

PHILIPPIANS AN INTRODUCTION:



The City Of Philippi

Originally the city was named Krenides, which means fountains. Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, annexed the adjoining territory in which the city of Krenides was located. After expanding and fortifying the city, he renamed it Philippi after himself.

The gold mines around the city supported Philip's and Alexander's armies and empire. Alexander the Great proceeded to conquer the Mediterranean world. In doing so he spread the Hellenistic culture and the Greek language throughout that vast area. God used his spreading of the Greek language to make it possible for the apostles like Paul to proclaim the gospel from the east into the west and into Europe.

The Romans conquered the Macedonian empire about two hundred years later. By then the gold in the mines around Philippi had been depleted and the City was deserted. In 42 B.C. Philippi became the battleground on which Mark Antony and Octavian (later Caesar Augustus), defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius, who had plotted the assassination of Julius Caesar.

Philippi was made a Roman colony where retired army veterans were given a grant of land as a reward for their years of service and settled there. As in other places, this placed loyal Roman citizen/soldiers at this strategic location along the Egnatian Way, which was the main road that connected Rome in the west with the far flung Roman provinces of its empire in the east.

The citizens dressed in Roman attire, used Roman coins, and spoke Latin, which was the official language of the city.

Later history

The prosperity of the city in the 5th and 6th centuries was attributed to Paul and to his ministry and many new ecclesiastical buildings were constructed at this time. Seven different churches were constructed in Philippi between 350 and 600 AD, some of which competed in size and decoration with the most beautiful buildings in Thessalonica and Constantinople.

In the same age, the fortifications of the city were rebuilt in order to better defend against the growing instability in the Balkans. In 473, the city was besieged by the Ostrogoths, who were unable to take it but burned down the surrounding villages.



Already weakened by the Slavic invasions at the end of the 6th century, the city was almost totally destroyed by an earthquake around 619, from which it never recovered. There was a small amount of activity there in the 7th century, but the city was now hardly more than a village.

The city prospered again around 1100 but continued to be a place of conflict with brief occupations by the Franks and Serbs and was later abandoned in the 15th Century.

How did the church at Philippi begin?

While Paul and his companions were in Troas, on the north-west coast of Asia Minor, during his second missionary journey, he had a vision of a man from Macedonia saying 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'. As a result of that Paul and his companions travelled across the sea to Philippi which was the leading city of that district of Macedonia.'

As Jews were few and far between, there was no synagogue, but Paul and his friends found a group of women at a place of prayer near the river. After speaking to them about Christ, Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, became the first believer.

Eventually as a result of opposition from commercial interests in the city Paul and Silas were flogged and imprisoned. During the night there was an earthquake which released all the prisoners' shackles. The jailer was about to kill himself because he assumed everyone had escaped, when Paul called out to him. The jailer, then uttered words that have echoed down the centuries 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' to which Paul replied 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved - you and your household'.

After explaining about Christ to them the jailer and his family believed and were baptised. After meeting the believers at Lydia's house and encouraging them the first church in Europe was born.

Why was the letter written? Paul was in prison, probably in Rome, One day he was visited by Epaphroditus who was a leader in the church at Philippi. He had been sent with a generous gift and must have told Paul the latest news.

Philippians is a missionary 'thank-you' letter, it is his most personal letter, introducing himself confidently and simply as 'a servant of Christ'.

The letter has a dominant note of Joy (The word is used 5 times and 'rejoice' 11 times).

Paul's main concern and priority is that the gospel should be preached and he is anxious about unity in the church: that they 'stand firm' against attack; and that they remember the return of Christ.