



Philippians

(Introduction & background information provided is from the ESV study Bible)

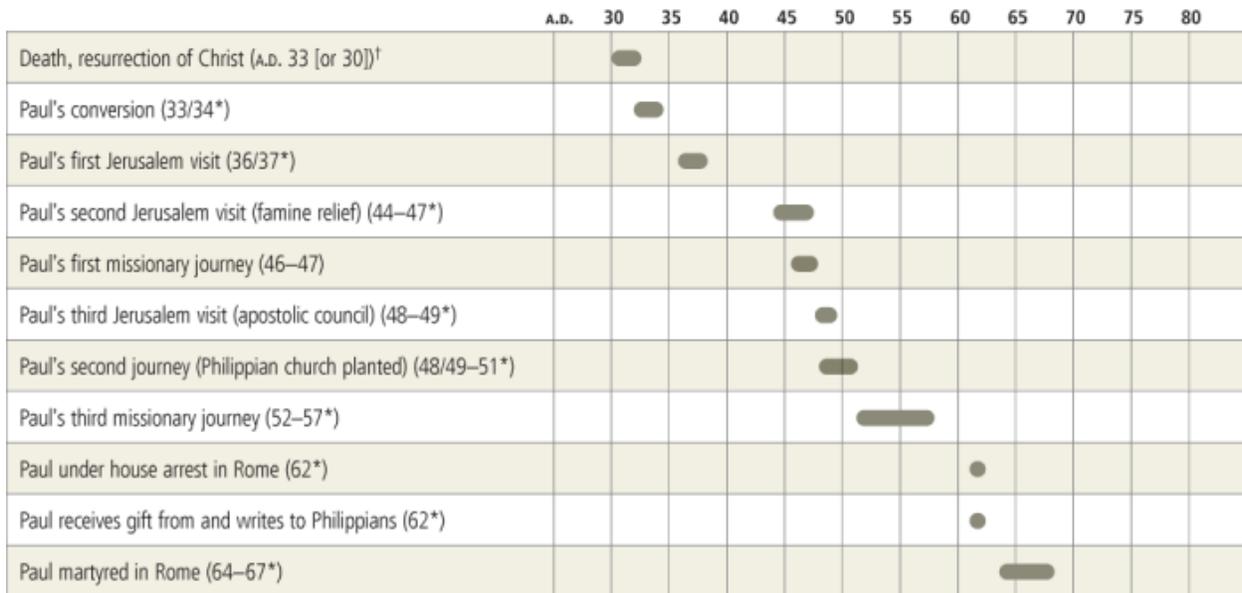
Author and Title

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.

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.

Timeline



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The church at Philippi had a special significance for Paul, since it was the first church he founded in Europe (see 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 (e.g., Phil. 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).

Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison (see above), 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-centered, 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 (Phil. 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. He is above all 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's answer is 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 toward the goal for the prize of the upward 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; 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 centerpiece 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; 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 [their] own salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12). But they can do so knowing that "it is God who works in [them], both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (2:13).

History of Salvation Summary

God works in the Philippians in accordance with the achievements of Christ, who has fulfilled the promises of the OT (cf. [2 Cor. 1:20](#)).

Key Themes

1. Christians need to keep making progress in their lives.	<u>1:12, 25; 3:12-16</u>
2. A proper spiritual outlook is critical for progress in the faith.	<u>1:5-11; 2:1-11; 3:7, 15; 4:7-9</u>
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.	<u>1:12-26; 2:5-11, 19-30; 3:3-17; 4:9</u>
4. Suffering will come, but through faith it can be met with joy.	<u>1:12-26; 2:14-15; 4:4, 11-13, 19</u>
5. Prayer is crucial for maintaining a joyful Christian life.	<u>1:3-11; 4:5-7</u>
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.	<u>1:4, 7, 24-27; 2:1-4, 19-30; 4:2-4, 14</u>
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.	<u>3:2-10</u>
8. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Because of his suffering on the cross, he is now exalted as Lord and Christ.	<u>2:5-11</u>

The Setting Philippians

(c. A.D. 62)

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



Outline

- I. Greeting and Prayer ([1:1-11](#))
 - A. Salutation from Paul and Timothy ([1:1-2](#))
 - B. Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians ([1:3-11](#))
- II. Paul's Reflections on His Imprisonment ([1:12-30](#))
 - A. Paul's imprisonment has meant progress for the gospel ([1:12-18](#))
 - B. To live is Christ ([1:19-26](#))
 - C. Encouragement to walk worthy of the gospel ([1:27-30](#))
- III. Exhortation to Humble Service ([2:1-30](#))
 - A. Encouragement to unity in the faith and service to one another ([2:1-4](#))

- B. Christ's example of humble service ([2:5-11](#))
 - C. Living as lights in the world ([2:12-18](#))
 - D. Timothy as an example of a service-centered life ([2:19-24](#))
 - E. Epaphroditus as another example of service ([2:25-30](#))
- IV. Opponents of the Gospel: Where Does Righteousness Come From? ([3:1-21](#))
- A. Initial call to rejoice in the Lord ([3:1](#))
 - B. Contrast between the opponents of the gospel and the true people of God ([3:2-3](#))
 - C. Paul's renunciation of spiritual and ethnic privileges for the sake of knowing Christ ([3:4-11](#))
 - D. Paul's progress in the gospel: through Christ, not the law ([3:12-16](#))
 - E. A call to follow Paul's example of commitment to Jesus as Lord ([3:17-21](#))
- V. Concluding Exhortations and Thanksgiving ([4:1-23](#))
- A. Standing together for the gospel ([4:1-3](#))
 - B. Rejoicing in faith ([4:4-9](#))
 - C. Thanksgiving for the Philippians' gift; Paul's contentment in God ([4:10-20](#))
 - D. Greetings ([4:21-22](#))
 - E. Benediction ([4:23](#))

FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

BIBLE STUDY FOCUS - "Advent Love"

MAIN TEXT: Philippians 2:1-11

Instructions for Small Group Time:

Option 1: Send the main text to small group members so they can read it ahead of time.

Option 2: Read the text together when you meet

Basic Bible Study Practices:

1. As people read the text, ask them to pay attention to key words
2. As people read the text have them highlight key words, people, and places

3. As people read the text have them pay attention to repetition of key terms, ideas, and people
4. If people are given the opportunity to read the text ahead of small group time, have them read it at least twice so they become familiar with its contents.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read Philippians 2:1-11 (also feel free to read more verses to gain a deeper understanding of context).
2. What are some specific questions or themes that stick out to you about this passage? Take a few minutes and discuss them as a group.
3. Define "love" in your own words.
4. Define "love" according to God's word.
5. Is there a difference between the love that we see in Scripture versus the love that we see promoted within the world? If so, what is the difference?
6. What are some verses in the Bible that speak specifically about love? Read them together as a group.
7. What are some ways that God has revealed His love to you? How do you show that same love to others?

Extra Resources

The Bible Project - "Overview of Philippians": <https://youtu.be/oE9qqW1-BkU>

The Bible Project - "Love": <https://youtu.be/slyevQ1LW7A>