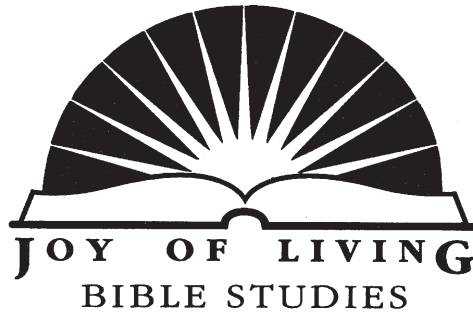


Philippians & Colossians

Lesson 1



Introduction to Philippians

The apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote this letter to the church in Philippi while he was a prisoner. Some scholars say this imprisonment took place in Ephesus, and others in Caesarea. However, the best evidence favors Rome in about 61 A.D. Paul was not yet imprisoned in the Mamertine dungeon in Rome, as he later was when he wrote his Second Letter to Timothy. Rather, he was under house arrest in his own rented house (see Acts 28:14-31), where for two years he was free to preach the gospel to all who came to visit him.¹

Though Paul wrote that he was “in chains for Christ” (Philippians 1:13), the tone of his letter doesn’t sound like he was writing from detention with chains or guards restricting him. Instead, he had a light heart and it was evident that his soul was free! There was no atmosphere of depression and disillusionment in his confinement, but only a reflection of the joy of the Lord.

In this letter, Paul portrayed Jesus Christ as our joy and hope. The words *joy* and *rejoice* occur repeatedly in this short letter. Perhaps you might like to read the whole letter at one sitting and underline the many times he mentions “joy,” “rejoice,” “be glad,” “Jesus Christ,” and “Lord.” Paul encourages us to always rejoice in the Lord. When we are suffering trials, true joy can only come from Jesus Christ.

Paul mentioned the Lord Jesus Christ’s name forty times in this short letter. Some of the most wonderful things concerning Jesus and the Christian life are found in Philippians. It tells us how our lives may be purified, dangers avoided, and joyful progress made if we are willing to trust Jesus Christ by making Him our Savior and Lord.

Paul’s Background

Paul was known as the great apostle to the Gentiles. His Hebrew name was Saul, and in the Book of Acts he was called Saul until Acts 13:9, which says, “Then Saul, who was also called Paul...” From then on in Scripture he is always called Paul, the Greek form of his name. Paul, a Jew, was a Roman citizen from birth, so he probably bore both names from an early age. The apostle always referred to himself as Paul in his letters.²

Paul was born near the beginning of the first century A.D., in the busy Greco-Roman city of Tarsus, located at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. There he learned his first language, Greek, was taught a trade, and received his early schooling. Growing up in a Gentile city may have helped him bridge the gap between Gentiles and Jews after his conversion to Christianity. However he was never ashamed to acknowledge himself a Jew (see Acts 21:39) and was proud of his Jewish background (see 2 Corinthians 11:22). He was the son of a Pharisee (see Acts 23:6) and was raised as an orthodox Jew. He was trained in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3).

When Paul first appears in the book of Acts he is called a “young man” (Acts 7:58), and he was already an acknowledged leader in Judaism. He was intensely opposed to Christianity, and actively persecuted the followers of Jesus Christ (see Acts 26:10-11). He was convinced that Christians were heretics and that the honor of the Lord God demanded their extermination.

Paul’s Conversion

The story of God’s divine intervention in Paul’s life is told in Acts chapter 9. Paul was on his way to Damascus, planning to arrest any Christians he found there and take them back to Jerusalem as prisoners. A light from heaven flashed around Paul, temporarily blinding him, and Jesus audibly spoke to him from heaven. Paul at once realized how wrong he was, and surrendered to Jesus’ call. From that time on he served Jesus Christ and the church with all his heart.

Paul first became involved in ministry to the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria. The church in Jerusalem had sent Barnabas to Antioch to help lead the growing church there. Barnabas brought Paul to work with him in Antioch, and for a whole year they met with and taught the church there (see Acts 11:19-26). The work of Gentile foreign missions was begun by the Antioch church under the direction of the Holy Spirit when they sent Barnabas and Paul off on their first missionary journey in about 48 A.D. (see Acts 13:1-3).

1. Kenneth Barker, editor. *The NIV Study Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985. See introduction to Philippians.
2. Much of the material about the apostle Paul in this and the following paragraphs was taken from:

J.D. Douglas, revising editor. Merrill C. Tenney, general editor. *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987. “Paul.” 756-761.
David Noel Freedman, editor. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. “Paul.” 1016-1020.

The Church in Philippi

During his second missionary journey, Paul and his new ministry partner, Silas, were prevented by the Holy Spirit from entering into the province of Asia and into Bithynia. Acts 16:9 says, "During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" Paul and Silas obeyed God's call to preach the gospel in Macedonia. They crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas to Neapolis, and walked some eight to ten miles up and over the coastal range to the city of Philippi. The church in Philippi was the very first European church founded by Paul¹ (Philippi is located within the modern country of Greece).

God had called Paul to preach the Gospel in a very strategic area. First of all, Philippi (named after King Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great) was famous for its gold mines. These mines had been worked as far back as the time of the Phoenicians. There had also been silver mines here and, Philippi had become a great commercial center of the ancient world.

Philippi was also known as the gateway to Europe as its site was on the chain of hills which divides Europe from Asia from the east to the west. The hills dip into a pass where Philip situated the city. The road between Europe and Asia, and later from Rome to its eastern provinces, wound through this pass in the mountains.

Philippi became a prosperous Roman colony. The city planners determined to make Philippi as similar as possible in design and architecture as Rome itself. The Roman language, Latin, was spoken, Roman dress and customs were observed, Roman titles used for city leaders, and, of course, Roman government ruled the city. A glimpse of Roman pride can be found as some of the people of Philippi brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for *us Romans* to accept or practice" (Acts 16:20-21, italics added). Yet with all this Roman influence, God used Paul, a Jew, to preach the gospel, and Philippi became the birthplace of European Christianity.

The Letter to Philippi

Paul's primary purpose in writing this letter to the Philippians was to thank them for the gift they had sent him after they learned of his detention in Rome. He also wanted to:

- ☛ report on his own circumstances
- ☛ encourage the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and rejoice regardless of circumstances
- ☛ urge them to humility and unity
- ☛ commend Timothy and Epaphroditus to them, and
- ☛ warn the Philippians against the legalists and libertines among them.²

Paul certainly had joyful memories from Philippi, which were in part responsible for his ability to rejoice in detention as he wrote this letter. He could look back to the day when Lydia and all of her household responded and believed his message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 16:12-15). He probably remembered with great joy how the slave girl was delivered from a spirit of divination through the power of Jesus Christ's name (see Acts 16:16-18). As a result of Paul's intervention on her behalf, he and Silas were severely flogged and thrown in prison, with their feet fastened in the stocks. About midnight as they were praying and singing hymns, God sent a great earthquake, which loosed their chains and opened the doors to the prison. The greatest joy in this memory was the fact that the jailer and his whole family believed in the Lord Jesus Christ that night because of this great happening (see Acts 16:19-34).

As Paul sat in Roman detention thinking about all of these events in Philippi, he must have pondered how God had worked during both pleasant times and difficult times. He must have thought of the placid days of prayer and teaching while he stayed in Lydia's household as an honored guest and teacher. He probably thought of the pain and fear that he and Silas experienced in the Philippian prison. Yet as Paul thought about all of these things he could rejoice, for he realized that God had worked through all of these events and formed a strong, faithful and joyous group of Philippian believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you find yourself in a hard place, in fear, pain or terror, just remember how God used Paul's experience! You may feel chained to an office desk, a kitchen sink, or to some other situation, but be like Paul and remember what God has been doing in your life instead of becoming discouraged over your present situation. As you praise God for what He has done in the past, you will be reminded of what He has promised to do for you always! As Paul wrote in Romans 12:12, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

1. *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*. "Letter to the Philippians." pp 781-782.

2. *The NIV Study Bible*. See introduction to Philippians.

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Introduction to Philippians.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Introduction to Philippians or from your teacher’s lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, tack it to your bulletin board, on the dashboard of your car, etc. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Philippians 1, concentrating on verses 1-6.

1. a. What does Paul call Timothy and himself in this chapter? To whom is Paul writing this letter? (Philippians 1:1)

b. In the Bible, the word “saints” is not restricted to especially holy individuals, but is a term for the people of God in both the Old and New Testaments.¹ If you are a believer in Jesus Christ and trust Him as your Savior and Lord, then you are a saint. How do Romans 1:7a and 1 Corinthians 1:2 help you understand this?

2. Challenge: All believers in Jesus Christ are also called to be His servants. How do the following verses help you understand what it means to be a servant of Jesus Christ?

Matthew 8:9

John 14:15

1 Timothy 6:18

2 Timothy 2:24

3. a. What blessings do God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give us? (Philippians 1:2) If possible, look up these words in the dictionary.

1. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. “Saints.” 1151-1152.

- b. Personal: Have you received God's gift of grace and peace through your faith in His Son, Jesus Christ? Read 1 John 4:9-10 with Revelation 3:20. If you haven't yet trusted in Jesus' sacrifice, why not pray now to receive Him as your Savior and Lord?

4. What does Paul do every time he thinks of the Philippian believers? Why are his prayers for them filled with joy? (Philippians 1:3-5)

5. a. What wonderful thing did Paul declare about the Philippians believers? (Philippians 1:6)

b. Read Hebrews 13:20-21. How do these verses help you understand what Paul declared in Philippians 1:6?

6. Personal: Do you ever feel discouraged with your life as a Christian? Do you feel that you will never be able to consistently live a life pleasing to the Lord? Remember who it is that both began the good work in you and will bring it to completion. It is not dependent on your power, but on His! Why not pray now and thank God for what He has done and will continue to do in your life?

Third Day: Review Philippians 1, concentrating on verses 7-14.

1. How did Paul feel about the Philippian Christians? (Philippians 1:7-8)

2. What did Paul desire for the Philippians? (Philippians 1:9-11)

3. Challenge: How do the following verses say a believer can discern what is best?

John 16:13-14

Romans 12:2

Colossians 1:9

4. Read John 15:5. How can a believer be "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:11)?

5. How does Paul say that his detention has affected his ministry? (Philippians 1:12-14)

6. Personal: Have you ever had opportunities to share your faith because of trouble you have suffered? Has someone else's life encouraged you as you have seen God work out His plan in their life through a difficult situation? Share if possible, without using any names.

Fourth Day: Review Philippians 1, concentrating on verses 15-19.

1. What motives does Paul state that other Christians have for preaching Christ while he is in prison? (Philippians 1:15-17)
2. How does Paul feel about all who preach of the Lord Jesus Christ? (Philippians 1:18)
3. What similar thing did the Lord Jesus say to His disciples in Luke 9:49-50?
4. Challenge: Read Numbers 11:24-29. What did Joshua urge Moses to do about the two prophets and what was Moses' reply to him?
5. Personal: Have you ever been jealous because you felt someone was being used for Christ in a way that you would like to be used? Have you ever asked Christ to forgive you for this jealous attitude? Why not stop right now and ask for His forgiveness?

Fifth Day: Review Philippians 1, concentrating on verses 19-26.

1. Paul did not know whether he would be delivered from prison through being released back to freedom or through death. In either case, what did he expect and hope? (Philippians 1:19-20)
2. What was Paul's attitude about his life and death? (Philippians 1:21-24)
3. Why did Paul believe that it was necessary for him to live a little longer on earth? (Philippians 1:25-26)
4. Challenge: One who has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ never needs to fear death. Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-6. How do these verses describe the believer's view of life and death?

5. Personal: Do you share Paul's view of life and death? How would you describe the two ways you are pulled—the things for which you wish to stay on earth versus the desire you have to be with Jesus in heaven?

Sixth Day: Review Philippians 1, concentrating on verses 27-30.

1. What challenge does Paul give these beloved Christians in Philippians 1:27-28a?

2. Read Colossians 1:10-12. How does this passage clarify the way we are to live as believers?

3. What will the Philippian believers' fearlessness and unity signify, both to their opponents and for the believers themselves? (Philippians 1:28b)

4. a. What privilege is given to the Philippian believers along with the gift of faith? (Philippians 1:29-30)

b. Read 2 Timothy 3:12. Who else is given this privilege?

c. Challenge: What else do you learn about this privilege in the following passages?
James 1:2-4

1 Peter 4:12-14

5. Personal: How have you suffered on behalf of Christ? Do you consider it a privilege? If you have not yet suffered on His behalf, consider why that might be. Do you publicly identify yourself as a Christian and stand out as a representative of the gospel?

6. Which verse did you choose to memorize this week? Can you write it down here?