

## **A Bible Study...the Epistle to the Church at Philippi**

### **Session 1: Introduction to the Book of Philippians**



Ruins of Ancient Philippi. De Agostini / Getty Images

#### **What is the Theme of the Book?**

The joy of the Christian experience is the dominant theme running through the book of Philippians. The words "joy" and "rejoice" are used 16 times in the epistle.

#### **Why did the Apostle Paul write the letter?**

To express his gratitude and affection for the Philippian church, his strongest supporters in ministry.

*Note: A letter is a one-way conversation we get to read or hear. It is like a telephone call to someone on the other end and there is another person listening to the one way conversation of the one in the room. The one that reads a letter or the one that is listening to the person talking on the phone*

*can only speculate what is being said on the other end and why it is being said. We have this wonderful epistle as well as others written by Paul. We can speculate and have some idea as to why the epistle was written and, maybe even guess as to who all were really being attentive to the letter. Since it is Scripture, however, we must depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and direct us into the truth. Was Paul speaking to Lydia, the seller of purple, her family...or the jailer and his family who were saved while in prison at Philippi; or, was it the slave girl who was probably saved while Paul was ministering in Philippi? What were the women (Euodia and Syntyche) in chapter 4 in disagreement about? We can only speculate. However, we can enjoy the epistle's message and how it especially reveals to us our own fallacies, broken relationships, etc. Then we must depend on the Spirit to reveal what it is teaching and inspiring us to do in our lives. The Holy Spirit is such a wonderful teacher!*

### **When did Paul write the letter?**

Traditionally, scholars agree that Paul drafted the epistle during his two years of house arrest in Rome. He himself had established the church in Philippi approximately 10 years prior, during his 2nd missionary journey recorded in Acts 16.

*“From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.” (Acts 16:1)*

### **Notes for those studying this letter:**

- **Paul's tender love for the believers in Philippi is apparent in this “most personal” of all Paul's writings.**
- **The church had sent gifts to Paul while he was in chains. The gifts were delivered by Epaphroditis, a leader in the Philippian church who ended up assisting Paul with the ministry in Rome.**

- **At some point while serving with Paul, Epaphroditus became severely ill and nearly died.**
- **After his recovery, Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi carrying with him the letter to the Philippian church.**

**As in every letter Paul wrote, Paul had additional information to give to the readers of his treasured epistles. He did the same with the church at Philippi:**

- 1. Besides expressing thanks to the believers in Philippi for their gifts and support, Paul took the opportunity to encourage the church concerning practical matters such as humility and unity.**
- 2. He warned them about "Judaizers" or Jewish legalists.**

*Note: Judaizers is predominantly a Christian term, derived from the Greek verb "live according to Jewish customs". This term is most widely known from its single use in the Greek New Testament (Galatians 2:14) where Paul publicly challenges Peter for compelling gentile converts to early Christianity to "judaize".*

*One who has been "Judaized", refers to a Christian who has accepted the necessity of adhering to the Mosaic Laws or to specific laws that are believed to be superseded, such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, or observation of the Passover.*

- 3. He gave instructions on how to live a joyous Christian life.**
- 4. He conveyed a powerful message about the secret of contentment.**  
Although he had faced severe hardships, poverty, beatings, illness, and even his current imprisonment, in every circumstance Paul had learned to be content.
- 5. The source of his joyous contentment was rooted in knowing Jesus Christ:**

*"I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus*

*my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him” (Philippians 3:7-9a, NLT).*

***Where Paul chose a place wherein to preach the gospel, he always did so with the eye of a strategist. He would choose one which was not only important in of itself, but was also the key point of a whole area. To this day, many of Paul’s preaching centers are still great road centers, railway junctions, or ports for shipping trade.***

*Today we do the same when we look for the best location for a place of business (exits, entrances, residential clientele); and, if we are looking for a place to establish and build a church, we do the same as Paul; i.e. how many other churches are in the area, how many potential believers (apartments, number of residents in area, relevancy of evangelistic style preaching), and the potential need for Jesus in the cultural climate of the area in which we are looking. Although we lean and glean from the Holy Spirit’s leading to certain areas, we still need to make wise decisions for the Lord’s sake.*

## **The City of Philippi—**

- **A Roman colony, Philippi was situated in Macedonia, or current-day Northern Greece.**
- **The city was named after Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great. Founded around 368 B.C.**
- **One of the major trade routes between Europe and Asia.**
- **Early history state that in the neighborhood of Philippi there were gold and silver mines.**
- **A chief commercial center with a mixture of different nationalities, religions and social levels. Where there is silver and gold, multitudes of people can be found. “The possibility of riches has a pull on people.” One of the greatest battles a Christian has as he is facing trials and temptations is, of course, “the love of money, prestige, and power.”**
- **One of the great battles of history was fought in this area due to the location, the wealth, and the trade possibilities. Here...Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius, and thereby decided the future of the Roman Empire.**
- **Retired military generals, heroic soldiers of the Roman Empire came here to settle down with their families. Very proud and arrogant were many of these folk. They never lost their glorious pride...even in defeat.**
- **Founded by Paul in approximately 52 AD, the church in Philippi was made up mostly of Gentiles.**
- **Philippi was an answer to prayer to a preacher who wanted to proclaim the gospel. Philippi was ripe unto harvest.**

**“When someone is introduced to Jesus and they humble themselves to His authority, they are the best of soldiers in God’s army.” From arrogant pride to a rejoicing, anointed pride in the Salvation offered to him or her**

**by Jesus, the Christ, they are totally absorbed in Jesus' unconditional love.**

Note: A soldier realizes the importance of respect for authority. They have lived it with a "Yes, Sir!...No, Sir!" all of their adult life. Honoring the One who has released him from the shackles of seeing or doing evil makes him a choice candidate for God's chosen ones.

**Do we realize the significance of being free? Do we realize that freedom means a total "giving in" to the authority of Jesus Christ?**

**Paul was so proud of the church at Philippi. However, even with their support of Paul and giving to the work of Jesus Christ, the church had a problem of unity.**

- **Paul speaks about the Judaizers who were causing the church members to question the authority of Paul and question their freedom in Christ (true path through Jesus, i.e. Jesus is enough).  
Philippians 3:2**
- **Two women who were not in one accord (Philippians 4:2).**

**All in all, Paul was very happy to encourage and lift up the church at Philippi.**

**Questions to consider before we get into the verse by verse study of  
Philippians:**

**1. Why didn't Paul lay hands on Epaphraditus for his healing?**

He probably did (no Scripture letting us know); we must remember...God is the healer, not the person laying hands on the individual for healing. Some are healed, some are not...but all healings are for the glory of God.

**2. Why were good Christian women quarreling and disagreeing among themselves?**

They are human; we are not perfect. The church members will disagree; that is why we have various denominations. We can even learn some spiritual truths through disagreements.

**3. Do we see that Paul is wise in the way he counsels the church at Philippi?**

*He never chastises without seeing the positive points of a group of believers (church). He commends and reprimands. He challenges and provides corrective applications to each and every problem. I have gained great insight from this method of counsel. Whether we are speaking to an individual or a group, we need to point out the positive traits and characteristics before we give a reprimand or a need for corrective action. I have learned that the recipient of a reprimand listens and learns from an individual if he or she feels that the counselor/teacher/supervisor is not against him, but is one that desires to see a positive change in areas where it is needed.*

*Job 29:21, "People listened to me expectantly, waiting in silence for my counsel."*

*Psalms 16:7, "I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me."*

*Psalms 32:8, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you."*

4. Why was the church at Philippi not one of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation (chapters 2-3)?

Possible answers:

- John wanted to use the churches in which he knew were established Christian churches as those representing the world! He did not know that much about the Church at Philippi.
- The seven churches mentioned were on a postal route at the time when the Book of Revelation was penned. John knew that by calling out the churches where there were means to distribute to other areas of the world, the message from the One Who makes life possible would be made known to all areas of the globe.
- God, the Father, gave Jesus, the Son of God, the revelation to give to His servants via an angel who gave the prophecy and detailed information to John who testified as to everything he saw (Revelation 1:1-4). John just penned the prophecy provided him by the Angel of the Lord. Why the Church at Philippi was not one of the churches; only God Himself knows.

*Note: I lean toward the latter answer. The Spirit of God reveals to the servants of God as to what to say and what to write.*

*2 Timothy 3:16, “**All Scripture is God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,”*

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