

# Philippians and Thessalonians Commentary and Notes: Out of Macedonia

## 1. The Establishment of the Church in Macedonia

### *History and Background*

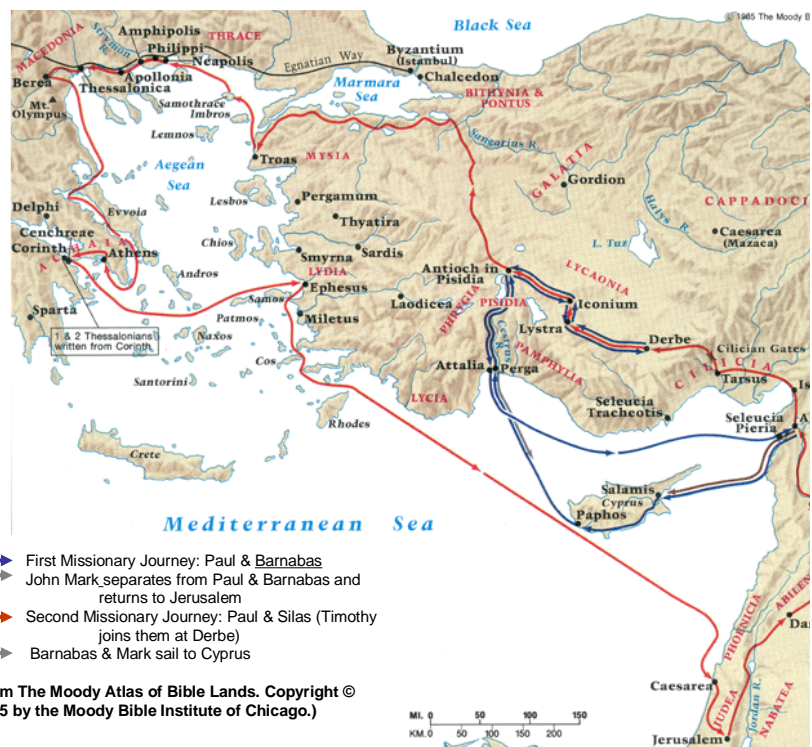
Acts 15 closed with Paul and Barnabas leaving on their second missionary journey, with the intent to revisit the brothers in all the towns where they preached on the first journey. Paul, with Silas as his cohort, launches his second missionary journey, after the elders and apostles in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the Gentile churches instructing them on what matters of the Law of Moses that they should keep. With such a pointed letter in hand, Paul and Silas determined to go church by church through the provinces of Asia Minor. The letter named only four items of the Law to be observed by Gentile Christians. An abbreviated text of the letter as recorded in Acts 15:23-29 follows:

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

. . . 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul . . . 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to **abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.** You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.



### **Timothy Joins Paul**

Acts 16:1-2

16 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

Derbe and Lystra were the last two churches Paul and Barnabas visited on the first journey. A huge event, because of its future benefits to the work of the Lord, was when Paul selected Timothy to accompany him.

Acts 16:3-5

3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

As a free will matter and not as an obligation of faith, Paul circumcised Timothy, making him more effective in working with Jews. There are times when Paul, by act or teaching, accommodated Jews and Gentiles when no principles of the law of Christ were at risk. Acts 18:18 records that Paul took what may have been a Jewish vow: "Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken." This vow, with its cutting of hair, is most likely the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6:3ff. Paul knew that in Jerusalem his credentials as a practicing Jew would come into question

### **The Macedonian Call**

Acts 16:6-10

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The second journey turned north allowing them to preach in regions of Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit kept them out of Asia and out of Mysia and Bithynia. This took them on a straight course to Troas on the Aegean Sea. Here, Paul had what commonly is called the Macedonian Call. Paul and his companions responded immediately and left to preach the gospel to those in Macedonia, which was the Roman province north of Greece and Achaia. Had they traveled north, the outcomes for the gospel would have been severely limited.

Acts 16:11-12

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

Samothrace was an island in the Aegean Sea on the way to Neapolis. Philippi was the main city of the Macedonia, named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. Although Philippi was land locked, it was on the main Roman highway, the Egnatian Way, and close to the seaport of Neapolis.

### **The Conversion of Lydia**

Acts 16:13-14

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

As Paul's custom was, he and his companions sought out worshippers on the Sabbath. As he spoke to the women, Lydia responded to the gospel preached by Paul: "The Lord opened her heart to respond." God provides a way, but the person has to supply faith and obedience to the gospel. There are no cases of divine intervention providing salvation. The Lord taught in

the parable of the sower in Luke 8:15: "15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

Acts 16:15

*15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

Therefore, Lydia's response to Paul's teaching, defined her belief. That response was to obey the message by baptism. Only after her response to the message with baptism, did she say; "If you consider me a believer in the Lord . . ." Those who deny baptism unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) must answer the question: If Lydia had not responded to the message with baptism, would Paul have considered her a believer? Or how can one be a believer and not obey the message?

### ***Paul and Silas Severely Flogged and Thrown in Jail***

Acts 16:16-18

*16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.*

The older translation read "spirit of divination" in describing this girl. As a fortuneteller, the girl was a principal source of money for her owners; but when she kept saying that Paul and his companions were servants of the Most High God who are telling the way of salvation, Paul, being troubled, cast out the spirit from her.

Acts 16:19-20

*19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."*

Philippi was a Roman city with few Jews or Greeks living there. Therefore, it was easy to make the charge stick that Paul and companions were Jews advocating customs unlawful for Romans.

Acts 16:22-24

*22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

With the crowd behind them, the magistrates had them severely flogged and thrown into prison. The jailer, who was commanded to guard them carefully, doubly secured them in the inner cell with their feet in stocks. Escape under such circumstance would seem impossible.

### ***Conversion of the Philippian Jailer and His House***

Acts 16:25-26

*25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.*

Beaten and jailed, Paul and Silas responded with the bravery of men dedicated to the Lord, whatever may come. Luke had recorded in his gospel the encouraging words of Christ in Luke 21:36: "36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man

The earthquake, so violent that it shook the foundations of the prison reflects, God's power in response to the prayers of the saints

By God's power, the doors flew open and the chains released.

Acts 8:27-28

*27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*

Immediately upon waking and seeing the doors open, the jailor sought to kill himself. The penalty in that day for letting one's prisoners escape was the giving of one's own life. Paul stopped him.

Acts 16:29-30

*29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

Perhaps, the jailer knew from the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment that Paul and Silas were teaching the way of salvation, or perhaps, the miracles of their release confirmed the word they had taught. Whatever his motivation, the jailor asked the most important question of all for an alien sinner: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The people on the day of Pentecost asked the same question in Acts 2:37: "37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Paul had asked this same question prior to his conversion, recorded in Acts 22:8-10.

Acts 16:31-34

*31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family.*

Paul now tells the jailer the way of salvation, step by step. As with Lydia, the way of salvation starts with "believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The answer to the question of what must we do in Acts 2:37 is in Acts 2:38: "38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" The jailer took them, washed their wounds, and was baptized. The urgency of acting on his belief is expressed in the terms—*at that hour of the night and immediately*. When Paul asked the question of what to do, Ananius expressed the same overwhelming sense of urgency in Acts 22:16; "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

The joy expressed by the jailer was only evident after he had obeyed all of the commands included in the way of salvation.

Acts 16:35-40

35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

Paul used his status as a Roman citizen to require the magistrates to escort them out. Paul refused to go quietly. Paul's final stop was to Lydia's house where the church in Philippi got its start. These brethren will be more by more involved in Paul's efforts as they provide support for him in his preaching efforts.

### **On to Thessalonica, Where the Church Is Established**

Paul and Silas came out of the prison, went to Lydia's house for a while, and then left the city of Philippi. The church at Philippi followed Paul with monetary support according Phil 4:15-16:

15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

Acts 17 records Paul's efforts as he spread the gospel from Macedonia into Achaia, beginning in Thessalonica. Achaia was the Roman province including ancient and modern Greece.

Acts 17:1-4

1 When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

When Paul arrived at Thessalonica, he went to the Jewish synagogue and reasoned with them from the scriptures. He was able to explain and prove that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. The apostles and evangelists preached this very same gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ from the day of Pentecost onward. The end of the logic is that Jesus



is the Christ. Since the Gospel is the power of God (Rom 1:16), it is no wonder that Paul persuaded some of the Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and prominent women.

Acts 17:5-9

*5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8 When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9 Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.*

These people at Thessalonica actually form a mob and start a riot. They catch Jason, a local believer, and drag him before the city official. In their eyes, Jason's crime was that he welcomed Paul and Silas into his house.

The three-fold charge against Paul and Silas will be the one that, once planted, becomes the rallying cry that the Romans use against the Christians as the kingdom (the church) spreads throughout the Roman Empire. First, they charge that Paul and Silas cause trouble all over the world. Second, they accuse Paul and Silas of defying Caesar's decrees. Third, they say that Paul and Silas teach that there is another king, one called Jesus. These charges, if proven before a Roman court, are treasonous.

### ***The Bereans Were More Noble Than Those at Thessalonica***

Acts 17:10-12

*10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

Because of the mob, the brothers sent Paul and Silas to Berea, where, as usual, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Acts 17:11 is one of the most powerful and instructive scriptures ever written:

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The eagerness of Christians to examine the scriptures to see if the one speaking is telling the truth is both protective and instructive. The scriptures and not man's word are complete and perfect.

Acts 17:13-15

*13 When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. 14 The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. 15 The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.*

The Jews who were after Paul in Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea. Then the brothers escorted to Paul to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea with instructions to join Paul as soon as possible.