

## **Philippians Introduction**

### *Roman Colony*

Philippi was not a large city but it was on the *Via Egnatia*, a major highway that ran from east to west. It was originally founded by Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, on the site of an earlier village. It came under Roman rule in the second century BCE after Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius at the battles of Philippi in 42 BCE. The statement in Acts 16:12 (“the leading city of the district of Macedonia”) may be an incorrect translation. It might more correctly be “a city of the first district of Macedonia.” At the time of the writing Macedonia was divided into four districts. Being a Roman colony gave Philippi’s citizens considerable property and legal rights and exemption from taxes imposed on cities that were not Roman colonies. Citizens of Philippi were citizens of Rome. Philippi’s relationship with Rome influenced Paul’s letter.

### *Citizenship*

When Rome conquered Macedonia many Romans were brought into Philippi, and its aristocracy was primarily made up of Romans. The city was loyal to Rome and therefore the cult of the emperor was prominent, although not the exclusive religion. Philippi had a mixture of citizens with Greeks being the majority. This mixed population meant there were a variety of religious cults in Philippi. Rome allowed people to practice their own religion as long as it was not a threat to peace or the empire’s power. There is no evidence of Jewish synagogue in Philippi. Paul found the only worshippers of God at “a place of prayer” outside the city (Acts 16:13). Among those Paul met was Lydia, a God-fearing Gentile. There does not seem to have been much, if any, of a Jewish population in Philippi.

### *Establishment of Christian Community*

Paul’s missionary efforts in Philippi came as a result of the Holy Spirit in some way not allowing Paul to go to Asia. Then during the night Paul had a vision inviting him to come to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). The suggested date for the establishment of the Christian community of Philippi is 50 CE. This took the gospel west rather than Paul’s initial intent of spreading the gospel to the east. This was a very important event in world history.

### *Place And Date Of Writing*

Although there is some debate over this issue, it is widely accepted that Philippians was written from Rome while Paul was in prison. The date would have been in the early 60’s.

### *Purpose*

As is seen in the letter, Paul had a special relationship with the community of faith in Philippi. Paul wanted to assure them concerning his circumstances of imprisonment. And he wanted to express his thankfulness for their continuing support of his mission and to express his deep love for them.

Paul addressed opponents that both he and the Philippians were facing. (1) There were Christians who opposed Paul and whose preaching was designed to cause Paul more suffering (1:17). (2) The church in Philippi was facing opposition from unbelievers (1:28). Proclaiming Christ as Lord rather than Caesar (2:11), promoting a Lord who had been crucified (2:8), and believing one's primary citizenship was in heaven (3:20) would have brought the ire of Roman citizens. (3) Paul gave a warning against Jew and Gentile Christians who preached Jewish identity markers, especially circumcision, was essential for true spirituality (3:2-3). (4) There were a group of *libertines* who professed to be Christians but whose lives were at odds with the gospel (3:18-19).

There was also at least the growing possibility that disharmony was at the doorstep of the community of faith. Two ladies at the center of this concern are briefly mentioned (4:2-3).

Paul's focus was certainly on the gospel. The words *gospel* and *Christ* are found more densely in Philippians than any other of Paul's letters. Paul's relationship is based solely on their mutual relationship with Christ (1:5,8). Jesus was the reason for the Philippians suffering (1:27-29) and for Paul's suffering and imprisonment, and was used by Paul's opponents against him (1:13,15). Christ was the reason for Paul's life (1:21). Christ was the reason for the Philippians to have one mind (1:27). The gospel and life of Jesus is the model, goal, and motivation for Christian living (2:4-10). All reasons for boasting are found in knowing Christ (3:1-10). Christ is the source of joy, peace, contentment, and strength (4:7-14).