

## **Joy at Philippi**

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## **Introduction**

Throughout the history of the church, believers have been enriched through the apostle Paul's brief epistle written to the church at Philippi. Throughout its pages, there is evidence of the special bond between Paul and the church at Philippi. The letter reflects the gratitude he felt towards the Philippian believers, having received unsolicited support in times of need and trial. The Philippians' generosity moved Paul to an uncontainable spirit of thanksgiving, highlighting his joy when he wrote, "I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me" (4:10). The Philippians went out of their way to support and supply Paul with whatever he may have had need of. He acknowledged their concern for his well-being, when he wrote in his letter to them, "for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need" (Phil. 4:16).

Furthermore, Paul used the opportunity in this communicate to urge them to faithfully work together and to live in harmony with one other. Paul warned against the destructive nature of strife within the church, particularly amongst its leaders. This would dishonor the testimony of Christ and hinder the spread of the gospel. These tensions could have had the potential to dilute the work of Christ in the lives of those young believers Paul was investing in. Paul had no choice, he needed to address the issue at the earliest opportunity. In a spirit of encouragement, he urged them to, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel." The believer's unity in Christ has always been a key distinguishing quality to be found in the church. No other New Testament text magnifies the believer's great privilege to express ones joy amid suffering and persecution. Paul being fully aware of the real threat of persecution to believers

throughout the Roman Empire, reminded them of the price to be paid by those who profess Christ as Lord, noting in Phil. 1:30, “you are going through the same struggle you saw I had.” He therefore urged house churches to serve one other in unity, having the “same mind of Christ”<sup>1</sup>. In fact, he used the term “joy” or “rejoice”<sup>2</sup> no less than sixteen times in his letter to them. Though written whilst in chains, this prison epistle demonstrates a type of joy that is not dependent upon one’s outward circumstances. It is not a coincidence that Paul’s repetitive language is used as a megaphone to deliver the message of Christ-centered joy. He underscored his main point, echoing previous statements, that they should, “rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again” (3:1). On each line of his letter, the apostle Paul emerges as being content despite the trials and persecution; indeed, having grown in faith and able to embrace all circumstances in and through the power of God.

### **Philippi – An Emerging metropolis**

Archaeological evidence suggests that Philippi’s location once was the oldest settlement in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, dating back to 5500 B.C. during the Neolithic era<sup>3</sup>. Located between the two rivers Nestos and Strymon, the city was originally named Krenides<sup>4</sup>. It was situated on a flat plain, flanked by a mountain range. Before the founding of the city, much of the area were swamps. The city was located 16 kilometers inland from the Aegean Sea, strategically placed on the Egnatian Way, the main road connecting Rome with the eastern half of the empire. The road was built in 130 B.C. when Macedonia was declared a Roman province<sup>5</sup>. The Egnatian Way served as an

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Kurt Hennig, “Jerusalmer Bibel Lexikon” (Gütersloh: 1986), 694.

<sup>3</sup> Randall Price, “Handbook of Biblical Archaeology”, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 314.

<sup>4</sup> Roland Youngblood, “Compact Bible Dictionary”. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 477.

<sup>5</sup> Fanoula Papazoglou, “Macedonia under the Romans” (Athens: Ekodotike Athenon S.A., 1983), 200.

extension to the Appian Way and the Maritime Route. Neapolis, an important coastal city served as the port for Krenides.

The city was founded in 360 B.C. by settlers from Thasos<sup>6</sup>, eventually becoming the home of veterans and legions from Italy. However, it was only four years later, when Philipp II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, came and conquered Krenides. Macedonia was a powerful force but would ultimately fall under Roman rule in 167 B.C. Nonetheless, Philipp enlarged the city of Philippi, relocating people from the countryside into the city limits and constructing a wall around it. The city was renamed Philippi, in honor of Philipp, its conqueror. Furthermore, he erected an acropolis at the top of the mountain, adjacent to the city.



*Figure 1: Tomb of Philipp II of Macedon, Father of Alexander the Great*

The year is 44 B.C. and Julius Caesar has been murdered. Shortly thereafter, in 43 B.C., in his place Octavian, Lepidus and Mark Antony were named as the Second Triumvirate, the three rulers who would share the office of emperor of Rome. The Battle of Philippi was fought in 42 B.C. when Mark Antony and Octavian combined forces to engage in combat against Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar. The battle was fought on the plains near Philippi, a battle which saw Roman forces taste victory. As a result, Philippi's status was elevated into a Roman colony. The people took their colonial status very seriously; the number of Latin inscriptions found on the archaeological site,

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<sup>6</sup> Kurt Hennig, "Jerusalmer Bibel Lexikon" (Gütersloh: 1986), 695.

testify to this fact. In addition, the residents of the city were given the rights and privileges of Rome, an honor usually bestowed upon the peoples of Italy<sup>7</sup>.

Eleven years later, another significant battle was being fought off the west coast of Greece, when Octavian fought and defeated the army of Antony and Cleopatra. Antony's supporters were punished through eviction from Italy and exiled to Philippi for resettlement. As a victory prize, Octavian accorded all his soldiers the properties and possessions left behind by Antony's banished and defeated forces.

Octavian, a nephew of Julius Caesar, was the first sole Roman emperor (27 B.C. – A.D. 14)<sup>8</sup>, ruling during the period of Jesus' birth. In fact, he is mentioned in Luke 2:1, where Luke affirms that, "in those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world."



*Figure 2: Statue of Caesar Augustus (27 B.C. - A.D. 14)*

In the first year of his reign, the emperor honored Philippi, bestowing upon it the name Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensis<sup>9</sup>, a name found on an inscription from Philippi's East Temple and the Library. It did not take long for the city to be given the unofficial title of 'little Rome' by the people. The city was supposed to be a little outpost of Rome where its citizens were to live according to Roman values and its ways of life. Places like Philippi were to exemplify what it meant to be a Roman citizen. Octavian reigned for a total of

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<sup>7</sup> Roland Youngblood, "Compact Bible Dictionary". (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 477.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Collart, "Inscriptions de Philippes", (1933), 328.

44 years, bringing peace, prosperity, and extensive architectural achievements to the empire. As a matter of fact, Philippi grew in its size and importance. No longer was it simply a small settlement, but it rose to be a city with dignity and privilege. The highest honor being the *ius Italicum*<sup>10</sup>, a privilege that gave the city's citizens legal rights equivalent to those of Italian cities. The city housed bath houses, a common place for people to meet, share gossip, ideas, philosophies and even the gospel. It had a theatre which stands to this day. Catling writes, "The theater in Philippi was standing during Paul's visit. In recent work on the theater, archaeologists have used ceramic typology to date its final use to about the beginning of the fifth century<sup>11</sup>. After his death in A.D. 14, the title 'Augustus' was given henceforth to all subsequent Roman emperors (i.e., Acts 25:21, 25).

### **Paul's Second Missionary Journey**

Luke gives the reader of the Book of Acts the accounts of the apostle Paul's three missionary journeys, detailing the events that describe how the gospel made its way around the known world of Paul's day. Reading through the Lukan accounts, the reader may get the impression of a man traveling from one place to another, however Luke's frequent references to spending a period of time at a place, strengthening churches is indeed a corrective that needs to be heard by the modern reader. To be witnesses to the ends of the world needs to involve pastoral care for those who receive the witness. According to Acts 16:6, "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia." The year is A.D. 49 and Paul is on his second missionary journey through Asia Minor. It was at this point that the travelers decided to make their way to

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<sup>10</sup> Barry Nichols, *Ius Italicum* | Oxford Classical Dictionary (oxfordre.com)

<sup>11</sup> Catling, *Archaeology in Greece*. ARep 31. (1985-85), 49.

Troas, a large Roman colony in northwestern Mysia, roughly 20 kilometers away from the location of the Trojan war. Troas was strategically located on the northern route between Asia and Rome (Via Egnatia). It was here where Paul during the night had a vision of a man in Macedonia begging him to, “come over...and help [them]” (16:9). Gaventa points out that, “Rationalizing questions about how Paul knows the man is Macedonian overlook the extent to which similar recognitions take place elsewhere in Luke-Acts and are simply part of the revelation itself.”<sup>12</sup> Although it is Paul who has the vision, it is in fact the entire team that is “convinced that God had called [them] to proclaim the good news” (v.10). Luke, the author of these early church accounts, joins the travel group at Troas in their travels. Troas offered the most convenient harbor in the region, for Paul and his companions to travel from, likely on a small coastal boat, common in these waters. They began the 240-kilometer journey to the island of Samothrace. It is probable they docked on the island’s capital port on the northern end of the island, thought to have been the best harbor on the island. The island is located about halfway between Troas and their destination, Neapolis. Luke does not detail whether the traveling group went ashore, however he does record that their visit was brief. Samothrace was a “Sanctuary of the Great Gods”<sup>13</sup>. Its religious rituals and ceremonies were carried on at night and were open for all to attend, no matter of class, background or status. The island’s pre-Greek deity called Demeter was a mystery religion “with the most sacred ceremonies”<sup>14</sup>.

Port cities like Neapolis around the Mediterranean have not only been places of trade but have always been a natural gathering point for people groups from far and wide.

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<sup>12</sup> Beverly Gaventa, “Acts”, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 234.

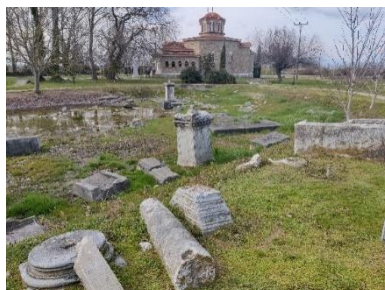
<sup>13</sup> John McRay, “Archaeology and the New Testament”, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 279.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 280.



Luke tells his readers that they continued the next leg of their journey the very next day, eventually landing at Neapolis, Philippi's seaport. Christianity had finally arrived in Europe. Without delay, Paul made his way up the Via Egnatia and traveled the sixteen kilometers to the city of Philippi, most likely entering the city from the east, entering through the Neapolis Gate. John McRay writes in his book *Archaeology and the New Testament* that Paul, "must have had some reason to think that Philippi was his destination because he journeyed directly there without stopping to preach along the way."<sup>15</sup>

Although Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, Luke's language suggests that Philippi was the most respected of the regional cities, describing it as a "leading city" (v. 12). It was Paul's custom to seek out the Jewish community in any given city he visited to preach the good news of the gospel to them. However, since the formation of a synagogue requires a minimum of 10 men, it is safe to assume that Philippi did not have a synagogue. Luke records that, "on the sabbath [they] went outside the city gate to the river, where [they] expected to find a place of prayer. [They] sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there." It was customary for places of worship and prayer to be located near water since water was needed for ceremonial washing. Paul and Silas had hoped to find Jewish believers at a place like this outside of the city walls to converse with them about the risen Christ. McRay asserts that, "limited excavation in the



*Figure 3: Traditional meeting point at Philippi between Paul and Lydia*

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 277.

area has revealed the foundation of a building, pavement for a road that ran westward toward the stream, and some inscribed Roman burial monuments.”<sup>16</sup>

This seemingly insignificant encounter proved to be an event that would change the course of history. Perhaps Paul and his companions were trying to find the man Paul saw in his vision (cg. Acts 16:6-10), but instead of finding a man, they found a group of women. Not only that, but the one man’s conversion, Luke records in his account is in fact not a Macedonian. Moreover, the first convert to the Christian faith on the European continent was a woman by the name of Lydia. Luke informs his reader that, “she was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (v. 14). Interestingly, the biblical account chronicles that Lydia came from the city of Thyatira, which is in western Asia Minor. The region was well-known for its production of textiles. In actual fact, the region’s name had previously been ‘Lydia’, consequently the woman’s name, “a dealer in purple cloth” (v. 14) was very fitting.

There is no mention of a synagogue in Philippi in the New Testament records, nor did the French School of Archaeology at Athens discover any archaeological evidence of such a place of worship during their unearthing of Philippi in 1917. It would make sense therefore, that Paul and Silas converged onto the Roman forum to engage shoppers, sellers, and beggars with the gospel. Beverly Gaventa notes that the intriguing characters the apostle met while in the city almost flow seemingly into and out of one another. She writes in her book, Acts, “Lydia and the female slave make for a fascinating contrast, while the story of the slave in turn introduces the wrath of her owners and the imprisonment of Paul and Silas.”<sup>17</sup> As the account unfolds, it becomes evident that the message of salvation fell on deaf ears. Luke narrates an encounter of a slave girl, who being filled with

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>17</sup> Beverly Gaventa, “Acts”, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 235.

an evil spirit shouted, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved” (16:17). Paul did not appreciate this free publicity they were receiving. The frustrated apostle cast the spirit out of the girl, angering the girl’s owners. In so doing, Paul shut down a substantial source of income for the owners. The men were accused of disturbing the peace, no small charge, in addition to introducing a foreign cult. Craig S. de Vos comments, “as it stands in the text an accusation of disturbing the peace is one that could easily have been refuted by Paul and Silas.”<sup>18</sup> Regarding the second charge, there was no evidence to suggest that there was a specific Roman law prohibiting Roman citizens from becoming Jews. Moreover, Sherman White writes, “the accusation relies on a typical Graeco-Roman antisemitism. Although citizens of Rome were expected not to worship foreign gods, no action would be taken against them, unless it would either disturb the peace or offended ancestral practices<sup>19</sup>. The forum was a buzzing place of a mix of cultures, traditions, and religions, resulting that Paul’s efforts contributed one further religious message in an already sprawling array of beliefs held at the time. Although archaeological digs have been underway for over a century, not much has been uncovered that is connected to the New Testament. The ruins of the forum, “measure 325 feet by 164 feet, and were built by Marcus Aurelius about 160 A.D., according to inscriptions. An earlier forum on the same ground was a square of even larger dimension.”<sup>20</sup> Archaeologists discovered monumental foundations at both ends of the northern part of the forum, suggesting that a bema was situated between them. This would be the most likely location where Paul and Silas were arrested after casting out the evil spirit. Luke records the account in Acts 16:19-21, “When her owners realized that

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<sup>18</sup> Craig S. de Vos, “Fending a Charge that fits: The Accusation against Paul and Silas in Philippi (Acts 16.19-21 (Parkville: Journal for the Study of the New Testament Date), 1999.

<sup>19</sup> A.N. Sherwin-White, “Roman Law and Roman Society in the New Testament” (Grand Rapids: 1992), 79.

<sup>20</sup> H.W. Catling, “Archaeology in Greece” (1984-1985), 49.

their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The crowds were opposed to the apostle and his companion. They were stripped and beaten with rods without being properly tried. After the ordeal, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. The location of this prison has been of great interest to both bible scholars and archaeologists. One structure has served as the traditional prison at Philippi going back to the fifth century when the early Roman architect, Vitruvius, wrote that prisons were normally built near the fora of ancient cities. Inside the crypt are benches around the walls and later added frescos are partially still visible<sup>21</sup>. There is a problem however with the location of this traditional prison site, as, "the area was a complex of religious buildings first erected in the Hellenistic period. Prisons were not built in a religious complex. Nevertheless, frescoes and a small chapel were found in it, leading to the idea that it was the site of Paul's imprisonment."<sup>22</sup> If so, the location of the prison remains an unresolved issue. However, another suggestion suggests the prison's location to be in the city magistrate's office, a custom not uncommon in the antiquity.



*Figure 4: Traditional prison site at Philippi*



*Figure 5: Magistrate's office at Philippi*

Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, an important detail the city officials neglected to inquire about. No citizen of Rome was allowed to be treated in this fashion. The events

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<sup>21</sup> Robin Barber, "Greece", Blue Guide, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Norton, 1987), 637.

<sup>22</sup> Randall Price, "Handbook of Biblical Archaeology", (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 316.

at the forum relating to the slave-girl and the evil spirit which indwelt her, happened so hurriedly that Paul and Silas did not have the opportunity to give evidence of their Roman citizenship; in short, their rights had been unquestionably violated. Their treatment would have been seen as appropriate for people of low rank, but not for Roman citizens. The Roman philosopher Cicero said, "To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination"<sup>23</sup>. The irony in this account is that those who had beaten Paul and Silas were in reality the ones who had acted in an 'unRoman'<sup>24</sup> manner, taking action against Roman citizens without proper legal proceedings.

The inner prison cells would have had little to no ventilation. If prisoners were fastened to the floor, as had been done to Paul and Silas, movement would have been difficult. After the events of the night, including the earthquake and the conversion of the jailer, Luke reports, "when it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers" (v. 35) to release the prisoners. However, after having told the officers of Paul and Silas's citizenship, these reports were conveyed to the magistrates. Paul protested the flogging they had received and demanded a public apology. Luke remarks, "when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city" (v. 38). Paul and Silas did not want revenge, but they wanted the name of Christianity cleared before the people.

Moreover, the Romans believed that earthquakes were a direct message from the gods handing down judgement on the people caused by their unjust actions towards Paul and Silas. Rome's penalties for such actions could have included the magistrate's removal from office, the loss of all their possessions, their very lives or a severe penalty for the city

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<sup>23</sup> Valerie Abrahmsen, "Cicero in Verrem 2.5.170", (translation C. D. Yonge, adapted).

<sup>24</sup> Beverly Gaventa, "Acts", (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 241.

as a whole. Although in practice such actions were often overlooked; some places like Philippi, possessed a undiluted self-awareness of its status as a Roman colony.

Whilst in prison, Luke lets his readers know that at, “about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them” (v.25). Many scholars are convinced that Paul’s use of an even earlier composed hymn in Philippians 2:5-11, often referred to as the ‘Hymnal of Christ’<sup>25</sup>. It summarizes the person and work of Jesus Christ, echoing the prophecies in Isaiah 45:23 and expressing the hope to see the glorification of the Son of God, who is the lamb that was slain. It is possible, some scholars suggest, that it is this earlier hymn recorded in his letter, which may in fact be the song Paul and Silas sang whilst in their chains at Philippi. In this miraculous account, less attention shines on those who are perpetrators of violence, instead on Paul and Silas who are in prison. The believer may have expected God to bring about a supernatural escape for the apostle, when in fact, it is the jailer and the prisoners who see deliverance.

### **Europe’s first Christian community**

Paul left a mark on the community of believers at Philippi. The account documented for the church in Acts 16 would not be his last visit to Philippi, as Luke pointed out, Paul made not one, but two further stops during his third Missionary journey (Acts 20:6). His affection for the church is well established as he expressed his wish to send them Timothy and wanting himself to visit at the earliest opportunity. What sort of people made up the church at Philippi? Scholars like Steven Travis have commented that the size of the city’s population in the days of Paul could have been as large as ten thousand people. Less than one percent of the population would have been part of the

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<sup>25</sup> Kurt Hennig, “Jerusalmer Bibel Lexikon”(Gütersloh: 1986), 695.

elite. It would have been unlikely that any of those would have been part of the church. Another twenty percent would have been the farmers, descendants of the those veterans who resettled to Philippi a century earlier. The largest class of the population and approximately half of the church's make-up would have been those involved in providing services. Paul would have found it easy to identify with them, as he himself, was a trained tent maker. Another twenty percent of the population would have been considered the poor, who would either have been begging in the marketplace or seeking employment. The last group of people, making up the city's population would have been the slaves. The two lowest classes of people would have had strong representation in the church. The church could have totaled of up to fifty adults plus their children<sup>26</sup>. As Lydia was a prominent lady and very likely a wealthy citizen, it is not a stretch of the imagination to envision her opening her home to serve as the first meeting place for the church in Europe.

Archaeological sites have attested to the impact of Paul's visit in Philippi. Randall Price, author of the Handbook of Biblical Archaeology highlights that, "several remains relating to early Christianity may be found at Philippi, which was a major center of Christianity since it was the first Christian community in Europe. At Philippi an episcopal see was established in the mid-fourth century A.D. Three early basilicas have been found from that time period, one basis for the Octagon Church found there."<sup>27</sup> During the excavations at Philippi, archaeologists found a mosaic floor, significantly citing the name of Paul visible as a testimony for all to see. The inscription reads, "Porphyrios, bishop made this mosaic floor of the basilica of Paul in Christ", it dates to the year A.D. 312<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Steven Travis, "The Apostle Paul in Greece", Online Resource.

<sup>27</sup> Randall Price, "Handbook of Biblical Archaeology", (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 316.

<sup>28</sup> Admin, "Mosaic inscription in Greek with dedication by Bishop Porphyrios" (University of Oxford Online Resource), 2014.

Paul Lemerle places this early Christian leader in the proper historical context, commenting, “The inscription confirmed an early dating for the basilica: Bishop Porphyrios' name appears on the list of Western bishops who attended the Council of Sardica in the mid-fourth century.”<sup>29</sup> This basilica dedicated to Paul is the first church building on the European continent. According to Mark Cartwright:

*the small first Christian church has a surviving mosaic floor with an inscription indicating that the church was dedicated to St. Paul. The church was replaced by a larger octagonal one, built on the same site c. 400 CE. This new building had a double colonnade inside and a pyramid roof but was altered some 50 years later to take on a square form. The area around the church was made into an enclosure with stoas (colonnaded halls), accommodation for pilgrims, a large two-story bishopric building for priests, and a monumental gate leading to the via Egnatia.<sup>30</sup>*



Figure 6: 4<sup>th</sup> century mosaic at Philippi



Figure 7: Floor of first church building in Europe

Questions remain about the importance of this early church bishop. Valerie Abrahamsen notes that, “In the end, we can assume (1) that he was rather wealthy at the point in his career when he donated the mosaics to St. Paul's (perhaps he was one of the patrons of this basilica/martyrium); and (2) that his beliefs were in accord with Western Christianity of the time, not Eusebian, since his name appears on the list of Western

<sup>29</sup> Paul Lemerle, “Porfinus a Machedonia de Filippis” (Paris: Senes Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1945), 270.

<sup>30</sup> Philippi - World History Encyclopedia (Online Resource).



bishops.”<sup>31</sup> What we do know however is that the city of Philippi became an important center for Christianity in the years of the early church. No less than six structures, some formerly dedicated to the deities of Greece and Rome, later served as churches in which the gospel was proclaimed.

Just like Philippi and other cities were small-scale copies of the mother city Rome, serving as a representation in the region in which they were set, indeed a place where visitors could understand Roman culture and grasp her mindset; so too was Paul’s vision of the church. Christians were not to see themselves as citizens of the country they originated from, but instead as citizens of heaven (cf. Phi 3:20). The church is to live by the values of heaven, its love, its justice, and its peace. The church is to demonstrate God’s reality and God’s standards. The church is not to adopt the customs, values, and lifestyles of those surrounding it, instead the church is to live according to the values of its home city, the New Jerusalem.

### **A letter from prison**

It is about a decade after Paul’s first visit to the city of Philippi that he pens the letter known as Philippians. Scholars have debated about the location from where Paul had written his letter. The year is A.D. 61 and Paul writes in Phil. 1:13, “As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.” Thus, scholars agree that this letter was written while he was in captivity, Paul testified to that, it is however not entirely clear which imprisonment he had in mind when he wrote those words. The palace guard, which he mentions could refer to a governor’s palace (cf. Acts 23:35), but it is more likely that it refers to the Praetorian guard (cf. Acts 28:16). It consisted of several thousand free Italian soldiers in 12 cohorts of as many as a

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<sup>31</sup> Valerie Abrahamsen, “Bishop Porphyrios and the City of Philippi in the Early Fourth Century. *Vigiliae Christianae*”, vol. 43 (1989), 80-85.

thousand each. They received the best wages of all Roman soldiers. Moreover, they were treated as clients of the emperor, hence being an extension of his household, this and other factors helped to ensure their loyalty.

There are three recorded imprisonments the apostle had endured. The first one, already discussed was in Philippi itself in the year A.D. 49 (cf. Acts 16:24ff). A second imprisonment took place in Jerusalem and Caesarea Maritima (cf. Acts 21:32-27:1). The circumstances around this imprisonment however do not fit into the situation at Caesarea, in addition Paul's tone in Philippians is unmistakably different. Some have even suggested that the letter was written from Ephesus and although no explicit incarceration in Ephesus is mentioned, the time of the letter would have been between A.D. 55-57. Lastly, Paul was imprisoned in Rome itself (cf. Acts 28:16ff). This view which is not only supported by early Christian traditions, but through the already mentioned Praetorian Guard, hence Caesar's household. Furthermore, Paul does not mention appealing to Caesar (cf. Acts 25:11), suggesting that he may already be waiting for Caesar to judge on his case. According to his own writings, some scholars have suggested that he may have been imprisoned more frequently than those three occasions (cf. 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:23).

When dividing up the letter to the Philippians, the reader gets a distinct picture of a very common ancient framework that is in use. The first letter addresses topics that are common to both the author and the recipient of the letter, in this case, it's the labor in the gospel. This is a motif often used in ancient friendship letters. The second chapter not only includes letters of recommendation, but furthermore provides models to imitate. Chapter three digresses, a common practice in ancient letter writings. The fourth and final chapter presents the intent of his message, namely, Paul's heartfelt gratitude, avoiding any misconceptions of why he is writing to them.

## **Conclusion**

The book of Philippians is a living testimony of the power of God's work in the lives of his followers, inconsequential of any external circumstances they may experience. Paul exemplified what it means to be grounded in the peace of God. It is an essential reality to grasp that the only antidote to anxiety is the joy of the Lord. Paul thanks the church at Philippi for their loyalty to him, supporting him in his hour of need. He also encourages them to be unified and not to waver in their devotion to the gospel of Christ. The apostle urges them to end their quarrels and serve each other humbly, just as Christ came down from heaven to be obedient to the will of God. Serving others can only be done rightly when the person is enslaved to Christ and thus free to love. Paul urges the believers in Philippi to identify with Christ in his death and resurrection. Moreover, he encourages them that the suffering believers may experience in this life, it is a prelude to the resurrection (Phil. 3:10). Thus, all believers should strive toward the goal of salvation, walking in confidence of God's calling and to push toward that heavenly price (Phil. 3:13).

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