

***The Letter of Paul
to the Philippians
A Bible Study***

Bible study written in 2020, by Lisa H. Bryant.

Introduction

The Epistle to the Philippians is one of the seven undisputed Pauline letters. Some scholars claim that Paul wrote this letter while in Ephesus in the early to mid 50's (Wright et al. 439). This would mean that he wrote this letter between his first and second visit to Philippi. I am concluding that he actually wrote the letter while under house arrest in Rome in the early 60's (Witherington 9). The relationship between Paul and the Philippians is close, suggesting that he had spent much time with them. While his second visit was fairly short, it would make more sense that he had visited them on more than one occasion. He is also obviously imprisoned while writing the letter. There is no proof from his letters or from Luke's account of Paul's journeys in Acts that he was ever imprisoned in Ephesus (Witherington Iii 525).

Many of Paul's letters address a certain problem in the churches. However, Philippians is more of a letter of encouragement. There is a possibility that Paul may be addressing some inner disagreements, but the whole of the letter is encouraging the Philippians to stand firm in the Gospel. These Gentile Christians would have faced a lot of opposition to the Christian lifestyle from their Greco-Roman neighbors. Paul is simply encouraging them to stay the course.

Paul's Letter to the Church in Philippi is often called the "Epistle of Joy". While joy is characteristic of the Pauline letters, he mentions the words joy and rejoice more times in this letter than in any of his other writings. He uses forms of the Greek word "καρᾶ" (*kara*), translated as "joy" or "rejoice", sixteen times in this letter. As we will see when we dive into this letter, joy is more than just an emotion for Paul. Paul's joy is directly tied to his life in Jesus Christ. There is somewhat of an eschatological element in that Paul sometimes makes reference to his future salvation as a present joy (Hellerman et al. 22). Dr. Ben Witherington, III, explains that because of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has filled believers with "many things, including eschatological joy over their salvation." (Witherington 59) For Paul, this joy in Christ remains even when he is imprisoned and faces the possibility of execution.

The Letter to the Philippians is also about unity. Paul uses many rhetorical devices to hammer this point home to his audience. Unity will make the Philippian church stronger in Christ and help them to face any oppositions to Paul's teaching. Their unity is also tied to joy, both for the believers in Philippi and Paul. Unity will assist the Philippians in "working out their own salvation" (2:12), so that they are "pure and blameless in the day of Christ" (1:10); and they will experience that present joy because of their future salvation. Paul is joyous over the Philippians's

sharing in his ministry of spreading the Gospel, “make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” (2:2).

It is my hope that through Paul’s instructions to the church at Philippi, we can glean some nuggets of truth to live into this same kind of joy that Paul experiences and the unity that he hopes for the Philippian church can become our unity. A joy to hold onto through all circumstances and a unity that sustains and strengthens us in Christ Jesus.

This study will last for six weeks. There will be an introduction video at the beginning. Each week will consist of five segments of readings and short homework. You may choose to complete a segment each day for five days or all in one day. At the end of the week, there will be a video that goes into the topics a little deeper. You also may choose to only watch the videos or only do the reading/homework. Both ways will be insightful.

Each day will consist of a scripture reading, “Initial Takeaways” or short answer questions that will be insightful to the rest of the study, “Into the Text”, and “Reflection Questions” designed to think deeper about how the Scripture applies to our lives today.

Below is an outline of the six week study.

Week 1:

To understand Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we must first understand who Paul is and his background as a Pharisaic Jew turned Apostle to Christ Jesus. The next thing we must understand is the context into which Paul is writing. Philippi was a very Romanized city, populated with both Greeks and Romans. What is society like in Philippi? Then we will look at the introduction to the letter. The introductions to Paul’s letters are very similar on the surface, but when you dig deeper you will see themes that Paul uses throughout each individual letter.

1. Background on Paul – Acts 22:28; 9:1-9
2. 1st Visit to Philippi – Acts 16, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2
3. 2nd Visit to Philippi - Acts 20:1-6
4. Letter Intro – Philippians 1:1-2
5. Thanksgiving & Prayer for Participation in the Gospel – Philippians 1:3-11

Week 2:

We begin this week with an understanding of what is happening in Paul’s life at the time he writes the letter to the Philippians. Paul, even in unfavorable circumstances, is joyful in Christ. He writes of his present joy and his future joy. Paul also introduces to the Philippians that they are to live as and take pride in

being citizens of the Kingdom of God, which is contrary to their society and culture.

1. Paul's Circumstances – Part I (Acts 28:16-31) (*Acts 21-28:15*)
2. Paul's Circumstances Part II & the Continuation of the Gospel (Philippians 1:12-14)
3. Paul's Current Joy (1:15-18a)
4. Paul's Future Joy (1:18b-26)
5. Kingdom Citizenship (1:27-30)

Week 3:

In week 3, we are introduced to a popular pedagogical technique of the time, that of imitation. Paul urges the Philippians to imitate Christ and spells out the servanthood of Christ through the "Christ Hymn". He then urges them to unity through Christ. Paul also sends his co-workers in the Gospel, Timothy and Epaphroditus, as examples for the Philippians to follow.

1. Unity through Humility (2:1-5)
2. Christ Hymn Part I (2:5-8)
3. Christ Hymn Part II (2:9-11)
4. Humility Lived out in Community (2:12-18)
5. Paul sends Timothy & Epaphroditus (2:19-3:1)

Week 4:

In week 4 Paul introduces the Philippians to some counter-cultural expectations that living as Christ followers will bring to them. He urges them to press on towards their goal of unity in Christ despite those around them who are causing division.

1. Beware of the Dogs (3:2-3)
2. Confidence in the Flesh (3:4-6) (*Prevenient Grace*)
3. The Great Exchange: Everything for Christ Jesus My Lord (3:7-11)
4. Pressing On (3:12-16)
5. Imitation & Warning (3:17-19)

Week 5:

Paul further explains what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, even while living in a Greco-Roman society. It means being unified and of one mind, specifically having the same mind as Christ Jesus. It means rejoicing in the work of Christ. Paul offers himself as an example to be imitated.

1. Citizenship in the Kingdom of God (3:20-4:1)
2. Call to Unity (4:2-3)
3. Rejoice (4:4, et. al.)

4. The Lord Is Near (4:5-7)
5. Paul's Teaching & Example (4:8-9)

Week 6:

Again, Paul rejoices in both the Lord and his co-workers in the Lord's Gospel. He acknowledges the gift from the Philippians and explains to them that God was glorified in their gift. Paul ends the letter with a closing and benediction. We will look over the whole of Philippians and notice some contrasts that Paul reiterated throughout the entire letter.

1. Paul Rejoices in the Lord & Philippians Concern for Paul's Work (4:10-13)
2. Philippians Kindness (4:14-18)
3. God's Response & Doxology (4:19-20)
4. Closing Greeting & Benediction (4:21-23)
5. Wrap-Up – contrasts throughout Philippians

The Scripture used in this study comes from the New Revised Standard Translation, unless the text is in italics which is my own translation.

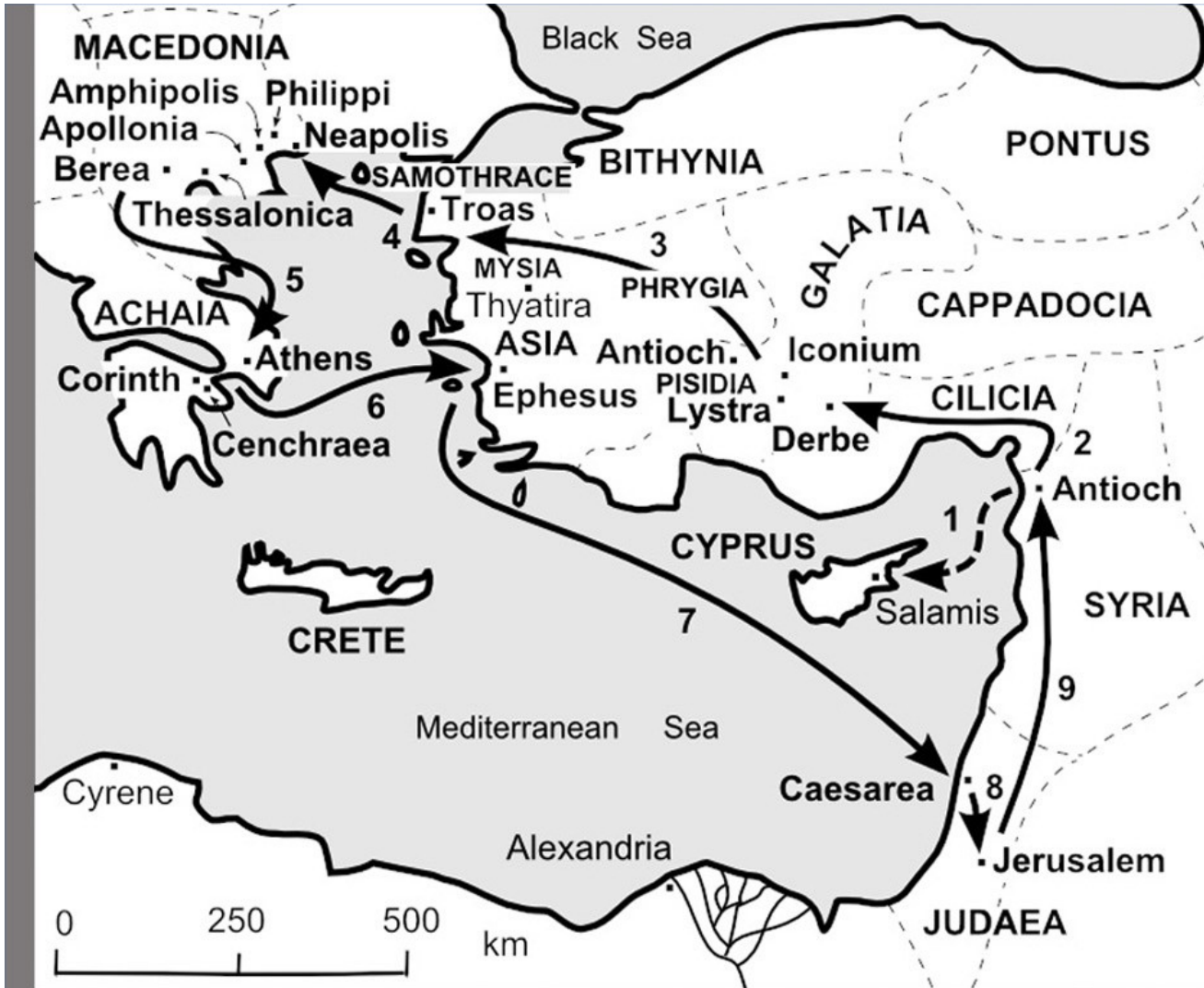
Paul & Philippians Timeline

This is not a comprehensive timeline of Paul's life, but rather important dates and facts that pertain to his time in and letter to Philippi. All dates are AD.

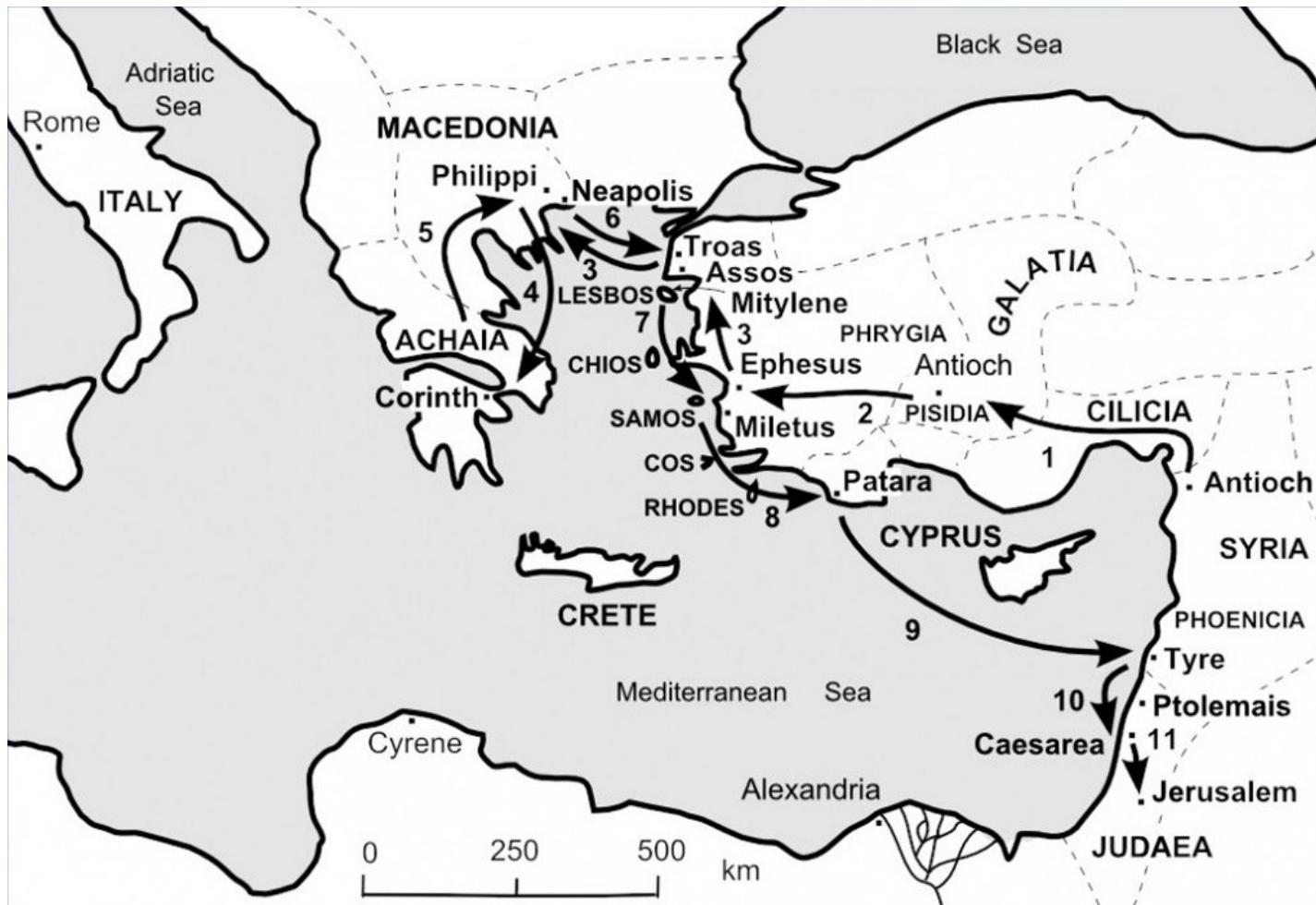
- c. 4 - Jesus of Nazareth is born
- c. 5-10 Saul is born an Israelite in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3)
- 30 - Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth
- c. 31-34 Saul is a Roman citizen (Acts 22:8)
Saul is a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5)
Saul persecutes Christians (Acts 8:1-4; Philippians 3:6)
- 34 – Saul's conversion on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9)
- 50 - Paul goes to Derbe & Lystra and picks up Timothy (Acts 16:1-5)
Paul & Timothy go to Troas, Paul has a vision about a Macedonian man (Acts 16:6-10) – See Map #1
- 51 - Paul & Timothy visit Philippi for the first time on what is called Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey (Acts 16)
Paul & Silas imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:19-39; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2)
Departs from Philippi (Acts 16:40)
Preached in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10)
- c. 51-55 – The church at Philippi sends money to Paul for his missionary work more than once. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, Philippians 4:16)
- 56 – Paul visits Philippi for the second time on what is called his 3rd Missionary Journey (Acts 20:1-6) – See Map #2
Paul writes the 2nd letter to the Church in Corinth during this time
- 57 - Paul is arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:26-36)
- 60 – Arrives in Rome and is placed under house arrest (Acts 28:14-16)
- 60-62 – Preaches the gospel freely while under house arrest in Rome
Writes what are known as “The Prison Letters”, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, & Philippians



Map #1



Map #2



PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Map #3

Week One/Day One Paul's Background

This is probably a refresher for most, but to understand Paul, and more specifically the Letter to the Philippians, it is important to understand Paul's background story. You know of the conversion story from Acts 9:1-9, when Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. Let's read the recount of that story Paul gives to the people of the city of Jerusalem from Acts 22.

Acts 22 - "Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I now make before you." ² When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. Then he said: ³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

⁶ "While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸ I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' Then he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ I asked, 'What am I to do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.' ¹¹ Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

¹² "A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, ¹³ came to me; and standing beside me, he said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight!' In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. ¹⁴ Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; ¹⁵ for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.'

¹⁷ "After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of

Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.’²⁰ And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him.’²¹ Then he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

²² Up to this point they listened to him, but then they shouted, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.”²³ And while they were shouting, throwing off their cloaks, and tossing dust into the air,²⁴ the tribune directed that he was to be brought into the barracks, and ordered him to be examined by flogging, to find out the reason for this outcry against him.²⁵ But when they had tied him up with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned?”²⁶ When the centurion heard that, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? This man is a Roman citizen.”²⁷ The tribune came and asked Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.”²⁸ The tribune answered, “It cost me a large sum of money to get my citizenship.” Paul said, “But I was born a citizen.”²⁹ Immediately those who were about to examine him drew back from him; and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

³⁰ Since he wanted to find out what Paul was being accused of by the Jews, the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and the entire council to meet. He brought Paul down and had him stand before them.

Initial Takeaways

1. Where was Paul born (22:3)?
2. What nationality does Paul claim (22:3)?
3. How was Paul educated (22:3)?
4. What other citizenship does Paul claim (22:28)?
5. Find Tarsus, Damascus, and Jerusalem on Map #1.

Into the Text

Tarsus was a bustling Roman city, a city of culture, politics, philosophy, and industry. Having been born in Tarsus, Paul was a Roman citizen. But having been born into a Jewish family, Paul was also a Jew. This would be the equivalent to a fish living in a tree. Augustus Caesar, the emperor of Rome, had declared his late adoptive father, Julius Caesar, to be divine. All Romans were required to worship the goddess Roma and *Kyrios* Caesar, or “Lord Caesar”. This in turn made Augustus the son of god. Jews worshiped the One True God, Yahweh. They followed the laws of the Torah (the first five books of our Old Testament). As you may have figured, this posed a problem. The first of the Ten Commandments says, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.” (Deuteronomy 5:6-7). A deal was worked out that allowed the Jews to pray and worship their One True God, but only if they prayed for Rome to their One True God.

This was the atmosphere in which young Saul was born and raised. His family were not only Jewish, but of the strictest of the Jewish schools. They were Pharisees. The Pharisaic school was relentless in teaching their members a strict adherence to the ancestral traditions. Saul would have more than likely memorized the Torah and he would have been praying the *Shema* as soon as he was able to talk. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” (Deuteronomy 6:4). It is evident in Paul’s letters that he was very well learned in the entire Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament), as he quotes extensively from those books throughout his writings.

Roman citizens were extremely proud of their citizenship and received certain benefits because of it. As you can see in the Acts 22 reading, it was illegal to flog a Roman citizen for no reason. There was also a sense of pride in being a Jew. It was not so much that these two groups lived in opposition to each other, but more like the Jews were a sub-culture of their Roman colonies. There was more of a sense of separate but equal; with the Jews thinking they were the superior party and the Romans thinking they were the superior party.

This background is important to studying any of the letters Paul wrote. It will help to understand where Paul is coming from, as well as the situation in which the Philippians are currently living.

Week One/Day Two

Paul's First Visit to Philippi

Luke recorded both of Paul's visits to Philippi in his book of Acts. Today we will read and study about Paul's first visit to the Roman city of Philippi in the year 51 AD. He first visited Philippi in what is called his "Second Missionary Journey". This journey is shown on Map #2. Paul tells the church of Thessalonica a little of the struggles he faced in Philippi in his 2nd letter to them.

Acts 16 - Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.

⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

¹⁶ One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” ¹⁸ She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰ When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹ and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³ After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴ Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴ He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

³⁵ When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” ³⁶ And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, “The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace.” ³⁷ But Paul replied, “They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.” ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates,

and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; ³⁹ so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

Thessalonians 2:1-2 - You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.

Initial Takeaways

1. Locate all of the cities/places mentioned in the Acts reading on Map #2.
2. Where do Paul, Silas, and Timothy stay while they are in Philippi?
3. What is the “shameful mistreatment” Paul speaks of in the Thessalonians reading?

Into the Text

Around 356 BC, King Philip II of Macedonia, father of Alexander the Great, brought his armies to the area of now-Philippi to protect the local inhabitants from raiding tribes. King Philip II realized the strategic value of the area due to its location and the economic value of the gold and silver mines in the Pangaion Mountains. He founded a new town; settled it with Greeks from Thasos and Macedonia, as well as immigrants from Egypt, Asia Minor, Israel, and other countries; and built a wall around it. It was named “Philippi” after its founder.

There is very little historical information about the Roman/Macedonian wars that happened in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BCE. By around 148 BC, Macedonia was controlled by Rome and divided into four districts. The district where Philippi was located is district one. While these districts were no longer formally used in the time of Paul's visit, they were certainly still recognized unofficially as we see in the Greek text of Acts 16:12a. The adjective *protos* (first in place) is used to describe district, but it is not translated into the English.

In the following years, Philippi was increasingly Romanized. The great trade road, *Via Egnatia*, was built and it ran through Philippi. For this reason, Philippi became an important city. In 42 BC, a decisive battle of the Roman civil war between Octavian/Mark Antony and Brutus/Cassius was fought at Philippi. Brutus and Cassius were defeated. After this war, lands in Philippi were awarded to retired soldiers to allow them to become self-sustaining in a time of peace. But in 31 BC, Octavian and Mark Antony fought against each other in the battle of Actium. Octavian won and became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. Again, land was given in Philippi to retired soldiers loyal to Octavian. Some of these lands came from lands confiscated from Mark Antony's followers. Octavian granted Philippi the *Ius Italicum*, which conferred upon Philippi the same legal status as cities in Italy.

With Philippi being an outpost of Roman government in land across the Adriatic sea from Italy, there was a cohort of praetorians quartered there. A cohort consisted of around 1,000 men and the Praetorian Guard was the Emperor's elite troops; think secret service for the emperor. Philippi was governed as a Roman city, with the *duumviri*, which means literally "commission of two men". These are the magistrates mentioned in Acts 16:20-39. The *lictores*, or police officers, would serve directly under the *duumviri*. These titles would have been very important to the bearers and a source of pride.

In place of the districts, people were placed in a *tribus* (tribe). These tribes served as voting districts. Philippi and the surrounding area were in the tribe Voltinia. We know from inscriptions excavated Philippi that Roman, Philippian, and Voltinian citizenship was a source of pride. People would be called "Bob, son of Robert, citizen of Rome, Philippi, and tribus Voltinia"(Verhoef 2-13).

Philippi at the time of Paul's visits was inhabited by mostly Roman citizens. But because of its crucial location on the *Via Egnatia* there were also merchants and others who settled in Philippi from other lands. For example, Lydia in Acts 16:14. She was a dealer in purple cloth and from the city of Thyatira. But still, many of the inhabitants were retired Roman soldiers. Being Roman and being retired from the fighting life, what else was there to do for fun but gladiatorial games. Hence, the Greek theater in Philippi, built sometime in the mid 4th c. BC, was transformed into a Roman amphitheater for these games.

Status was extremely important to the Romans. Titles held, family names, and citizenship were all sources of pride and status. One was always hoping to climb the social and political ladder and would use any means available and necessary to do so.

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think Paul did not mention his Roman citizenship when he was first brought before the magistrates?
2. Do you think that Paul shared in the pride of citizenship like the Roman citizens of Philippi? Why or why not?
3. Are we somewhat like the Romans in that we place a high value on our status, whether it be financial, political, or titles held? What about family name? Education? Nationality? How can we use these means of status for good?

Week One/Day Three

Paul's Second Visit to Philippi

Paul left Philippi and traveled to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10), and Corinth in late 51-52 AD (Acts 18:1-17). He spends the latter part of 53 AD through 55 AD in Ephesus. In 55 AD, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on to Macedonia (Acts 19:22). Late in the year 55 AD, there was a great uproar in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). We pick up in Acts 20, where Paul returns for his second visit to Philippi in 56 AD. You can trace his route on Map #3, in what is called "Paul's Third Missionary Journey".

Acts 20:1-6 - After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia. ² When he had gone through those regions and had given the believers much encouragement, he came to Greece, ³ where he stayed for three months. He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews, and so he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. ⁵ They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; ⁶ but we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

Initial Takeaways

1. How long does Paul stay in Philippi the second time?
2. Who accompanies Paul on this second trip to Philippi?

Into the Text

Our reading picks up in Ephesus, immediately following this uproar. Before leaving, the text says that Paul sends for "the disciples". Disciples are students or pupils. Paul would have had disciples, or students, in each of the cities where he established a church. Paul understood his call to be to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles to the ends of the earth, which would have meant he was

always travelling. Timothy, and the others mentioned in the passage would have been some of Paul's disciples, but he would have also left behind disciples to carry on the work he had begun in each of these cities. These disciples spoken about here most likely include Priscilla and Aquilla, who joined Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-2), traveled with him, and stayed behind in Ephesus (Acts 18:19). We will see that Paul has disciples in Philippians as well. These disciples would have carried on the teachings of Paul, which was the Gospel of Jesus Christ. More than likely, they would have been leaders of the churches in Paul's absence.

The reference to the "days of Unleavened Bread" refers to the week following Passover. The Festival of Unleavened Bread, or the Festival of Passover, is the celebration of God's mighty acts during the Exodus. Specifically, the passing over of the Israelite's houses, which were marked with blood from the sacrificial lamb, during the tenth plague. This was the Festival that Jesus and his disciples were celebrating on the night of the Last Supper.

Reflection Questions

1. How would you describe what it means to be a disciple?

2. How would you describe what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Week One/Day Four

Letter Introduction

Now that we have studied about Paul in Philippi, let's look to the letter he writes to the church in Philippi after his departure. Today we will study the first two verses of the introduction to the letter, the sender & recipients and the greetings.

Philippians 1:1-2 - Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:
² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Initial Takeaways

1. Who is the letter from?

2. Who is the letter to?

Into the Text

As mentioned before, Paul was an extremely educated person. He was educated in not only Jewish teachings and the Hebrew Bible, but he was also a master rhetorician and letter writer. Both rhetoric and letter writing were taken very seriously by ancient Greeks and Romans. Formal schooling would have included lessons on both of these art forms. There were manuals written instructing how to write different letter types.

Scholars debate over which type of letter Philippians is, but I agree with Gordon D. Fee who says it is a specific type of "letter of friendship", namely a "family letter"(Fee 2-3). We will see the contents typical of a letter of friendship, as well as familial language throughout the letter. It is important to note that Paul's letters were meant to be read to the congregation. They would have been sent by a courier, probably one of Paul's disciples/traveling companions, to the city with the intent that it would be read when the house church met. This being said, many of Paul's letters will have the feel as if Paul is talking to the church.

The basic letter structure of that time is the same as it would be now, Opening, Body, and Closing. The Opening would include the sender(s) name, the addressees, oftentimes the relationship between the two, a greeting, and well

wishes. The Closing would include greetings, final wishes, and occasionally dating. Paul sticks pretty close to this structure in his letters.

Loveday Alexander has reviewed several “family letters” of this time period and developed a formula that describes this type of letter. It is listed below with the corresponding verses of Philippians in brackets.

1. The address and greeting [1:1-2]
2. Prayer for the recipients [1:3-11]
3. Reassurance about the sender (“my affairs”) [1:12-26]
4. Request for reassurance about the recipients (“your affairs”) [1:27-2:18; 3:1-4:3]
5. Information about movements of intermediaries [2:19-30]
6. Exchange of greetings with third parties [4:21-22]
7. Closing wish for health [4:23](Fee 3)

These opening or introductory sections in Paul’s letters at first glance look to be just a basic introduction following the letter structure taught in those ancient manuals. However, when we look closer, we can see that there are hints in the opening sections of each of Paul’s letters that tell us quite a bit of information about the letter. These two verses in Philippians tell us several things.

First off, it is from Paul and Timothy. We will see later in the letter that Paul is more than likely the sole writer of the letter, but the Philippians knew Timothy as he was with Paul on both visits to Philippi. It is possible that Timothy was the scribe as Paul dictated the letter, so the letter is sent from both.

Qualifying Paul and Timothy are the words, “servants of Christ Jesus”. The word translated as servant, *doulos*, can also mean slave. In the undisputed Pauline letters, Paul usually introduces himself as an apostle or an apostle of Christ Jesus. Only in Philemon does Paul say something familiar to Philippians, “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (Philemon 1:1a). Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians are called Paul’s “Prison Letters”. They were most likely written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. In both Colossians and Ephesians, Paul introduces himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God”. We will see later that this theme of “servant” is also prevalent in the remainder of the letter to the church in Philippi.

The addressee is “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi”. Paul’s typical addressee would be “to the saints in...” or “to the church in...”. Romans is addressed “to all God’s beloved who are called to be saints” (Romans 1:7a). The Greek word translated as “all” is “*πας*”(*pas*). This word can be translated as all, each, every, everyone, everything, the whole, etc.(Danker et al. 782–84) This is also something that we will explore more in later readings, but it is important to note that Paul uses this word in the opening or introduction.

“With the bishops and deacons”, this is the only place in Paul’s letters to churches that specific offices of the church are mentioned (both are mentioned in 1 Timothy). Scholars debate about what this exactly means. Is there a church hierarchy established in Philippi? Are there specific offices that Paul has sanctioned for the care of the church in his absence? I tend to think that this reference has to do with the Philippian context. If you’ll remember from day two, titles were important in a Roman society. Then in day three we learned that Paul would have left disciples, or students of his teachings, behind in the churches to continue his work. Disciples, or students, may very well have a derogatory connotation, or maybe sound like a lower status, as a title in the Greco-Roman culture of Philippi. Certainly, “bishop” or “deacon” would be a more desired title.

Verse 2, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” is a typical Pauline greeting; he begins all of his letters with this phrase or some form of it. It quite possibly is a variation of the Jewish greeting “Shalom”. Shalom means peace in Hebrew, but it is more than just an absence of conflict. Shalom is peace from God, and encompasses the whole self; mind, body, spirit, relationships, etc. Paul adds to the Jewish greeting “grace to you” and includes “the Lord Jesus Christ” in the formula of the One God in the shema.

While this is a typical greeting for Paul, the Philippians would have heard it a little different from those in Paul’s other churches. For those living in a Roman society, peace came from Caesar through the *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace. The *Pax Romana* was a peace instilled by fear of the imperial armies. Peace from God was a completely different kind of peace. Not only that, as stated before, Caesar considered himself divine and Romans were instructed to say, “Caesar is Lord”. Proclaiming Jesus as *Kyrios*, or Lord, would certainly initiate a fearful gasp from the neighbors of the Philippian Christians.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you think it means to Paul to be a servant of Christ Jesus?

2. What does it mean to you to be a servant of Christ Jesus?

3. What does “peace from God” mean to you?

Week One/Day Five Thanksgiving & Prayer

Today we will look at Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians. Note that we are still in the opening portion of the letter structure.

Philippians 1:3-11 - ³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ always praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you are partners in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and every insight ¹⁰ for you to decide what is most important, so that you may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Initial Takeaways

1. In the text above, highlight or underline each occurrence of the words "every", "always", "all".
2. Who do you think Paul is referring to when he says in verse 6, "the one who began a good work among you...?"

Into the Text

Notice how many highlights or underlines you have there. All these words are a form of the Greek word *pas*. Remember that this letter would have been read in the gathering, so the alliterative "p" sound would have stood out to the hearers. Paul uses repetition and alliteration often in his letters. This repetition/alliteration is the beginning of the "unity" theme of this letter. Paul really wants the

Philippians to understand that all who believe belong in this church. There would have been many social groups in a Greco-Roman culture like Philippi. Think fraternal organizations and societies; these would have membership qualifications and not everyone would be allowed to join. Paul is stressing that the church is different, and everyone is welcome and important to both himself and God.

The thanksgiving portion of the letter was common also in Greco-Roman letters of this time. However, Paul's "my God" contrasts with the usual "I give thanks to the gods for..."

Verses 3-5 are one long sentence. Paul's thanks to God and his joyous prayers for the Philippians are because they participate with him in the gospel. In verse 5, the word that I translated as "fellowship" is the Greek word *koinonia*, which means "close association involving mutual interests and sharing" and can be translated as fellowship, communion, association, participation, sharing, etc. (Danker et al. 552-53).

This word, *koinonia*, is found again in verse 7 and translated as "partners". Paul considered his ministry to the Gentiles a gift, or grace, from God (see also Ephesians 3:7-8). In verse 7, the Philippians are partners with Paul in, not only God's saving grace, but also the grace of ministry God has gifted to Paul. He rejoices that the Philippians have joined him in both.

Then there are two parts of Paul's ministry in which the Philippians are participating. The first is Paul's imprisonment. Paul considers his imprisonment a part of his ministry and even part of God's grace. In Rome, prison was not a sentence, but merely a holding place while awaiting a trial and sentence. Prisoners were not fed or cared for by the Roman government, but rather family members or friends would provide food, clothing, etc. The Philippians provided Paul with funds for a place to stay and to purchase food and other essentials while he was imprisoned.

Remember from earlier in the week that we can find clues in the openings of Paul's letter as to the topic or main concern that letter will address. In the first letter to Corinthians Paul addresses divisions in the church and in his opening stresses unity. The churches in Galatia were being attacked by Judaizers (Jewish Christians who felt that Gentile Christians must also adhere to the Mosaic Law, i.e., male circumcision). In the opening to his letter to the Galatians, Paul stresses God's free gift of grace.

There seems to be no such problems in Philippi. The purpose of this letter is for encouragement. Paul is encouraging them to continue what they are doing. They are already participating in the second part of Paul's ministry, the defense and confirmation of the gospel, and Paul wishes for them to continue. We will see later in the letter that Paul sends warnings to the Philippians that the Judaizers may come to Philippi also. But for now, keep doing what you're doing.

