

Philippians I – Introduction: The Macedonian Call (Acts 16:6-12)

Introduction – God’s sovereignty is everywhere. Before we begin our verse-by-verse study of the book of Philippians, we should consider the sovereign hand of God in the establishment of this first church in Europe. Many would say that western civilization would have been dramatically different had God not done what He did in Acts 16. In many ways, we are here today because of the story of plans gone awry in Paul’s journey. There is much for us to consider as we see our plans go awry from time to time.

Messing With Paul’s Plans (vv6-8) – As Paul heads out on his second missionary journey (c. 51), he brings with him Timothy and, expecting to minister to the Jews first, has Timothy circumcised (because he was half Jewish). For the Gentiles in the churches he will visit, he has a confirmed message from the Jerusalem council. In addition, Paul plans to go southwest to the Roman province of Asia, continuing the work of preaching in the synagogues and establishing churches.

When the Spirit forbids them from going to Asia, they change their plans and attempt to head north to Bithynia. Once again, the Spirit does not permit them to follow their plans, and after some time, they find themselves on the western seaport city of Troas. Because of the pronoun change from verse 8 to verse 10, it appears that the physician, Luke, joins Paul, Silas, and Timothy, while they stay in Troas.

Messing With Your Plans – When your plans go wrong, one of the first things to remember is that you are in good company. Even the apostle, carefully and prayerfully planning where he should go, finds that his plans are not the Lord’s. Even more important, and this will come out throughout Philippians, is that Paul learns to remain content in every situation, because he believes and trusts in God’s sovereign hand (Phil 4:4, 6-7, 12).

The Macedonian Man (vv9-10) – Paul receives a vision in the night. This was not simply a dream. There were other times where Luke records that Paul received such visions (Acts 18:9, 23:11, 27:23f). Verse 10 hints that they have been trying to determine what they are to do for some time. They have been seeking God’s will. Note that it does not say that they have been seeking a vision. In fact, when the vision comes, they ‘lay these things down next to one another’ to conclude that they should go to Macedonia.

Discerning God’s Will – Even during the days where God spoke through visions, prophets, and angels, the Old Testament points us in a very different direction to seek after God’s will.

Proverbs 16:9 - *A man’s heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.*

Psalms 119:105 - *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.*

Proverbs 6:23 - *For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life.*

Proverbs 11:14 - *Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*

Proverbs 15:22 - *Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established.*

Proverbs 19:21 - *There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the Lord’s counsel—that will stand.*

In fact, James warns believers of the foolish and arrogant self-confidence of believing you know what is going to happen tomorrow (James 4:13-16). We must take care to lay our plans before the Lord and to trust in His ultimate and exhaustive sovereign care and goodness. We must curb our desire for visions and supernatural signs and learn from scripture how we are to ‘know God’s will’.

“Pleading” – The man in the vision is pleading, that is, begging, beseeching, imploring. Macedonia generally, and Philippi particularly, is in great need of good news. This stands in stark contrast to the ‘natural man’s’ perception of Philippi.

The “Pleading” Macedonian City of Philippi (v11-12) – Because of great historical events (read – God’s providence), Philippi had become the foremost city of Macedonia. It had been designated a Roman colony and with that many special privileges had been given to the populace. Thus, this ‘little Rome’ was a city very loyal to her mother.

A City In Great Need – For all of its wealth, security, and strong cultural pride, Philippi was in great darkness. God’s means of bringing the Light to such darkness is through the preaching of His Word (1 Cor 1:21). Jesus tells us to pray that God would raise up such laborers for these places of darkness (Luke 10:2).

But Why Philippi? – And why not Asia or Bithynia? Was one place more worthy than another? No (Rom 3:23). Was one place more open to the gospel than another? No (1 Cor 2:14). The answer to this can never be found in us. The answer is found in God. This is why God chose Israel (Deut 7:7-8). God’s choice is always by grace and never in the merit of those whom He chooses. But isn’t this unfair, unrighteous? No (Rom 9:14-16).

God Chose Philippi: God Chose You – “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” Why are you here today, and not in Bithynia? Why did you come to hear a sermon? Why were you born into a believing family? Why did you respond with repentance and faith? Why did it make sense to you? It is God’s grace. It is His mercy. It is His love. God owes you nothing other than the damnation of your soul and body to hell. But this is the grace of God – Jesus Christ came to save sinners. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.”

In every turn of events, we are to see the hand of God and the multitude of His mercies. And that will be the theme throughout Philippians. 1953 years ago, Paul received a vision – and the gospel went to Europe – and here we are.

Dave Hatcher - 01/18/04