

# **Encounters on the Via Egnatia**

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**7/29/2012**

## **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). 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).

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).

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). 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).

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).

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). 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).

## **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).

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). 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). 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).

## **Paul at Berea**

Coming to Berea, Paul taught worshippers at the Jewish synagogue, along with prominent Greek women and men (Acts 17:10-12). However, unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica soon arrived, agitating and stirring up the crowds (Acts 17:13). Accordingly, the brethren sent Paul away to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remained behind (Acts 17:14-15).

## **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?