

Text: Acts 16:6-40

Title: Background of the Letter to the Philippians

Truth: The Philippian Church has a well-known background from Acts 16.

Date/Location: Sunday November 14, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

After the Jerusalem council, Paul formed a new ministry team.

I. Key Facts About Philippi

- A. Paul and Silas planted the church of Philippi around 50 A.D. during his second missionary journey.
- B. Philippi was a Roman “colony.” There were many legal advantages to this status in the Roman empire, including that its citizens were the equivalent of virtual residents of Italy. There were also tax advantages and more autonomy in the local government.
- C. Philippi was a chief city in the region. It was not, however a provincial or district capital. This “first place” standing may have engendered a little attitude of superiority among its residents as if they were “better” than the surrounding areas.
- D. The Jewish population appears to have been small enough that there was no synagogue. Paul usually went to the synagogue first, but here he went to a riverside prayer meeting (Acts 16:13).
- E. Luke may have become a resident of Philippi, although he did not start out there. He uses “we” in 16:10 before Paul arrived in Philippi. Notice “we” in 16:16 but “they” in 17:1. Actually “they” is the focus of 16:18 and following until 20:5 when the pronoun “us” appears again when Paul came back up through Macedonia, where Philippi was located. Luke seems to have rejoined the missionary team at that time.

II. The History Recorded in Acts of the Philippian Church

- A. After the Holy Spirit hindered the team from visiting Asia and Bithynia, it became apparent why: a vision from God showed that a man of Macedonia was crying out to the missionaries to come and help them. This was like the Acts 10 arrangement God made for

Peter to get the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius (see Acts 10:3-6, 10:9ff). This is not the usual way missions happens, but this was the first movement of the gospel—ever in history—into Europe. God guided the apostles in those early significant steps of mission work.

We hear of such calls today, not in the form of a vision, but by way of normal communication. Christians in a city that have no sound church are pleading for someone to come and help them start a church: someone who knows what to do and how to do it. It is strange, dear believers, because in many established churches, the churches are pleading with the people to come. In other places, people are pleading for churches to come. What a privilege that we have a good church. Thank the Lord.

- B. What are missionaries? The book of Acts shows us that missionaries are church-planting evangelists. “Missionary” is just another name for a church-planter who is engaged in the Great Commission.
- C. Lydia was the first convert. She was a God-fearer, an almost-proselyte of the Jewish faith. She did worship the true God, again like Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2). Notice how she was saved: the text does *not* say that she opened her heart, although I am sure she would say that she did. The apostolic explanation of what happened was that “the Lord opened her heart” to obey what Paul spoke about.

When Paul spoke the gospel, God illuminated her mind, opened her heart, saved her, gave her new spiritual life, etc. She was saved by God in the Christian sense of that word. She had not been a Christian up to that point because she did not know of Christ and His substitutionary work, nor of the Holy Spirit. We understand that a work of God upon one’s heart (mind) is necessary for a person to be saved.

What a wonder this is! God graciously opens our hearts to understand the gospel and believe in Him. This does not take away from the fact that *we* do understand, and *we* do believe.

D. The city was not Christianized and had little influence of godliness. We know this because there was demonic activity there, including a poor girl enslaved by masters who used her dark prophetic ability to make money. Whether the fortunes she told were usually correct is unknown, but people were paying for them. And at least in one thing, she was right: “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” Even demons know some of the facts about God and the gospel.

Societies today which have had no influence of Christ for generations are often overrun with demonism and false religions. What this girl was doing at the bidding of her masters was wicked (Leviticus 19:26, Deut. 18:10). We ought to be thankful for the heritage we have and be aware that as the society moves farther away from God, demonic activity will naturally increase.

Let us assume for now that the young girl began to follow the Lord after Christ released her from the awful demonic oppression. We cannot be sure of this, but we can certainly hope so.

Of course, the masters were displeased, and they lied about Paul in verse 20-21. Their identification of Paul and Silas as Jews was technically correct, but what they were teaching was not old Jewish doctrine; it was firstly *Christian*.

E. The third convert in Philippi was a prison guard. He was as unlikely to believe in Christ as you might think some of your co-workers or family members are to believe. He probably did not oversee the beating of Paul and Silas—after all, he was assigned the graveyard shift as a prison guard and was lower in rank than many of his colleagues. The day-time shift was responsible for locking Paul up.

Back to this prison guard, after experiencing the great earthquake, he was concerned about how to be saved. I wonder if this was more than just “I’m about to be executed because all the prisoners are escaping.” When people are in bad situations, at least some begin to think about what happens after they die. They know if they have been rotten, or even fairly good, but they know that is not good enough to cut it with God. Where will I go? Will God accept me?

Paul and Silas explained to him the way of salvation. In a verse that all Christians should memorize in case they need a quick summary of the gospel in a life-or-death situation, they tell the man, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” The same goes for his entire household. They too must believe if they want the Christian hope of salvation.

F. And thus a new church was born! The group that was initial members of the church included a saleswoman in the textile business and her family, a corrections officer from the prison-industrial complex and his family, and perhaps a young woman who had been a trafficking victim and possessed with an oracle-demon, used by her masters for financial gain. Others joined over time, but this start is of interest to me because it shows the variety of people who are part of a typical church.

In both cases, Lydia and the prison guard and their families were baptized by Paul—*after* believing the message of Jesus (v. 34). Belief and baptism are prerequisites for church membership.

G. The authorities illegally beat and imprisoned Paul and Silas without a proper trial. We know this because they were *un-condemned* according to verse 37. Just because magistrates were involved (v. 20-24) does not mean that the “trial” was legitimate. The evangelists did not let that go unnoticed. Using their rights as Roman citizens, they forced the authorities to humble themselves. Paul and Silas suffered unjust treatment; that is sometimes what God ordains for us. Note their example amid suffering.

H. Both the guard and Lydia showed early and significant spiritual fruit by being willing to help Paul and Silas even though persecution was a real possibility. The jailer brought them to his home, and shared food with them. Lydia welcomed them into her home after they were released from prison. Earlier she had offered the missionaries to stay in her home during their stay in Philippi.

Conclusion

People saved...steadfastness under persecution...a church is born.
Paul will interact with this church many times in the future.