



Paul goes to Philippi

Philippians - Introduction

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Introduction to Philippians

To understand the relationship between Paul and the Philippians you must go back to the beginning. In [Acts 16](#) we learn how the Philippian church was started. In chapter 16 of Acts Paul and Silas have come to Lystra. This is the beginning of his second missionary journey. They had just come from the Jerusalem Council, where the role of gentiles in the church had been decided. Paul is sharing this news with the church as they traveled.

Paul was obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit and went to Macedonia to spread the Gospel. The church in Philippi was the first church started in Europe. Paul has a special bond with this church. This church will become a joy for Paul. They will also become important financial supporters of his ministry.

The Author

The apostle Paul, the founder and friend to the Philippian church, is the author of this letter. He wrote this letter while in prison in Rome. The letter starts out with Paul claiming to be the author. Paul's authorship of the letter has never been in serious question. Today most scholars, no matter what their theological persuasion, accept Paul as the author of the letter to the Philippians.

The Date and Recipients

While uncertain of the exact date of the writing of this letter, it was most probably written around A.D. 60-63 while Paul was in prison in Rome. It is considered to be part of Paul's prison Epistles along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. All of which were written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

The letter is to the Philippian church. Having been founded ten years earlier during Paul's second missionary journey. The result of Paul's obedience to the vision to take the gospel to Europe ([Acts 16](#)). Even though Paul was only in Philippi a brief time. And the church that was founded could only be described as meager. Made up of Lydia and her household, a former demon-possessed girl, and a Philippian jailer and his household and a few others. It had grown from a small group of believers to a strong, healthy, mature, and God-honoring church. This church had provided financial and prayer support to Paul's ministry.

The City of Philippi

The City of Philippi. Philippi was the gateway to Europe. It lay on the great Roman road known as the Egnatian Way. The city was named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. The site was a natural fortress, sitting on a range of hills that separated Europe from Asia, the East from the West. The city was a strategic center commanding the great Egnatian Way.

Philippi was also a proud Roman colony. In fact, it was famous as a miniature Rome. A city became a Roman colony in one of two ways. At first Rome founded colonies throughout the outer reaches of the Empire to keep the peace and to guard against invasions from barbaric hordes. Veteran soldiers, ready for retirement, were usually granted citizenship if they would go out and settle these colonies. Later, however, a city was granted the distinctive title of a Roman Colony for loyalty and service to the Empire. The distinctive thing about these colonies was their fanatical loyalty to Rome. The citizens kept all their Roman ties, the Roman language, titles, customs, affairs, and dress. They refused to allow any infiltration of local influence whatsoever. They totally rejected the influence of the world around them. They were Roman colonists within an alien environment.

Paul in Philippi

The Macedonian Vision [Acts 16:1-13](#)

They visit with Timothy, a young convert who was the result of Paul's first missionary journey. Timothy was a child of a mixed marriage. His mother was Jewish, and his father was Greek. According to Jewish law a child took the religion of its mother, but according to Greek law the father dominated the home ([2 Tim 1:5](#)). Timothy was raised to believe in God and had a devout faith that he received from both his grandmother and mother.

Paul has a special relationship with Timothy. Timothy was in Rome with Paul when the apostle was in prison. Many times, Paul used Timothy to deliver messages. It is conceivable that Paul saw Timothy as his successor who would take his place upon his death.

Timothy had not been circumcised. This was most likely because, even though his mother was a Jew and devout in her faith, she would be an outcast in the Jewish community for marrying a Gentile. The strict Jews would refuse to accept that as a marriage at all; in fact, if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy or a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, they would regard that Jewish boy or girl as dead—so much so, that sometimes a funeral was actually conducted.

Even though Paul circumcised Timothy, circumcision has/had nothing to do with salvation. Paul was doing it to remove the stigma from the young man's status in the Jewish community in Lystra. Timothy willingly let Paul circumcise him so that he would not become a stumbling block to the Jews he would encounter as he preached the Gospel and served alongside Paul.

What is one thing you can do to make yourself responsive to God and His will?

First Convert in Europe [Acts 16:14-15](#)

After choosing Timothy, the team, now consisting of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, continue their mission of visiting and strengthening the churches. The team shared the ordinances that had been determined by the apostles and elder in Jerusalem ([Acts 15](#)). They saw people come to faith. They traveled through the Phrygian and Galatian regions. The Holy Spirit had forbidden them to go to Asia. While in Troas Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia pleading with him to come and preach the Gospel.

Paul and his team left immediately for Macedonia and arrives at Philippi. Where on the Sabbath day they go to the riverside outside the gate and began to speak to the women who were assembled there. In cities where no Jewish synagogue existed, believers gathered under the sky and near water so other Christians knew where to find them. In Jewish law a synagogue could not be started with fewer than ten male heads of households to form the congregation.

There was a merchant lady from Thyatira there named Lydia. She sold purple fabrics and was a worshiper of God. She hears the gospel and is saved and baptized along with all her household. They became the first converts in Europe. She immediately wants it to be a blessing and invites Paul and his team to stay at her home.

Following Lydia's example, how can you take the initiative in helping someone else today?

The Demonic Slave Girl [Acts 16:16-21](#)

Paul and the team were trying to make their way to Lydia's home when Satan tries to disrupt what God is doing. They encounter a demonic slave girl.

The python, a mythical serpent of the Greeks, guarded the temple of Apollo. By A.D. 50, they used the word python to describe a possessed person through whom the python gave prophecy. Pagan generals would commonly consult people with a “pythian spirit” before marching off to war; owning such a python-possessed slave girl would be a gold mine for her master. A demonic spirit possessed the slave girl. Thus, made copious amounts of money for her masters.

This encounter is very similar to the story found in [Mark 5](#) where the demonic man declares that Jesus was the “*Son of the most high God*” in that story Jesus told the demon to come out. Here the slave girl declares These men are bondservants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you a way of salvation.” [Acts 16:17](#) . After some time, Paul becomes annoyed and tells the demon in the name of Jesus Christ come out of the girl. The demon comes out and the girl is no longer possessed or able to see the future. She becomes of no use to her masters, who stand to lose a large amount money without her abilities.

In both instances the demonic person was correct in what they were saying, but the medium from which the message came was wrong. I like what Jon Courson says: The Christian community is becoming increasingly weakened, I believe, because we have too often said, “We’ll use this worldly source to communicate the gospel.” Not all means of the spreading the Gospel compatible with the message. Just because the world uses it does not mean that the church should.

Do not miss the fact that his slave girl was in double bondage. She was being treated like property by her slave owners and she was in bondage to the demon that possessed her. But through the name of Jesus Christ, she was set free. Luke does not tell us whether she became a believer. But you must imagine that there was definitely a change in her life. She was free for the bondage of Satan.

What can you pray about this week to put a check on evil in your place of work, neighborhood, or community?

Paul and Silas Imprisoned [Acts 16:22-30](#)

Paul and his team were just trying to get to Lydia’s house. They were going to stay with her. The must have been a joyful celebration going on. Lydia and her household had been saved. But as usual tries to disrupt what God was doing, thus the demonic slave girl.

One can only imagine the uproar and commotion that is caused in the city. The owners were upset because of the wealth they would lose. No longer could they use this girl to foretell the future and give them an advantage in business. The owners immediately start complaining and accusing Paul and his team of causing trouble. They were using the fact that they were Jews. It is a familiar claim throughout history. Many, dictators, and enemies of God have blamed the Jews.

It must be remembered that Philippi was a Roman Colony and was immensely proud of the fact they were Roman. They did not want anything to disrupt the status quo. The magistrate did not want any trouble that would bring trouble, especially from Rome. So, they beat and imprisoned these disruptive Jews.

We can speculate that the reason Timothy and Luke did not get placed in jail was because they were identified as Greeks. Paul and Silas were signal out because they were Jews. It must be noted that the fact that Paul and Silas were Rome citizens was not discovered until later. This would have changed things. Roman citizens were not allowed to be beaten without trial. But we must remember had they not gone to jail the jailer might not have heard the gospel. God will use all circumstances to see that the Gospel is preached. Even being unjustly thrown into jail.

The attitude of Paul and Silas was not to complain but praise. They had been beaten severely and placed in stocks. This would have been very painful. Their wounds would have been bleeding and it would have been impossible to rest or sleep. So, what do they do...they are praying and singing praises to God. This is the opposite of what most people would do... When hurting and going through trials it is easier to complain than praise.

What songs and prayers of praise can you offer God today?

The Jailer Converted [Acts 16:31-40](#)

While they were praying and singing, there was a great earthquake. The doors of the jail are opened, and the chains are unfastened. It would have been easy for the prisoners to escape. But none do. The jailer knew that any Roman soldier that let a prisoner escape, regardless of the cause, was going to have to pay for it with his life.

We do not know why the other prisoners did not try to escape it could have been: They were stunned by earthquake and afraid of aftershocks, they could have been afraid of what would have happened to them if they escaped and were recaptured, it could have been something they saw in Paul and Silas. Whatever the reason, none of the prisoners were missing. The jailer was about to take his life when Paul stopped him.

The jailer had heard the prayers and praises of Paul and Silas. He heard the gospel message. He became convicted and sought to be saved. His next question to Paul is “What must I do to be saved?” Paul does not go into a long theological explanation of salvation. He makes it simple and easy to understand. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household” ([Acts 16:31](#)). Paul was not claiming the jailer’s household was saved by his confession, but it would be saved as they saw salvation lived out through the change in jailer’s life. The jailer is saved and immediately proves his conversion with actions. He takes Paul and Silas to his home and gives them food and medical attention. Paul is able to further explain the gospel to the jailer and his family and they all receive salvation. There are many stories of families come to salvation as the result of one member believing in Jesus.

It is after the jailer’s conversion that Paul and Silas reveal their Roman citizenship. It must be understood that to be a Roman citizen had many rights and privileges. A Roman citizen could travel anywhere without liability of prosecution by local laws. In other words, the local magistrate had messed up by having Paul and Silas beaten and thrown in jail. The magistrate wanted to quietly resolve the matter, but Paul would not let them. Magistrates had to admit and rectify publicly their mistake. But still wanted them out of town because there was still an angry mob. Paul and the team left but only after meeting and encouraging the new converts.

How can you encourage someone else in his or her Christian walk this week?

Points of Application

- When God sends us somewhere to minister, he has someone ready to listen.
- God’s people can sing in their struggles when they know he leads and blesses in each step of their lives no matter how difficult and dark days may be.
- In thinking through the future of our lives, we must always be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading and God’s call to stay or go.
- Sometimes, just when things are going great, the bottom drops out. In those times, too, we trust God and sing in the midst of our struggles.
- Sometimes one must confront the enemies of Christ to gain some measure of justice. Christians should use every legal and biblical means to keep themselves and the gospel free from restraint.
- The size of a congregation is irrelevant in measuring God’s work in a city or town.

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