

# An Introduction to Philippians

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – An introduction and overview of the book of Philippians
2. aim – To cause us to understand the relevance of this book, individually and corporately
3. passage – Philippians 1:8-11

### b. outline

1. The Context of Philippians
2. The Content of Philippians
3. The Contention of Philippians

### c. opening

1. the **reasons** for choosing this book as our next sermon series
  - a. **#1**: a book from the NT, specifically from the Pauline corpus (breaking from our “J” series)
    1. **note**: the last series I did through a Pauline letter was **2 Timothy**, ending **August 25, 2019**
  - b. **#2**: a book I’ve never preached through (although I have taught it in BSF; and did a *brief* sermon series through it just *before* I began full-time pastoral ministry)
  - c. **#3**: a book written to a ancient place *I’ve actually visited* (**2005**) – preached from the riverside
  - d. **#4**: a book rich in *theology* – a letter written by a man who loved *the church*, especially a church consistent (in its doctrine) and generous (in its ministries)
2. the **purpose** of an introduction sermon (**by way of repetition**)
  - a. to establish details – to understand the simple details of the book (who, when, to whom, etc.)
  - b. to establish context – to understand *why* the book was written, and what the author intended
    1. **i.e.** the **grammatical-historical** approach to the *interpretation* of Scripture
  - c. to establish interest – to give us an initial desire to enter into it *and be willing to be changed by it*
  - d. to establish purpose – to reveal the *purpose* of the work and how it affects us here and now
  - e. **i.e.** the **context** of the book, the **content** of the book, and the **contention** of the book ...
    1. **again: I cannot (will not!) say everything that needs to be said here ...**

## I. The Context of Philippians

### Content

#### a. the genre of the book

1. genre = the category of **artistic composition** contained in the book
  - a. **e.g.** *historical; poetic; prophetic; biographical; apocalyptic; etc.*
    1. **Jonah**: *historical narrative* interspersed with *poetic* elements; **Job**: the *opposite*
  - b. **ITC**: an *epistolary* (or *didactic*) work = a NT form of **apostolic instruction** – an epistle (in the form of a personal letter) designed *specifically* for training in theology and doctrine (**e.g. 1 John**)
    1. **remember**: the message of Christ Jesus (at the heart of the Christian faith) is an **apostolic gospel** – the essence of redemption **as communicated by the apostles**
    2. **i.e.** anyone “dismissing” the apostles (deferring *only* to the words of Jesus) *cannot* hold the true gospel, for it is the *apostles* who “fleshed out” Christ’s message to the early church

#### b. the author of the letter

1. there is *no* serious dispute that Paul (orig. Saul of Tarsus) wrote this letter:
  - a. the author *identifies* himself at the outset (**1:1**)
  - b. the author notes that he had been *present* at Philippi (**2:12**)
  - c. the author mentions specific individuals *by name* in the church (**4:2**)
  - d. the author clearly *identifies* with the church and was *supported* by it (**4:14-16**)
  - e. **IOW**: *everything* about this letter *screams* that Paul wrote it after he had been to Philippi
    1. a pseudonymous writer would have to “convince” the audience of the letter that he was Paul
    2. and ... **Philippians** is “unlike” Paul’s other letters, in that it *does not* have the same depth of doctrinal substance (**e.g.** Romans) – it is much more *personal* than doctrinal, which argues for Pauline authorship to a church *that would have known him intimately*

2. like **2 Corinthians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians**, and **Philemon**, Paul includes Timothy as a *co-author* – **i.e.** giving credit to Timothy for “helping” to write the letter
  - a. Timothy became a Christian under his grandmother and mother (Eunice), who Paul converted
  - b. he was added to Paul’s team in Lystra (C Asia Minor), the church founded by Paul on 1<sup>st</sup> journey
  - c. he became Paul’s protégé and apprentice; circumcised by Paul because he was part Jewish
  - d. he became a church “consultant” under Paul for a number of churches, particularly Ephesus
  - e. thus ... as a co-laborer, Timothy was with Paul at Philippi and would have a *common* identification with them; thus, Paul includes him as a co-author (although the words are *clearly* Paul’s)
3. a *brief* biography of Saul of Tarsus (later Paul after his conversion)
  - a. date of birth unknown, although a “*young man*” in **Acts 7:58** (c. 4BC-10AD?)
    1. **interestingly**: not far off in age from Jesus himself; no more than 10 years (probably less!)
  - b. born in Tarsus of Cilicia (SE Asia Minor) – a city of great importance (rivaling Athens)
  - c. his father was a Pharisee (**Acts 23:6**), a Roman citizen, and (apparently) wealthy and influential
    1. Saul himself was a *natural-born* Roman citizen (**Acts 22:25-28**)
  - d. he was highly educated under the rabbi Gamaliel; fluent in Hebrew, Latin and Greek
    1. he describes himself in **3:4-6** as a Pharisee and a *devout* Hebrew (fluent in Torah)
    2. he became the *chief* persecutor of the fledgling Christian church just after the stoning of Stephen (c. 32AD), believing that this “sect” was heretical to true Judaism
  - e. Saul encountered the risen Christ about a year later (c. 33AD)
    1. ironically, the chief persecutor of the church becoming *its greatest evangelist and teacher*
  - f. after his conversion, Paul spends about 14 years in (re)training (**Galatians 2:1**), learning how to incorporate the risen *and divine* Jesus into his Jewish monotheism and understanding of the law
    1. and ... it is only *after* such intimate training with Jesus that he becomes a missionary

#### c. the audience of the letter

1. after commissioned by Christ as an apostle to the Gentiles (at his conversion), Paul began a series of missionary journeys bringing the gospel to C & W Asia Minor and to Greece
  - a. the **First** (c. 47AD): to C Asia Minor (the churches of **Galatians**) – Paul returned to Antioch in Syria
  - b. the **Second** (c. 49-52): *back* to C Asia Minor, then (after being prevented from going N to Bithynia; **Acts 16:1-10**) called across the Aegean to Macedonia (N Greece)
    1. **Acts 16:11-13**: arriving in Philippi, Paul finds no synagogue there and goes down to the river on the Sabbath to pray, encountering a group of women
    2. **Acts 16:14-15**: Paul converts Lydia, a wealthy Jewish widow and dealer in purple cloth, and her household, she then taking Paul and his team into her home
    3. **Acts 16:16-24**: Paul and Silas are arrested for exorcising a demon-possessed girl (**i.e.** her freedom causes Paul and Silas to lose theirs)
    4. **Acts 16:25-34**: an earthquake frees Paul and Silas from prison, but their refusal to flee brings the jailer to faith, along with his household
    5. **Acts 16:35-39**: Paul and Silas are released once it is discovered Paul is a Roman citizen, they make a final visit to Lydia, and depart for Thessalonica
2. so ... the **audience** of this letter is a church that Paul established in Philippi **c. 50AD**

#### d. the date of the letter

1. the author makes a number of references to being *imprisoned* (**1:7, 12-14, 17, 19**)
  - a. although Paul is arrested many times (**including in Philippi**), the *most likely* reference here is to his imprisonment in Rome (**Acts 28**; **i.e.** Paul writing this letter under house arrest; **read 1:13**)
  - b. **Primary Epistles**: **Galatians** (from Antioch, after 1<sup>st</sup> journey), **1 & 2 Thess.** and **Romans** (all from Corinth, during 2<sup>nd</sup> journey [after visiting Philippi])
  - c. **Prison Epistles**: **Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians**, and **Philemon**
    1. written **c. 61AD**, during his house arrest in Rome (**Acts 28**)
    2. **Philippians** first (to Macedonia), then the other three together (to W Asia Minor)
  - d. **Pastoral Epistles**: **1 & 2 Timothy, Titus** after his release, just before his martyrdom c. 64-65AD
2. therefore ... the letter can be dated *fairly specifically* to **c. 61AD**, about 10-11 years after Paul had originally established the church at Philippi (**i.e.** and it had grown and matured)

## II. The Content of Philippians

### Content

#### a. the occasion of the letter

1. **IMO**: Paul considered *the church* at Philippi his **favorite**:
  - a. **churches**: **Romans, Colossians**: never visited; **Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians**: deeply troubled; **Ephesians**: a non-personal encyclical; **1 & 2 Thessalonians**: personal, yet very eschatological
  - b. **individuals**: **1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon**: personal letters written to *individuals*
    1. **IOW**: *none* of Paul's other letters to *churches* are as personal as this one
  - c. **Philippians** has all the hallmarks of a people that Paul loved dearly:
    1. the church was born out of a very specific call by God (to go to Macedonia)
    2. the church was born out of great adversity (*i.e.* his arrest there for doing good)
    3. the church was born out of a people *truly committed* to (his) gospel (*e.g.* Lydia, the jailor)
    4. the church was generous in all of his ministry, giving *beyond* their means (**2 Cor. 8:1-6**)
  - d. **IOW (one commentator)**: this letter is like a **missionary letter** – correspondence from someone *supported* by the church as **a two-way encouragement**
    1. **in fact**: Paul desires the Philippians to continue supporting his cause *financially* (**see 4:14-19**)
2. so ... Paul wrote a letter from house arrest to *close friends* (who would understand his current situation) to encourage *them* to continue faithfully following Christ and living out the abundant life that comes from obedience to the Lord, and to continue to support him in his (future!) work
  - a. **IOW**: Paul, under deep affliction (and uncertainty about his future; **see 1:20**) writes to a group of dear friends, encouraging *them*, even as *he* endured suffering – to progress in the faith (**see 1:25**)

## III. The Content of Philippians

### Content

#### a. the outline of the letter

1. unlike Paul's other letters, this one:
  - a. doesn't have a **clear indicative-imperative** structure (although **4:1** *seems* like a turning point)
  - b. doesn't have a **clear outline** to follow (*i.e.* a nice, neat rhetorical structure)
2. so ... a *simplistic* outline of the letter *could* follow this pattern:
  - a. **chapter 1**: the confident life
  - b. **chapter 2**: the Christ-like and Christ-lead life
  - c. **chapter 3**: the concentrated and controlled life
  - d. **chapter 4**: the comforted and contented life
  - e. all for the purpose of bringing glory to God (**1:11**)

#### b. the contention of the letter

1. **contention (to them)**: **following the example of Jesus (and of Paul himself) live a life of joy – rejoice in the Lord always through obedience to him and service to one another**
  - a. the words “joy” and “rejoice” appear more than a dozen times *explicitly*, and *hinted at* many times
  - b. the letter is about *living the abundant life in Christ* – a life of joy:
    1. **1:8**: flowing out of Paul's affections for them; **1:9**: in which he prays for them to ... about “*in ... knowledge and discernment*”; **1:10**: thus “*able to approve what is excellent*”; **1:11**: being “*filled with the fruit of righteousness*”
    2. *i.e.* it is Paul's desire that the Philippians, already such wonderful friends and consistent followers of Christ, will *continue to experience what it means to truly live in Christ*
2. **contention (to us)**: **what does it mean to live as a true follower of Christ in a world filled with darkness and opposition to him – how do we imitate Paul (as he imitated Jesus) in the midst of our “imprisonments,” being filled with joy?**
  - a. **IMO**: Paul reveals his “life verse” in this letter: **3:10**  
“*O that I might know him, and the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and become like him in his death*” (my paraphrase)
  - b. to know Christ and the *transformation* that has come through being raised from the dead (like him), to *walk as he did* through sufferings, and to *become like him* in his ultimate act of obedience