

**>>>>>>    *Philippians – Introduction*    <<<<<<<**

**Author**

- 1) The undisputed author of the letter to the Philippians is Paul the Apostle.
- 2) Timothy is also included in the salutation, but aside from that mention, the letter is written basically in the first person indicating that Paul is the primary writer.
- 3) At the time when this letter is written Paul in prison in Rome.
  - a) Before coming to Rome he had been in custody under Felix in Caesarea awaiting trial on some charges that had been leveled against him some 2 plus years before.
  - b) Now, in Rome, he was under house arrest in a rented house with round-the-clock guard and had been for almost 2 more years.
  - c) He was able to have visitors and with that freedom came the ability to preach the Gospel and continue his work as an apostle.
- 4) This incarceration in Rome was under Nero.
- 5) One thing I will mention here and again later that has a bearing on Paul’s situation.
  - a) Being held in prison by Roman authorities was not the same as being held in the Tarrant County Jail.
  - b) Wealthier prisoners could pay for better accommodation and food, otherwise you were basically on your own – no food was supplied by your keepers.
  - c) In some cases, particularly for important political prisoners, basic rations might be provided but that was rare.
  - d) Prisoners who had no outside support often faced severe malnutrition
- 6) Beyond the biblical record of Acts 28, there is no historical record of his trial, its results, or exactly when or if it ever took place.
- 7) Tradition and the writings of the early church fathers indicate that by some means, Paul was set free and went on at least one more missionary journey.
  - a) He was then martyred some 5 years later – again, according to tradition by Nero.

**Date of Writing**

- 1) During those two years of house arrest in Rome Paul composed at least 5 letters.
  - a) This was from approximately 60CE to 62CE.
  - b) The letters were:
    - i) Ephesians
    - ii) Colossians
    - iii) Philemon
    - iv) The letter to the Laodiceans.

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- (1) Most likely lost. However, some think it may actually be the letter to the Ephesians.
- v) Philippians.
- c) We believe Philippians was the last prior to his release, probably written in 62CE.
- d) In fact, the letter to the Philippians might have been the last letter Paul ever wrote to a church.
  - i) He wrote three other letters beyond Philippians, all during what we might call his 4th missionary journey or during his final imprisonment and martyrdom.
  - ii) These are what we call the pastoral epistles which are the two letters to Timothy and his letter to Titus.
  - iii) One further comment here regarding letters of Paul, it is possible that Paul wrote other letters that we do not have.
- iv) In Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians written in about 113CE he tells the Philippians:

For neither I nor another like me is able to follow after the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was with you in the presence of the people at that time, he taught the word of truth accurately and reliably, who also being absent he wrote letters to you regarding which, if you examine them you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith given to you<sup>3</sup> which is the mother of all of us, hope follows after *and* the love which *is* for God and Christ and for the neighbor goes before.<sup>1</sup>

### **Where Written**

- 2) Some scholars disagree with the Roman imprisonment being the place and time of the writing. They believe instead that he was imprisoned in Ephesus.
  - a) I personally disagree with that stance for several reasons which we will not go into now because of the time required.
  - b) However, there is a paper from the Theopolis Institute that really lays out the pros and cons nicely if you are interested.
  - c) I have provided a link to this paper **“Paul in Prison: Ephesus or Rome?”** in the notes for this lesson that you will have access to next week.

[https://theopolisinstitute.com/paul-in-prison-ephesus-or-rome/#:~:text=Wright%2C%20the%20leading%20evangelical%20N,near%20future%20\(verse%202022\).](https://theopolisinstitute.com/paul-in-prison-ephesus-or-rome/#:~:text=Wright%2C%20the%20leading%20evangelical%20N,near%20future%20(verse%202022).)

- d) The paper is also available for download as a PDF on the biblical-matters website under “papers.”

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Brannan, trans., [\*The Apostolic Fathers in English\*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).

**Brief History of the Church at Philippi**

- 1) Obviously, the target audience was the church at Philippi.
- 2) As I am sure you recall, Paul, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke founded the Church at Philippi on his second missionary journey.
  - a) Philippi is in Macedonia which is now northern Greece.
  - b) This was the first church that is considered to be European.
  - c) All of this takes place in around 50CE to 52CE.
- 3) At this point, it is important that we look briefly at the founding of this church so we can better understand the background and history.
- 4) Paul, Silas, and Timothy are in Troas and meet up with Luke. Then the story goes from there...

**Acts 16:9–15 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and pleading with him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” <sup>10</sup> When he had seen the vision, we immediately sought to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

<sup>11</sup> So after setting sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the following day to Neapolis; <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were spending some days in this city. <sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were thinking that there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

- 5) This is different from the way Paul normally starts delivering the gospel in a new location.
  - a) Normally, he enters the synagogue and begins with the Jews there.
  - b) The reason for Paul not going to the synagogue as he usually does is – *there wasn’t one*.
- 6) Consensus has it that there were few if any Jews in the city of Philippi.
  - a) There was a requirement that a minimum of 10 Jewish men live in a city in order to form a synagogue so, we can assume less than 10.
  - b) One other note on this subject we should mention here which is reasonably important.
    - i) Since there were assumed to be no synagogues in Philippi, we must also assume that there may have been few if any copies of the scriptures for this new church to use.
    - ii) I am sure that God took care of this but it is just one more difficulty which Paul faces as he plants this church.
- 7) Continuing in verse 14...

**First Convert in Europe**

<sup>14</sup> A woman named Lydia was listening; she was a seller of purple fabrics from the city of Thyatira, and a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup> Now when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

- 8) Paul continues going to the river and sharing the gospel for many days.
- 9) During this time he gets in trouble because he casts out a demon from a slave girl and costs some folks their livelihood.
- 10) He and Silas are then beaten and thrown in jail.
  - a) They were singing at midnight when there was a great earthquake.
  - b) The jailer wakes up and sees the doors open and starts to kill himself.
  - c) Paul assures him that they are all still there and he then asks what he must do to be saved.
  - d) This ushers in the next group of converts we are told about – the jailer and his family.

**Acts 16:32–33 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of God to him together with all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

11) Finally, after Paul and Silas are released...

**Acts 16:40 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>40</sup> They left the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brothers and sisters, they encouraged them and departed.

- 12) So, at this point, we have a church beginning with Lydia and her household and then others over the time that Paul was preaching there.
  - a) Finally, concluding just before they leave the city, the jailer and his family become members of this church.
  - b) Estimates of Paul’s time in Philippi on this initial visit and founding of the church range from a few weeks to approximately 3 months – we really can’t nail that down.
  - c) However, their final visit to Lydia’s house on the way out of town was a visit with the “brothers and sisters.”
    - i) I think we can assume that there have been a number of converts from the river and possibly others as word spread beyond Lydia, her household and the jailer and his household.
  - d) I believe I am correct in saying that this is the first fully Gentile church that was founded.
  - e) This is based on the fact that, as indicated, there were probably few if any Jews in Philippi.

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- f) To found a church in that situation would require considerably more effort in teaching and preparation than one where Jewish converts were members.
  - i) Those converts would have had the Scriptural knowledge which could be shared with the Gentiles.
  - ii) In this case the only member that might have that knowledge was possibly Lydia.
- g) That being said, my guess is that he spent a more on the order of months rather than weeks there in the beginning.
- h) Evidently it worked because the church at the time of this letter has been growing for 12 years.
- i) And taking one further step, we know that this church is still thriving after 50+ years because of the letter we have from Polycarp.

13) Paul returns to Philippi at the end of the third missionary journey. We read in Acts 20 vs. 6.

### **Acts 20:6 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>6</sup> We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and reached them at Troas within five days; and we stayed there for seven days.

- 14) Likely, they spent Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread in Philippi which would amount to at least 2 weeks before they sailed.
- 15) Though we do not know the length of time he stayed there each time, from the first paragraph of the letter, it will be obvious that he had created a strong bond and feeling for the members of the church there.
- 16) This last recorded visit is in 58CE just before his imprisonment began.
- 17) We will see in the greeting that the church has established elders and deacons and as will also be obvious from our study, they have had time to develop a few problems.
- 18) Some think there may have been other visits to Philippi during his missionary journeys. We obviously do not have a record of this.

### **Purpose and Message**

- 1) The purpose of the letter is simple – to thank the Philippians for their gifts and to strengthen these believers in their faith.
- 2) Though this is a very personal letter and Paul does keep it positive and upbeat throughout, there are still issues he will deal with.
  - a) A divisive rivalry
  - b) Some selfish ambition
  - c) And of course as always a smattering of Judaizers
- 3) Despite all these potentially somber and difficult subjects, Paul manages to keep the message filled with joy and rejoicing.

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- a) In the coming weeks, we will see Paul express his concerns about Self-sacrifice, Christian living, and unity and, how important these things are to true **JOY**.
- 4) All of these things are as important for us today as they were for this young church.

### **Outline of Philippians**

- 5) The simplest outline for the Philippian letter is:

- I. Joy in Suffering (1:1–30)
- II. Joy in Serving (2:1–30)
- III. Joy in Believing (3:1–4:1)
- IV. Joy in Giving (4:2–23)<sup>2</sup>

### **Philippians 1:1–5 (NASB 2020)**

#### **Thanksgiving**

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1) Paul opens this letter with a description of himself and Timothy as bond servants.
- 2) His greetings are to the saints, overseers, and deacons.
  - a) As mentioned earlier the church is now 12 years old and has grown to the point of having these elders and deacons.
- 3) The greeting of this letter different than most others in one respect.
  - a) In all other letters, in the greetings, Paul makes mention of his being an apostle or in some other wording establishes his apostolic authority.
  - b) Two reasons are possible for this omission:
    - i) First, he may not have felt that it was necessary because of the closeness he felt with this congregation.
    - ii) Second, as we will see, there are no issues he addresses in this letter that warrant such a statement of apostolic authority.
- 4) Continuing with verse 3 ...

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, <sup>5</sup> in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Barton et al., [\*Life Application New Testament Commentary\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 842.

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- 5) In vs. 3, he is simply saying that he thanks God for them every time he remembers them and all that they have accomplished.
- 6) In vs. 4, we see that he prays for them often but also we encounter our first occurrence of the word JOY.
  - a) There is really a missing emphasis in the NASB translation. – Paul is consciencely making his prayers joyful.

### **Phil 1:4–5 (BHGNT)**

<sup>4</sup> always in my every prayer for all of you, making the prayer with joy<sup>3</sup>

- b) And, of course, the reason for his joy filled prayers is in verse 5 – because they had “participated” with him in the gospel from the beginning and are still doing so.
    - i) One assumes this is for several reasons:
      - (1) Preaching and sharing the gospel as is obvious by the church having grown.
      - (2) Also in the caring prayers of this congregation as well as their financial support.
        - (a) As we will see, they have recently sent one of their members Epaphroditus to Paul during this prison stay presumably with financial support.
    - ii) Even in Rome and under house arrest, Paul was totally dependent on others for his rent, food, and other needs during this two-year imprisonment.
  - c) It is obvious that Paul considers these folks as partners in his ministry.
- 7) Before we move on, I think we should take this opportunity to discuss the two words that are to be a major part of if not the theme of this letter – Joy and Rejoicing.
- 8) First, let’s look at JOY.
- 9) Webster says:

Joy is a feeling of great happiness or pleasure that can be caused by good fortune, success, *or a sense of well-being*. Joy can also be used as a noun to describe something that gives joy. As a verb, joy means to experience joy or to rejoice.

**What part of this definition do you think best fits the joy Paul has in mind?**

**Or – how would you define joy?**

**Is the joy we have described the same joy that is a fruit of the Spirit from Gal 5:22**

- 10) The Life Application Commentary says this about joy which I truly think is right on point for the discussion we are having.

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<sup>3</sup> Lidija Novakovic, [\*Philippians: A Handbook on the Greek Text\*](#), ed. Lidija Novakovic, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 4.

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Often happiness is mistaken for joy, but the two are very different. Inward joy comes from knowing and trusting God; happiness comes as a result of pleasant circumstances. Inward joy is lasting; we can feel joy in spite of our deepest troubles; happiness is temporary because it is based on external circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

11) So, let’s talk about the other word which is actually part of this verse – REJOICE.

12) Again, turning to Webster we find:

To rejoice is to feel or express joy or great delight, or to give joy to or gladden:

13) One thing I found interesting about Webster’s definition is that rejoicing can be “giving joy or gladdening.”

a) In that case it would take an indirect object such as another person.

14) In other words, considering joy as the feeling then rejoicing is the expression of that feeling.

### **Is our rejoicing primarily internal or external?**

15) Going back to the definition,

### **In what ways can our “rejoicing” give joy or gladdening others?**

16) I would think it would have to start internally but definitely be expressed externally in order to gladden or give joy.

17) Honestly, I think we will see this idea play out in some of the things Paul says to these folks later in this letter.

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Barton et al., [\*Life Application New Testament Commentary\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 855.