

Introduction to Philippians

Author: There is little debate or disagreement in regard to Paul being the author of the Philippian letter. As with the other epistles, he introduces himself as the writer in the immediate greeting of the letter. *Clement of Rome, who lived in the first century, wrote a letter to the Corinthians and referred to Paul's letter to the Philippians. Polycarp, who lived in the second century, wrote the Philippians and mentioned Paul's letter. Ignatius, another early church leader, alluded to it. There are other references to Paul's authorship by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian—all early church writers.*ⁱ

Date: While it is impossible to know for certain, most agree the Philippian letter was written within the timeframe of 60-63 AD. It is accepted as one of the prison epistles, written while Paul was bound, captive in Rome. [Phil.1:13 – So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace](#) (praetorium or governor's courtroom), [and in all other places](#). [Phil.4:22 – All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household](#). His first trip to Philippi was around 51 AD, and many agree the letter was written around 11 years later. The other prison epistles include Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Background: Philippi was the gateway to Europe, being situated on the Egnatian Way, which linked Europe and Asia. Philippi was captured by King Philip of Macedonia (the father of Alexander the Great) in 356 BC. He renamed the city Philippi. When the Romans defeated the Grecians, Philippi became a Roman colony and important military outpost. [Acts 16:12 – And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days](#). Since Philippi was granted status as a Roman colony, the people enjoyed privileges associated with Roman citizenship and were loyally devoted to Rome. Such colonies were usually staunchly opposed to anything contrary to Roman culture and practice.

➤ Upon hearing the Macedonian call, the Holy Spirit led Paul to Philippi in order to establish a church in this vital region of the world on his second missionary journey. [Acts 16:9-12 – And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.](#) ^[10] [And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.](#) ^[11] [Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;](#) ^[12] [And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days](#). Philippi would serve as the strategic location to spread the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

➤ When Paul arrived in Philippi, he was met with opposition, but he remained faithful to the leadership of the Lord. He met an influential business woman named Lydia, with whom they shared the Gospel, leading to her salvation and those of her household, [Acts 16:13-15](#). Paul and the others soon met a young slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination. She had been very profitable to her masters, and followed Paul and his company many days. Being grieved with her persistent following, Paul commanded the spirit to come out of her, [Acts 16:16-18](#). The young woman's masters were displeased that their means of income was now gone, and brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates, accusing them of teaching customs that were contrary to Roman law. The city rose in an uproar, and Paul and Silas were cast into prison, [Acts 16:19-24](#). Rather than giving up, and abandoning their efforts, Paul and Silas began to sing and praise the Lord at midnight within the prison. The Lord moved in mighty power, shaking the prison's foundations, opening the doors and freeing the prisoners from their bands. This led to the salvation of the Philippian jailor, [Acts 16:25-34](#). Paul was then forced to leave Philippi, going into Thessalonica, but he left Luke with the newly converted believers. A church was born in Philippi.

Purpose: As we consider the purpose for the Philippian letter, we discover that Paul's desire was varied. The Philippians had been very gracious and supportive of Paul. They had provided for him financially on more than one occasion. He wanted to express his gratitude for their unflinching support for the ministry and the unwavering love they had shown. He communicated his gratitude to them within the letter and also revealed it in the second epistle to the Corinthians. [2 Cor.11:9 – And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.](#)

➤ He also extended a call for unity among the church. It appears there had been a dispute between two of the women within the church, and he desired them to maintain complete unity, [Philippians 4:2; 1:27; 2:2-4, 14](#).

➤ There also must have been some who were teaching false doctrine, and Paul wanted to address that before it had time to spread and contaminate the church, [Philippians 3:1-11](#).

➤ Finally Paul sought to defend and support Epaphroditus, a brother in the faith who had been sent from Philippi to Rome in order to attend unto Paul. During his stay, Epaphroditus became sick and his return was delayed. Paul wanted them to receive him without question, knowing he had been faithful unto Paul and hindered physically from returning, [Philippians 2:25-30](#). Epaphroditus had not abandoned the faith or neglected his responsibilities; he had labored faithfully alongside Paul.

Theme: Like the purpose for writing the letter, the theme of Philippians is also varied. Most agree the major theme of Philippians is our joy in Christ the Lord. Many consider this to be the epistle of joy. It cannot be overlooked or missed. Paul speaks of joy or rejoicing at least sixteen times in four chapters. Clearly the joy of the believer is a consistent theme.

➤ True to his nature of exalting Christ, Paul also emphasized our being “in Christ” or “in the Lord” throughout the Philippian letter. He sought to ensure the church understood and appreciated their position in Christ. *The whole thesis of Paul is that life is "in Christ" and that Christ is to be "in life."* ⁱⁱ

➤ Most scholars also agree that the Philippian letter is the most personal of Paul’s writings. It is evident that he loved the church at large, willing to do anything and everything he could for her benefit, but there seems to be a special place in the Apostle’s heart for Philippi. [Philippians 4:1 – Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.](#)

Key Verses: In reality, this becomes a matter of opinion and is often determined by which verses or passages particularly speak to the reader. Having looked at various sources for background information on the Philippian letter, these continue to appear:

[Philippians 4:4 – Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice.](#)

[Philippians 1:21 – For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.](#)

[Philippians 4:12 – I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.](#)

➤ No doubt [Philippians 4:13](#) is a favorite of many, often quoted and found on various products and media.

Christ in Philippians: One doesn’t have to search long to discover Christ in Philippians. Paul doesn’t give the Lord a passing mention, or seek to hide Him in an obscure thought. In fact, Christ is front and center within this epistle. I am convinced that [Philippians 2:5-11](#) is one of the greatest passages in all of Scripture, and it is focused on the Lord.

➤ We see Christ portrayed as Our Life in Chapter One. [Philippians 1:21 – For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.](#)

➤ He is revealed as Our Example in Chapter Two. [Philippians 2:5 – Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.](#)

- Paul reveals Christ as Our Eternal Hope in Chapter three. [Philippians 3:21](#) – Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.
- Christ is displayed as Our Strength in Chapter Four. [Philippians 4:12-13](#) – I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ^[13] I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

I trust the Lord will speak to our hearts, challenging our walk and strengthening our faith, as we move through this precious epistle. I am looking forward to discovering the great truth Paul left for the Philippian church and all who read these eternal words.

ⁱ Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

ⁱⁱ Ibid