

# JOIN THE JOURNEY™

*A one-year journey with the early church*



## Introduction to Dr. Tom Constable and His Bible Study (Expository) Notes

Dr. Constable is one of the most respected and beloved teachers of God's Word at Dallas Theological Seminary, and he has served as a Bible teacher and elder at Plano Bible Chapel for many years. Learn more about him at: [www.soniclight.com/constable/index.htm](http://www.soniclight.com/constable/index.htm). You can explore the rest of the Sonic Light website by left-clicking in the top lighthouse graphic to return to Sonic Light's homepage, or click on one of the tabs to see other pages:

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NOTES ON

## PHILIPPIANS

2008 EDITION

DR. THOMAS L. CONSTABLE

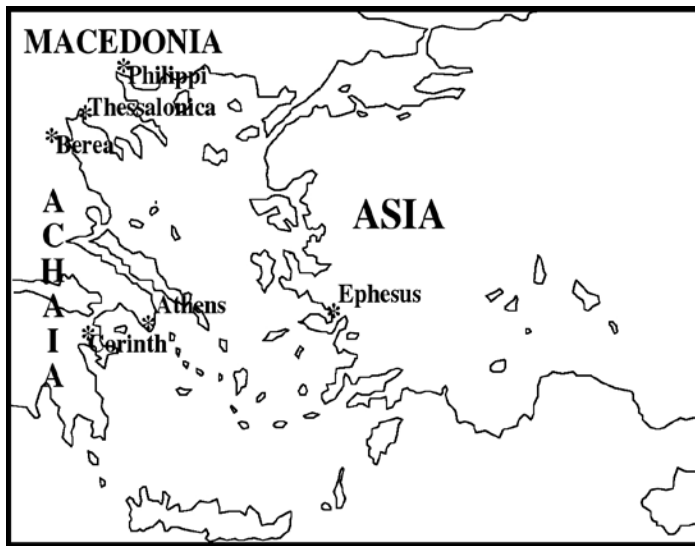
## INTRODUCTION

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The name of the city of Philippi was originally Krinides (lit. springs). It stood about 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea in the Roman province of Macedonia. In 356 B.C. Philip II, King of Macedonia and father of Alexander the Great, renamed the town after himself and enlarged it.

In 42 B.C. the Romans Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus defeated Brutus and Cassius in a battle fought just west of Philippi. After that battle Philippi became a military colony. Subsequent battles in 42 and 31 B.C. resulted in Philippi receiving even higher status. The citizens enjoyed autonomous government, immunity from taxes, and treatment as if they lived in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Some commentators have seen indications of the pride the Philippians took in their city in Acts 16:20-21 and Philippians 1:27 and 3:20. Luke's description of Philippi as a "leading city of the district of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12) probably refers to its colonial status since it was the only Roman colony in the area. Amphipolis was the capital of the district, and Thessalonica was the capital of the province.

The Via Egnatia, the main highway from Rome to the



east, ran through Philippi and brought much commerce and many travelers to Philippi. Also the nearby Gangites (modern Angitis) River was another natural advantage since it constituted another ancient thoroughfare (cf. Acts 16:13).

The story of the founding of the church in Philippi appears in Acts 16. Philippi was the first town in which Paul preached after he crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas and entered Europe. Then (A.D. 50) the city had few Jewish residents and the first converts were Lydia, a Gentile businesswoman from Thyatira in the province of Asia Minor, and the Philippian jailer. The church evidently met in Lydia's home at first (Acts 16:15). Paul's companions on his first visit to Philippi included Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Luke may have stayed in Philippi to establish the new converts when the other members of Paul's missionary team moved on to Thessalonica.<sup>2</sup> The Philippian Christians sent financial support to Paul in Thessalonica more than once (Phil. 4:15-16).

Probably Paul visited Philippi again during his third missionary journey in A.D. 57. He travelled from Ephesus to Corinth by land and then from Corinth back to Miletus mostly by land. From there he took a ship to Jerusalem. The land route he took on both occasions would have led him through Philippi.

No serious question about the Pauline authorship of this epistle arose until the nineteenth century. Paul claimed to have written it (Phil. 1:1), and the references to his acquaintances, events in his life, and his way of thinking all point to him as the writer.

The apostle was a prisoner when he penned this letter (Phil. 1:7, 13, 16). References to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) have led most interpreters to conclude that Paul wrote from Rome rather than from Caesarea (cf. 1:19-24; 2:24).<sup>3</sup> The Marcionite Prologue (ca. A.D. 170) also refers to Paul writing Philippians from Rome. Evidently he did so during his first Roman imprisonment (A.D. 60-62) during which time he also

wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, the other Prison Epistles.<sup>4</sup>

The primary purpose Paul had in mind in writing this epistle seems to have been to reassure the Philippians. Epaphroditus, whom they had sent with a gift for Paul and to minister to his needs in prison, had recovered from a serious illness and was about to return to Philippi. Paul built up Epaphroditus in the eyes of his readers (2:25-30), which suggests that they may not have appreciated him adequately for some reason. Secondary reasons for sending this letter include expressing thanks for the Philippians' gift to Paul in prison (4:10-14) and announcing Timothy's approaching visit (2:19).<sup>5</sup> Paul also wanted to explain his desire to revisit his readers (2:24) and to deal with the problem of the two women in the church who needed to reconcile (4:2). One commentator identified the genre of this epistle as a letter of friendship and moral exhortation.<sup>6</sup>

Of all Paul's epistles Philippians is the most consistently positive and personal. It reflects a joyful spirit.<sup>7</sup> Paul did not rebuke this church sharply nor did he refer to any major problems in it. His warnings are of a precautionary nature. His occupation with Jesus Christ also stands out. In 104 verses there are 51 references to the Lord Jesus by name.

"... what is most noticeable in this letter is the general paucity of Paul's more specialized theological vocabulary and the infrequency of the explanatory 'for,' which is always a dead giveaway that Paul is involved in heavy argumentation."<sup>8</sup>

## OUTLINE

- I. Salutation 1:1-2
- II. Prologue 1:3-26
  - A. Thanksgiving 1:3-8
  - B. Prayer 1:9-11
  - C. Progress report 1:12-26
    1. Paul's present imprisonment 1:12-18
    2. Paul's anticipated deliverance 1:19-26
- III. Partnership in the gospel 1:27—4:9
  - A. A worthy walk 1:27-30
  - B. Unity and steadfastness 2:1—4:1
    1. Walking in unity ch. 2
    2. Walking in steadfastness 3:1—4:1
  - C. Specific duties 4:2-9
    1. Restoring unity 4:2-3
    2. Maintaining tranquillity 4:4-9

#### IV. Epilogue 4:10-20

- A. The recent gift 4:10-14
- B. The previous gifts 4:15-20

#### V. Greetings and benediction 4:21-23

### FOOTNOTES

- 1** F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity. Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, 4:187-90.
- 2** Luke dropped the use of "we" from Acts 17:1 through 20:4.
- 3** For defense of the Caesarean origin of the letter, see Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, pp. xxxvi-xliv. A third possible site is Ephesus, which G. S. Duncan, "A New Setting for Paul's Epistle to the Philippians," *Expository Times* 43 (1931-32):7-11, advocated.
- 4** Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, p. 37, believed the internal evidence of Philippians puts its writing toward the end of this period.
- 5** Robert P. Lightner, "Philippians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 647, suggested that the book "might be called a thank-you note to saints in Philippi for their generous gifts."
- 6** Fee, p. 2.
- 7** See Charles R. Swindoll, *Laugh Again*, a popular treatment of Philippians that stresses the importance of living joyfully in spite of circumstances.
- 8** Fee, p. 20.