

Philippi, Greece



“Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony.” (Acts 16:11-12)

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The City Of Philippi

Introduction

- I. During his second evangelistic journey, Paul visited the city of Troas (properly called *Alexandria Troas*) in what is now western Turkey (Acts 16:6-12).
 - A. Troas was a major Aegean port 10 miles south of the ancient city of Troy.
 - B. He had thought of preaching in Roman province of Asia, but was forbidden by the Holy Spirit.
 - C. Mysia was the north-west part of the Roman province of Asia.
 - D. He wanted to go into province of Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit him.
 - E. We don't know for sure, but perhaps Paul went to God in prayer to inquire about what God wanted him to do.
 - F. Paul saw a vision in the night of a man of Macedonia who stood and pleaded with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."
 - G. In New Testament times what is known to us today as *Greece* was two Roman provinces, *Macedonia* in the north, and *Achaia* in the south.
 - H. Thus, the door of faith was opened to Paul and he was about to preach the gospel for the first time on European soil (c. 49-50 A.D.).
- II. Leaving the seaport of Troas by boat Paul sailed to the northwest and came to Neapolis, a journey of about 100 miles.
 - A. This city is known today as Kavalla, Greece.
 - B. Neapolis was the regular landing place for those who desired to travel by the *Egnatian Way*, the great Roman military highway stretching some 490 miles across Macedonia, linking the Adriatic with the Aegean Sea.
 - C. Leaving the seaport of Neapolis he traveled north to Philippi which was about ten miles inland.
- III. At Philippi Paul preached the gospel first to Lydia and her household, then to the Philippian jailer and his family.



Discussion

I. The History Of Philippi

- A. The city was first occupied in the 6th century B.C. by settlers from Thasos (the northern-most of all the Aegean islands) who named it Krenides ("the springs") because water sources in the region were abundant.
 1. In former years Philippi was a gold rush town—a feature which drew settlers to the area of nearby Mt. Pangeo (Mt. Pangaeus).
 2. The site was renamed Philippi by Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) around 358 B.C. when he established a settlement of Macedonians to protect the gold mines from looters.
 3. Philippi was brought under Roman rule in 168 B.C.
 4. The Philippi which Paul visited was a Roman colony founded by Augustus after the famous battle of Philippi, fought here between Antony and Octavius and Brutus and Cassius, in 42 B.C.

- B. “*Philippi* was an ancient town which had been renamed by Philip of Macedon c. 360 BC. It was the site of the defeat of Julius Caesar’s murderers, Brutus and Cassius, by Antony and Octavian (the later Emperor Augustus) in 42 BC. The town then became a *Roman colony*, i.e. a settlement for veteran Roman soldiers who possessed the rights of self-government under Roman laws and freedom from taxes. Further veterans were settled there after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BC. According to RSV it was *the leading city of the district of Macedonia*, which as it stands is a meaningless phrase. Macedonia was unusual as a Roman province in being divided into four subprovinces, of which Philippi belonged to the first, although its capital city was Amphipolis. The Greek text is confused, the manuscripts offering several different versions of a phrase that had evidently been garbled at an early stage, but the rendering in GNB and TNT, ‘a city of the first district of Macedonia’, probably represents the intended sense. Luke’s description betrays local knowledge and is intended to prepare the way for the account of Paul’s first encounter with a Roman situation and the Roman local administration.” (Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*)
- C. “Philippi was the site of one of the most significant military engagements in Roman history. In a series of battles there in 42 B.C.E., Mark Antony and Octavian (later endowed with the title ‘Augustus’) conquered the republican forces of the assassins of Julius Caesar, Cassius and Brutus. In some ways this battle marked the turning point between the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. The poet Horace fought in this battle, on the side of Cassius and Brutus, though he reports that he threw away his shield and ran for his life when his defeated leader Brutus killed himself. Little more than a decade later, when Augustus defeated Antony, his sole remaining competitor for Roman rule, at the battle of Actium (31 B.C.E.), Augustus turned Philippi into a Roman colony which he named Colonia Julia Augusta Victrix Philippensis. Here he planted veterans of the civil wars and the supporters of Mark Antony whose lands he took over and whom he dismissed from Italy. Special privileges were allowed to these Roman colonists, such as exemption from taxes and the right to own and market property.” (*Eerdman’s Dictionary of the Bible*)
- D. “Following the battles, Philippi became a Roman colony and discharged veterans receiving land allotments settled permanently in the area. Within a few years after Augustus’ defeat of Antony at the battle of Actium (30 B.C.E.), as many as 500 more Roman soldiers—mostly veterans of Antony’s praetorian guard who had lost their claims to land in Italy—received allotments and accompanying privileges in Philippi. Renamed Colonia Julia Augusta Philippensis, in honor of Augustus’ daughter, the colony of Philippi embraced an area of more than 700 square miles extending from the Pangaion mountain range in the north to the colony’s seaport of Neapolis in the S and from the Nestos river in the E to the Strymon in the W. The city of Philippi was the urban political center of the colony and with its proximity to the Via Egnatia also dominated the colony’s commercial life.” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*)

- E. “There were in fact so few Jews in Philippi that there was no synagogue (ten married men were required to establish one), so the Jews who were there met for prayer along the banks of the Gangites River. It was customary for such places of prayer to be located outdoors near running water.” (John H. Walton, *Archaeological Study Bible*)
- F. Philippi was a Roman *colony* (Acts 16:12).
1. A colony enjoyed special benefits:
 - a) *Libertas* or self-government.
 - b) *Immunitas* or freedom from paying tribute to the Emperor.
 - c) *Ius Italicum* (Italian right) or the rights of those who lived in Italy, including Roman dress, language, coinage and holidays.
 - d) “Augustus created the Roman colony of Philippi expressly for the purpose of making homes for his military veterans. He was also motivated by a desire to establish a military presence in this strategic area and to further the cultural and political Romanization of Macedonia. Philippi had a sizeable population of Latin-speaking Roman citizens. Colonies were often initially established with between two and five thousand men. The citizens were probably extended the privilege of the *ius Italicum*, giving them the same rights as colonies in Italy and *immunitas* (exemption from direct taxation).” (*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: New Testament*, Vol. 2)
 2. “The colony was used for three different purposes in the course of Roman history: as a fortified outpost in a conquered country; as a means of providing for the poor of Rome; and as a settlement for veterans who had served their time. It is with the third class, established by Augustus, that we have to do here. The Romans divided mankind into *citizens* and *strangers*. An inhabitant of Italy was a citizen; an inhabitant of any other part of the empire was a *peregrinus*, or *stranger*. The colonial policy abolished this distinction so far as privileges were concerned. The idea of a colony was, that it was another Rome transferred to the soil of another country. In his establishment of colonies, Augustus, in some instances, expelled the existing inhabitants and founded entirely new towns with his colonists; in others, he merely added his settlers to the existing population of the town then receiving the rank and title of a colony. In some instances a place received these without receiving any new citizens at all. Both classes of citizens were in possession of the same privileges, the principal of which were, exemption from scourging, freedom from arrest, except in extreme cases, and, in all cases, the right of appeal from the magistrate to the emperor. The names of the colonists were still enrolled in one of the Roman tribes. The traveler heard the Latin language and was amenable to the Roman law. The coinage of the city had Latin inscriptions. The affairs of the colony were regulated by their own magistrates named *Duumviri*, who took pride in calling themselves by the Roman title of *praetors*...” (Marvin Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. I)

- G. Roman citizenship is spoken of often in the New Testament.
1. Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25–29), and used his status when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:11).
 2. At Philippi Paul used his citizenship for protection (Acts 16:20–21).
 3. “No *civis Romanus* would claim his rights in Greek... Paul claimed them in the Roman tongue” (William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen*).

II. Philippi In The New Testament

- A. Philippi is first mentioned in the New Testament in connection with Paul’s first evangelistic journey (Acts 16:11–40).
- B. “Because a considerable portion of the citizenry were Romans who enjoyed special privileges as colonists, Paul encountered there a community with a pronounced devotion to and pride in the Roman Empire. The political and religious loyalties of the people appear to have been an issue for Paul. Only in Philippians does he use language that speaks of civil or political identity, when he tells his readers to live in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ (Gk. *politeuísthe*; Phil 1:27) and when he reminds them that they are citizens of heaven (*poliíteuma*; 3:20). Paul appears to have been trying to get the Philippian Christians to see themselves as Christians first and Romans second, not Romans first and Christians second.” (*Eerdman’s Dictionary of the Bible*)
- C. Lydia, a seller of purple, and her household were the firstfruits of the gospel in Europe (Acts 16:13–15).
1. The city of Thyatira was located in the Roman province of Asia, 20 miles southeast of Pergamum.
 2. The dyeing of fabrics in Thyatira was well known in the ancient world.
 3. “Paul’s first European convert, Lydia of the town of Thyatira in the province of Lydia, Asia Minor, came to Philippi because she was a dealer in purple dyed cloth, a business which had flourished in her native province from ancient days. Thyatira today is the Turkish town of Akhisar, well known as a center for carpet making. Since Lydia was a householder and her husband is not mentioned, we assume that she was a widow. The reference to her as a believer in God suggests that she may have accepted the Jewish faith in Thyatira where a Jewish colony existed. St. John, the Seer of Patmos, addressed one of his seven letters to the church of Thyatira, in which we are informed of the prevalent religious syncretism in this city. Lydia was not the only representative of her trade in Philippi. In 1872 Professor Mertzides discovered in Philippi the following text in Greek inscribed on a piece of white marble: ‘The city honored from among the purple-dyers, an outstanding citizen, Antiochus the son of Lykus, a native of Thyatira, as a benefactor.’ The marble with this inscription, which has unfortunately disappeared, indicates that the purple-dyers of Thyatira may have worked in Philippi as a guild and that their profession was held in high esteem.” (Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Greece*)
 4. “But this Asiatic merchant-woman from Thyatira proved to be one of the greatest trophies in Paul’s ministry. This church came to be the joy and crown of Paul (Phil. 4:1), and that fact was largely due to Lydia and Luke.” (A.T. Robertson, *Paul’s Joy In Christ*)

D. Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16–24).

1. Paul was very humiliated by his treatment and later told the Christians at Thessalonica how he was “spitefully treated” at Philippi (1 Thess 2:2).
2. “cruelly attacked” (1 Thess 2:2, *Bible in Basic English*).
3. “injuriously treated” (1 Thess 2:2, *Young’s Literal Translation*).
4. “met with suffering and outrage at Philippi” (1 Thess 2:2, *Weymouth*).



E. The jailor and his household were also converted here (Acts 16:25–34).

F. It is possible the Luke himself was from Philippi, or had a second home here.

1. It has been suggested by William M. Ramsay and others the Luke was the “Man of Macedonia” who appeared to Paul and appealed him to “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”
2. The *we* sections of the book of Acts begins at Acts 16:10, but Luke stayed at Philippi (Acts 17:1, *they*), but rejoined Paul on his third journey (Acts 20:6).
3. Luke was a *beloved physician* (Col 4:14) and there was a school of medicine at Philippi.

G. The brethren at Philippi sent financial support to Paul on at least two occasions (Phil 4:15–16).

H. The book of Philippians was one of the “prison epistles” of Paul.

1. Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippian church to deliver gifts to Paul and to help him; he became ill and nearly died (Phil 2:25).
2. Euodia and Syntyche were urged to be of the same mind (Phil 4:2).
3. Clement had been a fellow-worker with Paul (Phil 4:3).

I. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul sent greetings to the brethren from the saints “who are of Caesar’s household” (Phil 4:22).

1. “Paul adds, *especially those of Caesar’s household*. This expression does not as such refer to the emperor’s blood relatives. It refers rather to all persons in the emperor’s service, whether slaves or freedmen. Such people who had been given employment in the domestic and administrative establishment of the emperor were found not only in Italy but even in the provinces.” (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*)
2. “Paul sends special greetings from the Christian brothers who are of Caesar’s household. It is important to understand this phrase rightly. It does not mean those who are of Caesar’s kith and kin. Caesar’s household was the regular phrase for what we would call the Imperial Civil Service; it had members all over the world. The palace officials, the secretaries, the people who had charge of the imperial revenues, those who were responsible for the day-to-day administration of the empire, all these were Caesar’s household.” (William Barclay, *The Letters To The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*)

III. What To See In Philippi Today

- A. “The archaeological site of ancient Philippi lies on the Via Egnatia, which runs through it. Excavations have revealed ruins of Roman baths at the end of a colonnaded street, basilicas on either side of the street, temples, a Roman forum, a 4th-century theater which the Romans renovated for gladiatorial contests, remnants of several Christian churches, and an acropolis which gives evidence of occupation for the Macedonian to the Byzantine ages. The rocky slope on the north side of the road is dotted with numerous inscriptions, shrines, reliefs, and votive carvings which represent numerous religions, myths, cults, and deities that were part of this vibrant and pluralistic society. These include religious movements that spread widely throughout the Mediterranean (e.g., the veneration of Isis and Osiris) as well as purely local deities (e.g., Bendix and the Thracian rider-god).” (*Eerdman’s Dictionary of the Bible*)
- B. Acropolis and town walls.
- C. The Roman theater is dated from the 4th century B.C.
 - 1. One of the largest in the ancient world.
 - 2. It was altered by the Romans in the 3rd century A.D. to make it suitable for wild beast fights.



D. The Agora (marketplace).

1. Dates from the time of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180).
2. A rectangular square approximately 300 by 100 feet.
3. Shops, a library, and some temples (one including a statue of Cybele) have been identified.
4. Remains of the Via Egnatia can be seen in the Agora.



E. Two Basilicas from the Byzantine era.

1. Basilica A (c. A.D. 500).
 - a) This was the first “church building” built in Philippi—it was destroyed by an earthquake shortly after its completion.
 - b) “It is noteworthy, however, that the earliest large basilica at Philippi (5th century C.E.) was constructed in immediate proximity to the heroön just above the Egnatia. This church complex, known as Basilica A, spread over an area almost as large as the Roman forum. The two-storied basilica with its apse oriented typically to the E, featured elegant frescoes in its various chambers, a long, broad nave, and an expansive narthex and exonarthex to the W. Excavations have revealed another basilica N of the Egnatia, to the W of and below Basilica A, which was carefully built and richly appointed with fine marble materials.” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*)

2. Basilica B (c. A.D. 560).
 - a) An ambitious attempt to build a church building with a dome; the structure was top-heavy and collapsed before it was dedicated
 - b) “An even more grandiose church building (the so-called ‘Direkler Basilica’ or Basilica B) was begun S of the forum adjacent to the palaestra. It was to have been crowned by an enormous free-standing dome which collapsed prior to completion of the church. A church of more modest dimensions later was built at the site.” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*)
3. Three more ancient church buildings have been found.
- F. Traditional site of the Philippian jail where Paul was imprisoned.
 1. “A local tradition identifies a Roman cistern as the place where St. Paul was imprisoned. This cistern is immediately east of what is known as Basilica A, north of the modern road which cuts through the ruins of Philippi. This ‘jail’ is divided into two rooms, the outer and the inner prison (Acts 16:24). The guard will even point out where the chains which tied the prisoners were fastened to the wall.” (Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Greece*)
- G. The river associated with Lydia (known as Ganga, Gangites, Gargites) is located one mile west of the town.
 1. A baptistry (of sorts) has been formed by diverting the river.
 2. A Greek Orthodox church building is located nearby.

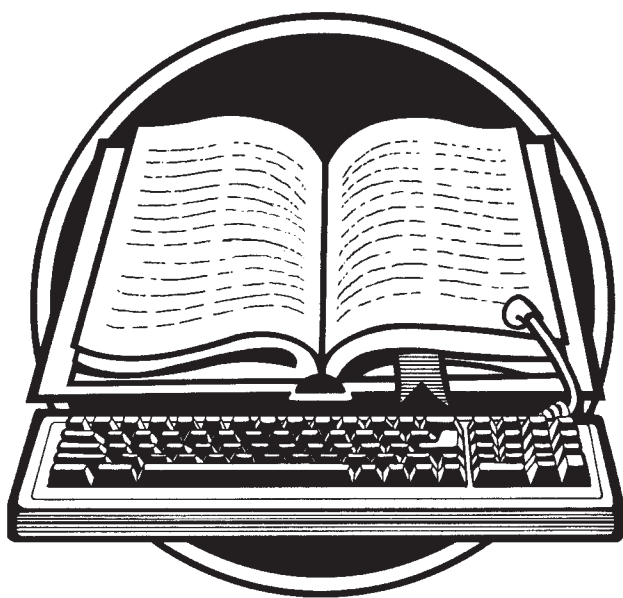


- IV. A beautiful mosaic floor and an underground Macedonian tomb is in the process of being excavated.



Conclusion

- I. Philippi prospered during the 5th and 6th centuries as a place associated with the memory of the apostle Paul.
 - A. Catastrophic earthquakes in the early 7th century A.D., together with invasions by Slavs and Bulgars brought the city into a state of decline.
 - B. After the Turkish conquest (after A.D. 1387) the city and its fortifications were abandoned and fell into ruin.
- II. Having a great past does not guarantee a good future.
 - A. Like so many places in the lands of the Bible, you can see great monuments and relics of the past, but in the background you will see the minaret of the local mosque from which the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer.
 - B. This is what happens when people cease searching the Scriptures daily.



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