

A. The City and Its People

Philippi was located at the far eastern end of a large fertile plain (Dartos) in central Macedonia; it sat astraddle the Egnatian Way, nestled on the edge of the plain at the initial ascent up a considerable acropolis, 16 kilometers inland and across a low range of coastal mountains from the seaport of Neapolis (modern Kavála). Originally founded as Krenides by some Greek colonists from the island of Thasos (ca. 360 BCE), it was taken over and renamed after himself by Philip of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great) in 356. Its reason for existence and for Philip's taking it over are related to its strategic location: it sat as sentinel to the large agricultural plain of Darto; it was well-protected by its acropolis; and, most importantly to Philip, it was nearby to Mount Pangaion on the northern side of the plain, which at that period was rich in mineral deposits, including gold.

Philippi (and all Macedonia) came under control of the Romans in 168, who abolished the ancient Macedonian dynasty and eventually created a Roman province, divided into four parts. According to Luke, Philippi was “the leading city of that district of Macedonia” (Acts 16:11).

Our interest in the history of the city stems particularly from 42 BCE, in which year two major battles were fought nearby in the plain—between Cassius and Brutus (the assassins of Julius Caesar) and the victors, Octavian (later the emperor Augustus) and Mark Antony. Following these victories Octavian honored Philippi by “refounding” it as a Roman military colony, thus endowing its populace with Roman citizenship. Always astute politically, Octavian populated the town and its surrounding agricultural area with discharged veterans from the war. This both alleviated a population problem in Rome and ensured allegiance to the Empire (through its emperor) at this strategic spot along the major highway across Macedonia and northern Greece which connected Rome with Asia Minor and other points east. In an even more astute move Octavian did the same once again after he defeated Antony in the battle of nearby Actium in 30 BCE, this time with veterans from Antony's army, thus creating loyalty from those who had once fought with him and more recently against him. Although these events happened some ninety-plus years before the writing of our letter, they have a considerable effect on several key matters in Philippians.

By the time Paul came to the city in 49 CE (Acts 16:11–15), Philippi was the urban political center of the eastern end of the plain. Its population was both Roman and Greek; and although Latin was the official language, Greek was the predominant language of commerce and everyday life—all the more so in a city located in Greece.

Of the four people from the early Christian community whose names we know, three bear Greek names (Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche) and the other Roman (Clement). We know very little otherwise about the socio-economic makeup of the congregation itself. Lydia, a merchant from Thyatira, bears the name of her home province. That she had a household large enough to include Paul and his companions suggests she owned a villa; at least some of the women who were gathered with her at the river for worship, perhaps including Euodia and Syntyche, were very likely members of her household. The jailer, on the other hand, who also had a household, probably belonged to the artisan class; whereas the young girl from whom Paul had cast the divining spirit belonged to the slave class that often made up a large part of early Christian congregations (as members of

Christian households or, as in her case, on their own). What this suggests is that the socio-economic range is similar to what one finds in churches in other urban centers. Finally, the fact that three of the people whose names are known to us are women is probably not accidental, since there is good evidence that in Greek Macedonia women had long had a much more significant role in public life than in most other areas in Greco-Roman antiquity.

Church founded around 49 AD

Timothy named as co-author but may have been scribe as he was well known to the Philippian church. Paul doesn't say he was an apostle, perhaps because of the nature of the letter (exhortation and friendship) and his relationship with the community – he quite likely spent some time with them because they gave generously to his work. Servants of Christ better translated as slaves – it was also used in Christian circles to mean servants of God. This is the theme of the letter – everything is of, by and for Christ.

The “all” of the greeting is also an exhortation to unity – probably because of discord between two leaders Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3). There doesn't seem to be any single head of the church, the reference is to overseers and deacons (plural) – note Paul addresses the community before the heads.

V2 should be grace to you and peace (charis shalom) – grace of God is given and peace is what results.

Vv3-11 a thanksgiving and/or benediction always follows Paul's greeting. Paul starts with prayer as thanksgiving for partnership in the gospel. VV3-8 are one sentence in Paul's letter.

These verses are like 1 Thess 5:16-18 – Paul can still feel joy even though he's in a Roman prison. Prayer, thanksgiving and joy go together.

Remembrance of their past and present participation in the gospel through thick and thin encourages Paul to express confidence that God will continue his larger work in them to the very end.

V3 Paul always starts his thanksgiving this way

V4 Paul not only thanks God for his friends he does so regularly. His prayer is for *all* – significant with the Philippians.

V5 he's not just talking about their financial support – he's also talking about their spreading the gospel in Philippi.

V6 their participation will continue until the second coming of Christ. Paul's perhaps beginning to hint that some Philippians have lost their future hope. Paul's reminding them that Christ has guaranteed it.

V7 All emphasized again. I think Paul is talking about the grace of being together promoting the gospel.

V8 God knows how I feel about you. Paul's emotion comes out of his theology.

VV9-11 Prayer as petition

V9 Having told the Philippians he prays for them Paul now tells them what he prays. The sort of love he's talking about is modeled on God's love.

V10 why they need knowledge.

V11 This is not a righteousness of keeping the Law, but of being transformed into God's own character which only comes through Christ.

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VV12-26 Paul now talks about his own situation, what's happening to him. This is common in friendship letters. As always Paul's main focus is Christ and the gospel.

V12 Paul tells them his imprisonment has advanced the gospel – that's his first concern

V13 his imprisonment has had a good effect on unbelievers (the palace guard). His imprisonment is because of his faith not for crime or politics. His chains are a manifestation of his discipleship a participation in Christ's suffering. The guard normally rotated on a four hour shift, so he would gradually have had access to many of them.

V14 Because of Paul's imprisonment Roman Christians are proclaiming the gospel more fearlessly. This is the early 60's and Nero's madness was beginning to peak – the great persecution of Christians was about to begin.

V15-18 The gospel advances outside the prison in spite of ill will. Some are preaching because they think this will hurt Paul. In Galatians 5 and Romans 1 Paul condemns such people. It's probably because they aren't Judaizers. On the other hand there are those who are helping in the ministry.

V18 the only important thing is that the gospel advances.

V18-26 The future. Paul is saying that he expects to be vindicated/saved because of their prayers, but even if he is killed that will benefit him. However, he feels he will live because this will be best for the gospel.

It's a bit like Job 13 – Paul knows he will be vindicated. Paul doesn't want to be disgraced for the sake of the gospel.

VV25-26 Paul's expected outcome is reunion in Philippi.

VV27-30 Paul now turns to the Philippians affairs. Paul is concerned for their steadfastness and unity in the face of opposition and suffering. Paul is now more exhortational.

The problem is not schism, but posturing and bickering—selfish ambition, empty conceit, complaining, arguing. At stake is the gospel in Philippi—Christ himself, if you will.

Thus, Paul’s concerns:

- (1) The *exhortation*: that they live as worthy citizens of the gospel of Christ;
- (2) The *reasons*: that in his current absence, he may hear about “their affairs”:
 - (a) that they stand firm in the one Spirit
 - (b) contending side by side as one person for the faith of the gospel
- (3) The *circumstances* that called this forth: intimidation by their adversaries
- (4) Which leads to an *aside*:
 - (a) Their doing 2 and 3 will become an “omen” of the opponents’ destruction;
 - (b) but evidence of the Philippians’ salvation,
 - (c) which has God as its source;
- (5) A concluding *theological explanation* of their suffering (implicit in item 3):
 - (a) It is a “grace” given to those who believe
 - (b) It is consonant with Paul’s own struggles (past and present).

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Chapter 2

- A Appeal to steadfastness and unity in the face of opposition (1:27–30)
- B The appeal to unity, based on Paul’s and their common life in Christ (2:1–4)
- C The appeal to Christ’s example (2:5–11)
- B’ Application of the appeal, again based on their mutual relationship (2:12–13)
- A’ Further application: unity in the face of opposition (for the sake of witness) (2:14–16)

VV1-4 Unity through humility. Paul appeals to their common experience of Christ’s comfort.

VV5-11 Paul urges on them the example and mindset of Christ.

VV12-18 are the application and a final appeal.

V12 salvation is not only something the Philippians receive it’s something they do. It is an ethical text, dealing with “how saved people live out their salvation” in the context of the believing community and the world. What Paul is referring to, therefore, is the *present* “outworking” of their *eschatological salvation* within the *believing community* in Philippi. This has to do with their obedience. Paul is talking about the community as a whole here. Fear and trembling comes from the OT – what is experienced in the presence of God.

If the whole universe is going to be made obedient to Christ, Paul is saying that the Philippians should get on with being obedient now. Thus “working out the salvation” that God has given them should be done with a sense of “holy awe and wonder” before the God with whom they—and we—have to do.

VV19-30 Paul is sending the letter with Epaphroditus and hopes to send Timothy to see them soon. Paul wants to know about the situation there and Timothy will report back to him.