

City of Philippi

The city of Philippi was a major city in Greece located northwest of the nearby island of Thasos. The colony of Philippi comprised of an area of more than 700 square miles extending from the Pangaion mountain range in the north, to the seaport of Neapolis in the South, and from the Nestos river in the East to the Strymon in the West. The colony may have been dependent largely on its access to the sea via Neapolis for commerce and communication.

It was stated that excavations at Philippi revealed building activity in the third and fourth centuries including the construction of one of the earliest known Christian churches in Greece. Additionally, six more churches were found that were built at or near the city during the 5th-7th centuries C.E. proving that the remarkable power of Philippi as an episcopal and ecclesiastical center was an important object of Christian pilgrimage.

The city of Philippi was famous for its abundant gold mines and plentiful springs of water. The town received its name Crenides from these springs which means fountains or springs but around 359 BC, the city was renamed Philippi after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. By New Testament times, the city had come under Roman rules with a diverse population.

The apostle Paul planted the church of Phillippi in approximately 50-51 A.D, the first church in Europe, on his second missionary journey accompanied by Silas and Timothy after a fallout with Barnabas (Acts 15:39). He had originally gone to Macedonia because of a night vision when he saw a man of Macedonia standing and asking that he come over to help them (Acts 16:9). Paul would always visit the synagogue whenever he first arrived in a new city, but in Philippi there was no synagogue, and he went to the river where he knew that Jews would be worshipping (Acts 16:13). He met Lydia there, a Gentile who became the first Christian convert in Europe.

The church at Philippi consisted of converts who were Gentiles from the middle and upper class. This fact is assured by the financial support that the church provided to Paul on more than one occasion (Phil4:16 and 2Cor 11:9). Luke tells us that Lydia, who was a wealthy merchant woman from Thyatira pleaded with Paul and his friends to use her household in Philippi as their headquarters after her conversion.

The letter to the Philippian church was to encourage them to become like minded and to continue doing the things that they had learned and received and heard and seen in him (Phil 4:9). He thanked them for their generous gifts and encouraged them in their faith in Christ and their fellowship amongst the believers and to be unified in the body of Christ. The three major events were the conversion of Lydia, the exorcism of the slave girl which resulted in Paul and Silas being thrown in prison (Acts 16:23). Finally, the third was the conversion of the jailer and his family (Acts 16:34).

From the time it was established, the church at Philippi was healthy, strong, and generous, becoming a model church that only experienced minor problems of disunity.