

Shout
Joy!

An Introduction to
the Book of
Philippians



VINTAGE PRESS

Shout Joy! An Introduction to the Book of Philippians

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PURPOSE OF THE SERIES

Reflective praise inspires future perseverance. As Paul sat in chains in Rome, he wrote to the church in Philippi. Despite his imprisonment, Paul continued to SHOUT JOY! His reflective praise inspired future perseverance. Despite being imprisoned, Paul was reminded of God's faithfulness in the past. Being reminded of God's faithfulness in the past, Paul knew he could persevere through anything, including death. It was God's faithfulness that allowed Paul to remain joyful. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi in order to remind them of the joy that can only be found in Christ, regardless of our circumstances. Join Vintage Church as we journey through the book of Philippians and SHOUT JOY together!

AUTHOR

Few have challenged the belief that the Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians. In simply reading the text, it is clear that the author and sender of the letter identifies himself as "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1). Paul would have included Timothy in his introduction for two reasons. First, Timothy was with Paul when he wrote this letter. Secondly, the church at Philippi would have been familiar with Timothy because of his work in that region with Paul during their missionary journeys. Beyond the introduction, Paul is also very autobiographical in the book of Philippians. In Philippians 3:4–6, Paul describes himself in vivid detail:

though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to

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the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Here Paul makes his past abundantly clear. Early church fathers, Irenaeus (130?–202), Clement of Alexandria (150–215), and Tertullian (160–220), all considered Paul to be the author of Philippians. Also, around 135 CE, the church father, Polycarp, wrote to the Philippian church reminding them of Paul's letter to them.¹ In his letter Polycarp writes, "For neither I nor anyone like me can keep pace with the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul. When he was with you in the presence of the people of that time, he accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the truth. And when he was absent he wrote you letters . . ."² All of the evidence seems clearly to point to Paul as the author of the book of Philippians.

TITLE & GENRE

Typically, this letter is described as "The Letter of Paul to the Philippians," "The Epistle to the Philippians," or simply "Philippians." Though the title of this New Testament book clearly reveals its genre, other sources also confirm the classification of Philippians. The book of Philippians clearly follows a typical epistle or letter format found throughout the first century Greco-Roman world. The form of letters in the ancient world typically followed a set pattern: (1) name of the writer, (2) name of the recipient, (3) greeting, (4) prayer wish or thanksgiving, (5) body (for Paul this included instruction on doctrine and Christian living), and (6) final greeting and farewell.³ We see all of these elements in Philippians. The name of the writer comes in verse 1: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus." The name of the recipients comes at the end of verse 1: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and

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deacons." The greeting can be found in verse 2: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Following the greeting comes the prayer wish and thanksgiving in Philippians 1:3–11. The body of the letter consists of Philippians 1:12–4:20. Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians with a final greeting and farewell: "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brother who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Philippians 4:21–23).

In understanding Paul's letter to the Philippians, it is also important to understand that this is an occasional letter. "This means that they were occasioned, or called forth, by some specific circumstance, either from the reader's side or the author's side."⁴ Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians because he had a particular message he wanted to send the church at Philippi. This is important to remember when reading, interpreting, and applying the book of Philippians. However, before considering how Paul's letter applies to our own lives, we first have to know what exactly he wrote to the church at Philippi.

DATE & PLACE OF WRITING

Of all the issues related to the book of Philippians, the most confusing seem to be when and where Paul wrote the letter. Throughout the book, Paul does provide his readers with some evidence as to the answers to these questions. In the first chapter, Paul mentions two things that provide some evidence as to when and where he wrote this letter. In Philippians 1:12–13, he writes, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ." At the conclusion

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of his letter, Paul provides another clue. He writes, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household" (Philippians 4:22). From these verses, we can at least assume Paul is imprisoned. It also seems that he is imprisoned near Roman authorities. The "whole imperial guard" refers to the Roman Praetorium. While some debate existed as to what praetorium means, we can at least say it refers to a large encampment of soldiers, and could actually refer to the Roman emperor's bodyguard.⁵ Paul's mention of Caesar's household "refers not to the members of the Emperor's family or relations but to the great number of slaves and freedmen from who ranks the imperial civil service was staffed."⁶

The issue with this information is that we know Paul was imprisoned more than once. So, the location of Paul's imprisonment would determine the date when he wrote his letter to the Philippians. Here are the three possibilities for when and where Paul wrote this letter.

- **Rome, 60–62 CE**

Rome has traditionally been the accepted location where Paul authored his letter to the Philippians. "Reference to Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22), the praetorium or palace guard (1:13), as well as the ability to receive visitors (Acts 28:16, 30–31) like Epaphroditus and the possibility of execution (Philippians 1:20–26) seem to mesh well with the imprisonment described in the closing verses of Acts."⁷ However, some debate of this theory has arisen due to the massive distance between Philippi and Rome. The significant distance between the two locations seems to diminish the possibility of Paul completing all of his journeys between Philippi and the place of his imprisonment.⁸ Nonetheless, much of the evidence still seems to point

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to Paul writing his letter in Rome between 60 and 62 CE.

- **Caesarea Maritima, 57–59 CE**

Caesarea Martima has garnered some support as a possible location over the years for a few reasons. First, Paul was imprisoned in this city. In Acts 23, Paul is transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea to keep him safe from attacks. In Acts 23:35, we are told that Paul was to be "guarded in Herod's praetorium," potentially the same praetorium guard Paul references in Philippians. This could have been an official praetorium guard considering "here the Roman procurator of Judea had his headquarters, and since he had auxiliary troops under his command it could properly be called the praetorium."⁹ Also, from Acts 24:23, it seems as though Paul had significant freedom in Caesarea. The text says that Paul "should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs." This statement seems to corroborate with the situation Paul paints regarding himself. Still, Caesarea is as far from Philippi as Rome, and so the distance between the two locations is still problematic. Also, Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea does not seem to include the same possibility of execution as does his stay in Rome. Thus, while Caesarea is a possibility, it seems as though this was not where and when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians.

- **Ephesus, 54–55 CE**

Finally, some have argued that Paul wrote his letter while imprisoned in Ephesus between 54

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and 55 CE. Paul certainly had conflicts in Ephesus (see Acts 20:18–19) and of all the places he visited, Paul stayed in Ephesus the longest. However, the greatest weakness of this argument lies in the fact that we have no idea whether or not Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus. At best, this theory is a guess. From that weakness alone, we can assume Ephesus was not where Paul wrote Philippians.

From the evidence, Rome seems to be the most probable location from which Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians. He was imprisoned in Rome between 60 and 62 CE and therefore would have written this letter then.

SETTING

Like many of the cities Paul visited, Philippi had its own unique history that played into how Paul ministered in the city. Situated in northeast Greece, Philippi was inhabited by the fourth century BCE. Originally populated because of its gold and silver mines, it would later be taken over by Philip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great's father, turning it into a significant military garrison post. By the second century, Rome conquered Philippi, making it a Roman outpost. Philippi became famous in 42 BCE when Marc Antony and Octavian defeated the assassins of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius. After this, "the victors settle[d] a number of their veteran soldiers there and established Philippi as a Roman colony."¹⁰

The settlement of Roman soldiers in Philippi was a significant element to the city's history and importance. Because of the high population of Roman soldiers, Philippi

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was given the highest privilege possible for a Roman provincial municipality—the *ius Italicum*—which meant that it was governed by Roman law. The rights of the purchase, ownership, and transference of property, together with the right to civil lawsuits, were privileges included in the *ius Italicum*. The citizens of this colony were Roman citizens, while the constitution was modeled on that of Rome itself, with two collegiate magistrates at the head. Philippi itself was modeled on the mother city, Rome: it was laid out in similar patterns, the style and architecture were copied extensively, and the coins produced in the city bore Roman inscriptions. The Latin language was used, and its citizens wore Roman dress.¹¹

The Via Egnatia, a major thoroughfare cut through the middle of Philippi. The Via Egnatia was a “great Roman military and commercial artery that transversed the whole province of Macedonia,” making it a road Paul would certainly have traveled on during his missionary journeys.¹² From the evidence in Acts we can conclude two things regarding the religion of Philippi. First, few Jews lived in the city. Jewish law required at least ten men living in a city for a synagogue to be formed. In order to find anyone following Judaism, Paul had to go to the river outside the city, rather than a synagogue, where he found a group of women praying (Acts 16:13). Also, we see a high consecration population of paganism in Philippi. After healing a demon-possessed girl in Philippi, Paul and Silas incite a riot and are later imprisoned because they disrupted the economic realities connected to pagan worship (Acts 16:16–40).

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Map taken from the *ESV Study Bible*

PURPOSE

Paul's reasons for writing can be summed up in four ways:

- **A Desire To Say Thanks**

More than anything, Paul simply wanted to tell the Philippian church thank you for sending Epaphroditus to Rome with a gift for Paul. Throughout *Philippians*, Paul "expresses his gratitude to his friends for their generosity (4:10–20; cf. 1:3, 5; 2:25–30), as evidenced in the recent gift Epaphroditus had brought."¹³ Because Epaphroditus fell ill, Paul was delayed in sending him back and thanking the Philippians. Nonetheless, when Epaphroditus recovered,

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Paul made sure to take the opportunity to thank the Philippian church.

- **An Update on Paul's Circumstances**

"Paul wrote also to bring them up to date on the news about himself, about his present situation, and about the prospects for his future, namely, that he was in danger and was suffering but was at the same time rejoicing and optimistic."¹⁴ The Philippian church had heard about Paul and, because of the report, had sent Epaphroditus with a gift for Paul. Therefore, it was only fitting that Paul provide the church with an update on his condition. In his report Paul is able to share with the Philippians that "what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ" (Philippians 1:12–13). Thus Paul's letter to the Philippian church is an update of his imprisonment and his ministry in Rome.

- **A Warning Regarding Judaizers**

Paul is emphatic that the Philippian church needs to watch out for Judaizers. In Philippians 3:2–3 he writes, "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." Judaizers were Jewish Christians who were preaching that Christians were required to follow the Mosaic Law. This meant that men needed to be circumcised and all Christians needed to follow elements of the Mosaic Law

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like dietary rules held by the Jews. Paul warned the Philippian church of these Judaizers, believing that "their teaching was pernicious, their example ungodly, and their final destination eternal ruin and separation from the presence of the Lord."¹⁵

- **A Plea To Remain United in the Gospel**

Finally, Paul desired more than anything that the Philippian church remain united in the gospel. In Philippians 1:27, Paul writes, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one Spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Emphasis mine). In Philippians 2:2, Paul tells the church to be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Paul tells the church to "stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved" (Philippians 4:1). He asks that Euodia and Syntyche "to agree in the Lord" (Philippians 4:2). The church at Philippi was not perfect. Like any other church, division, disputes, and rivalries existed in the Philippian church. Paul desired that the church at Philippi would remain united around the gospel, both glorifying Jesus in their unity and reaching Philippi with the message of Jesus.

THEMES

- **Joy**

"Philippians is unified by its joyful, almost exuberant mood (the words for "joy" or "rejoice" oc-

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cur more than a dozen times)."¹⁶ Despite Paul's circumstances, he is joyful and encourages the Philippians to follow his lead in this unconditional joy. Their joy was not to be found in circumstances but rather in the gospel of Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection brought them peace between God and one another. Because of what Jesus had done for them, they were then to live in joy.

- **Encouragement**

Related to the above theme of joy, Paul wanted to encourage the Philippian church. He recognized that both his circumstances and the circumstances of the church were not ideal. Nonetheless, because of God's work in their lives, Paul wanted to offer them hope. In particular, Paul encouraged the Philippian church for sending Epaphroditus with a gift for him. Paul also encouraged them for partnering with him in his ministry throughout the Greco-Roman world.

- **Unity**

Although already discussed in the the purpose of the book, unity is a significant theme in Philippians. Because of the nature of the church at Philippi, there was strife and divisiveness among its people. Utilizing the example of Jesus in Philippians 2:1–11, Paul encourages the Philippians to be united by humbling themselves and thinking of each other over their individual selves. In maintaining unity, the church at Philippi is again a beacon for the gospel.

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- Suffering

Finally, suffering is a significant theme throughout the book of Philippians. From the onset of the letter, Paul lets the church know that he is imprisoned and could die. At the conclusion of the letter, Paul reminds the church that he "knows how to be brought low, and I know how to abound" (Philippians 4:12). Suffering is an important element of Paul's life and ministry and therefore a crucial element throughout the book of Philippians.

OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS

I. Epistolary Greetings (1:1–2)

II. Thanksgiving and Prayers for the Philippians (1:3–11)

III. Body of the Letter (1:12–4:20)

A. Paul's Imprisonment, Anticipated Release, Either through Life or Death (1:12–26)

B. Exhortation to the Letter (1:27–2:18)

1. The Call for Unity (1:27–2:4)

2. The Example of Christ (2:5–11)

3. Corporate Conduct (2:12–18)

C. Letters of Commendation for Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19–30)

D. Warning against Incursion of the Judaizers (3:1–21)

1. Watch Out for the "Mutilators of the Flesh" (3:1–4a)

2. Paul's Past and Present Values and Credentials (3:4b–14)

3. Following Paul's and Other's Examples (3:15–21)

E. Final Exhortations: Stand Firm, Be United, Follow Paul's Teaching and Example (4:1–9)

F. Thanks for the Philippians' Generosity (4:10–20)

IV. Final Greetings and Blessing (4:21–23)¹⁷

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RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

We have included below some study helps, aids, and resources for our series through the book of Philippians. We encourage you to study the book yourself outside of our worship gatherings and your community group.

TECHNICAL COMMENTARIES

Ralph P. Martin and Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, rev. In the *Word Biblical Commentary*. Nashville: Nelson, 2004. ISBN: 978-0785250081.

Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*. In *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991. ISBN: 78-0802823922.

Moises Silva, *Philippians*. In the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. ISBN: 978-0801026812.

NON-TECHNICAL COMMENTARIES

Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*. In the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008. ISBN: 978-0830842414.

J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*. In the *Bible Speaks Today*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984. ISBN: 978-0877843108.

Frank Thielman, *Philippians*. In the *NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995. ISBN: 978-0310493006.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Gospel Coalition Resources on Philippians

[http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library?f\[book\]\[\]=Philippians](http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library?f[book][]=Philippians)

Desiring God Resources on Philippians

<http://www.desiringgod.org/all-resources/by-scripture/philippians/1>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/all-resources/by-scripture/philippians/2>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/all-resources/by-scripture/philippians/3>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/all-resources/by-scripture/philippians/4>

Matt Chandler, "To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain"

<https://www.rightnow.org/Media/Series/64>

REFERENCES

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²Polycarp, *The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians in the Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 283, 285.

³Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 56–57.

⁴*Ibid.*, 58.

⁵Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* in (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 93.

⁶*Ibid.*, 554.

⁷Michael Martin, "Philippians, Letter to the," in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 1290.

⁸O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 21.

⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹*Ibid.*

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¹² Burge, Cohick, and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 353.

¹³ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 35.

¹⁴ Ralph P. Martin and Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, rev., in vol. 43 of the *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), lvi.

¹⁵ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 36.

¹⁶ "Introduction to Philippians," in the *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 2278.

¹⁷ Burge, Cohick, and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 356.