

# Philippians

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## Introduction to Philippians

### The City

- Founded around 360 BC on the northern coast of the Aegean Sea by colonists from Thrace. Thrace was a region/kingdom that covered much of what is now the southeastern corner of Europe. The city's original name was Krenides, meaning “springs” or “fountains”. Any site with access to a seaport and with fresh water was going to do well in those days.
- The Thracians didn't hold on to their new city very long. Not only did it grow quickly with a suburb port town of Neapolis providing riches in shipping and trade, gold was struck there, making it a prime target for acquisition by the growing Macedonian empire in 356 BC. The Macedonian king was Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. He fortified the city, sent more colonists, made it more livable, built roads, and found more gold. He liked the city so much that he renamed the city for himself.
- The Romans took the city some 200 years later in 168 BC. For over 100 years they did very little with the city except to expand the great East-West road that ran through the center of town. The road had been in place since the time of Philip, but the Roman improvements made it easier to ship commerce. So now Philippi has gold mines, a thriving seaport, and is on the main commercial highway connecting the east and west of the Roman empire. These were very prosperous days.
- As it happened the deciding battle of the Roman civil war occurred just outside Philippi. After the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, armies under Caesar's killers, (Brutus and Cassius) faced off against Caesar's supporters (Mark Anthony and Octavian, who would later rename himself Augustus). The battle was won by Mark Anthony and Octavian

and Octavian became emperor. During his time in the area Philippi caught the new emperor's eye. He recolonized the city with retiring soldiers who were loyal to him and turned the city into a mini-Rome. Now the city prospered even more, adding an expanded forum, a new large amphitheater, and a variety of beautification projects to point up the city's wealth.

## Paul

- Sometime around 50 AD the Apostle Paul came to Philippi. On his second missionary journey he and Barnabas had gone separate paths: Barnabas with John Mark (the author of the second gospel) and Paul with Silas. The goal was to return to and strengthen the churches that had been founded during the first missionary journey. All of these churches are in what is now Turkey. Yet Paul wanted to push further, towards the Roman provinces near the Black Sea. But Acts 16 tells us Paul and his party (they had added Timothy) were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit" from speaking in the Roman colony of Asia in the northeastern part of Turkey and then that "the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them" to go into the province of Bithynia on the Black Sea coast.
- So Paul and his companions head west to the Mediterranean coast and the sea side town of Troas. It was here that Paul had a vision of a man dressed as a Macedonian pleading to Paul to "come over to Macedonia help us" (Acts 16:9). Acts 16 goes on to say that the party landed in Philippi's port of Neapolis, that they made their first European convert at a Sabbath prayer meeting, that Paul and his party ran afoul of the local population and were beaten and thrown into prison, and were ultimately able to win their jailer and the man's entire family for Christ. In ways they couldn't have imagined, what may have been the first church in Europe was founded.
- Acts 20 tells us that when Paul was on his third missionary journey, he passed through Macedonia again on his way to Greece and then back to Philippi to catch a boat back to Jerusalem with an offering for the Jerusalem church he had collected from the European churches. In

Jerusalem he was arrested and ultimately sent to Rome as an Imperial prisoner.

## The Letter

- The letter was written by Paul around 62 AD while he was a prisoner in Rome. It was essentially a Thank You note. In 4:18 we are told that a man named Epaphroditus had come to Rome from Philippi with a gift, a care package, for Paul. Before Epaphroditus returns to Philippi, Paul writes a letter thanking the church not for this gift only, but for their long term support of him and his ministry (4:15-16). The generosity of the Philippian church is made more pronounced by Paul's remark to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 where he points up the amazing generosity of the Macedonian churches who begged to participate in the offering for the Jerusalem church and how despite the "great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." The Macedonian church alone had supported Paul when no one would.
- There is nothing in the letter but affection, encouragement, and appreciation. There are no sharp rebukes from Paul such as stung the Galatian churches and Corinth. Paul must have surely thought, "If only ALL my churches were like Philippi!" He can be vulnerable with them, sharing word of his illness and talking plainly about his fears. The Philippians are his true friends. Despite being in prison and writing to a church under a "great ordeal of affliction" the letter is a letter of joy and hope! "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all!" (1:3-4).