



Joyful Assurance

The Book of Philippians

The City Paul Walked Into

356 BC	Philip II of Macedon takes the town, fortifies it, drains the marsh, renames it after himself. Alexander's father built the theater.
146 / 42 BC	Rome annexes Macedonia and lays the Via Egnatia through the plain. Then Antony and Octavian crush Brutus and Cassius here, the republic dies, and veterans get land as the settlement fee.
31-30 BC	After Actium, Octavian resettles more veterans and reestablishes the colony under his own name.
c. AD 49	Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke land at Neapolis and walk inland. Three conversions, one riot, one earthquake.
c. AD 62	Paul writes back to them, in chains, roughly a dozen years later.

LEGAL STATUS

Roman colony with "ius Italicum:" self-government, land held as if it sat in Italy, exemption from poll and land tax. Paul had a roman heritage.

WHO RAN IT?

Two annual magistrates (duoviri), the "praetors" of Acts 16:20, with rod bearing lictors (punishment police) as their muscle (16:22).

LANGUAGE

A Greek city speaking Latin in public. Latin dominates the inscriptions far more than at Corinth or Ephesus.

HOW MANY PEOPLE?

Roughly 10,000 people. Veteran families, Italic names, and a public scoreboard of titles. Status was the civic religion.

NO SYNAGOGUE MENTIONED

Paul goes to a riverside prayer place instead. The Jewish community was small, and the first hearers were women.

THE WAY IN

Paul lands at Neapolis, about ten miles southeast, and walks the Via Egnatia inland into the colony.

The Letter, By the Numbers

4 CHAPTERS	104 VERSES	1,629 GREEK WORDS	448 LEMMAS	15 min. out loud 8-10 min. silently TIME TO READ
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AUTHOR Paul, with Timothy named as coauthor (1:1). Undisputed across the whole scholarly spectrum.

DATE Circa AD 60 to 62 from Roman imprisonment; the praetorian guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) point to Rome. Ephesus and Caesarea are the alternatives.

OCCASION Thank you for the gift, report on Epaphroditus, warning about rivalry inside the church.

WORDS WORTH COUNTING

Χριστός	Christ, named more densely here than in any Pauline letter this short	37x
χαρά / χαίρω	joy and rejoice, in a letter written from prison	16x
φρονέω	to set the mind, to think this way. The hinge verb of the letter	10x
εὐαγγέλιον	gospel, treated as a shared enterprise, not just a message	9x

A new way to live as citizens of heaven. The “kenosis” or emptying of Christ.

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 ESV)

Citizens of Philippi kept score. A man climbed the “cursus honorum” one office at a time. It was bottom-up work for the city. The letter shows us a different way. Paul answers a status fight inside the church (2:3, 4:2) with a resume of Christ’s work and a gospel-infused hope for the believers to live in a contrasting way.

“In Christ Jesus God has thus shown his true nature; this is what it means for Christ to be “equal with God”—to pour himself out for the sake of others and to do so by taking the role of a slave. Hereby he not only reveals the character of God, but from the perspective of the present context also reveals what it means for us to be created in God’s image, to bear his likeness and have his “mindset.” It means taking the role of the slave for the sake of others.” (Gordon Fee – New International Commentary on the New Testament)

Three Encounters birthed the Philippian Church

Lydia

ACTS 16:14-15

An immigrant dealing in purple goods, wealthy enough to own a house and offer it to four traveling men. Already a worshiper of God, at a riverside prayer meeting because the colony had no synagogue. Luke shows God’s sovereignty in salvation: the Lord opened her heart.

The Slave Girl

ACTS 16:16-18

A python spirit, the word tied to Delphi and Apollo. Property twice over, owned by and worked for profit, and her true words about God are still a chain. Paul frees her, the money stops, and that starts a riot. Luke says she was set free.

The Jailer

ACTS 16:25-34

Almost certainly a Roman veteran with a public job and a citizen’s honor. When the doors open, he reaches for the sword, because losing prisoners meant losing face and then life. He asks the only real question in the chapter, then washes the wounds of the men he locked up and feeds them, inverting his own rank.

Themes to Track

PARTNERSHIP.

Real love and warm feelings between Paul and Philippi.

JOY UNDER PRESSURE.

Joy is one of the tones of the letter and the letter comes from prison.

ASSURANCE.

Paul hopes to create a settled disposition underneath the behavior.

CITIZENSHIP.

A proud Roman colony that is challenged to believe its true citizenship.

STATUS INVERTED.

Christ’s descent is the pattern. Multiple examples are shared in letter.

UNITY.

Two women at odds (4:2) and Paul wants to see unity in Christ.

Sundays in Philippians

09.06 Acts 16	09.13 1:1-11	09.20 1:12-18	09.27 1:19-26	10.04 1:27-30	10.11 2:1-11	10.18 2:12-18	10.25 2:19-30	11.01 3:1-11	11.08 3:12-21	11.15 4:1-9	11.22 4:10-23
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