

# Introduction to Philippians

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## Where is it in the Bible?

Philippians is the eleventh book in the New Testament and is found between Ephesians and Colossians.

## Who wrote it?

Paul wrote this letter, along with Timothy (1:1). This authorship is not disputed. At the time, Paul was in prison (1:7, 12-14, 17), but it is not clear when or where this was. Many think it was in Rome, but others have suggested Ephesus or Caesarea.

## When was it written?

Uncertainty about where Paul was in prison means that it is also difficult to date the book. If Paul was in prison in Rome, the letter was probably written in the early 60s. However, if Paul was in Caesarea, it would have been written in the late 50's. It would be even earlier, probably in the middle 50s, if the imprisonment mentioned occurred in Ephesus.

## What is it about?

Philippians was written to a church that was founded by Paul and that was the first center of Christianity in Europe. It was a Roman colony that was named for Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. This mid-sized city was located on the Via Egnatia, a Roman road that went from the Bosphorus Strait in the east to the Adriatic Sea in the west.

The letter is centered around two early confessions of Christ found in 2:6-11 and 3:20. It is a letter about joy, fellowship and thanksgiving. It calls on believers to be joyful because of their identity in Christ, regardless of their circumstances.

## How is it structured?

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians (1:3-11)
- III. Paul's Imprisonment (1:12-26)
- IV. Faithful Living (1:27-4:9)
  - a. Living in Unity and Confidence (1:27-30)
  - b. The Example of Christ's Humility (2:1-18)
  - c. Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30)
  - d. Life Centered in Jesus (3:1-4:1)
  - e. Encouragement for Unity and Peace (4:2-9)
- V. Thanksgiving for the Philippians' Gift (4:10-20)
- VI. Final Greetings (4:21-23)

## What are some things to look for?

- **Fellowship:** In this letter, Paul emphasizes the fellowship that he has with the Philippians and urges them to maintain fellowship with each other. He refers to them as co-workers and gives thanks for their partnership.
- **Humility:** The Philippians are urged to humble themselves as Christ humbled himself and to put others' interests before their own. Paul holds Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself up as examples of this type of humility.
- **Incarnation:** Philippians 2:6-11 is often called the "Christ Hymn" and was probably used in early Christian worship. This is one of the key passages supporting the doctrine that, in Jesus, God came to earth as a human being. It also expresses the idea that Christ existed "in the form of God" before the incarnation. These verses are particularly interesting because they show that these concepts were part of Christian thought before the Gospels were written. It would be centuries before they became the formal doctrine of the Church.
- **Suffering:** Paul realizes that suffering is something that occurs, but he does not try to address the question of why it happens. He encourages the Philippians to rejoice in the help to advance it (1:12—14). Paul also says that in some way, Christians who suffer share in the suffering of Christ (3:10).