

| **Philippians** |
Week 1 Scripture Guide | Philippians 1:1-11

Biblical Context

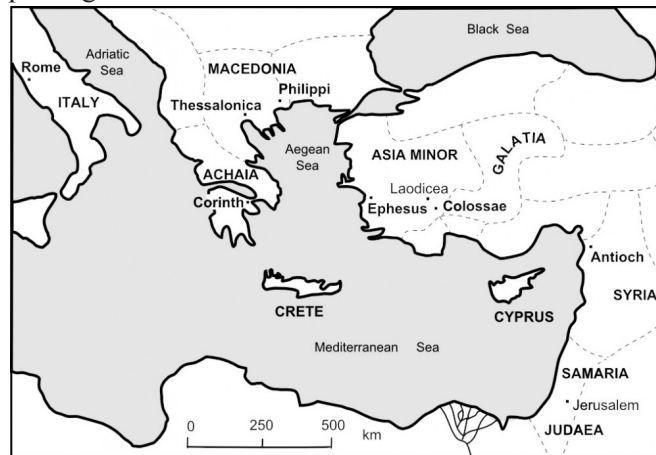
Before exploring the letter to the church in Phillippi, some preliminary questions must be asked of the text to determine its meaning, authorship, date and location and authorial intent.

Authorship. We see both author and audience immediately addressed in 1:1.

In the Greek: Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δούλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις. A literal translation reads: Paul and Timothy, slaves¹ of Christ Jesus to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the overseers and deacons.

While Paul is most notably attributed to the writing of this letter, Timothy is mentioned here as well as in other Pauline letters.²

Date and Location. This letter was written around 61-62 AD to the church in the city of Philippi, a church that was planted some 10 years prior. The city of Phillippi though some distance from the capital of the Empire, Rome, was nevertheless a deeply devoted and patriotic city-state and the largest city within Macedonia. Because of its large population, this city was a strategic outpost for the Empire and consequently for the Gospel to go forth.³



¹ “Undoubtedly the background for the concept of being the Lord’s slave or servant is to be found in the Old Testament scriptures. For a Jew this concept did not connote drudgery, but honor and privilege. It was used of national Israel at times (Isa 43:10), but was especially associated with famous OT personalities, including such great men as Moses (Josh 14:7), David (Ps 89:3; cf. 2 Sam 7:5, 8) and Elijah (2 Kgs 10:10); all these men were “servants (or slaves) of the Lord.” “Constable, Thomas. *NET Bible*. <<https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+1>>

² See Philemon 1:1, 1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1. This raises the question, to what extent if any did Timothy have in the writing of this or other Pauline letters? A minority position believes that Timothy, along with Paul’s other traveling companions, later wrote under Paul’s name in order to preserve his legacy. The majority view however is that Timothy most likely transcribed his letters as we see elsewhere - see 2 Thessolonians 3:17.

³ For a fuller background of the church’s beginnings, check out Acts 16. Also see the sermon “Philippi” in our 2018 teaching series, “Lessons from Church Planting” on our Teaching page on our church’s website.

Authorial Intent. Paul is at the time writing from one of his many imprisonments most likely in Rome.⁴ In Paul's current imprisonment we might liken it to house arrest although in order for his basic needs to be met, they must be provided for from others - food, clothing, stationary to communicate, books, all must be given to him from the outside. And even though he's dependent on others for basic necessities, he still maintains some amount of freedom to receive visitors and communicate via letters. Upon hearing of Paul's imprisonment, the Philippian church sends one of their members, Epaphroditus, with a sum of money to support Paul's future missionary endeavors and so that his basic needs would be met. In many ways, the letter to the Philippian church is both a thank you letter for their financial generosity as well as a call to not be discouraged by his imprisonment but to persevere in Christ.

In this first prayer-thanksgiving section of the letter we begin to see these themes of thankfulness, generosity and perseverance emerge in vv.1-11 though they get more fleshed out in the following chapters. The themes of generosity and perseverance can perhaps be summed up by the Greek word Paul uses for "partnership" in 1:5 - *κοινωνία*. (Translations render *κοινωνία* as "partnership," "fellowship" or "sharing." We see this word elsewhere in the New Testament 19 other times - most notably in Acts 2:42 and 1 John 1:6-7. Pending the context, *κοινωνία* can refer simply to being in relationship with others. In this context however, Paul seems to have in mind relationship through financial generosity.) The Philippian church shows they aren't just interested in the gospel but are literally invested in the gospel. Because of this outworking of their faith, Paul says with confidence in v.6 that they will persevere in their faith to the very end, (referring here not specifically to their death when they are with Christ though we see that clearly in Philippians 1:21. Rather, the day of Christ here refers to Jesus' "second advent" when he comes to judge both the living and the dead, usher in His Kingdom and defeat Satan once and for all. For more on this see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and Revelation 19-21.⁵

Connection and Application

This letter to the Philippians is one of the most joy-filled books not only the Pauline epistles but in the whole canon of Scripture. Joy (*χαρά*) or rejoice (*χαίρω*) is mentioned some 16 times throughout the brief four chapters. So how is it that Paul is able to have this outlook despite his imprisonment? Verse 6 offers us a glimpse into Paul's perspective. Though he may be in prison, God cannot be stopped. Paul is confident that God will work even through his imprisonment to bring about His glory and accomplish His mission. With this in mind, verse 6 ought to bring comfort to those who follow Jesus as well. Even when we undergo suffering or our circumstances are less than ideal, our faith is not placed in our circumstances nor is it in what we do for Christ. Our faith is placed in the work Christ has done for us. Christ's work becomes the bedrock by which we know He keeps His promises. As pastor Tim Keller says, "It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you." Knowing this frees up the Christian not to perform for God, but rather to give their life away because of what Christ has done for them. Such a response shows itself through good works (Ephesians 2:10), ongoing repentance (Matthew 3:8), and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) working itself out among the people of God.

⁴ One clue towards the Roman imprisonment, as opposed to the minority view that his imprisonment is in Ephesus, is verse 13, "the whole imperial guard." The imperial guard was the most elite group of soldiers at the time of the Roman Empire, and thus were more centralized in the capital, Rome.

⁵ "The "day of Christ Jesus" is the eschatological goal of present life in Christ. Paul, and perhaps the early church before him, took up the term "day of the Lord" from the OT to refer to the Parousia, the (now second) coming of Christ." Fee, Gordon. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians (The New International Commentary on the New Testament | NICNT)*