

Books of The Bible
A Survey of The Epistle To The Philippians

Introduction

The Holy Spirit never caused the Holy men to write to an individual (i.e. Philemon or Titus); or an undisclosed company (i.e. Hebrews); or a specified group (the Philippians); for the sake of writing. In every case there was a situation which had arisen and needed correction or exhortation. Therefore, when considering Philippians we automatically question, “In the chronology of Paul when were the letters written?”

To try to determine when the letters were written other questions come to the fore. “Which letters were written during his imprisonments and house arrest, and how many times was Paul imprisoned?” The answer to the latter question varies between two and three. However, I do not judge this as accurate for when writing to the saints at Corinth Paul wrote: “In imprisonments” (2 Cor. 6:5) and “in prisons more frequent” (2 Cor. 11:23). He speaks of multiple imprisonments and yet we only know of one BEFORE the Corinthian letters were written. Clement of Rome informed his readers of seven imprisonments of Paul, but I am only aware of four. He was imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:12, 23); Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:32); and twice in Rome (Acts 28:16-31; 2 Tim. 1:8). God in His sovereignty took Paul away from his work for God of bearing the Lord’s name before the Gentiles and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). A different door was now open to Him by His imprisonment. What a blessing it was for the saints who came to him as they were taught when he dwelt in his own hired house (Acts 28:30-31), and what a blessing has accrued to saints throughout the centuries because of that which was written in his prison epistles.

Philippians is one of the letters when Paul was in prison, as the following table lays out.

Missionary Journey	References	Letter written	Imprisonment
1 st missionary journey	Acts 13:1-14:28	No letters written	
2 nd Missionary journey	Acts 15:36-18:22	1 st and 2 nd Thessalonians	1 st Imprisonment- in Philippi (Acts 16:19)
3 rd Missionary Journey	Acts 18:23-21:16	1 st and 2 nd Corinthians Galatians Romans	
	Acts 21:17-23:30		2 nd Imprisonment- at Caesarea in Judea
	Acts 28:16-31	Ephesians Colossians Philemon Philippians	3 rd Imprisonment- house arrest for two years
4 th Missionary journey gathered for various references		1 st Timothy Titus	
		2 nd Timothy	4 th Imprisonment

Furthermore, that which we have in the New Testament are not the only letters Paul wrote, for it is evident there had been a letter written to the saints at Corinth before that which is called 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9). He also wrote a third letter between our first and second Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8). He had also written a previous

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letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 3:3) and one to the church at Laodicea (Col. 4:16). In this we see the overruling work of divine inspiration, for not all Paul wrote was left on record for us.

Interesting observations in Philippians:

- a) There are no Old Testament quotations in Philippians
- b) The Spirit is mentioned three times (ch. 1:19; 2:1; 3:3; The ASV, Dby, NKJV, Web and YLT all indicate this as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Some of the manuscripts read: “worship by the Spirit of God”, as does Robertson’s Word Pictures)
- c) Paul refuses to recognize and endorse splits among the saints, therefore, he speaks constantly to all the saints (ch. 1:1, 4, 7, 8, 25; ch. 2:17, 26; ch. 4:23). He did the same to the saints at Corinth. Divisions always come because of sin and are the work of the Devil.

The Writer - Paul

The penman is Paul the apostle who wrote in fellowship with Timothy (ch. 1:1) and the brethren at Rome, and they of Caesar's household (ch. 4:21-22). Paul had been to Philippi (it seems around 52-53 A.D.) and at that time he had Timothy, Silas, and possibly Dr. Luke (Acts 16:10). There were two other occasions when he was at Philippi (Acts 20:1, 6).

In this letter he is responding to news concerning attitudes which were causing rifts among the saints. It was the problem of personality conflicts being shown in strife and no one ready to say “sorry”. Vain glory had usurped humility, self consideration had usurped thoughts of others, individual importance usurped the glory of Christ and God. Paul does not write with apostolic authority as when writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1) but as a servant (Phil. 1:1), thus it is with a shepherd - priestly heart. Divisions in the church could not be corrected by apostolic law but tender hearted affection which would not tire or get agitated by repeating the solemn warnings and exhortations to them (Heb. 5:1-2). If they were fractured then there was the opening for the inroads of false teachers (Phil. 3:2-3), and the work of restoration had to be done by a spiritual individual (Gal. 5:1).

Interestingly Paul uses the personal pronoun “I” in forty-one verses and uses it at least sixty-one times, yet there is no self-aggrandizement.

In his outreach of the gospel Paul had travelled across most of Asia, and the decision soon to be made was, “Where next?” It seemed to him that Bithynia was an obvious, but the Spirit closed that door (Acts 16:7) and they came to Troas. There Paul had a vision and it is a distinct possibility it was of Luke asking him to come to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10).

Keys:

- a) Key Verse: ch. 2:5-8
- b) Key Words All (26); Joy (6); Rejoice (10); Mind (7); Gospel (9)

Matters Which Are Unimportant

We humans like to think we know more than we actually do, and at times God clouds a question in obscurity, not to tease us but to remind us that: “The secret things belong unto the Lord” (Deut. 29:29). Two such matters are:

- a) When was Philippians written?
 - i) There are two views when Paul wrote to these saints. Was it before he wrote Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon, or was it after? There are very studious scholars on both viewpoints. Those who side with it written before the others have it written in late 61 A.D. or early 62 A.D. Those who view it being written after Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon date it 63 A.D. Ultimately, it does not affect the truths contained in them.

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- b) Where was it written from?
- i) There are three possibilities in the minds of the scholars: Caesarea, Ephesus, or Rome. It is my understanding that the only feasible one of these three is Rome, but not because it is the “accepted view”. I understand Philippians to have been written from Rome because:
1. He was imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:30).
 2. It is the natural understanding of the expressions “in all the palace” (ch. 1:13) and “Caesars’s household” (ch. 4:22).
 3. At this judgment there would be no appeal for Paul recognized that it could mean his death (ch. 1:20-21).
 4. At Caesarea Paul had appealed to go to Caesar in Rome (Acts 25:10-12), but in this letter he is anticipating going to Philippi (ch. 2:24) which would indicate he was already in Rome.

The Recipients

The original name of Philippi was Krenides (which means springs) however, in 365 B. C. Philip II king of Macedonia changed its name to Philippi. When Dr. Luke wrote the Acts he emphasized that Philippi was “a chief city . . . and a colony” (Acts 16:12). Why did he call attention to such a matter? Philippi was not the capital, Thessalonica was, and it was not even the capital of a district, for Amphipolis was that. It is my understanding Philippi was called a “chief city” because it was the only one which was a colony in that area! The statement by Dr. Luke can be easily overlooked, but it helps greatly in the understanding of our place of government (conversation) (ch. 3:20). What was so important about being a colony? Being a citizen of a Roman colony meant the individual had the rights of any citizen of Italy. They could wear Roman dress, use that language, and observe Roman holidays.

It is evident there was no synagogue in Philippi and it was the women who met for prayer at the river (Acts 16:13). Lydia responded to the gospel and so did her household, and it was in her home that Paul and Silas stayed using it as a base for the spread of the gospel. People were saved, and among those who apparently heard the gospel was a demonic woman. While Paul and Silas went to prayer (Acts 16:16) this woman cried concerning them. This was a continual behavior until Paul commanded her to be released, which meant a loss of revenue to her masters. These men brought Paul and Silas before the judges (Acts 16:19-24) where they were beaten and put in prison. When in prison there was an earthquake which resulted in the famous question of the jailer: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The jailer got saved and his house, and when released they left Philippi en route to Thessalonica (Acts 16:40-17:1).

By the time Paul wrote to these saints the local church was already established with “saints, bishops (elders/ overseers/ shepherds) and deacons” (ch. 1:1).

Words And Clauses Peculiar to Philippians

There are at least thirty-four Greek words or clauses used in Philippians which are never used in any other book. They are:

Greek	Translated	Reference	Greek	Translated	Reference
Aisthesis	Judgment	Ch. 1:9	Alupoteros	The less sorrowful	Ch. 2:28
Hagnos	Sincerely	Ch. 1:16	Parabouleuomia	Not regarding	Ch. 2:30
Sumathleo	Striving together/ laboured	Ch. 1:27; 4:3	Katatome	“concision”	Ch. 3:2

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Greek	Translated	Reference	Greek	Translated	Reference
Pturo	Terrified	Ch. 1:28	Oktaemeros	“eighth” day	Ch. 3:5
Paramuthion	Comfort	Ch. 2:1	Summimetes	“followers together”	Ch. 3:17
Sumpsuchos	Of one accord	Ch. 2:2	Politeuma	“conversation”	Ch. 3:20
Kemodoxia	Vain glory	Ch. 2:3	Epipothetos	“longed for”	Ch. 4:1
Hagnos	Robbery	Ch. 2:6	Suzugos	“yokefellow”	Ch. 4:3
Huperupsoo	Highly exalted	Ch. 2:9	Euphemos	“good report”	Ch. 4:8
Katachthonios	Under the earth	Ch. 2:10	Alaireomai	“lacked opportunity”	Ch. 4:10
Apousia	Absence	Ch. 2:12	Anathallo	“your care” also translated “flourished again”	Ch. 4:10
Eupsucho	May be of good comfort	Ch. 2:19	Autarkes	“content”	Ch. 4:11
Isopsuchos	Likeminded	Ch. 2:20	Mueo	“instructed”	Ch. 4:12
Gnesios	Will naturally	Ch. 2:20	Lepsis	“receiving”	Ch. 4:15
Paraplesion	Nigh	Ch. 2:27			

The Occasion And Purpose of The Book

- 1) Paul was either in court proceedings or about to be judged, and such was the seriousness of the proceedings and “crime”, he did not know if he would be released or not (ch. 1:19, 20). There was the possibility he might not be able to contact them again and this letter was possibly his final thoughts for them.
- 2) The saints at Philippi had heard of his imprisonment and sent Epaphroditus with a gift for Paul (ch. 4:10, 14, 15, 16, 18). It was more than a monetary gift, it was also the message of care (ch. 4:10) which, due to circumstances, they had not been able to do for a while (ch. 4:10). It is also evident they were under affliction (ch. 1:29). Therefore, he writes to thank them for the expression of love and care.
- 3) He wants to emphasize to the Philippians the esteem Epaphroditus and Timothy should be held in. There were dangers from without and within which needed observation and correction.
- 4) Evil teachers either had or would come among them, but they were self seeking and had no care for the sheep. They were those who the Lord described as “heirings” (Jn. 10:12).
- 5) Internally there was strife, pride, possibly spiritual apathy, and Euodias and Syntyche were not in fellowship with each other (ch. 4:2).
- 6) Paul longed for the Philippian saints and wanted to know how they were, therefore, Timothy was being sent to bring back to Paul the news concerning them (ch. 2:19).

While these are all reasons the book was written, there is to my understanding deeper reasons, but interconnected reasons for the writing. These are:

- a) The importance of the gospel.

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- b) To encourage by personal aspirations.
 - i) God had done all He could do and will fulfill His work, then out of gratitude we ought to work with Him.
 - ii) Do not be discouraged by present situations. They may be used for the spread of the gospel (ch. 1:12-14); they will result in the spiritual encouragement of the oppressed by the care of others (ch. 1:19; 2:24-25); it will bind saints more together (fellowship, ch. 1:5; 2:1; 3:10). Paul speaks of fellowship more in Philippians than any other church epistle.
- c) To exhort to unity by consideration of others.
 - i) Paul's thoughtfulness and practical considerations of the Philippians (ch. 1:3-11; 2:17-18)
 - ii) The Lord's thoughtfulness and practical considerations of all humanity (ch. 2:6-15)
 - iii) Timothy's thoughtfulness and practical considerations of the Philippians (ch. 2:19-23)
 - iv) Epaphroditus' thoughtfulness and practical considerations of the Philippians (ch. 2:25-26)
 - v) The Philippians' thoughtfulness and practical considerations of Paul (ch. 4:10-18)
- d) To warn through illumination.
 - i) Set against these lovely examples of thoughtfulness toward others, there are dark shadows. There were those who were self seeking (ch. 3:2) and two sisters who were not pulling together (ch. 4:3).

The gospel was very dear to Paul. He writes about it 13 times in Romans; 18 times in 1st and 2nd Corinthians; 11 times in Galatians; 4 times in Ephesians; 2 times in Colossians; 8 times in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians; 4 times in 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus; and once in Philemon. When we consider Philippians with its four chapters and 104 verses, it is mentioned 9 times! Paul wrote of the "fellowship in the gospel" (ch. 1:5); "confirmation of the gospel" (ch. 1:7); "the furtherance of the gospel" (ch. 1:12); "the defense of the gospel" (ch. 1:17); "becometh the gospel" (ch. 1:27); "the faith of the gospel" (ch. 1:27); "served with me in the gospel" (ch. 2:22); "laboured with me in the gospel" (ch. 4:3); "the beginning of the gospel" (ch. 4:15). In every book there is a "gospel" aspect, whereas in Romans it is the necessity and power of the gospel in Philippians. It is its manifestation in thoughtfulness and practicalness regarding others from the spiritual perspective!

The letter to the Philippians which begins with grace (ch. 1:2) and ends with grace (ch. 4:23) reveals the heart of Paul as the Shepherd Priest. There is a tender heartedness in this letter which is totally different from the other epistles. Others were written to correct error in behavior or doctrine (Corinthians is such), Colossians was written against heresy, but Philippians is marked with sympathetic feelings and consideration for others. In Philippians there are no heavy doctrines to grapple with. There is the forceful apostolic authority, almost demanding discipline.

To Paul the Christian life was a life of that deep joy which did not depend on present circumstances. Writing from prison he will speak of "joy" and its associates a minimum of eighteen times. There is joy in heaven over a sinner that repents, but on earth there ought to be joy:

- a) In the fellowship of the saints (ch. 1:3-11)
- b) Over afflictions that further the gospel (ch. 1:12-30)
- c) In the great example set before us (ch. 2:1-18)
- d) In faithful friends (ch. 2:19-3:1)
- e) In the ground of our acceptance (ch. 3:2-16)
- f) That our citizenship is in Heaven (ch. 3:17-4:1)
- g) In all the "loyal yoke-fellows" (ch. 4:2-3)
- h) In all things at all times (ch. 4:4-9)
- i) In the liberality of God's people and the provision of God Himself (ch. 4:10-20)

There are several matters which make Philippians especially endearing:

- a) It was written to the first church in Europe (Acts 16:6-34).

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- b) It is gloriously Christ centered with the Lord being mentioned by name or personal pronoun at least seventy times.
- c) It lays out the foundation for the beginning and maintaining of a work of God. It was marked by:
 - i) A group of individuals who met for prayer (Acts 16:13)
 - ii) Individuals sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Lord forbade Paul and Silas to go into Asia but directed them to Europe (Acts 16:6-7)
 - iii) The scriptures teach: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18), and it is important to understand that seeing a need (as in Asia) did not constitute a call. Paul was given a vision, and while this was in a dream, whither God uses a dream or conscious appreciation and burden of a need, it can be called a vision.
 - iv) There was an immediate response to the revelation, for it is recorded: “immediately” (Acts 16:10). There was no waiting for a consideration if this vision was from God or not. These men were in such close communion with God that they knew the Shepherd’s voice and followed Him (Jn. 10:27).
 - v) Paul and Silas went to Philippi for a singular purpose: “To preach the gospel” (Acts 16:10); to make known “the way to be saved” (Acts 16:17).
 - vi) The divine endorsement of their work being of God is that there were results in salvation: Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15); the demonic girl (Acts 16:16-18); and the jailer and his household (Acts 16:25-34).
 - vii) Opposition by satanic forces. The work of God will always have opposition and this is especially true when God is working mightily (Acts 16:22-24).

Christologically

Often when thinking of the incarnation minds immediately think of Philippians two. The primary teaching of the passage is not the doctrine of the incarnation but is the first illustration of the practical obligations for those who profess to belong to Him. The others are Paul (ch. 2:17-18); Timotheus (ch. 2:19-23); and Epaphroditus (ch. 2:25-26). In chapter one we are “in Christ” (ch. 1:1); in chapter three Paul had the goal to “know Him” (ch. 3:10); and in chapter four we can have quietness of heart “through Christ” (ch. 4:7).

Suggested Structures

- a) No. 1
 - i) The theme of:
 - 1. Chapter one is the Gospel of Christ (ch. 1:27)
 - 2. Chapter two is the mind of Christ (ch. 2:5)
 - 3. Chapter three is the knowledge of Christ (ch. 3:8)
 - 4. Chapter four is the power of Christ (ch. 4:13)
- b) No. 2
 - i) Paul’s earnest request in his present circumstances (ch. 1:19-20)
 - ii) Paul's exhortation for the saints to have the:
 - 1. Mind of Christ (ch. 2:5)
 - 2. Knowledge of Christ (ch. 3:8)
 - 3. Unity through Christ (ch. 4:2)
 - 4. Have the Peace of God through Christ (ch. 4:6-7)
 - 5. Live in the purity of Christ (ch. 4:8)
 - 6. Power of Christ (ch. 4:13)

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**