



Introduction and background

Historical background to Philippians

The Epistle to the Philippians is a letter from Paul and Timothy to the church in Philippi. Philippi was a leading city in the district of Macedonia (now northern Greece). It was a Roman colony, a place where Roman Army veterans and citizens settled, and was therefore steeped in Roman culture.

The church at Philippi was planted by Paul on his second missionary journey in approximately AD 49-51. Acts 16 documents how God called Paul, Silas and Timothy to preach in Macedonia. Arriving in the city of Philippi, they spoke to women who had gathered together at the riverside. A wealthy businesswoman, Lydia, and the Philippian jailor were among the first converts. Paul and Silas – both Roman citizens – had been wrongly beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, and were then asked to leave. In this short space of time, the church had been established – likely among Gentiles since Philippi was a Roman colony.

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from prison. Paul does not say where he is in prison, but it is typically assumed that he wrote this letter with Timothy in Rome in the early sixties AD. The letter was sent back with Epaphroditus who the Philippians had sent to encourage Paul.

Big idea of Philippians

We've summarised Philippians' rich and beautiful interwoven themes under the phrase '**what it means to share in Christ together**'. Philippians is full of the theme of 'sharing' – also translated as fellowship, partnership, or participation (see 1.5, 1.7, 2.1, 3.10, 4.14, 4.15). The letter is written to 'all the saints *in Christ Jesus*' and the term '*in Christ*' or '*in the Lord*' occurs 19 times in this short epistle. We supremely see what it means to share in Christ in what appears to be an early hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. There we see that Christ's life and death are characterised by a humility, obedience and suffering that leads to glory. To share in Christ together is to live according to this same pattern, with our eyes fixed on the goal. Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and indeed the Philippian believers (who have sent Paul a gift), are examples of what it means to share in Christ together.

Outline of the series

Here is the planned breakdown of our sermon series in Philippians at GCG.

1. Opening and greeting (1:1-2)
2. Thanksgiving and prayer (1:3-11)
3. Paul's report on the progress of the gospel (1:12-26)
4. A call to unity and perseverance in suffering (1:27 - 2:4)
5. Jesus: the ultimate servant (2:5-11)
6. A call to obedience, unity, mission and joy (2:12-18)
7. Timothy and Epaphroditus' service (2:19-30)
8. Paul and opponents of the gospel (3:1-11)
9. A call to press on to the goal (3:12-4:1)
10. A call to unity, joy, peace, wisdom and imitation (4:2-9)
11. Paul's thanksgiving for the Philippians' gift and concluding greetings (4:10-23)

Helpful resources

Brown, J. K. 2022. *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries). IVP Academic: Downers Grove, IL.

Fee, G. D. 1995. *Paul's letter to the Philippians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament). Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI.

Hawthorne, G. F. 1983. *Philippians* (Word Bible Commentary). Word Books: Waco, TX.

Silva, M. 2005. *Philippians*. 2nd ed. (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI.