

## Background to Philippians

The church at Philippi began on Paul's second missionary journey probably around A.D. 50. Philippi was located in northern Greece in the region of Macedonia on a major east-west highway called the Egnatian Way. The last major battle of the Roman civil war that ensued after the assassination of Julius Caesar was fought on the plains outside the city and when the war was over Octavian (Caesar Augustus of Luke 2) settled some of his military veterans there and bestowed on the city the honor of Roman Citizenship. In fact, Philippi was given the *lus Italicum* and treated like a little Italy. Roman citizens were given special rights and privileges - lower taxes, protection by Roman law, etc. As a result, Philippi had a very Roman flavor.



### The Egnatian Way through Philippi.

The Egnatian way ran across northern Greece through Philippi. It stretched from the Adriatic coast in the west all the way to modern Istanbul in the east. It was a way to connect Rome with the eastern Empire. This meant Philippi was a well-connected city.



Here's an aerial view of the city showing an approximate layout of the city walls. The area inside the yellow box is downtown Philippi where the majority of the excavation has been done.

It's hard to see in this photo because it's written in a cursive font, but to the east of Philippi and right on the edge of the modern city is the river that was "outside the city gate" (Acts 16:13). This is where Paul met and baptized Lydia and likely where he baptized the warden of the jail.



Downtown Philippi  
- part of the area  
in the yellow box  
above.





The theater in Philippi. You can see it in the upper left corner in the picture on the preceding page .



This is the traditional site of the jail where Paul and Silas were held. When Acts says they were put into the inner prison, that probably refers to the central cell with no windows and no ventilation. Their feet were put in stocks and their backs were bruised and bloodied. But they sang and praised God nonetheless.



One of the things that deeply affected the nature of the city and appears in both the story in Acts 16 and in the letter is Philippi's deep loyalty to Rome. There was a deep civic pride in their status as a little Italy. Many of the inscriptions were written in Latin not Greek even though the city is in northern Greece.

In Acts 16, the charges against Paul pit Romaness against Jewishness because of this loyalty and because there was such a small Jewish population.

In the letter to the Philippians, the pride shows up in “citizenship” language. For example, when Paul says “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27), it literally says “walk as good citizens of the gospel...” Or in 3:20 Paul says “our citizenship is in heaven.”

Both of these verses play off of the kind of civic pride that the Philippians were familiar with and uses it to appeal to living as citizens of Jesus’ kingdom. It’s far more important to be loyal to King Jesus as Lord rather than Caesar and to walk according to the values of Jesus’ kingdom. This is one of the key lessons of the letter to the Philippians.



Latin Inscription in Philippi

More resources:

-For a helpful article on the history of the city: <https://www.livius.org/articles/place/philippi>

-For a video overview watch this from [Drive Thru History: Where is Ancient Philippi?](#)

-For detailed explanation of Philippi's connection to the biblical text: <https://bibleatlas.org/philippi.htm>