

Israel's continuing story  
and its climax in the  
life, death and resurrection  
of Jesus the Messiah,  
the announcement  
of God's victory  
over humanity's enemies  
sin and death,  
and the invitation  
for all peoples  
to be reconciled to God  
and to share  
in his restoration  
of all things,

presented in the books of

**The New Testament**



Introduction to **The New Testament**

The New Testament is the second of the two major divisions in the Bible, comprising the final one-quarter of its pages. It continues the story, begun in the First Testament, of how God is restoring his intention in creation by working through the chosen people of Israel. It tells specifically how this story reached its culmination in the first century AD as Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's Messiah, definitively answered the question of who God is and what he's like. Through his teaching, Jesus revealed the deepest meaning of the laws and institutions God had given to the people of Israel. Through his actions, he demonstrated what human life and community were meant to be, bringing healing and restoration everywhere he went. And through his death and resurrection, Jesus brought the forgiveness and life of the age to come into the present evil age. The New Testament also tells how the followers of Jesus formed a new community and invited people from all over the world to join them. It describes how they worked together to live out the reign of God that Jesus had announced and begun. Finally, the New Testament looks ahead to the day when Jesus will return to renew all of creation and to establish God's justice and peace throughout the earth.

The New Testament tells this story through the words of 26 different books, written for a variety of occasions between the middle and end of the first century. These books are of greatly varying length and they represent several different kinds of writing. Most of them are letters, some as short as a single page. On the other hand, a book of history that contains two volumes, Luke-Acts, occupies one quarter of the New Testament. There are also books related to literary traditions that were developed in the First Testament. James is similar to the wisdom books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and Revelation is an apocalypse like the second half of the book of Daniel.

The New Testament also contains what are traditionally known as the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke (the first half of Luke-Acts) and John. "Gospel" should not be thought of primarily as a specific kind of writing. The word actually refers to the content of these books: it means good news. In the New Testament, this term refers to the basic content of the message about Jesus that his followers shared far and wide. Thus *The Gospel According to Matthew* (the traditional title of that book) originally meant the good news as told by Matthew. The story of Jesus' life does serve as the framework and foundation for the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but in important ways these books still differ from one another in their literary character (as our introductions to them will indicate). When we read all of the New Testament's books with an appreciation for the circumstances in which they were written and for the kind of literature that they represent, the story of how Jesus brought God's plan to its culmination unfolds before us.

The order of the books of the New Testament in most printed Bibles today is not the most helpful one for good reading. For example, since Luke and Acts are two volumes of a single work, they should be read together. The three letters of John are best understood when read with the gospel according to John, since they are all by the same author and reflect the same perspective. But in the traditional order, Luke and Acts are separated by the gospel according to John, and John's letters are separated from his gospel by most of the New Testament. In addition, the wisdom book of James has been traditionally placed in the middle of a group of letters, suggesting that it, too, should be read as a letter. And in most printed Bibles, the thirteen letters the apostle Paul wrote are presented roughly in order of length. As a result, they are out of historical order and it is difficult to read them with an appreciation for where they fit in the context of his life and for how they express the development of his thought.

The order of the New Testament books in this edition seeks to express the ancient concept of the fourfold gospel in a fresh way. The traditional priority of the stories of Jesus is retained, but now each gospel is placed at the beginning of a group of related books. Thus the presentation of four witnesses to the one gospel of Jesus the Messiah is enhanced by a fuller arrangement that will help readers better appreciate why the books of the New Testament were written and what kind of literature they represent. The four sets of books, each headed by a gospel, form a circle, as it were, around the central figure of Jesus. Each sheds its light on his story in a unique way.

We have reunited the two volumes of Luke-Acts and placed them first because they provide an overview of the New Testament period. This allows readers to see where most of the other books belong. Next come Paul's letters in the order in which we believe they were most likely written. Luke was one of Paul's co-workers in sharing the good news about Jesus, so his volumes are well-suited to accompany Paul's letters. The gospel according to Matthew comes next, together with two books, Hebrews and James, also addressed to Jews who believed in Jesus as their Messiah. Then comes the gospel according to Mark (which many scholars believe was actually the first gospel to be written), together with the letters of Peter, since Mark seems to tell the story of Jesus' life from Peter's perspective. Also included in this group is the letter of Jude, which has many similarities with Peter's second letter. Our final group begins with the gospel according to John, which can suitably come last among the gospels because it represents a mature reflection, after many years, on the meaning of Jesus' life. The letters of John follow his gospel. The book of Revelation is appropriately placed last and by itself, since it is unique in literary type and perspective, and it describes how God's saving plan for all of creation will ultimately be realized.

Introduction to **Philippians**

On his second journey to bring the message of Christ to parts of the Roman Empire where it had never been heard before, the apostle Paul helped start a church in the city of Philippi (see pages 1484–1485). The people of that church became Paul’s friends and supporters for the rest of his life. When they heard that he had been taken to Rome as a prisoner, they collected money to assist him and sent it with one of their members, a man named Epaphroditus, who then stayed in Rome to help take care of Paul.

Unfortunately Epaphroditus became very sick in Rome and nearly died. When he recovered, Paul decided to send him back to Philippi, because he knew how concerned his friends were about him. Paul sent a letter with Epaphroditus to thank the Philippians for the friendship and support they had shown him, especially on this occasion.

In his letter, Paul also offers some challenges and encouragement. He knows that, like himself, the Philippians are experiencing a lot of opposition, so he appeals to his own life as an example of how to respond. *Throughout the whole palace guard*—that is, right in the center of Caesar’s realm—Paul is boldly making the royal announcement that Jesus is Lord. Paul’s desire is that the Philippians will be encouraged, as others have been already, to *become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear*.

He also knows that some of the people in the church were having trouble getting along, and he urges them to *stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together with one accord for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you*. In an amazing hymn, Paul urges the Philippians to have the same servant attitude that Jesus had. Jesus did not grasp his high position but humbled himself even to the point of death—all for the sake of others. This is the new way of life in God’s kingdom.

He reminds the Philippians that they don’t need to be circumcised, as some were apparently teaching they did, and he warns them that they should not live like those who are controlled by their desires. All of these themes are interwoven throughout the letter, which doesn’t develop systematically the way some of Paul’s other letters do, but flows freely, as one friend writes to another.

The dominant note in the letter is joy. Even though Paul was a prisoner, and even though he and his friends were experiencing strong opposition, he is rejoicing and urging them to rejoice in the partnership they have in helping others meet Christ and in the reward they anticipated when their work was finished. *We eagerly await a Savior* who will return to us, the Lord Jesus the Messiah.



## Philippians

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's

provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.\* I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Whatever happens, as citizens of heaven live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit,\* striving together with one accord for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:

Who, being in very nature\* God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own  
advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature\* of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a human being,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

But 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. 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.

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sis-

ters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 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 ac-

ceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All the Lord's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.\*

### Philippians Endnotes

Page 1599 *whole palace guard*: Or *whole palace*  
 Page 1600 *deliverance*: Or *vindication*; or *salvation*  
 Page 1600 *in the one Spirit*: Or *in one spirit*  
 Page 1600 *in very nature*: Or *in the form of*  
 Page 1600 *the very nature*: Or *the form*

Page 1601 "children . . . generation.": page 249  
 Page 1601 *through faith in*: Or *through the faithfulness*  
*of*  
 Page 1603 *Amen*: Some manuscripts do not have  
*Amen*.

