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A Time Line for Philippians

1. The letter begins at the point of **Epaphroditus'** arrival, which had a two-fold purpose (a) to present **the Philippians gift** to **Paul** (reflecting **their** concern for **him**); and (b) to inform **him** about the situation back home. For **Paul**, these two matters merge into one main concern: the progress of the Gospel.



2. **Paul** is currently **absent** from them, which calls for the first two sections of the letter. First he reports about **his "affairs" (1:12-26)**, that from **his** perspective (beyond what **Epaphroditus** would tell **him**) **his** imprisonment was advancing the Gospel; at the same time **he** joyfully (and hopefully) anticipates the outcome. **He** will be satisfied no matter what Caesar decides, for **Paul, living means living for Messiah, and dying is even better (1:21)**, for **to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:8)**.

3. But **Paul's** real concern is **their "affairs,"** which in **their** present condition are unlikely to advance the Gospel. Although **he** expects to come soon for the sake of **"their progress,"** in the meantime a letter will take **his** place; thus **1:27 to 2:18** addresses **their** current situation, in which **he** points to **Messiah** as the model of the selflessness and humility necessary for unity to be achieved.

4. At **2:19** two kinds of chronology are at work: (a) from the perspective of **his** writing the letter (with both **Timothy** and **Epaphroditus** presently); (b) from the perspective of **the Philippians**, as the letter is being read. Thus, **he** writes a

letter to accompany the return of **Epaphroditus**, which comes next in terms of actual chronology, but the second (after **verses 19-24**) in terms of **his** concerns for writing.

5. Thus, very soon **Paul** hoped to send **Timothy**, whose task is twofold: (a) to inform **the Philippians** about the expected outcome of **his** trial; but (b) to return to inform **Paul** as to whether the letter had done any good. Thus, **Timothy** was to return to **Paul**, before **Paul himself** set out, which would apparently happen shortly thereafter (**2:19-24**). **Paul** expected to be released (**1:23-26, 2:17** and **19-24**, especially **verse 24**), and never once contemplated that it might go the other way.

6. In the meantime **Paul** sent **Epaphroditus** back home with **his letter (2:25-30)**.

7. The next encouraging section (**3:1** to **4:3**) is written from the perspective of **Epaphroditus'** return and **his** reading this letter in **their** midst (which took the place of **Paul's** presence). Framed by the necessity to **rejoice in the Lord (3:1** and **4:4)**, it warns **them** – for **their** own safety – of matters **Paul** had often brought to **their** attention before, and uses that warning to refocus **their** attention on **their** eternal security (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**).

8. At **4:4 Paul** begins the final set of essential teachings (**4:4-9**) with which **he** regularly concludes **his** letters.

9. But **he** breaks that off just before **his** final greetings (**4:21-23**) to acknowledge **their** gift to **him**, so that the final words **they** hear will be those of gratitude, cooperation from **ADONAI Himself**, and praise (**4:10-20**).⁵