

## Book Studies

### Philippians – Epistle to the Church at Philippi



### Map of Paul's second missionary journey

This Church was established on Paul's second missionary journey. This was after his conflict and separation from Barnabas. Silas was his fellow traveler at this time.

#### **Section 1. The Situation of Philippi**

Philippi is mentioned in the New Testament only in the following places and connections. In [Act 16:11-12](#), it is said that Paul and his fellow travelers "loosed from Troas, came with a straight course to Samothracia and Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi." It was at this time that the "Lord opened the heart of Lydia to attend to the things which were spoken by Paul," and that the jailor was converted under such interesting circumstances. In [Act 20:1-6](#), it appears that Paul again visited Philippi after he had been to Athens and Corinth, and when on his way to

Judea. From Philippi he went to Troas. In [1Th 2:2](#), Paul alludes to the shameful treatment which he had received at Philippi, and to the fact, that having been treated in that manner at Philippi, he had passed to Thessalonica, and preached the gospel there.

Philippi received its name from Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. Before his time, its history is unknown. It is said that it was founded on the site of an old Thasian settlement, and that its former name was Crenides from the circumstance of its being surrounded by numerous rivulets and springs descending from the neighboring mountains (from *κρήνη* *krēnē*, a spring).

The city was also called Dathos, or Dato - *Δατος* Dato; notes, [Act 16:12](#). The Thasians, who inhabited the island of Thasus, lying off the coast in the Aegean sea, had been attracted to the place by the valuable mines of gold and silver which were found in that region. It was a city of Macedonia, to the northeast of Amphipolis, and nearly east of Thessalonica. It was not far from the borders of Thrace. It was about 15 or 20 miles from the Aegean Sea in the neighborhood of Mount Pangaeus, and had a small river or stream running near it which emptied into the Aegean Sea. We have no information of the size of the city when the gospel was preached there by Paul.

This city was originally within the limits of Thrace. Philip of Macedon having turned his attention to Thrace, the situation of Crenides and Mount Pangaeus naturally attracted his notice. Accordingly, he invaded this country; expelled the feeble Cotys from his throne, and then proceeded to found a new city, on the site of the old Thasian colony, which he called after his own name - Philippi (Anthon, Classical Dictionary). When Macedonia became subject to the Romans, the advantages attending the situation of Philippi induced that people to send a colony there, and it became one of the most flourishing cities of the empire; compare [Act 16:12](#); Pliny, iv. 10. There is a medal of this city with the following inscription - col. jul. aug. phil. From this it appears that there was a colony sent there by Julius Caesar (Michaelis). The city derived considerable importance from the fact that it was a principal thoroughfare from Asia to Europe, since the great leading road from one continent to the other was in that vicinity. This road is described at length by Appian, De Bell. Civ. L. iv. c. 105, 106.

This city is celebrated in history from the fact that it was here that a great victory - deciding the fate of the Roman empire - was obtained by Octavianus (afterward called Augustus Caesar) and Antony over the forces of Brutus and Cassius, by which the republican party was completely subdued. In this battle, Cassius, who was hard pressed and defeated by Antony, and who supposed that everything was lost, killed himself in despair. Brutus deplored his loss with tears of the sincerest sorrow, calling him, "the last of the Romans." After an interval of 20 days, Brutus hazarded a second battle. Where he himself fought in person he was successful; but the army everywhere else gave way, and the battle terminated in the entire defeat of the Republican Party. Brutus escaped with a few friends; passed a night in a cave, and seeing that all was irretrievably lost, ordered Strato, one of his attendants, to kill him. Strato for a long time refused; but seeing that Brutus was resolute, he turned away his face, and held his sword, and Brutus fell upon it.

The city of Philippi is often mentioned by the Byzantine writers in history. Its ruins still retain the name of Filibah. Two American missionaries visited these ruins in May, 1834. They saw the remains of what might have been the forum or marketplace, where Paul and Silas were beaten [Act 16:19](#) and also the fragments of a splendid palace. The road by which Paul went from Neapolis to Philippi, they think is the same that is now traveled, since it is cut through the most difficult passes in the mountains. It is still paved throughout.

## Section 2. The Establishment of the Church in Philippi

*Philippi was the first place in Europe where the gospel was preached; and this fact invests the place with more interest and importance than it derives from the battle fought there. The gospel was first preached here in very interesting circumstances by Paul and Silas. Paul had been called by a remarkable vision [Act 16:9](#) to go into Macedonia, and the first place where he preached was Philippi - having made his way, as his custom was, directly to the capital. The first person to whom he preached was Lydia, a seller of purple, from Thyatira, in Asia Minor. She was converted, and received Paul and Silas into her house, and entertained them hospitably. In consequence of Paul's casting out an evil spirit from a "damsel possessed of a spirit of divination," by which the hope of gain by those who kept her in their employ was destroyed, the populace was excited, and Paul and Silas were thrown into the inner prison, and their feet were made fast in the stocks. Here, at midnight, God interposed in a remarkable manner. An earthquake shook the prison; their bonds were loosened; the doors of the prison were thrown open, and their keeper, who before had treated them with special severity, was converted, and all his family were baptized. It was in such solemn circumstances that the gospel was first introduced into Europe. After the tumult, and the conversion of the jailor, Paul was honorably released, and soon left the city; [Act 16:40](#). He subsequently visited Macedonia before his imprisonment at Rome, and doubtless went to Philippi [Act 20:1-2](#). It is supposed, that after his first imprisonment at Rome, he was released and again visited the churches which he had founded. In this Epistle [Phi 1:25-26](#); [Phi 2:24](#) he expresses a confident hope that he would be released, and would be permitted to see them again; and there is a probability that his wishes in regard to this were accomplished.*

### *Section 3. The Time When the Epistle Was Written*

*It is evident that this epistle was written from Rome. This appears:*

- (1) Because it was composed when Paul was in "bonds" [Phi 1:13-14](#);*
- (2) Because circumstances are suggested, such as to leave no doubt that the imprisonment was at Rome; thus, in [Phi 1:13](#), he says that his "bonds were manifested in all the palace;" a phrase which would naturally suggest the idea of the Roman capitol; and, in [Phi 4:22](#), he says, "all the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."*

*It is further evident that it was after he had been imprisoned for a considerable time, and, probably, not long before his release. This appears from the following circumstances:*

*(1) The apostle had been a prisoner so long in Rome, that the character which he had manifested in his trials had contributed considerably to the success of the gospel; [Phi 1:12-14](#). His bonds, he says, were manifest "in the entire palace;" and many of the brethren had become increasingly bold by his "bonds," and had taken occasion to preach the gospel without fear.*

*(2) The account given of Epaphroditus imports that, when Paul wrote this Epistle, he had been at Rome for a considerable time. He was with Paul in Rome, and had been sick there. The Philippians had received an account of his sickness, and he had again been informed how much they had been affected with the knowledge of his illness; [Phi 2:25-26](#). The passing and re-passing of this knowledge, Dr. Paley remarks, must have occupied considerable time, and must have all taken place during Paul's residence at Rome.*

*(3) After a residence at Rome, thus proved to have been of considerable duration, Paul, at the time of writing this epistle, regards the decision of his destiny as at hand. He anticipates that the matter would soon be determined; [Phi 2:23](#).*

*"Him therefore (Timothy) I hope to send presently, as soon as I see how it will go with me." Paul had some expectation that he might be released, and be permitted to visit them again; [Phi 2:21](#). "I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly;" compare [Phi 1:25](#), [Phi 1:27](#). Yet he was not absolutely certain how it would go with him, and though, in one place, he speaks with great confidence that he would be released [Phi 1:25](#), yet in another he suggests the possibility that he might be put to death; [Phi 2:17](#). "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice*

*and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." These circumstances concur to fix the time of writing the epistle to the period at which the imprisonment in Rome was about to terminate. From [Act 28:30](#), we learn that Paul was in Rome "two whole years;" and it was during the latter part of this period that the Epistle was written. It is commonly agreed, therefore, that it was written about 61 or 62 a.d. Hug (Introduction) places it at the end of the year 61 a.d., or the beginning of the year 62 a.d.; Lardner, at the close of the year 62 ad. It is evident that it was written before the great conflagration at Rome in the time of Nero (64 a.d.); because it is hardly credible that Paul would have omitted a reference to such an event, if it had occurred. It is certain, from the persecution of the Christians which followed that event, that he would not have been likely to have represented his condition to be so favorable as he has done in this epistle. He could hardly have looked then for a release.*

#### *Section 4. The Design and Character of the Epistle*

*The object of the Epistle is apparent. It was sent by Epaphroditus [Phi 2:25](#), who seems to have been a resident at Philippi, and a member of the church there, to express the thanks of the apostle for the favors which they had conferred upon him, and to comfort them with the hope that he might be soon set at liberty. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippians to convey their benefactions to him in the time of his imprisonment; [Phi 4:18](#). While at Rome, he had been taken ill; [Phi 2:26-27](#). Upon his recovery, Paul deemed it proper that Epaphroditus should return to Philippi immediately. It was natural that he should give them some information about his condition and prospects. A considerable part of the Epistle therefore is occupied in giving an account of the effects of Paul's imprisonment in promoting the spread of the gospel, and of Paul's own feelings in the circumstances in which he was then. He was not yet certain what the result of his imprisonment would be [Phi 1:20](#); but he was prepared either to live or to die, [Phi 1:23](#). He wished to live only that he might be useful to others; and, supposing that he might be made useful, he had some expectation that he might be released from his bonds.*

*There is, perhaps, not one of the epistles of the apostle Paul which is so tender, and which abounds so much with expressions of kindness, as this. In relation to other churches, he was often under the necessity of using the language of reproof. The prevalence of some error, as in the churches of Galatia; the existence of divisions and strife, or some aggravated case requiring discipline, or some gross irregularity, as in the church at Corinth, frequently demanded the language of severity. But, in the church at Philippi, there was scarcely anything which required rebuke; there was very much that demanded commendation and gratitude. Their conduct toward him, and their general deportment, had been exemplary, generous, and noble. They had evinced for him the most tender regard in his troubles; providing for his needs, sending a special messenger to supply him when no other opportunity occurred [Phi 4:10](#), and sympathizing with him in his trials; and they had, in the order, peace, and harmony of the church, eminently adorned the doctrine of the Savior. The language of the apostle, therefore, throughout the Epistle, is of the most affectionate character - such as a benevolent heart would always choose to employ, and such as must have been exceedingly grateful to them.*

*Paul never hesitated to use the language of commendation where it was deserved, since he never shrank from reproof where it was merited; and he appears to have regarded the one as a matter of duty as much as the other. We are to remember, too, the circumstances of Paul, and to ask what kind of an Epistle an affectionate and grateful spiritual father would be likely to write to a much-beloved flock, when he felt that he was about to die; and we shall find that this is just such an epistle as we should suppose such a man would write. It breathes the spirit of a ripe Christian, whose piety was mellowing for the harvest; of one who felt that he was not far from heaven, and might soon "be with Christ." Though there was some expectation of a release, yet his situation was such as led him to look death in the face. He was lying under heavy accusations; he had no hope of justice from his own countrymen; the character of the emperor*

*(Nero) was not such as to inspire him with great confidence of having justice done; and it is possible that the fires of persecution had already begun to burn.*

*At the mercy of such a man as Nero; a prisoner; among strangers, and with death staring him in the face, it is natural to suppose that there would be a special solemnity, tenderness, pathos, and ardor of affection, breathing through the entire Epistle. Such is the fact; and in none of the writings of Paul are these qualities more apparent than in this letter to the Philippians. He expresses his grateful remembrance of all their kindness; he evinces a tender regard for their welfare; and he pours forth the full-flowing language of gratitude, and utters a father's feelings toward them by tender and kind admonitions. It is important to remember these circumstances in the interpretation of this Epistle. It breathes the language of a father, rather than the authority of an apostle; the entreaties of a tender friend, rather than the commands of one in authority. It expresses the affections of a man who felt that he might be near death, and who tenderly loved them; and it will be, to all ages, a model of affectionate counsel and advice.*