

PHILIPPIANS

Setting

1. CITY AND PEOPLE

a. Location

1. Northeast region of Roman province of Macedonia
2. On the *via Ignatia*,
 - The east-west road of Macedonia
 - Controlling land route to Hellespont (Dardanelles) and Bosphorus into Asia
3. Between two rivers—Strymon and Nestos Rivers
4. About ten miles from seaport of Neapolis
5. Abundant natural resources made city important
 - Gold mines on Hill of Dionysus (Mount Pangaeus) near city
6. Next to 750 foot rock cliff overlooking city—with carvings of religious cults on it

b. History

1. Ancient name—Crenides
 - a. Meaning = ‘springs’ or ‘fountains’
 - b. There was an abundant water supply nearby
2. Capital of Greek empire
 - 359 BC— Philip II of Macedon gained control of city
 - Philip renamed it for himself and made it his capital
 - From there he set out to conquer world—then died
 - Alexander continued his vision—developed it as capital of his huge empire
3. After Alexander’s death (323 BC)—Macedonia again became a separate kingdom
 - Macedonia waged three wars against Roman Empire
4. Roman era
 - Romans conquered Macedonia 168 BC

- Rome annexed it as a province in 148 BC, divided territory into 4 districts
 - Battle of Philippi (42 BC)—and afterward
 - a. Antony-Octavian defeated Brutus-Cassius nearby after Julius Caesar’s murder
 - b. Antony and Octavian established Roman colony there in 42 and 30 BC
 - c. Army veterans settled there
 - City declined in importance until about 40 BC
 - Octavian conferred on it title *ius Italicum*—giving it same status and rights Italian soil
5. Official territory of Philippi was 730 square miles—with several villages in region
 6. Five other Roman colonies were in Macedonia
 7. Philippi never became quite as important as Thessalonica—100 miles away

c. People and Language

1. Three main ethnic groups lived there
 - a. Native **Thracians**, from time before Philippi was under Macedonia
 - b. **Greeks**, who had colonized at time Philip’s conquest
 1. Afterward they settled there for commercial reasons
 2. The language of the city and the region became Greek
 - c. **Romans**, who occupied it from the late first century BC and onward
 1. Two waves of Roman colonization gave Romans predominance in city
 2. Latin became official language
 3. But Greek survived as a commercial language
 4. Besides Rome, Philippi was the most Romanized city Paul ever visited
2. Little evidence of Jewish community in Philippi
 - a. Paul did not visit synagogue there; probably one did not exist
 - b. Even believers in Jehovah were not ethnic Jews but Gentile God-fearers
 - c. Possibly Jews had been expelled

d. Following the pattern of imperial edict expelling them from Rome in 49 AD

e. Paul visited there about 50-51 AD, following that edict

d. Religion

1. Ancient Thracian religions

a. Crude, barbaric; often involved animal-worship, sometimes human sacrifice and orgies

b. Three main gods

1. **Liber Pater** (liberating father)

- Associated with grape harvests and wine
- Equated with Bacchus (Greek and Roman) or Dionysus (Greek)
- Also known as ‘Eluetherios’—‘the liberator’
- The great local god of Philippi

2. **Thracian Rider**

- Associated with hunting and the hunting cult
- Depicted on a horse

3. **Bendis**

a. Goddess associated with Diana and Artemis

- Goddess of hunt and healing; moon goddess
- Usually known for chastity (unlike the goddess worshiped in Ephesus)

b. Dressed in boots and skirt, carrying knife or spear, athletic

c. Worship involved orgies

2. Many Greek and Roman cults were present in the city—two examples were:

a. Paul encountered follower of **Apollo** in **Acts 16:16**—slave girl who practiced divination

- Apollo was the son of Zeus—and the twin brother of Artemis
- Known for divination, music, archery, medicine, and shepherding
- Was patron of Delphi—gave oracles—prophetic deity
- Had dominion over Roman colonists—like those of Philippi

b. **Silvanus** was a favorite Italian god

- One of Paul's companions was named for this god
- Paul called his companion Sylvanus; Luke called him Silas
- Silas accompanied Paul, Timothy, and Luke to Philippi

3. **Eastern cults**—there may have been as many as two dozen to forty of these present

4. **Emperor worship**

- a. Paul and his companions were charged with promoting religious beliefs contrary to this
- b. Reason: their teachings were “unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice” (**Acts 16:21**)
- b. Inscriptions to Julius, Augustus, and Claudia have been found there

2. **THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH**

a. Founded by Paul during second missionary journey—about 50-51 AD

1. Paul and Barnabas had parted ways in dispute about whether or not to take John Mark with them
2. Silas accompanied Paul to Lystra and Derbe—then Timothy joined them
3. Paul had his ‘Macedonian Vision’ vision at Troas (**Acts 16:6-7**)
4. Luke joined them (**Acts 16:10**)—there at Troas—and they Macedonia
5. They landed at Neapolis (in Samothrace) and walked to Philippi
6. **Acts 16:11-40** gives **three important events** in founding of the church

a. **Conversion** of God-fearer Lydia

- Purple-cloth merchant from the Asian city of Thyatira
- She became the first convert in Philippi
- She apparently became a leader/patroness of the Christian church in Philippi

b. **Exorcism** of demons from slave girl

- Her masters made money on her predicting the future
- Her masters dragged Paul and Silas to court; this was his first Roman trial
- Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into jail

c. **Conversion** of Philippian jailer

- He apparently became a member of the church

NOTE: Another key member of the church was **Epaphroditus**—see **Phil 2:25** and **4:18**

b. **First biblical evidence of Paul being in Philippi**

I Thess 2:2 (written about 50 AD from Corinth)

c. **Luke's early role in Philippi**

1. He probably stayed in Philippi, while Paul, Silas, and Timothy departed
2. Luke's presence/absence traced through the 'we' and 'they' narratives
 - 'We' narratives start in **Acts 16:10**
 - They are suspended at **Acts 16:17**—account focuses on Paul and Silas
 - "They" departed—**Acts 16:40**—Paul, Silas, Timothy—while Luke remained
 - **Acts 17:14**—Silas and Timothy with Paul in Berea—then Paul left for coast
 - **Acts 18:5**—Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth
 - 'We' passage resumes at **Acts 20:6**—all together again in Philippi—then set sail

d. **Paul's on-going contact with the Philippian church**

1. He visited it on the third missionary journey
2. Church sent financial help
 - To Paul (**Phil 4:15; II Cor 11:9**)
 - To Jerusalem church (**II Cor 8:1-5**)
3. When Paul was in prison in Rome
 - Philippians sent Epaphroditus to minister to him
 - Paul sent them Timothy, planned to visit them after his trial

e. **Characteristics of Philippian church**

1. **Gentiles**—were first converts—and they apparently dominated membership
2. **Women** played a key role in it
 - Lydia

- The slave girl (possibly?)
- Euodia and Syntyche (co-laborers with Paul)

3. **Generosity** of church set example for other churches in Macedonia and Achaia (**II Cor 8:1ff**)

4. **Loyal and helpful** to Paul, its founder

3. **OCCASION**

a. **Paul's Circumstances**

1. In prison—probably in Rome (**1:7, 14, 17**)
2. Date—about 60 AD—after 3rd missionary journey
3. Also wrote three other prison epistles (probably)
 - Ephesians
 - Colossians
 - Philemon
4. Timothy is there with him
5. He has received help from Philippi
 - He had to pay for his housing and food
 - No way for him to work
6. Epaphroditus
 - Brought him support from Philippi
 - Fell ill, nearly to death
 - Paul ministered to him; he recovered

b. **Regarding the Letter Itself**

1. Theme of letter:

- a. No circumstance of life is greater than God's gift of joy and gratitude that resides in believer's hearts
- b. Key phrase:

Joy in Christ—appears in some form 18 times

2. Occasion:

- c. Signs of disunity are evident (4:2)
 - d. Paul sends Epaphroditus back to encourage them
 - e. Paul wanted to thank them for their gift sent to support him ((4:10-20)
 - f. He also took the opportunity to instruct them in principles of stewardship
 - g. As an occasion to send Epaphroditus home
 - 1. Paul wanted him to be able to return home—after recovering from his illness (Phil 2:25)
 - 2. Paul also wanted to thank the Philippians for sending Epaphroditus to minister to him (Phil 4:18)
3. Other points in the letter
- a. Paul told them of Timothy’s impending visit—wanting them to prepare for it (2:19)
 - b. He also informed them of his desire to visit them himself (2:24)
 - c. Paul expressed concern about signs of disunity in the church (4:2-4)
 - d. He also warned them of threat posed by Jewish false apostles of legalism (3:1-3ff)

4. **AUTHORSHIP, ORIGIN, AND DATE**

- a. Pauline authorship—no credible major scholars dispute this
- b. Most likely setting and date
 - 1. Probably written during an imprisonment of Paul—imprisonment mentioned three times in chapter one
 - 2. When and where—probably near the end of Paul’s Roman imprisonment—about 60-62 AD
 - 3. Other letters—probably Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon written earlier during his imprisonment
 - 4. Probably Philippians *followed* these letters, near end of his imprisonment, about 61-62 AD
 - Evidence: He said he was ready to be poured out as a drink offering—2:17
- c. Minority opinion—some scholars say it may have been written earlier
 - From Ephesus about 54-57 AD
 - During the Third Missionary Journey
- d. Third opinion
 - Possibly written from Caesarea about 58-60
 - Before going to Rome—maybe even passing through Philippi
- e. Fourth opinion

- Possibly written from Corinth about 50-51 AD
- Immediately after Paul left Philippi

5. PAUL'S OPPONENTS IN PHILIPPI

- a. Evidence of opposition is found in—**1:15-17; 1:27-28; 3:2; and 3:18-19**
- b. Chapter 1
 - **1:15-17**—preachers of Christ with questionable motives but minor differences with Paul—preaching the gospel out of envy and strife
 - **1:27-28**—hints of disunity
- c. Chapter 3
 - **3:2**—apparently legalists who preached another gospel, maybe tinged with Gnosticism
 - **3:18-19**—worldly persons

6. Major Theological Themes in the Letter

1:12-26—Optimism about circumstance—knowing Christ is magnified even in adversity

1:27-2:18—Exhorting church to unity in Christ

3:2-21—Warnings about encroaching legalism

4:10-20—Principles of stewardship