

## Lesson 16: Philippi and the Philippian Church



The first century city of Philippi was located in ancient Greece on the eastern border of the Roman province of Macedonia, about 10 miles inland from the coast, directly northwest of its nearest port city, Neapolis. A strategic area in ancient times, Philippi sat on a fertile plain through which passed the Via Egnatia (Egnatian Way), a trade highway that linked the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. Many travelers passed through Philippi on their way to Rome.

Philippi was known from its earliest days for its strategic location, its many gold mines and its springs of pure water.

Thasian (Greek) colonists established a settlement called “Crenides” (translated as “fountains” or “springs”) in Thrace in 360/359 BC near the head of the Aegean Sea at the foot of Mt. Orbelos, now called Mt. Lekani. In 356 BC, King Philip II of Macedon (Alexander’s famous father) conquered the city and renamed it Philippi.

His reasons were simple enough: to take control of the gold mines and to establish an important military garrison set at this strategic passage. The town controlled the route between Amphipolis and Neapolis, part of the great royal route which runs east-west across Macedonia (which the Romans reconstructed in the 2nd century BC as part of what they later called the “Via Egnatia”). Philip II fortified the city and sent colonists to occupy it. Philip also had the marsh partially drained.

Philippi preserved its autonomy within the kingdom of Macedon and had its own political institutions (the Assembly of the Demos). The discovery of new gold mines near the city at Asyla contributed greatly to the wealth of Philip, who established a mint there. The city became fully integrated into the kingdom during the last years of the reign (221 to 179 BC). Phillip was assassinated by one of his bodyguards and his son Alexander founded an empire that was eventually succeeded by Rome.

When the Romans destroyed the Antigonid dynasty of Macedon in the Third Macedonian War (168 BC), they divided the kingdom into four separate states. Amphipolis (rather than Philippi) then became the capital of the eastern Macedonian state. Almost nothing is known about the city in this period, but archeological remains include walls, the Greek theatre, the foundations of a house under the Roman forum and a little temple dedicated to an unknown hero cult.

The city reappears in ancient historical records during the civil war (43–42 BC) that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Caesar's heirs Mark Antony and Octavian (whom we spoke of regarding Ephesus) confronted the forces of Julius Caesar's assassins Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus at the Battle of Philippi on the plain to the west of the city during October in 42 BC. Antony and Octavian won this final battle against the partisans of the Republic. They released some of their veteran soldiers, probably from Legion XXVIII, to colonize Philippi, which was re-founded as Colonia Victrix Philippensium. From 30 BC Octavian established his control of the Roman state, becoming Roman emperor beginning in 27 BC. He reorganized the colony and established more settlers there, veterans (possibly from the Praetorian Guard) and other Italians. The city was renamed Colonia Iulia Philippensis, and then Colonia Augusta Iulia Philippensis after January, 27 BC, when Octavian received the title “Augustus” from the Roman Senate.

Following this second renaming, and perhaps after the first, the territory around Philippi was divided into squares of land and distributed to the colonists. The city kept its Macedonian walls, and its general plan was modified only partially by the construction of a forum a little to the east of the site of Greek agora. It was a “miniature Rome”, under the municipal law of Rome, and governed by two military officers, the duumviri, who were appointed directly from Rome, similar to Roman colonies.

The colony recognized its dependence on the mines that brought it its privileged position on the Via Egnatia. Many monuments uncovered by archaeologists evidence its great wealth – these are particularly imposing considering the relatively small size of the urban area. The forum, laid out in two terraces on both sides of the main road, was constructed in several phases between the reigns of the Emperors Claudius (41–54 AD) and Antoninus Pius (138–161), and the theatre (originally built by Phillip) was enlarged and expanded to hold Roman games (right).

By the first century the city of Philippi had a diverse population of Thracians, Macedonians (Greeks), Romans and others from across the empire- but unlike most major Roman cities, no significant Jewish population nor synagogue. Acts 16 records how the Holy Spirit sent Paul a vision by night: “A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” (Acts 16:9) Paul and his companions, which included Silas, Timothy and Luke, immediately sailed for



Neapolis, the port city only about 8 miles from Philippi. Paul is believed to have preached for the first time on European soil in Philippi around AD 50 or 51.

Paul’s custom was to go to the synagogue whenever he first arrived in a new city, but in Philippi there was no synagogue, and he went to the river where he knew that Jews would be worshipping (Acts 16:13). They met Lydia, a Gentile who became the first Christian convert in Europe: “One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.”

Acts 16 describes how a slave girl “possessed with spirit of divination” followed them for several days and cried out “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” After many days, Paul became annoyed. He cast out the demon in a most public manner. Her masters, now seeing their profitable slave was no longer profitable, dragged Paul and Silas to the authorities, who put them in jail, tore off their clothes and beat them with rods. God sent an earthquake, and Paul taught and converted their jailer.

The next morning, when the jailer said Paul and Silas could go, Paul said, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.” (Acts 16:37) Uh oh- these local magistrates had bound, beaten and jailed Roman citizens. Paul and Silas could have gotten them in a *great* deal of trouble. Instead, Paul knew that the church was now established, and that it was time to move on to Thessalonica- at least for now.

Paul visited the church at Philippi again on his third missionary journey, and the believers there gave generously to support Paul’s ministry (Philippians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 11:9) as well as the church in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:1–5). While Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the church at Philippi sent Epaphroditus to minister to him. In return, Paul sent Timothy to the congregation at Philippi. Theirs was a close relationship.

From the time it was established, the church at Philippi impresses me as being healthy, strong, and generous, becoming a model church that only experienced minor problems of disunity (Philippians 4:2–7).

## Discussion Questions

Read Acts 16 in its entirety before answering the following discussion questions:

1. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? Hadn't he told the Galatians that this was unnecessary? (You can reference I Corinthians 9:19-23).
2. What did they deliver to the cities? Where was this found earlier in scripture?
3. Describe the role the Holy Spirit played/communicated after traveling thru Phrygia and Galatia.
4. Describe what they did when they went to Philippi.
5. Describe Lydia and what she begged Paul to do after she was baptized.
6. Describe why and how Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed. Did you see anything new in this reading that you found interesting or that you missed in previous readings?
7. Discuss the salvation of the jailer- including what he did for them later that night.
8. Imagine the scene—the magistrates sent officers to the jailer saying, “Let those men go.” What happens next?
9. The magistrates were afraid—they made some serious procedural errors. Discuss what one or two of those errors may have been.
10. One can only imagine the irony of the realization of the magistrates about Paul and Silas. First, these magistrates had jailed and beaten Roman citizens without trial and had not bothered to investigate the charges brought against these “strangers”; second, any investigation would confirm that neither Paul nor Silas had done any harm to the city or were troublemakers, but instead, had performed a noteworthy miracle (later, in Acts 19, Demetrius tries the same thing, starts a riot, and is called to task for it); third, that as these “troublemakers” were in jail after being beaten, they were praying and singing hymns; fourth, their God caused the previous night's earthquake, freeing all the prisoners from their chains—but none chose to escape, causing even their jailer to accept their “new religion”. Note any thoughts you may have about any of this. Do you think that if the word of this had eventually spread in the city, what effect would that have on the new local church?

## Lesson 17: Philippians Chapter 1

Read Philippians chapter one in its entirety and answer the following questions:

Paul thanked them for coming through when he needed help. He also reminds them that only in Christ are real unity and joy possible. With Christ as their model of ultimate humility & service, believers can enjoy purpose, have a positive attitude, have goals and labor with a purpose. The date of the letter doesn't matter, but it's thought to be penned from Rome about 62 AD.

### Philippians 1:1-2

1. Written by whom, and to whom?

### Philippians 1:3-11

2. In verses 3-6, what specifically was Paul thankful for in his prayers?
3. How do you think they felt when he expressed his confidence in them? Perhaps contrast that with statement(s) in other epistles.
4. In 7-8 he now says he has them "in his heart" and describes his deep longing for them. How can we apply these opening verses (3-8) to our Christian walk today?
5. It is truly wonderful to think about how many people Paul was able to touch with his teaching, and then with those that he taught who in turn taught others (as in Colossae and Laodicea, the next book we will study). Consider the prayers Paul made daily for the members, the elders and the deacons, as well as the prayers those that knew him—and those who only knew of him- made. What lessons could we draw from considering this?

### Philippians 1:12-18

6. In verses 12-14, Paul tells them that his imprisonment has furthered the cause of Christ. How?
7. Verses 15-17, especially verse 15, can give us much to think about. Putting Paul aside, what motivations have you observed in those who teach?
8. Verse 18 reminds me of Mark 9:38-41. Read that passage before commenting upon verse 18.

### **Philippians 1:19-26 “To live is Christ, and to die is gain”**

9. As Paul pens this epistle he awaits his first trial before Nero—which was his right as a Roman citizen. He did not know what the outcome would be (he was acquitted), but verses 19-20 explain Paul’s line of thinking and the reasons that he believed that he would be freed. What are they?
  
10. Verses 21-23 discuss a most mature outlook on his life to come. Paul knew that God had plans for him and Paul trusted that God would do what?
  
11. Verses 24-26 again speak of real confidence. What were Paul’s plans (or perhaps I should say his “hopes”)?

### **Philippians 1:27-30**

12. Verses 27-30 are one complete thought. Briefly describe the thought (and we’ll dig in a little deeper in the next few questions).
  
13. Verses 27-28 speak of worthy conduct, standing fast, striving together, and not fearing their adversaries (and God’s adversary). How do we, as Christians, and we, as a local church, do this?
  
14. Verses 29-30 remind us of the “honor” of suffering for the sake of Christ. Also read Matthew 5:10-12 (in the sermon on the mount) and Acts 5:41-42 (the apostles were publicly beaten), and then comment on what Paul reminded us of in these verses in Philippians 1:29-30.
  
15. Let’s go back to Paul’s public beating (without trial) in Philippi. What was his reaction then, and because of this reaction, what was the ultimate result for the local church?

## Lesson 18: Philippians Chapter 2

*“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus”*

Read Philippians chapter 2 in its entirety and answer the following questions:

### **Philippians 2:1-4**

1. In verses 1-2, Paul asks a series of “ifs”: consolation (encouragement) in Christ; comfort of love; fellowship of the Spirit; affection and mercy. He then asks (not commands) that they fulfill his joy by doing specifically *what*?
2. In spite of what others may say, it is not difficult to be unified. List a few attitudes or actions you have observed that keep people from being unified.
3. What actions do we take to be unified as a local body?
4. Verses 3-4 are a buildup to the big reminder (the big teaching) that we’re about to read of in the next section. What attitudes/actions are being commanded? (These are not suggestions.)

### **Philippians 2:5-10** (Maybe we’re not supposed to have favorite passages, but this is your teacher’s favorite.)

5. Verses 5-6 start by describing Christ’s position and his attitude before coming to earth. What is this attitude?
6. Verses 7-8 call Jesus a “bondservant”. Based on what we’ve studied earlier, how is this appropriate?
7. What does it mean that he “came in the likeness of men”?
8. Describe the example of Jesus and what He allowed to happen to Him.
9. In verses 9-11, we read of the reward. What was that reward?

10. Do you think that Jesus did what He did for the reward from God, or was there another motivation?

**Philippians 2:12-18**

11. Verses 12-13 reminds them that they had matured (he didn't have to be present anymore) and were able to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Does "work out" mean "figure out" (as we would use the phrase today, or does it mean something else?

12. Back in Ephesians 4:11-16 we read where Christ had appointed people to serve in different roles, but also, they were commanded that these people were to edify the church *"till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:13). How do we mature? Grow stronger? Stand in the stature of the fullness of Christ?

13. In Philippians 2:13-15 we are again reminded that God chooses to work in us and that by doing things without complaining and disputing we become blameless, harmless, and without fault.

14. As in Ephesians, we are taught in 14-16 that WE can shine as lights as Christ had taught during the Sermon on the Mount. According to this, how?

15. In verses 17-18, what does Paul refer to and rejoice about- and command that they do as well?

**Philippians 2:19-30**

16. In verses 19-24, without going into detail, what does he say about Timothy?

17. Who was Epaphroditus, what was his relationship to Philippi, and what did Paul report?

## Lesson 19: Philippians Chapter 3

Read Philippians 3 in its entirety, then answer the following questions:

### Philippians 3:1-11

1. How do we “rejoice in the Lord”? How can we be commanded to rejoice? Isn’t rejoicing just an emotion?
2. I like the message of verse 1. State this in more modern language.
3. Who is he speaking of in verse 2?
4. Ten or more years previously, Jewish Christians were teaching Gentiles to keep the law of Moses. The problem was resolved in Acts 15, with letters going to every church. When Paul speaks of “dogs”, “evil workers” and “the mutilation”, who do you think he is warning them about? Does it seem to you that this was a serious problem at Philippi?
5. Back in the Epistle to the Galatians (which was already in circulation among the churches, who would have most certainly kept a copy), Paul said that Christians today were “heirs according to the promise” (of Abraham). According to Paul, who are the “circumcision” today?
6. Paul noted that if anyone should have confidence in the “flesh” (the Old Law), it would be him. How so?
7. In verses 7-8, he contrasts his past life with what he now has. How does he really feel about it?
8. According to verses 9-11, where does his righteousness come from? What knowledge has he gained from this, and to what eventual end?

### Philippians 3:12-16

9. Verses 12-14 are quoted often and for a good reason! Can we see the challenges we face when we pat ourselves on the back instead of setting our faces toward the prize?
10. He says that this is a mature mindset and that those who don’t have it can have it. What other two things should we do, and what does this mean?



### **Philippians 3:17-21**

11. Paul invites them to follow his example. Can this be practical today? (Perhaps discuss problems you have observed when people continue to follow those whose actions have shown to be in error.)
  
12. He tearfully speaks of those who walk as “the enemies of the cross of Christ”. Who are some of those who do so today?
  
13. Verse 19 says they will have a sad ending. What?
  
14. Verse 20 speaks of citizenship. When do we first begin to enjoy the benefits of this citizenship? For whom do we eagerly wait?
  
15. What will Christ do for His children some day?
  
16. I Corinthians 15:27 says, “For he has put all things under his feet.” (Psalms 8:6). Here we read (in verse 21) that “He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Is this past tense or future?

## Lesson 20: Philippians Chapter 4

Read Philippians chapter 4 in its entirety and answer the following questions:

### **Philippians 4:1**

1. This verse actually belongs back in Philippians 3 from last week. What's the conclusion?
2. Why would Paul call them his "joy and crown", and what does that say about them?

### **Philippians 4:2-6**

3. What does he "implore" Euodia and Syntchche, and what does he urge the church to do to help them?
4. This is the first time in the Bible that the term "Book of Life" is found. Where else is it found and what is it referring to?
5. "Rejoice". "Let your gentleness be made known to all men." "The Lord is at hand." This is coming from a man in prison, unsure if he would live or die. Why would he command us to do these things?
6. Verses 6-7 can give us great comfort. We pray- and when we do, what does God do for us?

### **Philippians 4:8-9**

7. Your teacher finds himself going back to this passage in times of trouble, again and again. Have you found this passage to be helpful? How has it reminded you?
8. How does one go about "meditating" in a busy world?
9. Things that we learned, received, heard and saw. Can you think of one or two examples?

### **Philippians 4:10-20**

10. In this section Paul speaks about how they provided both people (such as Epaphroditus) and financial help as he was distressed and in prison.
11. Paul had learned to be content, no matter what. Practically speaking, how do we do that?

12. Verses 12-13 teach that Paul learned how to do these things. Can we imagine the difficulty he faced in learning these lessons?
13. In verses 14-18 he tells of what they did to help him. What did they do?
14. He speaks of not the gift itself but of the fruit that they received. What was that fruit?
15. He noted that God would, in kind, provide for them. What?

**Philippians 4:21-23**

16. Who sent their greetings through Paul to Philippi?
17. How does the grace of Jesus Christ be with believers and the local church?