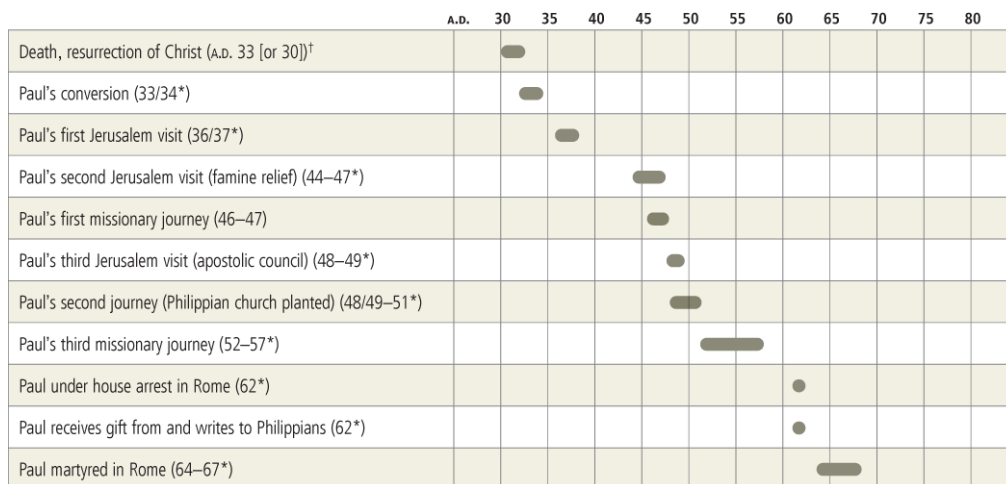


A Survey of Philippians

The Context of the Epistle

- Philippians is a warm, affectionate letter written around AD 61/62 by the Apostle Paul.
- 21 books in the NT are letters (epistles) – there are none in the OT. In OT times, the prophets spoke *oracles* to the people. In NT times, the apostles wrote *letters* to the brethren (intimacy).
- Philippians is one of Paul's *prison* epistles (cf. 1.13). There are epistles of his *pioneer* days (during the timeframe of Acts – like Romans and Galatians), epistles of his *prison* days (like Philippians) and his later *pastoral* epistles.
- Philippians was written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (AD 60-62), thus at the same general time as Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Philippians was carried by *Epaphroditus* (2.25; 4.18); the other prison epistles were carried together by *Tychicus* (Ephesians 6.21-22; Colossians 4.7-9) with *Onesimus* (Philemon).
- Paul brought the gospel to Philippi during his *second* missionary journey as recorded in Acts 16.9-40. Paul received a vision of a "man of Macedonia" pleading for help. This marked a clear westward turn of the gospel into Europe.
- The themes of Acts 16 rise again in the epistle, whether *supplication* (16.13, 16, 25) or rejoicing amid *suffering*. Stripes had been laid upon Paul, yet he could still rejoice (16.33-34)!



The Church at Philippi

- The assembly at Philippi was diverse – hence the strong calls to unity throughout the epistle.
- It included the wealthy family of *Lydia*, as well as the family of the *jailer* – a former pagan with low social status.
- Other believers included *Epaphroditus* [charming], *Euodia* [fragrant], *Syntyche* [pleasant] and *Clement* [merciful]. The spiritual atmosphere of the assembly must have been fragrant indeed!
- The assembly was predominately Gentile, both Greek and Roman. Most of the saints were likely from the lower echelons of society, with a small number of wealthy Greek and Roman citizens.
- Women play a prominent role in the activities of the assembly. The story begins with the conversion of Lydia, and sisters were able helpers of Paul in the work of the gospel (4.3).
- When Philippians was written, 10-11 years had passed since the events of Acts 16. Thus, the assembly was young but had made tremendous spiritual progress. Sandy Higgins says, "They were correct doctrinally, evangelically, morally, governmentally and materially." They were the 'correct' assembly of the NT.
- They had an evident fervency in the gospel (1.27; 4.3) and developed a special bond with Paul over the intervening years – ministering practically time and again to his material needs (4.10, 14-16, 18).

The City of Philippi

- Philippi is described in Acts 16.12, "And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia (a Roman province), *and* a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days."
- The city took its name from the father of Alexander the Great, Philip of Macedon, who captured the city from the Thracians in 360BC.
- Philippi became a Roman colony in honour of the Battle of Philippi when armies loyal to the murdered Julius Caesar, fighting under the joint command of Octavian (later the emperor Augustus) and Mark Antony, defeated the rebel forces of Brutus and Cassius in 42BC.
- After the battle, Octavian populated the city with army veterans and gave the city colonial status with special legal privileges that made it like the soil of Italy itself. Philippi was a miniature Rome.

- It seems that there was very little Jewish presence in the city. On his first visit to the city, Paul found a group of women meeting on the Sabbath for prayer (cf. Acts 16.13, 20-21).
- Presumably, not enough Jewish men (fewer than ten) lived in Philippi to form a synagogue, and the women may have sought out the site because Jewish worship was not welcome in this deeply Roman city.



The Citizenship of Philippi

- Philippi was located in Macedonia, but its citizens lived as Romans. Rome was reflected in Philippi by:
 - Language. Whilst Greek was the everyday language of most of the population, Latin was the official language of administration, law, and public inscriptions.
 - Clothing. Roman citizens wore the toga (or other distinctly Roman dress) on formal occasions, and Roman military or civic styles were the norm.
 - Coinage. The city minted its own coins, which typically carried Latin legends and Roman imperial imagery (emperors, deities, symbols of Roman power).
 - Worship. Everything about Philippi breathed the name of Caesar – the imperial cult of emperor worship thrived. Other traditional Greco-Roman gods like Dionysus were also worshipped, as well as some Eastern cults (Isis).
- This is the background against which Paul uses the language of citizenship (cf. 1.27; 3.20). **Christians belong to heaven!** Just as Philippi was considered to be Italian soil, so the assembly in Philippi was like a little slice of heaven. Those living in Philippi represented and honoured Caesar, but Christians represent a far greater than Caesar!
- Though 800 miles from Rome, the colony was not isolated. If they came under enemy attack, they had the right of appeal to headquarters (Rome) who would dispatch a garrison to protect them (cf. 4.6-7).

The Cause of the Epistle

- The text reveals several reasons for which Paul wrote this epistle. **First**, is the matter of Epaphroditus. He had been sent by the Philippians to “minister” to Paul in prison (2.25) but evidently fell sick and almost died (2.26-27).
- Some of the Philippians had heard of his illness, and Epaphroditus was concerned they would be unduly worried. Paul therefore sends him back to Philippi with this letter of warm commendation for his service (2.28-30).
- **Second**, the saints had sent a gift to Paul (4.14-18; cf. 2.25). The letter vibrates with joy as Paul writes to thank them for their generosity.

Grant Osborne writes, “Paul was forced to leave after the prison episode recorded in Acts 16.19-36, and as he finished that journey through Macedonia and Achaia the church in Philippi on several occasions helped the team financially (4.15-16). That church remained close to Paul for the rest of his ministry career. He probably revisited the believers there during the three-month stay in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 20.1-3) on his way to Jerusalem.

During the tumultuous events following Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and his imprisonments, first in Caesarea (two years) and then in Rome (two years), the Philippians were unable to help him (4.10). But for some reason they found an opportunity to do so partway through his second year in Rome (while still incarcerated) and sent not only financial aid but a personal assistant, Epaphroditus (2.25-30) to help Paul in his ministry. This was incredibly encouraging, and one of the reasons Paul sent this letter was to pour out his love and gratitude for the Philippians' faithfulness."

- **Third**, and the main thread of the epistle, was Paul's desire that their "fellowship in the gospel" (1.5) would continue as it had these 10 years. They had a special spiritual and practical partnership for the advance of the gospel.
- So, Paul reports his present situation, and the amazing advance of the gospel – even in Caesar's palace (1.12-13).
- But Paul was concerned about dangers lurking in the shadows at Philippi which had the potential to destroy their partnership and mar their witness to Christ. The twin dangers were *friction* on the inside and *foes* on the outside.
- The *friction* concerned two sisters (4.2) but was not limited to them (cf. 2.2-4). If rivalry and bitterness were allowed to fester in the assembly, it would damage their testimony.
- The *foes* fall into two groups. First, Roman citizens and unbelievers were persecuting the saints and causing fear (1.27-30). Second, false teachers had the potential to contaminate their preaching of the pure gospel message.
- Some false teachers were *Judaizers* (3.2-3). They believed a Gentile must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law to be saved. Others were *Libertines* (3.18-19) who treated Christian freedom as license for sensual indulgence.
- Paul therefore cautions the saints to be on guard against various doctrinal errors and encourages them to maintain their commitment to Christ. There is one great imperative that governs the whole letter – "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (1.28). They must conduct themselves in a way that is worthy of the gospel.

The Christ of the Epistle

- The gospel is all about Christ. If the saints would commend the gospel by their lives, they must be like Him.
- Philippians has the most references to the Lord Jesus (per verse) than any other book in the Bible. According to some studies, there are over 0.59 references to Christ per verse, i.e. on average He is mentioned in every other verse.
- GC Willis says, "we get the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned in this Epistle by His various names and titles, either together, or alone, 49 times, or seven times seven: and as we know, seven in Scripture tells us of Divine Perfection."
- Thus, Christ is set before the saints as the object on which to fix their gaze. If we are occupied with Christ, we will not be taken up with our brethren! Paul's great desire was to know Christ (3.10) and live Christ (1.21).
- *If Christ is the centre, the circumference takes care of itself.*

Christ in the Epistle to the Philippians			
Philippians 1	Philippians 2	Philippians 3	Philippians 4
Purpose of our Living	Pattern of our Thinking	Prize of our Running	Power of our Serving
Living Christ (1.21)	Learning Christ (2.5)	Looking for Christ (3.20)	Leaning on Christ (4.13)
Christ our Life	Christ our Pattern	Christ our Object	Christ our Strength
The Enrapturing Christ	The Exemplary Christ	The Excelling Christ	The Enabling Christ
His Person Captivating	His Pattern Conforming	His Prospect Controlling	His Power Enabling

- Other major themes of the epistle include *joy* (rejoicing), the *mind* (the way a Christian should think), *unity* and references to a future *hope* which is found in every chapter (1.10; 2.10, 16; 3.20-21; 4.5).

Hamilton Smith summarises the epistle beautifully: *"In Philippians, the Christian is viewed as a heavenly pilgrim, passing through this world on his way to Christ in glory. In the Apostle Paul we have an example of one who treads this heavenly path according to the mind of God. As he pursues his pilgrim way he is called to suffer bonds and imprisonment, and face the realities of life and death. Nevertheless, in spite of all difficulties, he forgets the things that are behind and reaches out to the things that are before. At every step of this path he is sustained by having in view the glorious end of the journey – the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus."*

Appendix

Authorised Version (1611) – Philippians [x50]

<i>Title / Phrase</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Verses</i>
Christ (alone)	18	1:10 (<i>day of Christ</i>), 1:13, 1:15, 1:16, 1:18, 1:20, 1:21, 1:23, 1:27, 1:29, 2:1, 2:16 (<i>day of Christ</i>), 2:30, 3:7, 3:8, 3:9 (<i>faith of Christ</i>), 3:18 (<i>cross of Christ</i>), 4:13
Jesus Christ	8	1:1, 1:6, 1:8, 1:11, 1:19, 1:26, 2:11, 2:21
Christ Jesus	8	1:1, 2:5, 3:3, 3:12, 3:14, 4:7, 4:19, 4:21
in the Lord	8	1:14, 2:24, 2:29, 3:1, 4:1, 4:2, 4:4, 4:10
Lord Jesus Christ	3	1:2, 3:20, 4:23
Lord (alone)	2	2:11, 4:5
Jesus (alone)	1	2:10
Lord Jesus	1	2:19
Christ Jesus my Lord	1	3:8

Revised Version (1881) – Philippians [x49]

<i>Title / Phrase</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Verses</i>
Christ (alone)	17	1:10 (<i>day of Christ</i>), 1:13, 1:15, 1:17, 1:18, 1:20, 1:21, 1:23, 1:27 (<i>gospel of Christ</i>), 1:29, 2:1, 2:16 (<i>day of Christ</i>), 2:30, 3:7, 3:8, 3:9 (<i>faith in Christ</i>), 3:18 (<i>cross of Christ</i>)
Christ Jesus	11	1:1 (x2), 1:8, 1:26, 2:5, 3:3, 3:12, 3:14, 4:7, 4:19, 4:21
in the Lord	8	1:14, 2:24, 2:29, 3:1, 4:1, 4:2, 4:4, 4:10
Jesus Christ	5	1:6, 1:11, 1:19, 2:11, 2:21
Lord Jesus Christ	3	1:2, 3:20, 4:23
Lord (alone)	2	2:11, 4:5
Jesus (alone)	1	2:10
Lord Jesus	1	2:19
Christ Jesus my Lord	1	3:8

Note. 4.13 refers to "Him" rather than "Christ" [KJV] and is not recorded in this table