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THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

NEW TESTAMENT

BOOK 50

PHILIPPIANS



The Apostle Paul In Prison by Rembrandt

SUMMARY

Paul ministered at Philippi during his second missionary journey, spending about three months in the city. The ministry at Philippi marked Paul's entrance into Macedonia, which came about as a result of a vision he had in the city of Troas, just across the northeastern corner of the Aegean Sea from the port city of Neapolis and its close neighbor Philippi.

During this first stay in Philippi—he later briefly visited the city on his third missionary journey. Paul brought to faith in Christ people who would form the core of the burgeoning congregation in the city.

Among them were Lydia, a businesswoman who opened her home to Paul and his coworkers, and the Philippian jailer, who was converted under Paul's ministry after an earthquake miraculously broke open the prison.

Of the four Prison Epistles, Paul likely wrote Philippians last, near the end of his Roman imprisonment in AD 61 or 62. Paul sent the other three Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon—by the hand of Tychicus, as their destinations were near one another.

However, the letter to the Philippians was to be delivered by Epaphroditus, who had come to Paul in Rome with financial help from the church at Philippi. But during his time in Rome, Epaphroditus took ill, which delayed his return home and, therefore, the delivery of the letter.

The apostle Paul did not write Philippians in response to a crisis, as he did with Galatians and Colossians. Instead, he wrote to express his appreciation and affection for the Philippian believers.

More than any other church, the believers in Philippi offered Paul material support for his ministry. Paul's affection for these people is clear throughout the letter as he encouraged them to live out their faith in joy and unity.

Philippians brims over with often quoted passages: He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus, To live is Christ and to die is gain, and I can do all things through Him who strengthens me are just a few.

But the portrait of Jesus Christ as a humble servant serves as the core of Paul's teaching in this letter. Paul's joy at the mere thought of the Philippian church is undeniable in the letter, and it's that same joy that he wanted the recipients to possess as well.

To lead the Philippians to this truth, Paul took them directly to Jesus, teaching them that a community of believers living in harmony with one another comes only through mutual humility modeled after the Savior.

Paul wrote that he poured out his life as an offering for the sake of Christ, leading Paul to find great joy and contentment in Christ's service. His letter to the Philippians showed them that by centering their lives on Christ, they, too, might live in true joy.

SUMMARY Continued

Though we all have much to be thankful for, the pace and the pressure of life often squeeze the joy from us. Our shoulders slumped and our heads bowed, we find some days—or months—very difficult to get through.

Desperate, we often search for joy in all kinds of ways—acquiring possessions, visiting places, or seeing people. But none of these can provide lasting joy. Where do you find joy in the midst of a trying circumstance?

Paul knew, as did the Philippians, that true joy comes only through humble faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ, joining ourselves in harmony with His followers, and serving others in the name of Christ.

This was the life experienced by the Philippian believers, and it is a life available to us today. Allow the joy you find in Christ to keep you from useless quarrels and divisions and to instead guide you into harmonious relationships with God's people.

NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 2:3** Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
- 2:4** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
- 2:9** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,
- 2:10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
- 2:11** and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
- 2:13** for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
- 2:14** Do all things without complaining and disputing,
- 2:15** that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,
- 2:16** holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.
- 3:2** Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!
- 3:3** For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,
- 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!
- 4:5** Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.
- 4:6** Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;
- 4:7** and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
- 4:11** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:
- 4:12** I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

- 4:13** I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
4:20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.
4:23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

CHARACTER Definitions

PHILIPPI - In the ancient world, the city of Philippi was the way through between Europe and Asia, like a gateway. At this point in northeastern Greece, where the mountains running from Bulgaria push so tightly against marsh and hill that the only main road linking West and East is squeezed through the middle of a town.

Ninety years later, the route from the east brought Paul to found his first Christian group in Europe. He later wrote a letter to them (Philippians), as did Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, in the early second century.

Philippi went on to become an important Christian center in late antiquity. The site is well preserved due to being abandoned in the Middle Ages, and it has been extensively excavated by French and, now, by Greek archaeologists.

Many commentators write about the privileges Philippi enjoyed because it was a Roman colony. The town operated under Roman law and was exempt from many taxes. Its citizens were citizens of Rome.

Archaeologically the most striking effects of this are inscriptions attesting both a public library (for the maintenance of Latin culture) and the head of a troupe of Latin-speaking actors paid for by the town. Yet Paul wrote his letter to Philippi in Greek, and most names in the letter are Greek.

They probably felt many things in common with anyone who has lived under a foreign colony. The Greeks were not citizens. They could not vote or have access to the Roman law of which the colony was proud.

They saw power and wealth mainly in Roman hands. The Greeks' grandparents had lost land to the colonists, veteran soldiers who settled after the famous battle. On the other hand, the colony had brought prosperity.

EPAPHRODITUS - Epaphroditus played a key role in biblical history, even if his name is not immediately recognizable. He is mentioned by name twice in the book of Philippians, one of Paul's Prison Epistles. Epaphroditus is the one who delivered the original manuscript of Philippians to its original recipients, the church in Philippi.

Paul was under house arrest in Rome, and the church in Philippi desired to send Paul what we might call a care package. The Philippian believers gathered supplies and sent them to Rome by the hand of one of their own, a man named Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus faithfully delivered the gift from his home church and then went above and beyond the call of duty. In his fervor to serve the Lord by serving Paul, Epaphroditus became seriously ill and, in fact, almost died.

CHARACTERS Continued

God graciously granted Epaphroditus health, and Paul sent his friend back home with the newly penned book of Philippians. This is part of what Paul wrote: I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.

Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

To the Philippians, Epaphroditus was a messenger who delivered a package. To Paul, however, he was so much more: a brother (belonging to the same family), a co-worker (laboring toward the same goal), and a fellow soldier (sharing the same trials).

Epaphroditus was a man of obvious devotion, faithfulness, and self-sacrifice. He put the interests of others before himself and so modeled the mind of Christ.

He labored on Paul's behalf until his own health broke, and, even when he was sick, Epaphroditus took no thought of himself; rather, he was distressed because his church had heard of his illness, and he didn't want them to worry.

Paul mentions Epaphroditus again near the close of his letter: I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.

They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. The very next verse is the oft-quoted promise that God takes care of those who put God first: And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Interestingly, Epaphroditus's name is of pagan origin. It means belonging to Aphrodite—the name of the goddess is actually incorporated into the name Epaphroditus.

Such is the power of the gospel that a man is set free from dead paganism to serve the living God. When Epaphroditus received the gospel, he was belonging to Jesus, and the idol had no more claim on him, regardless of his name. The new birth trumped the birth name.

When a man like Epaphroditus gives of himself for the sake of God's kingdom, many people benefit. Such a man is worthy of honor, and his presence is cause for rejoicing.

BIBLE TIMELINE

62 AD

Paul Writes to the Philippians

Philippians 1 - 4

MAP REFERENCES

