

PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS
ON
PHILIPPIANS

- A. General facts about Philippians.
- B. The Apostle Paul in Rome.
- C. Philippi and Macedonia.
- D. Paul's experiences with the Philippians.
- E. Critical Questions about authorship.
- F. Outline of Philippians.
- G. Questions over the Introductory Sections.

INTRODUCTION

A. GENERAL FACTS ABOUT THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

1. Philippians was written by the apostle Paul from Rome, 62/63 A.D. Paul was a prisoner at the time of writing. Philippians is one of four epistles written during the first imprisonment of Paul. The others were Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.
2. Philippians is probably the most affectionate letter Paul ever wrote. The letter shows Paul's strong attachment to the church at Philippi.
3. Many descriptive expressions have been coined to describe Philippians.
 - a. *The epistle of joy.* Such words as "joy" and "rejoice" occur no less than sixteen times in the letter. (If Paul could rejoice after two years of Roman imprisonment, why cannot we be joyful?)
 - b. *A thank-you letter.* The letter was written to acknowledge a much appreciated gift sent to Paul from the Philippians by the hand of Epaphroditus, one of their members. Phil. 4:18. Interestingly enough the word "thanks" does not occur in the letter. Paul knew how to express thanks without being sickeningly sugary about it.
 - c. *The epistle of excellent things.* Phil. 1:10; 4:8.

The value of thinking on excellent things certainly commends itself to everyone.
 - d. *The epistle of right-mindedness.* There are several references in Philippians to the mind. See Phil. 2:2, 5; 3:15, 19; 4:7-8. Nothing is more important to us than to have the right kind of mind.
 - e. *An epistle of unity.* See 2:1-11; 4:2.

It appears that the possibility of faction, disunity, and contention was Paul's greatest concern for the Philippians. Paul approached this problem by urging them to consider the deepest realities of their faith and the example of Christ.
4. Philippians does not expound on doctrinal issues in the manner used in Romans, or Galatians, or Hebrews. The doctrinal sections in Philippians are presented as matters of allusion rather than as systematic intentional teaching. When the points of doctrine are discussed, they are invariably given with a view to their practical application. Ideally this is the way all Christian doctrine should be presented.

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5. Philippians is very emphatic about holy living, holy thinking, dedication to God—in a word, about Christian ethics. The doctrinal section 2:5-11 was written to enforce the command to have humility. Paul's discussion about justification in 3:8-11 is intertwined with thoughts about our counting everything loss for Christ.
6. In Philippians the gospel is not reduced to a mere code of morals. The living Christ is at its heart. (1:21). Christ is neither a subject of controversy, nor simply a pattern of life. He IS Paul's life. Paul presents himself in the epistle as a disciple of Jesus, who lived only to know Christ and be found in Him, and even to share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death.

B. THE APOSTLE PAUL IN ROME

Since Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians were all written from Rome, it is necessary to give the background of Paul's experiences in Rome.

1. When did Paul arrive in Rome?

He arrived in early spring A.D. 61, following the shipwreck on Melita (Malta). Acts 27:12; 28:1, 11, 16.

Paul's arrival in Rome brought about an inevitable collision between pagan Rome and Christ. Until then Christianity had been persecuted by the Jews, but scarcely at all by the Romans. The Romans had even protected Paul from the Jews. After Paul's arrival in Rome the empire soon became not the ally of the gospel but its enemy. This was not, of course, purely the result of Paul's work. The conflict was inevitable, and just happened to take place at that time.

2. How long was Paul in Rome?

Over two years, Acts 28:30. He evidently left Rome before July 64, for Rome was burned at that time, and a great persecution against the Christians there arose. There is no indication that Paul was present in Rome at that time. Paul probably left Rome late in 63.

3. Under what circumstances had Paul come to Rome?

He was brought to Rome as a prisoner. He had been accused by the Jews in Jerusalem and in Caesarea of raising insurrection among the Jews, of profaning the temple, and of

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being a ringleader of the hated sect of the Nazarenes (that is, the Christians). Acts 21:28-30; 22:30; 24:5-6.

Paul had appealed his case, requesting to be tried before Caesar himself, rather than before the prejudiced Roman governors in Judea, who often sought to please the Jews more than they sought justice. Acts 25:9-12.

Paul had planned and hoped to go to Rome for a long time. Romans 1:10; 15:22-24. Paul concentrated his labors in the important cities of the world, and Rome as the capital city of the empire was the most important city of all.

4. Were there Christians in Rome before Paul arrived there?

Definitely yes. Sojourners from Rome were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when the church began. Acts 2:10. No doubt some of these were converts, and took their new faith home with them.

Paul wrote the lengthy and profound letter to the Christians at Rome before his arrival there. This was probably written from Corinth during his third missionary trip, about 57 A.D.

Christians from Rome met Paul on the road as he approached Rome. Acts 28:14-15.

The epistle to the Romans contains a long list of names of Christians to whom Paul sent greetings. Romans 16:3-16.

5. Where did Paul live in Rome?

He lived in his own rented dwelling. Acts 28:30. This was possibly located somewhere near the camp of the Roman Praetorian guard, because Paul was under the guard of Roman soldiers constantly.

6. Was Paul's situation in Rome comfortable?

Yes and no, probably more no than yes. Paul was a man who could be quite content in any situation. Phil. 4:11. However, he was confined to his house; visitors came to him; he couldn't go to them. Acts 28:17, 30.

He also constantly wore a long chain (an *alutis*, a coupling-chain), which coupled him to a Roman soldier, who was constantly with him. Eph. 6:20; Acts 28:16, 20.

7. Could Paul continue his preaching and teaching in Rome?

Definitely yes. Acts 28:31. His teachings there were so successful that his bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole Praetorian guard, and to all the rest. Phil. 1:13. Some of the soldiers guarding him became believers. The word

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of God even spread to Caesar's own household, where some became saints. Phil. 4:22.

8. How did Paul's presence in Rome affect the Christians there?

Most of them became much bolder. Phil. 1:14. However some preachers in Rome became envious of Paul, and tried to bring additional misery upon him. Phil. 1:15.

9. What letters did Paul write from Rome?

He wrote four letters that we know about during the period of his first imprisonment. They are Ephesians, Philipians, Colossians, and Philemon.

10. What guests and companions did Paul have in Rome?

Epaphras from Colossae came. Col. 4:12. *Luke*, the beloved physician, was there. Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11. Also *Demas*, who later forsook Paul. Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:10. *John Mark* was present for a time. Col. 4:10. *Tychicus* came from the province of Asia (the area around Ephesus in Asia Minor), and carried back the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians from Paul. Col. 4:7-8; Eph. 6:21. *Onesimus*, the runaway slave of Philemon, met Paul and was sent back with Tychicus to his master Philemon in the city of Colossae. Col. 4:9. *Timothy* was with Paul. Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1. *Aristarchus* of Macedonia (Thessalonica) was there. Col. 4:10; Acts 20:4. Perhaps *Priscilla* and *Aquila* were still in Rome when Paul came there. A congregation of Christians in Rome had met in their house for a while. Rom. 16:3-5.

Paul had relatives in Rome, *Andronicus* and *Junius*, who probably visited him, if they were not themselves detained as prisoners. Romans 16:7.

11. How did Paul get along with the Jews in Rome?

Not very well. When Paul arrived many non-Christian Jews visited him and heard him. They had had no word from Judea about the accusations against him, but after hearing him they disagreed among themselves concerning him and departed. Acts 28:21-28. They would have listened to the claims of a false Messiah, but not the apostle of the true Messiah. It is barely possible that the people to whom Paul refers in Phil. 1:15-17 as being those who preached Christ in such a way as to deliberately bring affliction to Paul were Judaizing Christians, that is, Jewish believers in Christ who taught that we must keep the law of Moses as well as have faith in Jesus.

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Col. 4:10-11 indicates that only three of the Jewish Christians with Paul—Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus called Justus—remained faithful with Paul. This has a sad sound to it.

12. Who ruled Rome when Paul was there?

Nero was emperor A.D. 54-68.

13. What was Nero's character?

He started his rule very well, but ended as one of the most monstrous, cruel, extravagant, and insane rulers in all history.

He became emperor through the scheming of his mother, Agrippina, when Claudius died.

Two good counsellors—Seneca, the Stoic philosopher who had been his tutor as a boy; and Burrus, the firm but fair Praetorian prefect (commander of the Praetorian guard)—guided Nero well during his first eight years.

Nero poisoned his step-brother in 55 A.D.

He became associated with a shameless woman named Poppaea. Agrippina and Poppaea fought for control of Nero and Poppaea won. Nero divorced and later put to death another wife, Octavia. Agrippina also was slain.

Burrus died in 62 (Paul was then in Rome), and Seneca was forced into retirement. Seneca was later put to death because Nero suspected him of a plot. Without the restraint of these wiser and better men Nero rapidly became an unrestrained tyrant.

Nero taxed the people heavily. He gambled at 100,000 sesterces a throw of the dice. He played musical instruments, and people flattered and applauded his playing out of fear for their lives.

After her earlier shameless career Poppaea later became a convert to Judaism! She successfully argued the causes of the Jews several times before her husband. Later Nero killed Poppaea in a fit of rage. Poppaea's being a Jewish proselyte certainly did not make Paul's position more favorable.

In A.D. 64 two-thirds of Rome burned, while Nero (according to tradition) played the fiddle. He himself may have had the fire started. The Romans became suspicious and angry toward Nero after the fire. To shift blame from himself Nero accused the Christians ("Atheists!") of this crime, and slew thousands of them, covering them with pitch and then burning them as human torches, and throwing them to the lions in the Colisseum.

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Nero's persecution was the first of ten great persecutions instigated by Roman emperors against Christians.

Heavy taxation and misgovernment caused a revolt against Nero. Roman troops from Spain under Galba led the revolt and marched on Rome. When Nero's bodyguard joined the rebels, he fled to the country and committed suicide. A brief civil war followed his death.

Not even a hint of the scandals and cruelties of Nero's reign appears in Paul's epistles. If Paul could live in Rome, where he could not have been unaware of the evils of the court of Nero, and still write a letter like Philippians, he truly was in the world, but not of the world.

14. Why was Paul's trial in Rome so long delayed?

Paul's accusers from Jerusalem do not seem to have shown up in Rome. They may never have arrived. As long as Paul was detained far away from them in Rome they were to a degree satisfied. Also there may have been a backlog of cases before the Roman court that delayed Paul's hearing.

15. What was the outcome of Paul's trial, or hearing?

Apparently he was released. He surely should have been. The Roman army officer in Judea had no real charge against him. Acts 23:29. Neither did the governor nor King Agrippa. Acts 25:25; 26:31.

Paul expressed optimism to the Philippians that he would soon be released. Phil. 2:24; 1:19. Then he would have opportunity to visit them.

16. What happened to Paul after his release?

Only traditions and implications from the epistles to Timothy and Titus give us information about this. Paul and Titus made a trip through the island of Crete. Titus 1:5. Paul perhaps visited Philippi and Colossae. Phm. 22; Phil. 2:24. He seems to have visited Spain. Apparently he returned to Rome about A.D. 67, was rearrested, and beheaded.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil. 1:21.

C. PHILIPPI AND MACEDONIA

1. Philippi was a city in northern Greece, the area called Macedonia in Paul's time. Philippi lay near the seacoast, eight miles inland from its seaport, Neapolis. Acts 16:11-12. It was on a

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plain to the north of a ridge of hills, and east to Mt. Pangaeus. Its site lay between the rivers Strymon and Nestus .

2. The position of Philippi in the plain dominated the road system of northern Greece. It commanded a pass on the road from Europe to Asia (the Via Egnatia). Paul generally chose such strategic locations as centers for his work, although, of course, he went to Philippi as the result of a divine call. Acts 16:6-10.
3. In ancient times the site of Philippi was called Krenides, which means "little fountains," from the numerous springs which arose in the mountains on the north, and ran into the neighboring marsh.
4. The mountains adjoining Krenides once contained rich deposits of gold and silver. However the gold and silver mines were mostly depleted before Paul's time.
5. In the earliest times of history Macedonia was part of Thrace, which was regarded as comprising all of Europe north of Greece. Ancient Macedonia did not reach to the sea, and its language was not Greek. By the seventh century B.C. various areas of Macedonia had fused and Edessa had become its center.
6. An exiled family of Greeks took over Macedonian rule about 520-500 B.C. They conquered to the coast of the Thermaic Gulf.
7. Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, assumed the throne in 360 B.C. He conquered several places, among them Krenides. He introduced colonists into the city and renamed it Philippi, after himself. Philip received an annual revenue of a thousand talents from the gold mining industry in the area.
8. The Romans defeated the Macedonians in 197 B.C. and again in 168 (at Pydna). Macedonia was subjugated and the whole country divided into four districts.
9. After a revolt against the Romans in 146 all Greece south of Macedonia and Epirus was formed into a Roman province named Achaia. Macedonia and Epirus were merged into a province called Macedonia.
10. Philippi became involved in the power struggle within the Roman empire during the first century B.C. The battle of Philippi (42 B.C.) was a decisive battle of history. Here Mark Anthony and Octavian (Augustus) defeated Brutus and Cassius and decided the future history of the Roman empire.
11. Octavian (Augustus) constituted Philippi a Roman *colony*,

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housing there partisans of Mark Anthony. He regarded these men as being undesirable in Italy. Acts 16:12.

12. Cities like Philippi which became Roman colonies were miniatures of Rome, using Roman coin, laws, and customs. They spoke Latin. They were self-governed, their affairs being regulated by their own magistrates. They were peopled by Roman army veterans on pensions and their families.

Note the eagerness of the Philippians to declare, "We are Romans." Acts 16:20-21.

13. Philippi flourished under the Romans. While Amphipolis was the capital, Philippi outstripped its rival and became the first city of the district. Acts 16:12. This happened in spite of the fact that the Romans never got as much from the mines around Philippi as the Macedonians had.
14. The number of Jewish residents in Philippi was small. There was no synagogue, only a place of prayer by the river. Acts 16:13. The residents regarded Jews as outsiders and trouble-makers. Acts 16:20.
15. There was a school of medicine in Philippi. This is interesting since Luke, the physician who wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, seems to have lived in Philippi.
16. The name Philippi has now disappeared from the location, and most of the old city is only ruins.

D. PAUL'S EXPERIENCES WITH THE PHILIPPIANS

1. Paul first came to Philippi about 52 A.D., during his second missionary trip. Acts 16 relates the story of this visit to Philippi. Philippi has the distinction of being the first city in Europe where Paul preached.
2. Paul came to Philippi with Timothy, Silas, and Luke.
3. Lydia was Paul's first convert in Philippi. Later at Philippi Paul cast out an evil (python) spirit from a girl. This touched off accusations against Paul, which were aggravated by local prejudice against Jews. Paul was beaten and imprisoned, but following an earthquake his jailor was converted. He was released the next day.
4. Paul's converts in Philippi reached into three levels of society: the lowest, the slave girl; the middle class, the jailor; the upper, Lydia.

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5. After Paul's departure the Philippian Christians experienced persecutions, as Paul had. Phil. 1:7, 28-30.
6. During his third missionary trip Paul revisited Philippi and other churches in Macedonia. This was about five years after his second trip. Luke rejoined Paul then, Acts 20:1-6.
7. A deep and true affection grew up between Paul and the Philippians, closer than that between him and any other church. Paul calls them, "My beloved, my joy and crown." Phil. 4:1.

This church supported Paul financially on numerous occasions, even when he went to Thessalonica just after leaving Philippi the first time. Phil. 4:15-16; II Cor. 11:9. They had a reputation for liberality, even though they and their land were in deep poverty following the civil wars. II Cor. 8:1-5.

8. Acts 20:6 is the last Biblical reference to Philippi until Paul's imprisonment, and the dispatching of the letter to the philippians.
9. The Philippians sent Paul another offering while he was in Rome, sending it by the hand of one of their members named Epaphroditus. Apparently they intended that Epaphroditus should remain with Paul in Rome to minister unto him. However, Epaphroditus became deathly sick in Rome, and only recovered because of God's mercy. Phil. 2:25-27.

The Philippians heard of his sickness, and Epaphroditus heard that they had heard of it. This worried him, for he feared they would worry over him.

This chain of events was the immediate occasion of Paul's writing Philippians. Epaphroditus was sent back with the letter, which included a gracious explanation as to why Paul had sent him back. Phil. 2:25-30.

E. CRITICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT AUTHORSHIP

1. What has been the prevailing view as to the authorship of Philippians?

It has been generally accepted as a genuine epistle of Paul, even by the critics who would question Paul's authorship of Ephesians.

2. What section of the letter has caused some questions about the unity of the letter?

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There is a sharp break in the tone of the letter at 3:2. Paul jumps from the reassuring news in chapter two into a stern condemnation of "dogs" and evil workers. This has caused some to say that the letter as we have it is really a composite of two ancient letters by Paul.

However, this is only a guess, and is not a necessary conclusion. The informal and unsystematic character of the letter helps to explain the sudden change of tone in it. Perhaps as Paul was writing it over a period of several days, bad news about these "dogs" in Philippi came to Paul, and the change in tone in the letter reflects a change in his own feelings.

3. What did the ancient Christian writers indicate about the authorship of Philippians? They indicate an acquaintance with it and an approval of it.

Polycarp's letter to the Philippians (about 120 A.D.) appeals to the epistle or epistles of Paul to the Philippian church.

Philippians is included in the Syriac New Testament called the Peshitto, of about 175 A.D. Also it is in the Old Latin version, about 200 A.D.

It is included in the list of Bible books accepted by Marcion about 150 A.D. (although Marcion admittedly was a heretic), and by Hippolytus (about 230 A.D.). It was used at the close of the second century by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria.

F. OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS

1. Philippians is a difficult book to outline because it is intensely personal, and does not attempt to give a logical and progressive presentation of some particular subject. However certain large sections can be given separate headings
2. Outline (Memorize)
 - Salutation: 1:1-2 (Author, destination, greeting)
 - A. Thanks and prayer for the Philippians; 1:3-11.
 - B. Progress of the gospel in Rome; 1:12-18.
 - C. Paul's hopes; 1:19-26.
 - D. Exhortation to a worthy manner of life; 1:27—2:18.
 - The example of Christ; 2:5-11.

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- E. News about Timothy and Epaphroditus; 2:19-30.
- F. False teachers contrasted with Paul's example; 3:1—4:1.
- G. Final exhortations and thanks; 4:2-23.
 - 1. To individuals to be in harmony; 4:2-3.
 - 2. To joy; 4:4-7.
 - 3. To right thinking; 4:8-9.
 - 4. Thanks for their gift; 4:10-20.
 - 5. Salutations; 4:21-23.
- 3. Although the above outline does not show much of a systematic development of ideas in Philippians, there is still a oneness about the book. Every chapter reflects of the unifying topic of RIGHT-MINDEDNESS, the good mind!

PHIL. 1—*A mind of thanks.*

Paul was thankful for the fellowship of the Philippians (1:3-11), for gospel victories (1:12-18), and for the hope of salvation (1:19-26).

PHIL. 2—*The mind of Christ.*

All of the feelings and acts that Christians should have and do are motivated by having the mind of Christ within us.

Timothy was commended because his mind was set on seeking the things of Christ. (2:19-21).

PHIL. 3—*A mind of right values.*

Paul counted everything loss for Christ (3:8). His superb Hebrew ancestry and training was counted refuse that he might gain Christ. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." (3:15).

PHIL. 4—*A mind of many virtues.*

The last chapter contains several paragraphs not directly related to one another, but all reflecting the good mind. They seem to be fruits growing on the tree of a good Christian mind.

Unity—"Be of the same (a united) mind." (4:2)

Joy—"Rejoice in the Lord." (4:4)

Clean thinking—"Think on these (virtuous) things." (4:8)

Contentment—"In whatsoever state I am, therein (I am) content." (4:11)

Thankfulness—(4:18)

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G. QUESTIONS OVER THE INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS

A. *General facts about Philippians.*

1. Who was its author?
2. What was the date and place of composition?
3. What was the feeling between Paul and the Philippian church?
4. Give four descriptive expressions that describe the epistle to the Philippians.
5. What act of the Philippians caused Paul to send the epistle?
6. Who was Epaphroditus?
7. How are the doctrinal sections in Philippians presented?
8. Does Philippians emphasize holy living, or is this one of the less prominent subjects in the book?
9. What (or who) is at the heart of the gospel and of life, as it is presented in Philippians?

B. *Paul the apostle in Rome.*

1. Why is it necessary to know something about Paul's experiences in Rome to understand Philippians?
2. When did Paul arrive in Rome?
3. How long was Paul in Rome?
4. Under what circumstances did Paul come to Rome?
5. Were there Christians in Rome before Paul arrived there? How do you know?
6. Where did Paul live in Rome?
7. Was Paul's situation in Rome comfortable?
8. Could Paul continue preaching and teaching in Rome?
9. How did Paul's presence in Rome affect the Christians there?
10. What letters did Paul write from Rome? (Name four.)
11. Name six guests or companions that Paul had in Rome.
12. How did Paul get along with the Jews in Rome?
13. Who ruled Rome during the time when Paul was there?
14. What was the character of this Roman ruler?
15. What hints of the scandals and cruelties of the Roman emperor appear in Paul's epistles?
16. Why was Paul's court trial so long delayed?
17. What was the outcome of Paul's trial or hearing?

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C. *Philippi and Macedonia.*

1. Where was Philippi?
2. What was the name of the area, or province, wherein Philippi was located?
3. Why was the location of Philippi strategic?
4. What was the ancient name for Philippi?
5. What mineral resources once were obtained around Philippi?
6. Who gave Philippi its name? About when did this occur?
7. What nation took over Macedonia during the second century B.C.?
8. Who made Philippi a "colony"?
9. What were the Roman colonies like?
10. Were there many Jews in Philippi?
11. What "first" in the experiences of Paul can the city of Philippi claim?
12. What physician seems to have lived in Philippi?

D. *Paul's experiences with the Philippians.*

1. During which missionary trip did Paul first visit Philippi?
2. Who accompanied Paul on that trip?
3. Name three converts to Christ in Philippi.
4. Did the Philippian church have pleasant or harsh experiences?
5. When did Paul revisit Philippi?
6. Where did the Philippians send offerings to Paul following his first visit with them?
7. Were the Philippians poor or rich?
8. Who bore the Philippians' offering to Paul in Rome?
9. What happened to this messenger in Rome?

E. *Critical Questions about Authorship.*

1. What has been the prevailing view as to the authorship of Philippians?
2. What point in, or portion of, the letter has caused some to question the unity of the letter.
3. What did the ancient Christian writers indicate about the authorship of Philippians?

F. *Outline.*

1. Write the outline of Philippians from memory, including the Scripture references.

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2. What unifying topic is reflected in every chapter of Philippians?
3. What are the topics suggested for each of the four chapters?

Memory Work

The following passages should be memorized as the epistle is studied:

1:3-6, 21-24, 27.

2:1-11, 12-18.

3:7-14, 20-21.

4:4-8, 13, 19.