

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

For the next several weeks, the *NEWSLETTER* articles will be mainly concerned with the information Paul shared with the people of Philippi. I hope to also follow each of them with a Sunday morning sermon dealing with the subject matter of the previous article. This next Sunday, however, the sermon will be the conclusion of the three-part lesson on "Our Worship to God." In our public worship times (and, yes, I did say TIMES – plural) we sing, we pray, we hear God's word taught and preached, and we fellowship with one another. This next Sunday, we'll look at the Lord's Supper and it's meaning to us.

Today's *NEWSLETTER* article will be an introduction to the study of Paul's letter to the Philippians and the themes he deals with in his letter. Who are the Philippians? Why did Paul visit them and preach to them? Why was Philippians written? And what do the words he wrote to them mean to us?

Philippi was a city that was founded north of the Greek peninsula by Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. When the Romans conquered Macedonia in 168-167 BC, many of the veteran soldiers of the Roman army settled there. It became a Roman colony, and all of its citizens were Roman citizens. Virtually everything in Macedonia copied Rome—law, architecture, money, dress, and language.

There were a number of religions in the area where Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were. In addition to Roman emperor worship, there were monuments to Greek gods and their Roman counterparts as well as Egyptian gods. There was also a small Jewish influence, although there was no synagogue. Women often met outside the city on the Sabbath for a time of prayer.

In **Acts 16**, Paul has made plans to preach in a number of areas of Asia. **Verses 6-10** tells of GOD'S plan for Paul:

"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. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

God wanted Paul in Macedonia, not Asia. So God, through His Holy Spirit, guided Paul to Troas, a port city from which he could sail to Macedonia. In Philippi, he met Lydia, a Jewess who was at the "place of prayer." She was convinced by the word of God preached to her by Paul that she should be baptized into Christ.

In Philippi, Paul was also imprisoned because he had healed a slave girl who prophesied and made a lot of money for her owners. It is in **verses 25-34** that we see Paul and Silas, after having been beaten, singing praises to God. An earthquake ensues and opens the

door of the prison. The jailer, who would pay with his life if his prisoners escaped, was about to kill himself when Paul stopped him. Again the word of God caused the jailer and his entire family to be baptized. The church was established in Philippi, and Paul's love for it would grow exponentially.

In next week's *NEWSLETTER*, we'll continue the introduction to our study with other references outside of the Philippian letter itself concerning the church that was addressed by Paul in his letter to the Philippians.

---Johnny Stephens