a journey that would ordinarily have taken five days.

Since there was no synagogue in the city, on the Sabbath Paul found a group of women meeting for prayer by the side of the river. There he preached the first gospel sermon on the European continent (Acts 16:13). In response to that sermon, Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, along with her household, believed and was baptized (Acts 16:12-15). Her home became the base of Paul's operations in the city (Acts 16:15). It also seems the young church met in her home (Acts 16:40).

Having cast a demon that enabled her to tell fortunes out of a slave girl, her masters brought Paul and his preaching companion Silas before the city's rulers and falsely accused them (Acts 16:20-21). They were beaten and cast into prison (Acts 16:22-23). At midnight, with their feet securely fastened in stocks, Paul and Silas were singing hymns (Acts 16:25). An earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, opened the doors and loosed the chains from the walls (Acts 16:26). The jailor, fearful that his prisoners had escaped, was about to commit suicide when Paul stopped him and told him that none of the prisoners had escaped (Acts 16:27-28). The jailor and his household were taught and baptized by Paul (Acts 16:29-34). Paul and Silas were released from prison the next day (Acts 16:36). Before they were released, Paul tells that both he and Silas had Roman citizenship and should not have been beaten (Acts 16:37). The magistrates became afraid and came and pleaded with Paul and Silas and asked them to leave the city (Acts 16:38-39). They go to Lydia's house, encourage the brethren there, and then depart the city (Acts 16:40).

When Paul left Philippi, Luke, who had joined him in Troas (Acts 16:8, 11, 40), remained there to further aid in building up the church. Silas later visited Philippi (Acts 18:5). Paul also later revisited the city on at least two occasions (2 Corinthians 2:13; Acts 20:6).

Perhaps no other local church enjoyed such an intimate relationship to the apostle Paul as did the church in Philippi. By their support of his work, they had made for themselves a special place in his heart. He loved them (1:8) and would never forget their many acts of gracious kindness on his behalf (4:1).

The church at Philippi seemed to have very few problems and very little trouble. It seemed to be filled with goodness and love. It held a keen interest in Paul. Paul had no special admonitions to this church as a whole because, apparently, there were no real difficulties in it. William S. Deal said of it, "This church continued to flourish on into the second century A.D." (*Baker's Pictorial Introduction to the Bible*, 358).

Author, Date, Place of Writing and Messenger

The writer clearly identifies himself as "Paul" (1:1). Philippians was written during the very last part of Paul's imprisonment at Rome probably during the latter part of A.D. 61. The references to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) fit with Paul's Roman imprisonment.

The messenger of the epistle was Epaphroditus. The church at Philippi had sent him to bring aid to Paul while he was imprisoned at Rome. While he was there he became sick and almost died

(2:26-27). Paul attributed his recovery to the mercy of God (2:27). Upon his recovery, Epaphroditus longed to return home so Paul, being sympathetic and knowing of the concern of the Philippians for him sent him back to Philippi along with this letter (2:25).

Why This Book Was Written

The primary purpose of this letter appears to be to express the sincere gratitude that Paul had for the constant support that the Philippian church had given him in preaching the gospel “from the first day until now” (1:3-5; 4:15) and for the gifts sent to him even while he was imprisoned at Rome (4:10).

He also wanted to reassure them and lessen their concern for him by sharing with them his state of mind (2:17-24); recommend that two ladies in the church, Euodia and Syntyche, be fully reconciled to each other (4:2); warn against those who would tempt them to return to Judaism (3:2-4); and plea for unity of purpose and work within the church by all its members (3:15-17).

The Themes of the Book

There are five major themes to be found in the book of Philippians.

1. **Fellowship in evangelism.** The Philippian church, from the beginning of its existence, had been partners—had fellowship—with the apostle Paul by contributing to his needs wherever he went (1:3-5; 2:25; 4:14-18). This provides an “Apostolic example” of how a New Testament church supported a preacher in his labors of proclaiming the gospel. They cooperated with other churches in supporting Paul at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:7-9). The pattern for church support of a gospel preacher is clear. Each church raised its own funds by the contributions of its own members, chose the preacher whom it would support, and sent its contribution directly to the preacher. There was no “sponsoring church” arrangement but rather a direct relationship between the supporting church and the preacher supported. From 2 Corinthians 11 it is seen that the church at Philippi did not send their support to the church at Corinth but directly to Paul. It is no wonder Paul was so thankful for them seeing that they had been so faithful through all the years in helping him spread the gospel.

2. **Joy as a Christian.** Someone has said that the sum of the whole book of Philippians is “I rejoice—you rejoice.” The words “joy” and “rejoice” are the most common words in the epistle. Joy, Greek *chara*, is found five times (1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1). Rejoice occurs eleven times (twice in 1:18; 2:17, 18; 4:4; and once in 2:28; 3:1; and 4:10). This joy, on Paul’s part, was the result of his peace and contentment (4:10-13). A key verse in this book is 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice.”

3. **Self-sacrifice.** There is the example of Jesus (2:5-6); Paul’s own example (3:3-7); and his commendation of Timothy (2:19-20). The Philippians were people who were willing to sacrifice. Paul used them as an example to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:7-8) and their great sacrifice (2 Cor. 8:1-3).

4. **Strong exhortations expressed in love.** There is the exhortation to unity, particularly as to a personal disturbance between Euodia and Syntyche whom he exhorts to be “of the same mind in the Lord” (4:2). There is an exhortation to maturity as a Christian through diligence, constancy in

their work, and faithful obedience (2:12-18). There is an exhortation to keep their confidence in the Lord, their minds pure, and to continue to follow that which they had “learned and received and heard and saw” in him (4:4-9).

5. **The four-fold Christ.** In this book, Christ is said to be our life (ch. 1; key verse: 21); our mind (ch. 2; key verse: 5); our goal (ch. 3; key verse: 14); and our strength (ch. 4; key verse: 13).

Philippians Chapter One

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 21

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Key People

Paul

Timothy

Key Places

Philippi

Key Words

Saints

Fellowship

Knowledge

Partakers

Discernment

Offense

Conduct

Adversaries

Perdition

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. To whom is the book addressed? By whom is it written?
2. What had the Philippians had with the apostle Paul “from the first day?”
3. Of what were the Philippians partakers with Paul?
4. In his prayers for them, in what did Paul request that their love abound?
5. What did the apostle Paul want the Philippians to approve?
6. How were some preaching Christ?
7. Of what was the conduct of the Philippians to be worthy?
8. In what were the Philippians to stand fast?
9. By whom were the Philippians not to be terrified?
10. What had God granted unto the Philippians?

Matching

- | | |
|--|---|
| _____ 1. Paul and Timothy | A. Knew Paul’s chains were because of his faith in Christ. |
| _____ 2. He who had begun a good work in you | B. By Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. |
| _____ 3. The fruits of righteousness | C. Will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. |
| _____ 4. The palace guard | D. Became bold to speak the word without fear because of Paul’s chains. |
| _____ 5. Most of the brethren | E. Bondservants of Jesus Christ. |

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | 1. Your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment. |
| T | F | 2. The things that happened to Paul turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. |
| T | F | 3. For to me, to live is gain, and to die is Christ. |
| T | F | 4. To depart and be with Christ is far worse. |
| T | F | 5. Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. |

Discussion Question

What does it mean to “approve the things that are excellent?”

Philippians Chapter Two

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 3

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

Key People

Epaphroditus

Key Words

Consolation

Self-ambition

Conceit

Esteem

Perverse

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. How could the Philippians fulfill Paul’s joy?
2. What attitude should a person have toward others? (Verse 3)
3. For whose interests should one look out?
4. What mind is the Christian to have?
5. At what should every knee bow?
6. According to verse 12, what is one to “work out?”
7. Without what are all things to be done?
8. To what were the Philippians told to hold fast?
9. Who was Paul going to send the Philippians shortly?
10. Why did Paul send Epaphroditus to Philippi?

Matching

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| ___ 1. Christ Jesus | A. None like-minded. |
| ___ 2. Every tongue | B. Being poured out as a drink offering. |
| ___ 3. Paul | C. Made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant. |
| ___ 4. Timothy | D. For the work of Christ he came close to death. |
| ___ 5. Epaphroditus | E. Should confess Jesus Christ as Lord. |

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | 1. Let all be done through selfish ambition and conceit. |
| T | F | 2. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. |
| T | F | 3. Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death. |
| T | F | 4. Work out your own salvation without fear and trembling. |
| T | F | 5. All seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. |

Discussion Question

How is Christ “highly exalted” and how is His name “above every name?”

Philippians Chapter Three

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 20

“For our citizenship is in heaven from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Key Words

Tedious

Mutilation

Confidence

Resurrection

Apprehended

Transform

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. In what were the Philippians to have no confidence?
2. What did Paul now consider the things that formerly had been “gain” to him?
3. According to verse eight, what did Paul suffer the loss of for Christ Jesus?
4. What comes through faith in Christ? (verse 9)
5. What, according to verse 14, was Paul pressing toward?
6. By what are we to “walk?” (verse 16)
7. What is the “end” of those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ?”
8. Where is the citizenship of the Christian?
9. For what does the Christian “eagerly wait?”
10. When He comes again, what will Jesus transform on the Christian?

Matching

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| _____ 1. The circumcision | A. A Hebrew of the Hebrews. |
| _____ 2. Paul | B. Worship God in the Spirit. |
| _____ 3. As many as are mature | C. Join in following Paul’s example. |
| _____ 4. Brethren | D. Have the same mind as Paul. |
| _____ 5. Enemies of the cause of Christ | E. Set their mind on earthly things. |

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. For Paul to write the same things was tedious. |
| T | F | 2. Paul was circumcised the seventh day. |
| T | F | 3. Paul’s righteousness was from the law. |
| T | F | 4. Paul pressed toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. |
| T | F | 5. Christians are to walk by the same rule and have the same mind. |

Discussion Question

How were the Philippians to follow the example of the apostle Paul? (v. 17)

Philippians Chapter Four

Keys to This Chapter

Key Passage: Verse 4

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”

Key People

Euodia

Syntyche

Clement

Key Places

Macedonia

Thessalonica

Key Words

Gentleness

Anxious

Supplication

Noble

Just

Pure

Lovely

Good report

Content

Abased

Abound

Key Lesson

Questions on the Text

1. Of what were Euodia and Syntyche to be?
2. What were the Philippians to always do?
3. What were the Philippians to make known to all men?
4. For what were the Philippians to be anxious?
5. What were the Philippians to make known to God by their prayers and supplications?
6. What would guard the Philippians' hearts?
7. Who strengthened Paul? What did this strength allow him to do?
8. What churches had shared with Paul in his support from the beginning when he departed from Macedonia?
9. What, in verse 18, did Paul call the support he had received from the Philippians?
10. Who sent greetings to the Philippians?

Matching

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Euodia and Syntyche | A. Had learned both to be full and to be hungry. |
| _____ 2. Clement | B. The one in whom to always rejoice. |
| _____ 3. The Lord | C. Fellow worker with Paul. |
| _____ 4. Paul | D. Sent once and again for Paul's necessities. |
| _____ 5. Philippians | E. To be of the same mind in the Lord. |

True - False

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. Euodia and Syntyche had labored with Paul in the gospel. |
| T | F | 2. The Christian should always rejoice in himself. |
| T | F | 3. The Christian should be anxious for everything. |
| T | F | 4. Paul could do all things through Christ. |
| T | F | 5. The saints in Caesar's household sent greetings to the Philippians. |

Discussion Question

What did Paul mean when he said he knew “how to be abased” and “how to abound?”

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