



Philippians - Introduction

Author and Title

Paul is the stated author of Philippians and few have questioned his authorship. It was written to the Christians in the Roman colony of Philippi, one of the Macedonian churches.

Date

Scholars have debated Paul's location when he wrote Philippians. Cæsarea, Ephesus and Rome have been the three most commonly proposed locations. Paul was in fact imprisoned in the prætorium of Herod the Great in Cæsarea (Acts 23:35) until AD59. But his statements to the Philippians about his possible imminent death (1:20), would be puzzling if coming from Cæsarea, since he would have been able to request a trial in Rome, as in fact he did. It is generally accepted that he was released from this Roman imprisonment and conducted a further missionary journey before being arrested again, this time resulting in his execution in the mid-60's AD.

Ephesus was close enough to Philippi for Paul to receive regular news from there, but there is no mention of his ever being imprisoned in Ephesus. On balance, it seems most likely that the letter was written from Rome, circa AD62. This also fits most naturally with the mention of the prætorium and 'Cæsar's household' (1:13 and 4:22).

Theme

The chief theme of Philippians is encouragement. Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony, as evidenced by a growing commitment to service to God and to one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was manifested uniquely in Jesus Christ; it was also evident in the lives of Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Purpose

The church at Philippi had a special significance for Paul, since it was the first church he founded in Europe, as recorded in Acts 16:6-40. The first convert was Lydia, a seller of purple goods, and women continued to have a prominent role in the Philippian church (4:2). Paul and Silas were imprisoned there for exorcising a

demon from a fortune-telling slave girl, but God miraculously delivered them, and they proclaimed the Gospel to the Philippian jailer. Paul likely visited the Philippians a few times after his initial departure, and they maintained active support for his ministry (4:15-16).

As already noted, Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison, prompted in part by his reception of their latest gift, sent with Epaphroditus, himself a member of the Philippian congregation. But the letter is far more than an extended thank you note. Paul wanted to pass along the important news that Epaphroditus had recovered from a serious illness (2:25-30), and that he was sending him along to them with the hope that soon he might also send Timothy for a visit (2:19). Timothy and Epaphroditus were also mentioned because they exemplified the Christ-centred, Gospel-focused life Paul wanted the Philippians to live.

Paul himself also wanted to encourage the Philippians in their faith, and his imprisonment meant he could do that only through a letter. Even a house imprisonment, assuming Paul was in Rome (Acts 28:16), could have been a source of great anguish, particularly with the possibility of execution looming, and so Paul wanted to assure the church that he was still in good spirits through his faith in Christ (1:12-18). He was also eager to thank them for their continued support: imprisonment carried with it a social stigma, and it would have been easy for the Philippians to turn their back on Paul at this point. But they had remained faithful to him.

Yet Paul's purpose in writing goes even further. Above all, he is concerned that the Philippians continue to make progress in their faith (1:25). While there were no doubt conflicts within the congregation, notably that of Euodia and Syntyche (4:2), the Philippians appear to be a healthy congregation, in contrast to the troubled groups in Corinth and Galatia. Can they then relax and rest? Paul answers in an emphatic no. The world is too perilous, and the Gospel too glorious, for them to be content with past achievements (3:12-16). They must follow Paul's example and: **<<press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus>>** (3:14).

Paul explains what spiritual progress will look like. Christian maturity does not come through special mystical insights available to only a few, but rather through the patient practice of the familiar virtues of love and service to others. Paul presents himself as one model for such a lifestyle (1:12-18, 3:17 and 4:9), and he commends Timothy and Epaphroditus in similar terms (2:19-30). But the supreme model for progress in faith is Jesus himself, and the centrepiece of Philippians is the magnificent 'hymn of Christ' in 2:5-11. Jesus willingly let go of the privileges of divine glory to take up the form of a servant, and even embraced the ultimate humiliation of the Cross, in order to liberate the world from sin. He is thus accorded the highest glory, receiving universal worship as God's Messiah.

Those who follow Christ's example have the hope that God will also vindicate them on the day of Christ, and thus they can rejoice (1:18, 3:1 and 4:4). They can also be confident that God will not leave them alone to make their way through the world as best they can. Spiritual progress involves effort; they are encouraged to: **<<work out your own salvation with fear and trembling>>** (2:12b). But they can do so knowing that: **<<it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure>>** (2:13).

The Ancient City of Philippi

After their victory in the Battle of Philippi in 42BC, Antony and later Augustus refounded this Macedonian city with army veterans. Its special status as an Augustan colony exempted the city from significant forms of taxation and gave it additional privileges of land ownership. The city encompassed good agricultural land, and it was on the Egnatian Way, an important Roman commercial road, built in the mid-2nd Century BC.

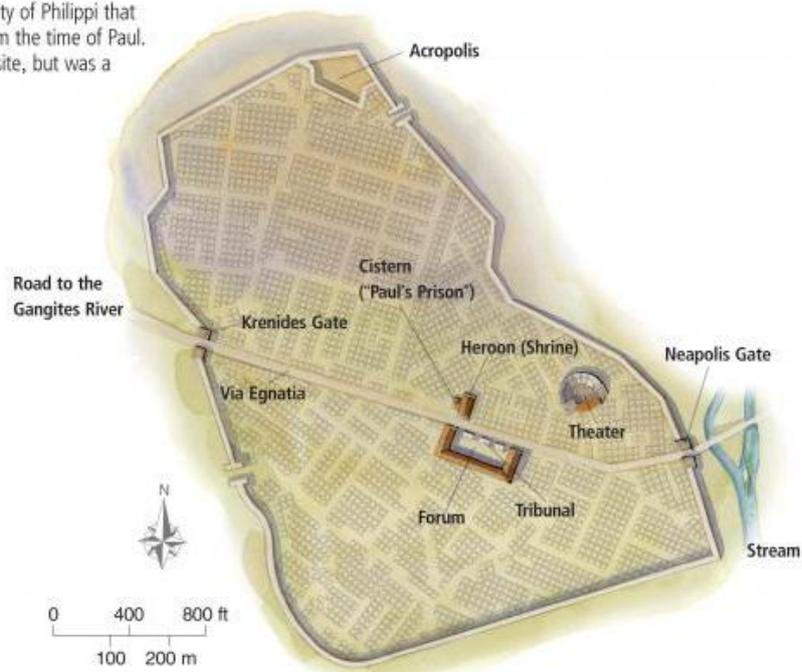
The Roman ethos of the colony is evident in Philippi's Latin civic inscriptions and in the worship of Roman gods. Extant archaeological remains from Paul's day testify to the presence of a theatre, a large forum beneath the later 2nd Century AD forum, shops and two city gates, designated Krenides to the west and Neapolis to the east. There is a speaker's platform, Greek *bēma*, in the existing 2nd Century forum between a pair of large fountains. One small stone crypt, built over a cistern near the forum, was designated in later church tradition as the prison site of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:23-34). Other structures dating from NT times and the early centuries of the church, e.g. a sports facility, pagan temples, octagonal and basilica style churches, can still be seen in Philippi.

Philippi in the Time of Paul (circa AD60)

The city plan shows those features of the city of Philippi that archaeologists have so far identified as dating from the time of Paul. 'Paul's Prison' is not believed to be an authentic site, but was a cistern later associated with Christian worship.

PHILIPPI IN THE TIME OF PAUL (C. A.D. 60)

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Key Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>References</u>
1 Christians need to keep making progress in their lives.	1:12; 1:25; 3:12-16.
2 A proper spiritual outlook is critical for progress in the faith.	1:5-11; 2:1-11; 3:7; 3:15; 4:7-9.
3 Christ is the supreme example of loving and faithful service to God; and mature Christians can also serve as role models in this regard.	1:12-26; 2:5-11; 2:19-30; 3:3-17; 4:9.
4 Suffering will come, but through faith it can be met with joy.	1:12-26; 2:14-15; 4:4; 4:11-13; 4:19.
5 Prayer is crucial for maintaining a joyful Christian life.	1:3-11; 4:5-7.
6 The Gospel is not individualistic. Christians are to share in rich fellowship with one another, and to be united together in service to promote the Gospel.	1:4; 1:7; 1:24-27; 2:1-4; 2:19-30; 4:2-4; 4:14.
7 The old covenant and observance of the law cannot provide the necessary right standing with God. Believers can be saved only through faith in Jesus Christ.	3:2-10.
8 Jesus is fully God and fully man. Because of his suffering on the Cross, he is now exalted as Lord and Christ.	2:5-11.

History of Salvation Summary

God works in the Philippians in accordance with the achievements of Christ, who has fulfilled the promises of the OT, which is confirmed in: <<***For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'*** ***For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God***>> (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Writing Style

Philippians follows many of the same conventions as the other Pauline epistles. The salutation, thanksgiving, prayer, body, paraenesis, i.e. a series of moral exhortations, greeting and benediction are all readily identifiable. Today Philippians would be called a missionary support letter. Paul is writing to people who help provide the prayer support and financial assistance necessary for his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.

To fulfil his end of the partnership, Paul assures the Philippians of his prayers, updates them on his personal circumstances, reports on the effectiveness of Gospel ministry in his area, offers spiritual encouragement, and expresses heartfelt gratitude for the many ways they support his ministry.

With its highly patterned lines of praise to Christ, Philippians 2:5-11 is usually identified as one of the earliest hymns or confessions of the Christian church. The

letter exhibits such stylistic techniques as aphorism, metaphor and lyric to heighten the impact of the writing.

Philippians is unified by its joyful, almost exuberant mood, the words for ‘joy’ or ‘rejoice’ occur more than a dozen times; by the strong personal relationship between its author and its recipients, a relationship that is almost constantly in view, from the beginning of the letter to the end; and by the many connections Paul draws between the saving work of Jesus Christ and the servant ministry of his followers, who are called to live and die according to the pattern of the sufferings, death, resurrection and glorious exaltation of Jesus himself.

The Setting of Philippians (circa AD62)

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians during a time of imprisonment, most probably in Rome. Located along the famous Egnatian Way, Philippi was the site of a key military victory by Augustus Cæsar, and as a result it was declared a Roman colony, ensuring its immunity from taxation and drawing many veterans to settle there. Philippi was the first city in present-day Europe where Paul established a church.



The Setting of Philippians

Outline

- I. Greeting and Prayer (1:1-11)
 - a. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - b. Paul's Prayer for the Philippians (1:3-11)
- II. Paul's Present Circumstances (1:12-30)
 - a. Paul's imprisonment has meant progress for the Gospel (1:12-18a)
 - b. To live is Christ (1:18b-26)
 - c. Encouragement to walk worthy of the Gospel (1:27-30)
- III. Exhortation to Humble Service (2:1-3:1a)
 - a. Imitating Christ's Humility (2:1-11)
 - i. Encouragement to unity in the faith and service to one another (2:1-4)
 - ii. Christ's example of humble service (2:5-11)
 - b. Shining as Lights in the World (2:12-18)
 - c. Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-3:1a)
 - i. Timothy as an example of a service-centred life (2:19-24)
 - ii. Epaphroditus as another example of service (2:25-3:1a)
- IV. Opponents of the Gospel: Where Does Righteousness Come From? (3:1b-4:1)
 - a. Breaking with the Past (3:1b-11)
 - i. Initial call to rejoice in the Lord (3:1b)
 - ii. Contrast between the opponents of the Gospel and the true people of God (3:2-4a)
 - iii. Paul's renunciation of spiritual and ethnic privileges for the sake of knowing Christ (3:4b-11)
 - b. Pressing towards the Goal (3:12-4:1)
 - i. Paul's progress in the Gospel: through Christ, not the law (3:12-16)
 - ii. A call to follow Paul's example of commitment to Jesus as Lord (3:17-4:1)
- V. Concluding Exhortations and Thanksgiving (4:2-23)
 - a. Exhortations (4:2-9)
 - i. Standing together for the Gospel (4:2-3)
 - ii. Rejoicing in faith (4:4-9)
 - b. Acknowledgment of the Philippians' Gift (4:10-20)
 - c. Final Greetings and Benediction (4:21-23)