

To Die is Gain

THE PATH TO JOY, A STUDY OF PHILIPPIANS

LESSON 1

From its beginning, the Philippian letter reminds us that God's thoughts and ways, His plans and purposes are not our own, but are infinitely higher (Isaiah 55:8-9). Closed doors, hindered plans, and shelved hopes were God's means to channel His servants to the place He intended them to be. Unfounded accusations, religious and racial prejudice, deep wounds, confinement and chains were among His methods to draw others to Himself.

As they read his words, the Philippian believers were reminded of the sacrifices that Paul made on their behalf years before. He *still* believed that the greatest gain was made in laying down one's life in the service of others. From his prison cell, Paul encouraged the Philippian believers to empty themselves of worldly ambitions and concerns, forget what they had known and who they had been, and strive to glorify Christ in all things. Jesus Christ would remain faithful to the end, finishing what He began (Philippians 1:6). Of this Paul was confident—it was his secret to contentment and great joy (4:11).

HISTORY

The city of Philippi (Greece) became a Roman colony after Antony and Octavia defeated Brutus and Cassius (the assassins of Julius Caesar) in the year 42 B.C. Special privileges awaited the citizens (mostly retired military) who chose to colonize this tax-free mini-Rome. In order to retain these rights, residents were expected to remain loyal to Rome, follow its laws, and uphold its ideals and its emperor.

As Rome's sister-city, Philippi practiced pluralist paganism (the worship of many gods). Modern-day excavations have revealed that there was a "prevailing continuation of paganism within the city"ⁱ that worked against the acceptance of one True God. Abundant images of the goddess Diana with many other Greek and Thracian gods, dating appropriately, have been recovered from the city's acropolis.

Paul founded the Philippian church during his second missionary journey, amidst persecutions (A.D. 50). It was the first Christian community on the European continent; Paul's "*joy and crown*" (Philippians 4:1). Its beginnings were small as the Jewish population was scarce. Few appeared to be receptive to the message of a Jewish Savior due to Roman anti-Semitism. In addition, the city lacked a synagogue (requiring only ten Jewish males), a gathering place for those seeking the prophesized Messiah and a primary location to share His gospel. Among Paul's companions were Dr. Luke, Silas and Timothy.

It is debated whether Paul penned the Philippian letter from the jail in Ephesus (A.D. 54) or Rome (A.D. 61-63).

READ ACTS 16:6-15.

1. How did Paul and his company arrive in the city of Philippi? (vv.6-12) What does this reveal about the methods God employs to guide His people?

When you are met with roadblocks or closed doors how do you respond?

2. How did Paul's decision to travel to Macedonia require both faith and reason?

3. Describe Lydia. What human and divine factors led to her conversion?

4. How does her response to Paul's message challenge you?

READ ACTS 16:16-34.

5. Who did Paul and his companions meet on their way to pray?

6. Compare her knowledge of the truth to the Philippians'. (vv.17-18)

7. How was she exploited? How did this continue after she was "set free"?

8. Of what were Paul and Silas accused? What fueled the magistrates' rash sentencing? (Consider Acts 18:2.)

Why were Timothy and Luke not taken before the authorities? (Consider Acts 16:1.)

9. Why might they have chosen not to plead their citizenship?

10. What instructions were given to the jailer in verses 23 and 24?

11. Would such a situation cause you to believe that ministry had come to an end? Explain.

12. Why do you believe Paul and Silas were able to praise God in the darkness?

13. How do such actions affect those around us?

14. After the great earthquake, *“the [prison] doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed”* (v.26). In what ways is this a picture of what was about to occur spiritually?

15. Roman law stated that if a guard lost a prisoner, he would take the punishment the prisoner would have received. How did this influence Paul’s decision not to flee?

16. What does this reveal about Paul’s view of his life in light of others’.

If he had fled, how might the new Christians have been consequently affected?

17. How would you have responded if you were offered freedom? Circle one: I would have **a)** fled, **b)** let the jailer kill himself, **c)** sought revenge, **d)** stayed.

How do you value others in comparison to Paul?

18. What resulted on account of Paul's selflessness? (vv.29-34)

19. What fruits of repentance did the jailer bear? (v.33)

CONTINUE READING IN ACTS 16:35-40.

20. Paul and Silas returned to the prison of their own accord. What did their actions demonstrate to the new Philippian believers?

21. Why might Paul have demanded a personal apology at this time?

22. Compile a list of all the Christ-like characteristics that the Philippian believers witnessed in Paul.

23. If you were among the Philippians, how would this impact your relationship with God?

¹ Archaeological Supplement, Thomas Chain-Reference Bible (pg. 2237).