

Philippians

BACKGROUND ON PHILIPPI

In 357 BC, Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, conquered the small village of Thrace. He rebuilt it, created a military stronghold, and renamed it after himself. Nearby gold mines and fertile agricultural land created industry and income and sustained a population. Philippi is located 10 miles north of the Aegean sea and along the Egnatian Way, a critical east-west trade road that runs through Macedonia (modern day Europe).

Hundreds of years later, it was a major battle site during the Roman civil war. In 42 BC, Julius Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, were defeated by the Imperialists Octavian and Mark Antony there. Many veterans from the battle made Philippi their home, created communities, and settled into Roman life. Because of the strategic location, Philippi continued to flourish economically and culturally.

As a Roman colony, the Philippians enjoyed a privileged status with high regard for Roman law (Acts 16: 12, 21, 37). They were exempt from taxation and enjoyed land ownership. With a population of 10,000, the citizenship consisted of Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, and just a handful of Jews. Latin was the official language.

Philippi was constructed to reflect the architecture of Rome. Ruins indicate there was an acropolis on the hilltop, a large forum in the center of town with a platform for orators, beautiful fountains, public baths, shops, a theater, and two impressive city gates. Philippi housed a school of medicine as well as a variety of worship opportunities. Because people and influence passed through the Egnatian Way, a mix of religious traditions was the natural outcome. Although Empire worship was the primary expectation among the Romans, influences from Asia Minor and Egypt created pluralistic opportunities for religious pursuits. Thirty-five different deities enjoyed the affections of the Philippine population. This is the fertile soil in which Paul entered the gate of the city.