

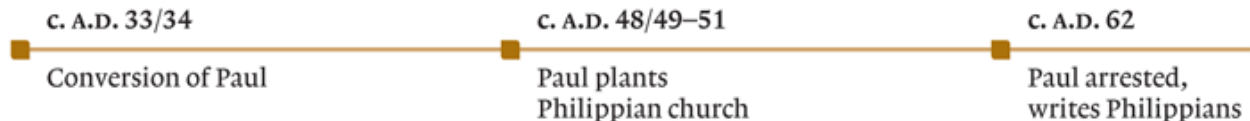


Introduction to Philippians

Introduction

Philippians 1:1-2; Acts 16:11-40

TIMELINE



AUTHOR, DATE, AND RECIPIENTS

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Philippi, probably from Rome c. A.D. 62.

THEME

Paul encourages the Philippians to live as citizens of a heavenly city, growing in their commitment to serve God and one another. Jesus is the supreme example of this way of life. Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus try to be good examples as well.

PURPOSE

Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison. He had several purposes in mind: (1) to tell them that Epaphroditus had recovered from a serious illness; (2) to encourage them in their faith; (3) to assure them that he was still in good spirits; and (4) to thank them for their continued support.

KEY THEMES

- I. Christians need to keep making spiritual progress (1:12, 25; 3:12–16).
- II. Such progress requires a proper spiritual outlook (1:5–11; 2:1–11; 3:7, 15; 4:7–9).
- III. Christ is the supreme example for the Christian. Mature Christians can also serve as role models (1:12–26; 2:5–11, 19–30; 3:3–17; 4:9).
- IV. Suffering will come, but Christians can still be joyful (1:12–26; 2:14–15; 4:4, 11–13, 19).
- V. Prayer is crucial for maintaining a joyful Christian life (1:3–11; 4:5–7).
- VI. Christians can enjoy rich relationships with one another; they can be united in service to promote the gospel (1:4, 7, 24–27; 2:1–4, 19–30; 4:2–4, 14).
- VII. Keeping the law cannot provide a right standing with God; believers are saved only through their faith in Jesus Christ (3:2–10).
- VIII. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Because of his suffering on the cross, he is now glorified as Lord and Christ (2:5–11).

OUTLINE

- I. Greeting and Prayer (1:1–11)
- II. Paul's Reflections on His Imprisonment (1:12–30)
- III. Encouragement to Humble Service (2:1–30)
- IV. Opponents of the Gospel: Where Does Righteousness Come From? (3:1–21)
- V. Concluding Encouragement and Thanksgiving (4:1–23)

THE SETTING OF PHILIPPIANS

A.D. 62

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians while in prison, probably in Rome. Philippi was the site of a key military victory by Augustus Caesar, and as a result it was made a Roman colony. Philippi was the first city in present-day Europe where Paul established a church.



Open it

1. What brings you the greatest joy in life? What things can steal your joy?

¹ www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-philippians/

Read it

Philippians 1:1-2; Acts 16:11-40

Explore it

2. What caused Paul to travel towards Philippi in the first place according to Acts 16:9-10?
3. How does Luke describe Philippi in Acts 16:12?
4. Who are the three early converts from the city of Philippi?
5. What trial does Paul and his companions face while in Phillippi and how does God address this trial?
6. Who is with Paul at the time of Paul's letter writing? To whom is the letter sent?

Apply it

Pipe Dream

After experiencing the famous vision of "a man of Macedonia" imploring him to bring help to Europe, Paul and his companions undoubtedly reflected on their journey thus far. They had been driven west by crosswinds of failure and rejection, and they interpreted this correctly as God's loving direction. God was leading them to Europe. Luke tells us in Acts 16:

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we remained in this city some days (Acts 16:11-12).

Philippi was an ancient town, having been renamed in 356 B.C. by Philip II of Macedon after himself. With the expansion of the Roman Empire, it became a Roman possession in 167 B.C. But its greatest fame came from the fact that it

happened to be the place where the armies of Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius in the decisive battle of the second Roman civil war in 42 B.C. It was from this event that Philippi derived its character in Paul's day because for its part in the battle it was awarded the status of a Roman colony that answered directly to the Roman emperor. Roman soldiers were encouraged to retire there, and its citizens were exempt from provincial taxes. Paul and company were now in for a complete cross-cultural missionary experience! Rome did not know it, but the flag of Christianity was unfurled in the Empire that day, and the reigning Christ was about to win many to himself.²

7. For centuries armies have sought to conquer Europe and, while some have, they have done so for limited amounts of time. How does knowing that Christianity has persevered for the last two centuries encourage us to share the gospel in our world?

GUYS AND DOLLS

The missionaries may have stayed a number of weeks. While probably several people were converted during this time (see v. 40), Luke only records three conversions— probably to display “how God breaks down dividing barriers and can unite in Christ people of very different kinds”.³ These encounters should encourage us as we behold Jesus’ power and grace in transforming people. They should also instruct us as we consider how three different types of people, in three different events that led to their conversions, were reached by the one and only Savior.

Consider this chart adapted from Tim Keller’s Church Planter Manual:⁴

<u>Converts</u>	<u>Ethnically</u>	<u>Economically</u>	<u>Spiritually</u>	<u>Event</u>
Lydia	Asian	Wealthy	God fearer	Public exposition
Slave girl	Greek	Poor	Demon possessed	Dramatic exorcism
Jailer	Roman	Blue-collar	Indifferent	Powerful miracle

8. What conclusions about the gospel can we derive from the chart above? How should the different conversions in Acts 16 impact our evangelistic efforts?

² Hughes, R. Kent. Acts: The Church Afire (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 3879-3903). Crossway. Kindle Edition

³ Stott, John. Message of Acts, 262

⁴ Merida, Tony. Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Locations 5015-5025). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition. (This also footnote includes the chart from Tim Keller)

9. Think through the people you come into contact with on a daily basis. Which of the three individuals from Phillipians are most similar to those you interact with?

What type of evangelism or interaction would best serve those around you and draw them closer to Christ and His gospel?

There is no boundary that the Gospel can't cross and no barrier it cannot break down. We must realize that we do not save people; Jesus saves people. Acts 16 shows us how three very different people come to know Christ.

10. Can we effectively minister to people that we don't entirely understand or empathize with? What challenges may occur when we do this?

My Fair Lady

Macedonian women were noted for their independence. Under Roman law a freeborn woman with three children or a freed-woman with four children had the right to own property and enter into legal transactions without the consent of a husband or father. Many Macedonian women became highly influential.

One such woman was Lydia, a God-fearing Gentile who heard Paul preach at the riverside prayer meeting. She conducted a successful business in purple cloth dyed with the secretions of a rare Mediterranean shellfish. So rare and costly was this dye only the wealthy could afford the cloth. Trading in this exquisite fabric had made Lydia wealthy. And she was head of her own household. The Lord opened Lydia's heart, and she believed in Jesus, becoming the first person on the European continent to turn to Christ. After she and her entire household were baptized she persuaded the team to stay at her home.⁵

11. Scholars seem to agree that Lydia was a very rich and influential member of Macedonian society. How can earthly wealth and prestige hinder the gospel's work in and among the upper class?

⁵ Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3526-3531). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition

We don't want to miss the fact that the initial audience in Philippi was female. As Furneaux notes, "The 'man of Macedonia' turned out to be a group of women." While Paul often takes a lot of flak for being something of a chauvinist, it is interesting that he, with Silas, Timothy and Luke, were quite comfortable evangelising women. Through the spread of the gospel, Christianity did more to abolish slavery and to liberate women than any other movement in history! The language used here—"we sat down and spoke to the women"—suggests that each of the four missionaries sat down by the river and shared the gospel with the women present.⁶

- 12. The missionary team (which consisted of all men) interacted and dialogued with the women gathered to pray on the riverside. What benefit comes from the dialogue of the two genders together about spiritual things?**

What can make such interactions challenging?

Lydia was a successful and wealthy religious woman ("worshiper of God") whose heart was opened to the Gospel when she heard Paul's message (v. 14). By today's standards, Lydia is a moral and kind person who may describe herself as a Christian, but she lacks real fruit to back her claims of knowing Christ.

- 13. How common is it for people today to fear God and yet not follow Christ and His word? What types of things keep these "God-fearing people" from fully and truly believing?**

⁶ Simon by Doug Van Meter, God's Great Work, found @ <https://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/gods-great-work>

Wicked

In this passage we have the account of a demon-possessed woman who was converted. This happened “as we went to prayer.” Presumably, this means that, as in v. 13, they were going to the place of prayer, possibly on the Sabbath. As they did so, they encountered “a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination.” The phrase “spirit of divination” literally means “a pythonic spirit.” Longnecker explains the significance of this term: The Python was a mythical serpent or dragon that guarded the temple and oracle of Apollo, located on the southern slope of Mount Parnassus to the north of the Gulf of Corinth. It was supposed to have lived at the foot of Mount Parnassus and to have eventually been killed by Apollo (cf. Strabo Geography 9.3.12). Later the word python came to mean a demon-possessed person through whom the Python spoke—even a ventriloquist was thought to have such a spirit living in his or her belly. Undoubtedly all who knew the girl regarded her as neither fraudulent nor insane but as demon possessed and able to foretell the future.

This young woman was not in some way mentally ill. She was not insane. She was demon possessed. And, like so many vulnerable women throughout history, she was abused by men who sought to profit through her evil behaviour. She was a tool and a toy of their depravity. As Erdman notes, “There are men today who are willing to acquire wealth by the degradation of womanhood, and who resent as impertinent intrusion every attempt to deliver their victims from the power of sin.”⁷

14. Why are people, not only then but also today, so infatuated with fortune tellers? What examples of this pursuit are seen today, and why are they unbecoming for a Christian to engage with?

15. Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned for ruining the business that these men had because of the young woman's demonic power. What businesses might be angry with our gospel endeavors today?

⁷ ibid

The Sound Of Music

Philippi's maximum-security cell was no Holiday Inn. It was colder than a witch's elbow and blacker than the ace of spades and smellier than road tar. The stocks were ingeniously designed to immobilize the feet and legs for maximum discomfort. This torture was often used on early Christians. Such were the accommodations enjoyed in the Philippian stockade. Backs bruised and torn, punished illegally for an act of mercy, these crazy Christian fanatics had no time for self-pity. Rejoicing was the order of the evening!

About midnight the stockade echoed with the sound of two Jewish-accented male voices singing hymns! As a kid in church, I remember an old fire-and-brimstone preacher saying, "Paul sang tenor, Silas sang baritone, and God joined in with a thundering bass that shook the prison so violently stocks fell off, locks shattered, doors flew open, and the prisoners' chains fell away!" All might have escaped, but none did. In the dungeon dark, the Lord Jesus touched people who could be reached no other way. "The [other] prisoners were listening" (Acts 16: 25 NKJV). Their chains broke too. They could have escaped but didn't. The jailer found Jesus. The other prisoners got a taste of the gospel.⁸

16. These men had very little to rejoice about from an earthly perspective and yet they sang their hearts out. What is it about our faith that allows us to rejoice amidst great suffering and trials?

This must have been quite a sight. The other prisoners had no doubt seen a lot of cellmates, but never quite like these two. They had no doubt witnessed a lot of cursing and protestations of innocence, but their two newest cellmates "were praying and singing hymns to God." And this was no private devotion, for "the prisoners were listening to them."⁹

17. In what ways can our response to trials and tribulations serve as a witness to those around us? When have you seen this firsthand?

⁸ Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3580-3586). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁹Sermon by Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/gods-great-work/>

Hello Dolly or (Philippians)

Finally, consider Paul's opening words to the Philippian church in the first two verses. This is a beautiful greeting because it sounds the theme of grace. All of these things that we've been talking about are works of God's grace—joy, unity, partnership, conversions, new churches, generosity, and such. By God's grace we become Christians, servants of Jesus, and it's by God's grace that we live out the Christian life. The phrases "of Christ," "in Christ," and "from God" all highlight God's work in uniting us to Jesus. Notice three evidences of grace in this little greeting.¹⁰

18. Given who Christ is, why is it a blessing, rather than a bondage, to be one of His "servants"? How can this viewpoint help to reorder our lives as Christians?

One of Paul's main themes in this letter stems from his imprisonment. Even though he was in very difficult circumstances, he tells believers to rejoice—something he was able to do. Many people can tell other people to have joy while they're having few problems, but it's the truly godly person who can do it while they're having their own very difficult challenges. Paul was one of those colony people. Let's see what we can learn from him.¹¹

19. We will be studying this letter under the series heading of Relentless Joy. What does it mean to be joyful? In what area of your life do you have a joy that is relentless no matter the circumstances of life?

¹⁰ Merida, Tony; Chan, Francis. Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 27). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 2670-2674). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.