

Encounters on the Via Egnatia

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Introduction

The Via Egnatia was a Roman Road constructed in the 2nd century BC connecting ports on the Adriatic Sea with Byzantium. It crossed the Roman provinces of Illyricum, Macedonia, and Thrace, running through territory that is now part of modern Albania, Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey. The ancient cities of Thessalonica, Amphipolis, and Philippi lay along this route.

Paul at Philippi

Coming to Philippi, Paul met with a group of women who assembled for prayer beside the river. They listened attentively to the preaching of the gospel (Acts 16:13).

Acts 16:13 (NASB95) — 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, responded to the things spoken by Paul. After being baptized, along with her household, she prevailed upon Paul and his companions to stay in her house as they continued their evangelistic endeavors (Acts 16:14-15).

Acts 16:14-15 (NASB95) — 14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Afterwards, Paul encountered a slave-girl with a spirit of divination who was being exploited by her owners. For many days, she followed him, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." Paul commanded the spirit to come out of her, and she was freed from its controlling influence. However, when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they brought false charges against Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16-21).

Acts 16:16-21 (NASB95) — 16 It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." 18 She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. 19 But when her masters saw

that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, 20 and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, 21 and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.”

Deuteronomy 18:9-14 (NASB95) — 9 “When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. 10 “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 “For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. 13 “You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. 14 “For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so.

Ezekiel 13:9 (NASB95) — 9 “So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord God.

Yielding to mob pressure, the chief magistrates ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods, thrown into prison, and securely guarded (Acts 16:22-24; cf. Exod. 23:1-3; Matt. 27:24-26).

Acts 16:22-24 (NASB95) — 22 The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. 23 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; 24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Exodus 23:1-3 (NASB95) — 1 “You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. 2 “You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; 3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

Matthew 27:24-26 (NASB95) — 24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.” 25 And all the people said, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” 26 Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening. Suddenly a great earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. Immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened (Acts 16:25-26; cf. Eph. 5:15-21; Col. 3:16-17).

Acts 16:25-26 (NASB95) — 25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

Ephesians 5:15-21 (NASB95) — 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Colossians 3:16-17 (NASB95) — 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Observing the effects of the midnight miracle, the Philippian jailer, asked “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” After Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him, the jailer washed their wounds (evidencing repentance), and immediately was baptized, along with his household (Acts 16:27-34). Cases of household conversion involved individuals who could hear, understand and respond to the gospel message (cf. Acts 10:1-2, 30-33).

Acts 16:27-34 (NASB95) — 27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” 29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. 34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

Acts 10:1-2 (NASB95) — 1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

Acts 10:30-33 (NASB95) — 30 Cornelius said, “Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, 31 and he said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 ‘Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also

called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.’
33 *“So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”*

When day came, the chief magistrates sent word that Paul and Silas should be released. However, Paul objected. Utilizing his rights as a Roman citizen, he insisted that the city officials (who had wrongfully ordered him beaten) come to the prison, and bring them out (Acts 16:35-39).

Acts 16:35-39 (NASB95) — 35 Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, “Release those men.” 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” 37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.” 38 The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, 39 and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.

After meeting with Lydia and the brethren, giving and receiving encouragement, Paul and his companions departed (Acts 16:40; cf. Phil. 1:1-11; 4:15-23).

Acts 16:40 (NASB95) — 40 They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Philippians 1:1-11 (NASB95) — 1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 4:15-23 (NASB95) — 15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. 19 And my God will

supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul at Thessalonica

Coming to Thessalonica, Paul met with worshippers at the Jewish synagogue. He reasoned with them for three Sabbaths, explaining and giving evidence that Jesus was the resurrected Christ. Some were persuaded, especially among the God-fearing Greeks, and a number of leading women (Acts 17:1-4).

Acts 17:1-4 (NASB95) — 1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

However, the Jews, becoming jealous, took some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar, attacked the house of Jason, seeking Paul and his companions (Acts 17:5-7).

Acts 17:5-7 (NASB95) — 5 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. 6 When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; 7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

Zeal, i.e., an intense interest in something, is good if properly directed (1 Cor. 12:31; 2 Cor. 11:2). However, the same Greek word also refers to sinful jealousy, i.e., intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success (Acts 7:9-10; James 4:1-3).

1 Corinthians 12:31 (NASB95) — 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

2 Corinthians 11:2 (NASB95) — 2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

Acts 7:9-10 (NASB95) — 9 "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, 10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

James 4:1-3 (NASB95) — 1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

The crowd and the city authorities were stirred up. After receiving a pledge (bond) from Jason and the others, they were released (Acts 17:8-9).

Acts 17:8-9 (NASB95) — 8 They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. 9 And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 (NASB95) — 13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. 17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

Romans 16:21 (NASB95) — 21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

Paul at Berea

Coming to Berea, Paul taught worshippers at the Jewish synagogue, along with prominent Greek women and men (Acts 17:10-12).

Acts 17:10-12 (NASB95) — 10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

However, unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica soon arrived, agitating and stirring up the crowds (Acts 17:13).

Acts 17:13 (NASB95) — 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

Accordingly, the brethren sent Paul away to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remained behind (Acts 17:14-15).

Acts 17:14-15 (NASB95) — 14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

Acts 18:1–5 (NASB95) — 1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, 3 and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. 4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. 5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Conclusion

How do we respond to the preaching of the gospel? Are we like Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and individuals with good and honest hearts who lived in Thessalonica and Berea? Or are we like the unbelieving Jews or the mindless and easily manipulated mobs who opposed Paul and Silas?