

The Church At Philippi

Introduction. Philippi owed its importance in ancient times to its strategic location (it commanded the land route to Asia Minor). The city was also important because of the gold mines in the nearby mountains. Philip of Macedon annexed the region in 356 B.C. from the Thracians and renamed the village of Krenides as Philippi. In 42 B.C., it became the site of one of the most crucial battles in Roman history. In that battle, the forces of Antony and Octavian (cf. Luke 2:1) defeated the republican forces of Brutus and Cassius. The battle marked the end of the Roman republic and the beginning of the empire. Antony and Octavian settled many of their army veterans at Philippi, which was given the coveted status of a Roman colony. Later, other army veterans settled there.

Philippi was a Roman colony, governed by Roman laws and subject to Roman rule. Citizens of Philippi were Roman citizens, were exempt from paying certain taxes and were not subject to the authority of the provincial governor. It was a little Rome in the midst of a Greek culture, just as the church is a "colony of heaven" here on earth (Philippians 3:20).

The Philippian church had its share of problems. Its members were desperately poor, they were being persecuted for the cause of Christ, they were being attacked by false teachers and there was a feud between two prominent women in the congregation. Yet, despite the circumstances of both writer and recipients, we can gain a lot from the study of this church.

I. ***They Had Humble Beginnings***

- A. Events leading up to the founding of the church.
 1. Paul was on his second preaching trip and he visited the churches established on his first trip (Acts 15:36; 16:5).
 2. The Holy Spirit intervened and prevented Paul from turning aside to Asia or Bithynia and he journeyed to Troas (Acts 16:6-8).
 3. The Macedonian vision and call directed Paul to Europe (Acts 16:9-10).
 4. Paul went to Philippi and searched out the synagogue (Acts 16:11-13).
 - a) Though the initial converts were Jews or Jewish proselytes, Gentiles made up the majority of the congregation.
 - b) The fact that there was no synagogue is evidence that the city's Jewish population was small.
- B. The Philippian church began with the conversion of Lydia at a meeting of Jewish women for the purpose of prayer (Acts 16:14-15).
 1. Paul preached and Lydia heard.
 2. Her heart was opened to believe and give heed.
 3. She was baptized.

- C. The Philippian jailer and his household were also converted (Acts 16:25-34).
 - 1. He was caused to inquire by an earthquake (Acts 16:30).
 - 2. Paul preached Christ to him (Acts 16:32).
 - 3. The jailer believed and was baptized (Acts 16:33-34).
- D. These conversions marked the beginning of the Philippian church. This was the first church Paul founded in Europe.

II. ***They Had Extraordinary Character***

- A. It was properly organized (Philippians 1:1; cf. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-13).
- B. Its character was such that Paul was continually thankful to God whenever he thought of them (Philippians 1:3-4).
- C. It was an evangelistic church and it supported Paul in spreading the gospel (Philippians 1:5; 4:10-20).
- D. It was steadfast, zealous and diligent in service (Philippians 1:6, 25-30).
 - 1. They did not wait until they had a large congregation and fine building paid for to begin to carry the gospel into other areas.
 - 2. When you think about it, no one gets anywhere without hard work. You sure will not do it at your job and the Lord's church is no different.
- E. It had strong ties of brotherly love and devotion.
 - 1. They sent Epaphroditus to Rome to minister to Paul (Philippians 2:25).
 - 2. He longed for them and they received him when he returned (Philippians 2:28-29).
 - 3. Paul had a deep affection for them, as they did for Paul (Philippians 4:1; 1:8).
 - a) Fifty years later, they would show the same generosity to Ignatius.
 - b) He passed through their city on his way to martyrdom at Rome.
- F. It was a happy and joyful church.
 - 1. "Rejoice" occurs 12 times in the letter and "joy" occurs 6 times in the letter. This, by far, makes joy the dominant tone of the epistle.
 - 2. R. C. H. Lenski wrote, "Joy is the music that runs through this epistle, the sunshine that spreads over all of it. The whole epistle radiates joy and happiness."
- G. It was a liberal church.
 - 1. They gave liberally to the poor (2 Corinthians 8:2).
 - 2. They gave of their own accord (2 Corinthians 8:3).
 - 3. They were consecrated to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5).

III. ***They Had Wonderful Exhortations***

- A. Philippians 1:9-11, 27-28.
- B. Philippians 2:1-5, 12-16.
- C. Philippians 3:1-2.
- D. Philippians 4:6-9.

Conclusion. We always need to have the spirit of the Philippians within us. As Paul encouraged Christians to be followers of him (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17), we would do well to follow the Philippian church.

There is nothing more exciting than a growing, healthy body of Christ. It has a magnetic effect that draws people together. We cannot grow numerically until we grow spiritually (Ephesians 4:15-16). We must become a place where people want to be!

God used the Philippian church to make an impact because the Philippian church was ready to be used! Think how exciting it must have been! Think how exciting it can be today if we begin to mirror what we see reflected in that local assembly. It must be done for another generation hangs in the balance (Judges 2:10).