

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILLIPIANS

April 17, 1988

## I. The city of Philippi.

### A. Location.

1. Paul first visited it on his second missionary journey, Aug.-Oct. 50AD.
2. It was a fortified city of Macedonia near the Thracian border.
3. It was an inland town situated about eleven miles north of the seaport of Neapolis.
4. It stood astride the famous Roman highway via Egnatia (the highway divided the city into the Upper and Lower Towns).
5. The Upper Town containing the ancient fortress was located on the rocky slopes of a steep hill overlooking the fertile plain of Drama watered by the Gangites or Angites River.
6. The Lower Town was established later and extended some distance into the plain.
7. This was the most important section of the city since the forum, the market place, and the centers of the city's life were here.

### B. History.

1. The more ancient name of the place was Crenides, "The Little fountains", so called because of the numerous springs in the region.
2. Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, recognized the strategic importance of the place and seized the territory to protect Macedon from the Thracians.
3. In 336BC, the place was enlarged, fortified and renamed Philippi by Philip.
4. He worked the gold mines in the region, which enabled him to enlarge the Macedonian army and to give Macedonia a gold standard.
5. Following the battle of Pydna in 168BC, Philippi as a part of Macedonia passed under the control of the Romans.
6. In 42BC, the city witnessed the death of the Roman Republic and the birth of the Roman Empire in the defeat of the Republican armies of Brutus and Cassius by the forces of Augustus and Mark Anthony.
7. Octavian (Augustus) elevated the city to a colony under the name "Colonia Julia Philippensis."
8. Eleven years later, following the victory of Octavian over Mark Anthony in the battle of Actium (31BC), the city received the much coveted Jus Italicum, which involved numerous privileges, the chief of which was immunity from taxation (the name was changed to "Colonia Augusta Julia Victrix Philippensium").
9. After these battles, the victors settled a number of their veterans there.

### C. Status.

1. Luke describes Philippi as "a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony", Act.16:12.
2. He describes the city as the first of the four administrative areas into which the Romans divided Macedonia.
3. Luke mentions several other cities which we know to have been Roman colonies, but Philippi is the only one which he actually so designated.
4. A Roman colony was modeled on the municipal constitution of Rome.
5. The original purpose of Roman colonies was military, as it was considered a wise thing to have settlements of Roman citizens at strategic points throughout the Empire.
6. Philippi enjoyed the privilege of exemption from the oversight of the provincial governor, immunity from poll and property taxes, and the right to hold land in full ownership under the laws of Rome (it was a miniature reproduction of Rome).
7. The official language was Latin, but knowledge of Greek was a necessity for all its residents (inscriptions in both languages have been found in the place).

8. At the head of the city were two officials, the praetors or duumviri, who combined civil and military authority in the persons.
9. Lictors attended the praetors, bearing the official bundles of rods with a mace or ornamental rod protruding from the center, which were symbols of power and authority.
10. The Roman spirit and atmosphere in Philippi are quite evident in the narrative of Luke.
11. This was appealed to by the owners of the slave girl in stimulating opposition to Paul and Silas.
12. This civil atmosphere explains the quick redress for the mistreated prisoners.

#### D. Population.

1. The population of the city was mixed, consisting of three main elements.
2. The Roman colonists constituted the dominant or ruling class.
3. The old Macedonian stock was numerically the strongest section.
4. There was a considerable admixture of Orientals.
5. Being situated on the famous Egnatian Way, Philippi was daily visited by strangers from many lands.
6. Because Philippi was a military and agricultural rather than a commercial city, few Jews were attracted to the city.
7. There were not enough Jews in the city to have a regular synagogue, but they did maintain their religious practices at a "place of prayer" situated outside the city by the riverside.

## II. The church in Philippi.

### A. Origin.

1. The church was established as a direct result of the labors of Paul and his coworkers during Paul's second missionary journey.
2. The account is based on Luke's personal observations (Luke's presence is assured by the fact that the ministry there is introduced by the first "we" section of Acts, Act.16:10-40).
3. By closing a series of doors, God lead Paul down to Troas, Act.16:6-8.
4. At Troas, where Luke apparently joined the missionary party, Paul received his "Macedonian call" and the missionary party at once set sail for Macedonia, Act.16:9,10.
5. Their journey was favored by the winds, and after two days they arrived at Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi.
6. They proceeded to Philippi, which was eleven miles inland.
7. The work of evangelism was begun on a Sabbath day with the few Jews of the city.
8. They went to the place of prayer outside the city and spoke to the women that had assembled there.
9. The first convert in Philippi was a proselyte of Judaism, a business woman from Thyatira Lydia, Act.16:12-14.
10. The opening of her home to the missionaries provided a base of operation for the work and a place of assembly for the young church, Act.16:15.
11. On a subsequent Sabbath visit to the place, a crisis arose when Paul cast out the spirit of divination from the slave girl who had been following the missionaries, Act.16:16-18.
12. The owners of the slave girl, realizing that their source of revenue was gone, seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the magistrates.
13. They accused them of teaching a religion which was illegal for Romans to practice (there were laws against inflammatory foreign religious propaganda).
14. This incited the mob, who threatened violence, and the magistrates acted without stopping to investigate.
15. They were beaten with rods and ordered jailed (because of the orders given the jailer, he put them in the inner jail and put their feet in stocks).
16. That night while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, a great earthquake shook the prison, causing the doors to open and everyone's chains to unfasten,

Act.16:25,26.

17. The jailer was about to commit suicide, thinking all the prisoners had escaped, when Paul stopped him, Act.16:27,28.
18. Instead of death, he received the plan of salvation and he and his entire house became believers, Act.16:29-34.
19. The next morning the praetors, alarmed by the news of what had happened, sent the lictors with a message to release the missionaries, Act.16:35.
20. When the jailer brought the news to Paul, Paul resolutely refused to go and demanded that the praetors come themselves and conduct them out, Act.16:36,37.
21. Paul's refusal to be set free without a public recognition of their rights was not prompted by a desire for personal vindication.
22. It was prompted by a desire to safeguard the young church.
23. Roman law exempted Roman citizens from certain forms of degrading punishment, such as beatings with rods, scourging, and crucifixion.
24. The praetors by their hasty action made themselves liable to severe punishment.
25. Paul could have avoided the beating and incarceration by simply declaring his status as a Roman citizen, Act.22:24-29, but he deliberately chose not to, thinking of the security of the church.
26. The crisis, however, made it necessary for Paul and Silas to depart, Act.16:39.
27. Luke apparently remained behind to guide the affairs of the church.

#### B. Characteristics.

1. The prominence of women in the church is in accordance with the general status of women in Macedonia.
2. The first convert was Lydia, and her liberality was carried over in the church's subsequent history.
3. In the epistle, two women, Euodia and Syntche, are mentioned as coworkers with Paul, Phil.4:2.
4. The membership was unquestionably gentile in background.
5. The church membership grew from the time of its founding (50AD) to the time of the writing of Philippians (62AD).
6. The Philippians were among the Macedonian Christians whose liberality Paul held up as an example to the Corinthians, 2Cor.8:1-15.
7. Their liberality is confirmed by the unique record they attained in the relations to Paul, Phil.4:15,16.

#### C. Relations to Paul.

1. The church was born out of the labor and sufferings of the apostle.
2. The church maintained its close relations with him.
3. His warm affection for them is seen in his epistle.
4. Shortly after his departure, they sent him a financial contribution while he was at Thessalonica, Phil.4:16.
5. Another contribution was sent him while he was at Corinth, Phil.4:15; Act.18:5; 2Cor.11:9.
6. In this matter the Philippians had a distinctive record, Phil.4:15.
7. During the third missionary journey, after an absence of about six years, Paul again visited the church (June 56AD).
8. A year later he again returned to Philippi, Act.20:6.
9. He kept in touch through messengers sent to them, Act.19:22.
10. Paul visited them at least once more after his first Roman imprisonment, 1Tim.1:3.

#### D. Subsequent history.

1. With this epistle the church fades from the Biblical record.
2. Its last prominent mention in church history is in connection with martyr Ignatius, early in

the second century.

3. On his way to Rome, they were not ashamed of his chains and ministered to him.
4. Their action led to their receiving a letter of commendation from Polycarp, a friend of Ignatius.
5. The bishops of the church are rarely mentioned in the Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries.
6. The site of the city is today in ruins.

### III. The place and date of Philippians.

#### A. The place.

1. Paul wrote the letter during his first imprisonment in Rome (Feb. 60-Mar. 62).
2. The letter itself makes it clear he is a prisoner and that his presence has caused considerable interest in the gospel in Rome, Phil.1:7,13-20.
3. Further, it is evident that he has been in that situation for some time, Phil.1:13.
4. The mention of believers even in Caesar's household indicates Rome as the place of imprisonment, Phil.4:22.

#### B. The date.

1. Indications in the epistle of the elapse of some time, as well as Paul's hope of an early release, forbid that the letter was written in the early part of Paul's Roman imprisonment.
2. News of Paul's arrival in Rome must have had time to reach the Philippians.
3. An offering was collected and sent to Rome by Epaphroditus who fell gravely ill after he reached Rome.
4. News of his sickness reached them and the report of their concern for him reached Rome (all this requires time).
5. The decisive factor for a date at the end of Paul's imprisonment in Rome is seen in Phil.2:23.
6. The Imperial Court has begun to consider Paul's case and he expects a verdict enabling him to visit them soon, Phil.2:24.
7. The date is within the closing months of the imprisonment (Spring 62AD).

#### C. The bearer.

1. The bearer is Epaphroditus, Phil.2:25-30.
2. Epaphroditus was a bishop in the church at Philippi, Phil.1:1.

### IV. The occasion and purpose.

#### A. The occasion.

1. The immediate occasion for the writing was the return of Epaphroditus to Philippi following his serious illness in Rome.

#### B. The purpose.

1. There is no clear evidence that Paul is answering to a letter they wrote him.
2. The letter was not occasioned by any special crisis such as caused Paul, for example, to write Galatians or 2 Corinthians.
3. The letter was written to provide them with official information about his circumstances.
4. This gave Paul an opportunity to commend Epaphroditus and to write on a variety of matters.
5. Paul expresses his love and appreciation for the believers there, Phil.1:8, and thanks them for the offering, Phil.4:10-18.

### V. The characteristics of the epistle.

A. The letter is extremely personal in nature, exhibiting his affection for them.

B. Joy, a product of the filling of the Holy Spirit, is prominent in the epistle (the words "joy" or "rejoice" occurs 16X).

C. Like the other prison epistles, Philippians contains a profound Christological passage, Phil.2:5-11.

