

The Book of Philippians

Notes: Doug Hamilton



The Ancient Ruins of Philippi

The Author, Location, Date, Purpose and Theme

- The Letter to the Philippians was likely written by Paul in 62 AD while he was a prisoner in Rome (Phil 4:22). *Acts 28:16 And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.*
- While there, the Philippians sent some support by the hands of their missionary Epaphroditus. The reason for the letter was to thank them for sending Epaphroditus with a gift of needed support to sustain him while under arrest for preaching the word of God. He also uses the letter to warn against false teachers and to strive for unity among them. The key theme of the letter is the gospel and the need to spread it to others by our teaching and example.

The History of Philippi



- The name Philippi means "the fountain" and it was the capital city of the province of Macedonia. It was named for Philip of Macedonia in 359 BC. It is located by the sea and is today referred to as the ruined village of Philibedjik and it surrounded by a rolling countryside.
- It was designated a Roman colony, i.e. a military settlement, by Mark Antony and Octavian in 42 BC. It was a natural location for thus since it was located on the main road connecting Europe to Asia called the *Via Egnatia* (see left).
- Archeology reveals that in the first century Philippi already had distinct Roman architecture (see left), including a bathhouse, a forum, a theatre, sanctuaries and a Roman style prison. It was nicknamed "miniature Rome", under municipal of Rome, governed by Roman military soldiers and used Latin for the primary language. It was as "Roman" of a city in the empire, second only to Rome itself.

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- Upon retiring, the Roman Government would offer to send large groups three to five-hundred of these men and their families to certain cities for their retirement. Many times these cities were those that were found among popular trade routes and needed a strong military presence to keep the travelers safe. This is the case in Philippi, for it was on a major thoroughfare and was a retirement community for Roman veterans. There is a strong military theme in Philippians and it will come up often in this study.
- The city of Philippi also had her share of pagan religions, including many shrines to the "god of wine" called Dionysius. Other favorite local deities included Liber, Libera and Hercules. The women of Philippi played a major role in the pagan worship and typically held the goddess Diana as their favorite. She was associated with fertility, childbirth and children, emblematic of ancient women. Archaeologists have also surfaced more than 140 Egyptian deities. They definitely loved their paganism.

The Beginnings of the Church in Philippi

1. The first arrival of the missionaries to Philippi
 - a. Acts 16:9-12 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹ Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a {Roman} colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.
 - b. It was here that Luke, the writer of Acts, joined the mission team, for there is a transition from "they" to "we" and "us". At least two other members on the mission were Timothy and Silas. This account took place during the second missionary journey in 52 A.D. that Paul first brought the gospel to Macedonia.
2. The First Converts in Philippi
 - a. (Lydia) Acts 16:13-15 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. ¹⁴ And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵ And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.
 - i. Lydia and the others were meeting by the riverside, referred to a place of prayer. Judaism was probably not well-

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- established in Philippi, for this is the early setting of an early synagogue. Until the Jewish people of a town had ten families, they could not build a synagogue, for one tenth giving times ten would provide enough for a synagogue ruler. Until that point, they would have to meet by the riverside to conduct their worship and prayer.
- ii. She was a business woman from the Thyatira, a seller of purple fabric made from the dye of a mollusk. This area was well-known for its industry and trade guilds (Rev 2:18), so it is not difficult to find Lydia and her household setting up shop to make a good living. Jews were often known for moving into thriving areas to make a quick profit. *James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."*
 - iii. Paul studied with them and told them about Jesus. The result was the first European conversions to Christianity.
- b. (The Philippian Jailer) Acts 16:27–34 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" ²⁹ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰ and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. ³⁴ And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.
- i. Paul and Silas were beaten and locked in jail for carrying out the work of God. Archaeologists know the location of the traditional site of this event, the ancient prison of Philippi. They sang hymns and prayed prayers of joy in the midst of their suffering. About midnight, God caused a quake and the doors popped open. When the jailer awoke and saw thus, he feared that the prisoners escaped, which likely would have resulted in a death sentence for him.
 - ii. Upon seeing that they had not escaped, he very humbly requested to know the plan of salvation. He was told to believe in Jesus, but had not yet learned the gospel. While caring for the Paul and Silas' wounds, they shared the gospel with him. The result was the jailer and those in his household being baptized immediately.

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3. The First Persecution in Philippi

- a. Acts 16:16-24 And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling.¹⁷ Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."¹⁸ And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.¹⁹ But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities,²⁰ and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,²¹ and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."²² And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order {them} to be beaten with rods.²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;²⁴ and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks.
- b. There was a slave-girl possessed with a "python spirit" of divination and the owners were making a killing selling her services. This was one of the local deities of the community. For many days she was following the mission team around and "annoying" Paul, so he cast the spirit out of her and the hope of gains for the owners was gone. This infuriated them and they had Paul and Silas beaten, arrested and thrown into the prison for proclaiming the message of Christ and encouraging "unlawful" customs.
- c. Paul and Silas were severely beaten and as an added persecution they put their legs in stocks. This made it so they would have to lay on their wounded backs, yet still prayed and sang hymns unto God. It was this attitude that likely prepared for the conversion of the jailer, for he would have heard the praise to God.

God always works out things in the end.

Acts 16:35-40 Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men."³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, {saying,} "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace."³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."³⁸ And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,³⁹ and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they

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kept begging them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ And they went out of the prison and entered {the house of} Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

1. We see the two-fold intention of the locals officials: 1) Intimidate the mission team to give up on evangelism in Philippi. 2) Intimidate the newly converted Christians into being ashamed of their spiritual leaders. If something was not done concerning the latter, then the results would be devastating for the new Christians of the community.
2. Paul had already started a prison ministry with the imprisonment, now he will do something even greater. It was against the law to publically beat and humiliate a Roman citizen. Punishment for a town official for doing such could likely result in the death penalty if it were pressed. When the officials sent to release them the next morning, Paul sent back a message about their Roman citizenship. He said, "Have them come and bring us out themselves."
3. Out of fear for the possible repercussions, the officials very humbly came to clear up the mess that they started. By doing so they ended up publically retracting everything that was levied against Paul's preaching and teaching. In essence they received an apology and endorsement.
4. They did not immediately depart Philippi, but went to the house of Lydia and when the young Christians saw them, they were ENCOURAGED!!! What started out as a beating and humiliation became fuel for the growth of the church in Philippi. Considering this was a military colony and there was a public apology from the city officials, spreading the gospel in this city was much easier.
5. God always works out things for the good of those who love Him!
 - A. Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.
 - B. Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.
 - C. Jeremiah 29:11 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.
 - D. Philippians 1:6 *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

God has always and will always work it out in the end if you keeping hanging onto the cross of Christ. That is the theme of the first lesson from the Book of Philippians.