

#12. THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

1. **Paul's letter to the Philippians** is named for the city in which Paul founded a new congregation during the events of Acts 16:11-40. Philippi was the leading city in Macedonia, and was a Roman Military colony. It was the first place Paul preached on European soil.
 - Paul was directed to Philippi by a dream or vision from the Lord. After being stopped twice by the Holy Spirit when he tried to go to Asia and Bithynia, a citizen of Macedonia appeared to Paul asking for help. In this way Paul determined it was God's will that he minister in Macedonia.
 - A prominent woman named Lydia was saved, and Paul cast an evil spirit out of a young girl. This resulted in Paul and Silas being imprisoned and beaten. God responded with a supernatural earthquake that released the apostles, and resulted in the salvation of the jailer and his family. Paul was forced to leave the fledgling church, but returned in Acts 20.
 - From this inauspicious beginning, the strong church of Philippi was formed. The founding pastors were Paul, Timothy, and Silas. It appears Paul made a total of three visits to Philippi during his ministry.
2. **Author and date** - Paul is undoubtedly the author, but there is some uncertainty as to when it was written.
 - While we know it is one of the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon) there is some debate concerning the date of composition. Most scholars date the letter in 61-62AD, which was Paul's first imprisonment. Others have dated it from the period of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 24) or perhaps from Ephesus, but there is little to support those views. The conditions, including description of liberties, pending verdicts, etc. point to an incarceration in Rome.
3. **Paul's emphasis** seems to be "the Christian's joy". Paul mentions joy no less than 15 times in Philippians (at least twice in each chapter) and uses five different Greek words that express joy. (1:4, 18, 25, 26; 2:2, 16, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1, 3; 4:1, 4, 10).

4. Key Chapter

- There is no dominant chapter, although it appears 2:5-11 is the anchor point of the entire epistle.

5. Key Verses

- **Philippians 2:5-11 NIV** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
- **Philippians 3:7-14 NIV** But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

5. Key People

- **Paul** - the founding pastor of the church.
- **Timothy and Epaphroditus** - fellow laborers with Paul who were being sent to encourage the Philippian Believers.

7. Key Place

- **Philippi** – originally known as Krenides (*Little Fountains*), Philippi was a city in Macedonia which was located on the main transportation route joining Rome with

Byzantium (Constantinople). This road, the Egnatian Way, joined the Appian Way and ran for nearly 500 miles through the Empire. The city was established by Phillip of Macedon in 356BC. The population of 10,000 or so contained a large number of Roman military officers who retired to the area after receiving land in payment for their services. The Jewish population was exceptionally low. This is evidenced by the fact that there was no synagogue in the city, and Paul did not include Old Testament passages when writing to the Church.

8. Key Themes

- **Joy** - Paul wanted to stress the fact that Believers can have true joy, no matter what circumstances they may experience. Happiness is like a thermometer, reflecting conditions; joy is like a thermostat, controlling the conditions!
- **Self-denial and Suffering** - Christ is our model of sacrificial living and redemptive dignity in suffering. While there is no virtue in self-denial and suffering for its own sake, such behavior for the greater good of others and the furtherance of God's Kingdom is laudatory. Paul modeled the same type of sacrificial living for the sake of the churches. The entire letter seems to revolve around the example of Christ's suffering and self-emptying (2:5-11).

9. The Contents of Philippians

- Greetings to the Church (1:1-11)
- The Circumstances of Paul's Imprisonment (1:12-26)
- The Encouragement of Paul to the Philippians (1:27-2:18)
 - Stand strong in the midst of persecution and suffering (1:27-30)
 - Walk in humility (2:1-4)
 - Focus on Christ's example (2:5-11)
 - Let your light shine in difficult and dark places (2:12-18)
- **A word about Paul's co-workers (2:19-30)**

- Timothy (2:19-24)
- Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
- **The Warnings of Paul to the Philippians (3:1-4:1)**
 - Reject legalism (3:1-16)
 - Reject lawlessness (3:17-4:1)
- **The Final Admonition (4:2-9)**
- **The Thankful Heart of Paul (4:10-20)**
- **Farewell to the Philippians (4:21-23)**

Worth noting about Philippians

- There is a reference to the Kenosis of Christ (2:5-11) unequalled in any other Bible passage. The term Kenosis is a theological term describing the *self-emptying* of Christ as part of the incarnation. This doctrine does not imply that Christ laid aside His divinity. Rather, He set aside some privileges of deity in certain key areas. For instance, we know He laid aside His glory in large measure (John 17:5), though a residual portion was seen at the Mount of Transfiguration. He was clearly under full submission to the Father's will alone (Matthew 26:39, John 5:30), and He lived by the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 24:36; John 1:45-49).
- The *Mind of Christ* is easily contrasted with the *Mind of Self-Will*.
 - Adam sought to become like God; Christ emptied Himself of divine prerogatives.
 - Adam sought to exalt himself; Christ made Himself of *no reputation*.
 - Adam rebelled at his servant role; Christ made Himself servant of all.
 - Adam exalted himself; Christ humbled Himself.

- Adam became disobedient; Christ was fully obedient.
- Adam was condemned by God; Christ was honored by God.

When reading Philippians:

- Remember that Philippians is not a theological treatise, but is a letter between friends who share a strong bond. You will be confused if you look for systematic designs. It is Paul sharing his heart with a very special group of friends.
- More than any other New Testament letter, Philippians emphasizes the need to live with a renewed mind. Every Christian should follow Christ's example of sacrifice which was evidenced when He left Heaven to embrace His mission of redemption.
- Furthermore, a renewed mind is an essential part of relational health as well as spiritual health (Romans 12:1, 2). Devotion to Christ and to His people are both necessary ingredients of life in God's Kingdom.