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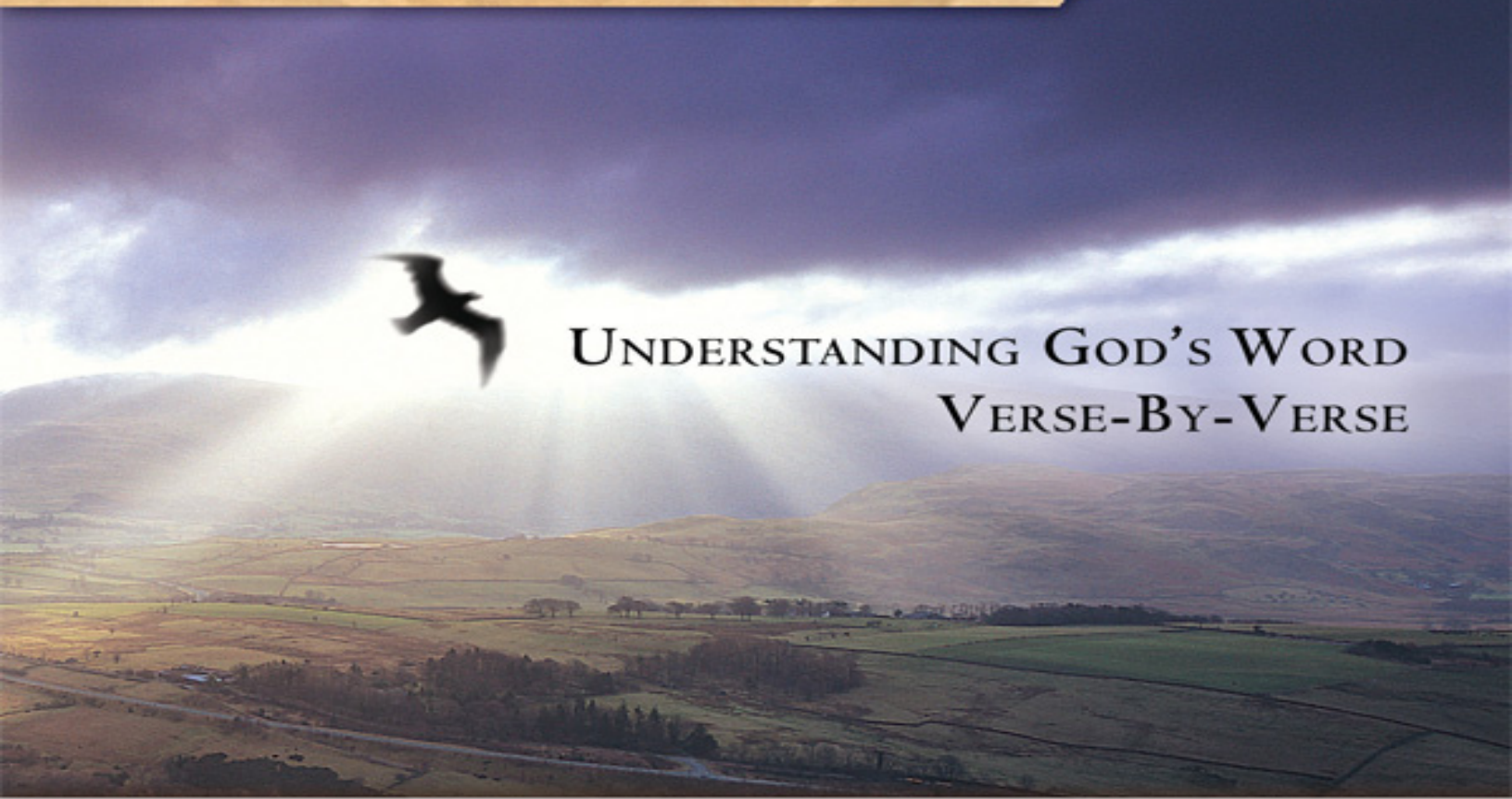
# PHILIPPIANS

## PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCHES

*Encouraging the Believer*



UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD  
VERSE-BY-VERSE



PHILIPPIANS—ENCOURAGING THE BELIEVER  
by Practical Christianity Foundation

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# INTRODUCTION



[Philippi \(view image\)](#) was an ancient city located in eastern [Macedonia \(view image\)](#), what is now eastern Greece. It was located ten miles (16 km) north of the port city of [Neapolis \(view image\)](#), now known as Kavalla, on the [Aegean Sea](#). Before 400 B.C., the region was well known for its gold mines. In 359 B.C., Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, annexed the region and renamed it for himself. Armies and expeditions were expensive, and Philip needed the gold to finance his ventures. Two centuries later, Rome conquered Macedonia and in 146 B.C. it became one of the six provinces governed by Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Over the centuries, the gold mines were depleted and the city began a slow decline. Under Rome, the city again became the center of the province and, as a colony, the residents enjoyed the benefits of citizenship ([Acts 16:12](#)). Many veterans of the Roman army retired to this region, making it a virtual replica of the capital city of Rome itself. Latin was the spoken language. “The city enjoyed not only economic privileges, such as exemption from tribute and the right to acquire, hold, and transfer property, but also political advantages, such as freedom from interference by the provincial governor, and the right and responsibility to regulate their own civic affairs.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul arrived in this city on his [second missionary journey](#), A.D. 50–53. Paul had retraced the steps of his first journey through Asia Minor, visiting the churches in Derby, Lystra, and Iconium. He then came to the port city of

Troas on the northwestern coast. There he had a vision of a man in [Macedonia \(view image\)](#), asking him to come to his country and tell them about Jesus ([Acts 16:9–10](#)). Without any hesitation, Paul set sail with his companions, Silas and Timothy, stopping at the island of Samothrace, and then sailing the next day to [Neapolis \(view image\)](#).



After several days in the city, Paul walked out of the city on the Sabbath and met a woman by the name of Lydia on the banks of the Gangites River. Luke states: “She was listening because the Lord made her willing to pay attention to what Paul said” ([Acts 16:14](#)). She believed the Gospel and was baptized immediately, becoming the first Christian in Europe.

Shortly afterward, Paul commanded a demon to leave a young slave girl who told fortunes and made a lot of money for her owners. The owners blamed Paul for their loss of money, had him beaten, and thrown into prison. An earthquake opened the doors to the prison, but Paul and Silas refused to leave. As a result of Paul’s testimony, the jailer became a Christian. When the magistrates discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen, they apologized for his treatment and set him free. Paul returned to Lydia’s home, encouraged the saints, and left the city.

Following his third missionary journey, Paul was confined to a long period of imprisonment, first in Jerusalem and eventually in Rome, A.D. 59–62. During that time, Paul wrote several letters to churches that had been established during his missionary journeys— Colossians, Ephesians,

Philippians, and Philemon. Most Bible scholars have come to the conclusion that these letters were written while Paul was in Rome about A.D. 61–62.<sup>3</sup>

Now, ten years after his first visit to the city, Paul pens this letter to the church that had flourished in [Philippi \(view image\)](#). He remembered them fondly and rejoiced in the relationship he had with them. At the outset, he wrote about his situation in Rome and the proclamation of the Gospel in the capital city. He wept over the divisions that had arisen in the Roman church. Nevertheless, he remained optimistic because the Gospel was preached despite these divisions. He was happy that his imprisonment had led to the salvation of some in Caesar's household.

Paul then asked the Philippian Christians to follow Christ's example, living out their salvation in unity, humility, and selfless service to others. He promised that such a life would give them great happiness. To help them toward this end, he promised to send Epaphroditus back to them as soon as possible. He wanted them to understand the evil of the world in which they lived. He wanted them to imitate his life—a man who was well educated, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, who considered these human achievements as rubbish compared to knowing Christ and His resurrection.

Finally, with words of love and longing, Paul urged the Philippian Christians to stay firmly rooted in the faith. They could do this by being watchful and prayerful, living in the peace of God that cannot be calculated by the human mind. Christ was their source of strength and comfort in all circumstances, just as He had been for Paul.

Though he was in prison, Paul wrote this letter with a tone of confident joy and thanksgiving, expressing how Christ was more valuable than anything the world had to offer. If one did not know Paul's circumstances, one might think that he was living the life of a wealthy man. And, indeed, he was! He was rich beyond human measure. Christ's grace had bestowed an inheritance that was more valuable than all the treasures of this life.

Christians would do well to emulate Paul, living in the contentment of their salvation in Jesus Christ, confident of His goodness, His strength, His supply. His Name be praised for all eternity by the saints who have been lifted from the depth of their sin to see the unsurpassed glory of their risen Lord, those who find in Jesus Christ the supreme satisfaction of their redeemed lives.

Let me learn of Paul  
whose presence was mean,  
his weakness great,  
his utterance contemptible,  
yet thou didst account him faithful and blessed.  
Lord, let me lean on thee as he did,  
and find my ministry thine.<sup>4</sup>

**PHILIPPI** — Formerly Crenides, “the fountain,” the capital of the province of Macedonia. It stood near the head of the Sea, about 8 miles north-west of Kavalla. It is now a ruined village, called Philibedjik. Philip of Macedonia fortified the old Thracian town of Crenides, and called it after his own name Philippi (B.C. 359-336). In the time of the Emperor Augustus this city became a Roman colony, a military settlement of Roman soldiers, there planted for the purpose of controlling the district recently conquered. It was a “miniature Rome,” under the municipal law of Rome, and governed by military officers, called *duumviri*, who were appointed directly from Rome. Having been providentially guided thither, here Paul and his companion Silas preached the gospel and formed the first church in Europe. This success stirred up the enmity of the people, and they were “shamefully entreated” (Acts 16:9–40; 1 Thess. 2:2). Paul and Silas at length left this city and proceeded to Amphipolis (q.v.).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

1. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1962), 6.

### **Acts 16:12**

<sup>12</sup> and from there we went to the city of Philippi. Philippi is a leading city in that part of Macedonia, and it is a Roman colony. We were in this city for a number of days.

**MACEDONIA** — Roman province in NT times, beginning as a kingdom in the 7th century B.C. Little is known about the first several centuries of its history, but with the coming to power of the Greek king Philip II (359–336 B.C.), and especially his son Alexander III (the Great, 336–323 B.C.), Macedonia became a world power. After Alexander's death, the empire was

divided among his successors into several regions, one of them the original Macedonian kingdom. Instability held sway for the next 150 years, and in 167 B.C. Macedonia came under Roman rule. Initially divided into four districts by the Romans (Acts 16:12 is a possible reference to this division), this territory was made into a Roman province in 14 B.C. with Thessalonica as its capital. Briefly, from A.D. 15–44, Macedonia was combined with Achaia and Moesia (other parts of Greece) into one large province; however, in A.D. 44, the three were again separated. Macedonia's importance continued through the Roman era, and it remained a separate entity down to modern times, though at present no Macedonian state exists.

The Roman province of Macedonia included the northern region of Greece and southern sections of present-day Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Noted for its gold, silver, timber, and farm lands, the region also served as a land route for trade between Asia and the West. Shortly after the Romans incorporated Macedonia as a province they built the Via Egnatia, a paved road over 500 miles long, running from the Adriatic coast to the Aegean, no doubt traveled by the apostle Paul as he moved through the Macedonian cities of Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica (Acts 16:11, 12; 17:1).

The gospel was introduced to Europe by way of Macedonia when Paul responded to a vision while on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:9–12). Details of that work, centering in Philippi and Thessalonica, are described in Acts 16:11–17:15. On his third journey, though delayed initially (19:21, 22), Paul later returned to Macedonia, and again after a stay in Corinth (20:1–3; see 1 Cor 16:5; 2 Cor 1:16 and 2:13 for other references to Macedonian visits).

Macedonian believers played an important part in the collection Paul gathered for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 9:2, 4); Paul commended them for their liberality (2 Cor 8:1, 2). He also praised them for their example of faith, even in times of adversity (7:5; 1 Thes 1:7), and for their love of others (1 Thes 4:10). Some of the Macedonians worked directly with Paul in carrying out the gospel commission (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2), and he addressed letters to churches in two Macedonian cities, Philippi and Thessalonica.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988). 1372-73.



**NEAPOLIS** — The seaport of the city of Philippi (Acts 16:11) where Paul landed on his second missionary journey. The port is located at modern Kavalla on the northern shore of the Aegean Sea about 16 km. (10 mi.) from Philippi. The city was known as Christoupolis during the Byzantine period.

Modern archaeological excavations have unearthed the remains of a village dating to the Hellenic period and a structure identified as a temple to the city god of Parthenos.

When Paul left the port for Philippi, he would have taken the famous Roman road, Egnatian Way, which cut through the rocks of the coastal Pangaeus mountain range. <sup>1</sup>

km. kilometer

mi. mile(s)

<sup>1</sup> Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987). 752.

2. Ibid., 7.

3. Richard R. Melick, “Philippians, Colossians, Philemon,” *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 40.

4. *The Valley of Vision* (Edinburgh, UK; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 341.

### **Acts 16:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia. The man urged Paul, “Come to Macedonia to help us.”

<sup>10</sup> As soon as Paul had seen the vision, we immediately looked for a way to go to Macedonia. We concluded that God had called us to tell the people of Macedonia about the Good News.

### **Acts 16:14**

<sup>14</sup> A woman named Lydia was present. She was a convert to Judaism from the city of Thyatira and sold purple dye for a living. She was listening

because the Lord made her willing to pay attention to what Paul said.

# PHILIPPIANS

1

## Philippians 1:1–11

**1:1–2** *<sup>1</sup>From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To God's people in the city of Philippi and their bishops and deacons—to everyone who is united with Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>Good will and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are yours!*

Paul opened his letter to the Philippians with a salutation that often characterized his writings. Together with his spiritual son [Timothy](#)<sup>1</sup> (*1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:1*), they saluted the elders and deacons of the church along with the saints who were united in Jesus Christ. They invoked God's favor on the church, asking for God's grace and peace to be abundant in their lives.

Paul and Timothy were the servants of Jesus Christ. Paul acknowledged the unity they enjoyed with the saints in Philippi along with their bishops

and deacons. They were God's people who had been joined together as one in the faith Jesus Christ gives. Even though he was an apostle appointed by God, Paul preferred to identify himself with his spiritual children. His message was important to the officers of the church and to the members of the body of Christ. Therefore, instead of talking down to the Philippians, Paul fondly greeted them with God's grace, favor, peace, and goodwill.

Paul left no doubt in the minds of the Philippians that his letter was Christ's inspired Word conveyed to God's people in the authority of God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote with a dedication defined by his relationship to his Master Jesus Christ, his loyalty to the office to which he was appointed, his unreserved surrender to the Lord, and his passionate care for God's people. As God's children united in one faith in Jesus Christ, he expected the Philippians to receive his epistle with the same dedication, a genuine surrender to the instruction of God's Holy Word, and an unqualified reverence for the Author of the Gospel.

***1:3–4 <sup>3</sup>I thank my God for all the memories I have of you. <sup>4</sup>Every time I pray for all of you, I do it with joy.***

Paul was fond of the saints in [Philippi \(view image\)](#). His memory of the believers there produced warm sentiments toward them. Paul personally rejoiced in the grace that God gave him when the Spirit called him to Philippi. He actually thanked God for the personal experience he had while serving God in Philippi and for the joy that filled his heart as he thought about their spiritual welfare.

Paul was filled with joy every time he prayed for these dear friends. Praying for his spiritual children was not a cumbersome duty for Paul. His heart was continuously refreshed by the joy of the Lord as he observed God's redeeming love work in the lives of those to whom he was sent to preach the Gospel. He always prayed for the Philippian saints with rejoicing and God-given enthusiasm.

***1:5 I can do this because of the partnership we've had with you in the Good News from the first day***

***[you believed] until now.***

Paul realized that rejoicing over someone else's good fortune was foreign to the deep-seated human impulse. Therefore, he explained the reason for his joyful attitude when he prayed for them—their partnership in Jesus Christ through the fellowship they shared in the Gospel.

Paul appreciated the excellency of Jesus Christ Who changed his life from a persecutor to an apostle of the Good News of God's redemption. The same transforming work of the Gospel occurred in everyone in whom the Holy Spirit accomplished God's salvation. Knowing that the same Spirit brought the joy of God's salvation to all of them, Paul showed them how the union they had in and through Christ also produced the love and care they had for each other. They rejoiced with each other in the fellowship of the Gospel. Paul rejoiced with these dear brothers and sisters, because the Holy Spirit generated an unfeigned joy in all believers as they worshiped the Lord together.

***1:6 I'm convinced that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it through to completion on the day of Christ Jesus.***

Paul rejoiced with the Philippians not only because they were rescued from condemnation but also because he knew what God had prepared for them. Paul wanted the saints to know that God was their eternal Father. He would be faithful to the end. What He had begun in them He would bring to a glorious conclusion. Paul wanted them to share his confidence in God. He rejoiced over their common destiny in Christ. The Lord Who delivered them from eternal death is also able to sustain them until that day when they see Jesus face-to-face. Paul's joy was fostered by his knowledge and confidence that God is faithful to bring His redemption to its glorious conclusion.

***1:7 You have a special place in my heart. So it's right for me to think this way about all of you. All of you are my partners. Together we share God's favor,***

***whether I'm in prison or defending and confirming the truth of the Good News.***

Paul was especially fond of the Philippian Christians. They should not be surprised by the way he viewed them. He loved them in the Lord. He shared their joy about the marvelous work of God's grace in them. So he assured them that it was natural for him to be excited about their spiritual well-being.

Paul considered the Philippians to be bonded with him in a true fellowship both in his suffering and in the service of the Gospel. Because of the union they had in Christ, they shared in the calling of the defense and confirmation of the Gospel. Even though they were not called to apostleship as Paul was, their life as the redeemed children of God provided a viable evidence for the Gospel that was committed to Paul. So Paul rejoiced with the Philippians not only as his spiritual children, but also as fellow laborers for the Gospel. God's all-sufficient grace given to him to persevere in all circumstances for the sake of the Gospel was also given to them.

***1:8 God is my witness that, with all the compassion of Christ Jesus, I long [to see] every one of you.***

Paul truly loved the Philippian Christians. He loved each member individually and as an assembly of the body of Christ. He considered them as his partners both in his suffering and in the service of the Gospel. He had a special place for them in his heart. He missed them. He often longed to see them. Remembering his experience in [Philippi \(view image\)](#) while a prisoner in Rome, Paul yearned for the day of his freedom so that he could go and visit them personally. He loved them in the compassion and care of Jesus Christ. He was passionate and caring for their spiritual well being in and through the power of Christ's love. His care for them was more than ordinary human emotional fondness. This was truly a God-given love demonstrating the power and love of Jesus Christ working through him toward the Philippian believers in a practical way.

***1:9–10 <sup>9</sup>I pray that your love will keep on growing because of your knowledge and insight. <sup>10</sup>That way***

***you will be able to determine what is best and be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.***

Paul's prayer for the Philippians surpassed the expression of his fond love for them. He wanted their love to reach beyond a commonplace conduct of Christian care and compassion toward one another. Paul fervently prayed that the love of the Philippians would also turn into a sincere desire toward gaining godly knowledge and wisdom. He wanted them to be lovers of people and lovers of the truth.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to be more than believing and loving Christians. He prayed that they would gain a viable spiritual maturity. As he did in [Ephesians 1:17–18](#), Paul prayed that the Philippians too would receive wisdom and knowledge, and that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened by the Holy Spirit toward the things of God and the mystery of His redemption. He wanted the Philippians to be discerning and insightful believers so that they might be able to live for Christ in the power of God's purifying and sanctifying truth. Even though loving and dedicated, Paul recognized that the Philippians and all believers need to realize that their new life in Christ must be nurtured into a life of godly excellence and holiness.

***1:11 Jesus Christ will fill your lives with everything that God's approval produces. Your lives will then bring glory and praise to God.***

Paul assured the Philippians that their lives will be transformed by the power of their Redeemer in a practical way. Godly excellence, holiness, truth, love, and faith will certainly be cultivated into their new life as the Holy Spirit Himself nurtures their growth with God's eternal truth. The fruit of Christ's righteousness will gradually begin to fill their lives. They will be drawn to the things that please and glorify God. They will ultimately live for the glory and praise of God. As Christ encouraged His disciples, they will deny themselves for Jesus Christ's sake and love Him with all of who they are and what they have.

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