

Paul and Places

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Gods, Glory and the Gold of Philippi

The Apostle Paul's visit to Macedonia marked the first time he set foot on European soil (Acts 16:11). However, this was not the first time the gospel was proclaimed in Europe (cf. Acts 2:10). In fact, the "Macedonian call" (Acts 16:9) seems to imply that there were already believers in Macedonia that needed help in evangelizing their province.

One writer commented, "Out of Macedonia, Alexander the Great once went to conquer the Eastern world but later from Macedonia the power of the gospel went to conquer the Western world of Paul's day" (Swift 1984:250).

Philippi played an important role in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. He also had an effective and lasting ministry in the lives of the believers in the Lord Jesus in Philippi.

Historical Overview

The earliest city that occupied the site of Philippi was called Dato. In 360 BC Greeks from the island of Thasos colonized it. They changed the name to Krenides, meaning "with many springs" because of the abundance of springs in the area (Diodorus of Sicily, Library of History 16:3:7; LCL 7:243). It was also famous for the fertile plain that stretched out before it as well as Mt. Pangaion to the southwest. To the east of Philippi was the Orbelos mountain range.

In the mountains of that area, there were gold and silver mines (Strabo Geography 7, fr 34; LCL 3:355). It was

these mines that caused friction between the Thracian tribes and the colonists from Thasos. In 356 BC, the colonists invited Philip II, the king of Macedonia, to help defend themselves from the Thracian tribes. Seeing the strategic importance of this city as well as the gold and silver mines, Philip II was more than happy to assist them. In the process of helping, he took over the city, enlarged and refortified its walls and renamed the city Philippi in his honor.

Diodorus of Sicily, a Greek historian of the first century BC, writing in his Library of History describes what happened next. “And then, turning to the gold mines in its territory, which were very scanty and insignificant, he increased their output so much by his improvements that they could bring him a revenue of more than a thousand talents. And because from these mines he had soon amassed a fortune, with the abundance of money he raised the Macedonian kingdom higher and higher to a greatly superior position, for with the gold which he struck [as coins] ... he organized a large force of mercenaries, and by using these coins for bribes induced many Greeks to become betrayers of their native lands” (Book 16:8:6,7; LCL 7:261). This is a classic example of the world’s Golden Rule. “He who has the gold makes the rules!”

Alexander the Great, the son of Philip II, was able to use the money to raise an army and pay his troops well. They swiftly conquered the Persian Empire, just as the Prophet Daniel predicted (Dan. 8:5-8; 11:3,4a).

The Romans conquered Macedonia in 168 BC and divided it into four parts. Philippi became the chief city of one of the districts (cf. Acts 16:12). The Romans also

built the via Egnatia, a military and commercial road that went across northern Greece between 146 and 120 BC. The Apostle Paul and his team were able to make effective use of this road for the spread of the gospel in the 1st century AD.

A pivotal battle in the history of the Roman Empire took place at Philippi. On the Ides of March (March 15, 44 BC) the tyrannical Julius Caesar was assassinated in Rome by a conspiracy led by two Senators, Brutus and Cassius. They misjudged the mood of the people of Rome and had to flee to Asia Minor because the people did not support the assassination. While there, they began to raise an army in order to reconquer Rome and reestablish it as a Republic. Brutus had the audacity to mint coins with his portrait on the obverse and on the reverse two daggers, a liberty cap and the words "EID MAR" (Eidibus Martiis)! (Molnar 1994:6-10). Mark Antony and Octavian (later to be known as Augusta) lead an army from Rome to Philippi in order to confront Brutus and Cassius. The Republican army of Brutus and Cassius had the clear advantage as far as its defensive position, access to supplies, finances and military tactics. However, the tired and ill supplied army of Mark Antony and Octavian defeated them. Upon recognizing their defeat, Brutus and Cassius committed suicide (cf. Acts 16:27).

The description of this battle can be read in the writings of the ancient historians Appian (Roman History 4:105-138), Dio Cassius (Roman History 47:35-49; LCL 5:189-217) and Plutarch (Parallel Lives, Brutus 38-53; LCL 6: 209-247 and Parallel Lives, Antony 22; LCL 9:183,185).

This defeat meant that Rome would have an imperial form of government and not a republican one. It ensured the worship of the deified dead emperor and would later be grounds for contention between the Christians and the Roman government. The Christians would refuse to worship the imperial cult.

After this battle, Philippi was enlarged and became a Roman colony and discharged soldiers were given fertile land to farm and settled in the city (Strabo, Geography 7, fr. 41; LCL 3:363). Luke was accurate when he said Philippi was a colony (Acts 16:12). After the Battle of Actium in 30 BC more soldiers were settled in Philippi. It should be no surprise that Paul used military terminology when he wrote his epistle to the church of Philippi. Some of the believers might have had relatives that had been in the Roman army. Paul called Epaphroditus “my fellow soldier” (Phil. 2:25).

The Visits of the Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul visited Philippi for the first time on his second missionary journey in AD 49/50. Following the principle set forth by the Lord Jesus, he went out “two-by-two” with his co-worker Silas (also known as Silvanus) and their disciple Timothy (cf. Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 10:1; Acts 15:40; 2 Tim. 2:2). Dr. Luke, the author of the gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts, escorted them from Alexandria Troas (Acts 16:10,11).

As Paul’s custom was, he sought out the Jewish people whenever he went into a new city (Rom. 1:16). His desire for the Jewish people was that they might come to faith in the Lord Jesus as their Messiah (Rom. 9:1-5; 10:1-3).

On Shabbat he found a group of women praying by the riverside (Acts 16:13). The phrase “where prayer was customarily made” may indicate there was a synagogue or prayer structure of some sort near the riverside. Recent excavations of the western necropolis of Philippi unearthed a Jewish burial inscription from the 2nd century AD that mentioned a synagogue in Philippi (Koukouli-Chrysantaki 1998:28-35, plate 11). The question is, was there an earlier one?

The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, a God-fearer from Thyatira. She and her household were baptized and she offered Paul and his team hospitality (Acts 16:14,15).

One day, while Paul, Luke and Silas were on their way to prayer, they were harassed by a slave girl possessed with the “spirit of divination” (“pythoness”). Apollo, the god of prophecy and the giver of oracles at his shrine in Delphi inspired this “spirit”. Not wanting an endorsement from the “enemy”, Paul cast the demon out of this girl (Acts 16:16-18; cf. Luke 4:31-37).

The owners of the slave girl seized Paul and Silas (but not Luke) and brought them before the magistrates at the Forum. They were accused of being Jews and causing trouble in Philippi. This anti-Semitism might stem from the fact that Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome the previous year because they were troublemakers (Acts 18:2; Suetonius, Deified Claudius 25:4; LCL 2:53).

Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. While there, they were “praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25). This joyous attitude while being persecuted was already set forth by James the son of

Zebedee (James 1:2-4) and Peter (1 Peter 1:5-9; 3:13-4:19).

At midnight, an earthquake struck and the Philippian jailer thought all the prisoners escaped. Thinking along the lines of Brutus and Cassius, he decided to commit suicide. Paul stopped him when he informed the jailer that nobody had escaped. The jailer, realizing that there was something different about Paul and Silas, asked them “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” In unison, they responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:25-31).

The magistrates decided to let Paul and Silas go. However, Paul knowing Roman law asked that the magistrates come and get them out. They wanted an apology because they were uncondemned Roman citizens. When the magistrates found out Paul and Silas were Romans, they were afraid. I suspect that Paul wanted to hold this over the heads of the magistrates. If they persecuted the church at Philippi or did not protect them, Paul would tell the authorities in Rome what had happened. There would be severe punishment and loss of a job if Rome found out (Acts 16:35-40; cf. I Thess. 2:2).

Paul knew that Roman citizenship had its privileges! However, he knew that his heavenly citizenship was more important. This citizenship would entitle him to a place in Heaven and a transformation of his earthly body, when the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ returned to earth (Phil. 3:20,21). This was in marked contrast to the emperors who were called “saviors” but could not do anything about immortality and eternal life (cf. I Tim. 1:17; 6:15,16; Witherington 1994:99-102).

With this, Paul, Silas and Timothy left Philippi on the Via Egnatia for Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). While ministering there, and probably in Corinth, the church at Philippi sent Paul some money to help with the work (Phil. 4:15,16). Paul thanked them for the gift, but prayed the Lord would bless them for their efforts (Phil. 4:17,19).

Paul visited Macedonia after an extended stay at Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Most likely Philippi was his first stop (Acts 20:1). After three months of traveling through Greece, he rejoined Luke at Philippi. Both proceeded to travel to Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:3-6).

The epistle of Philippians was written from prison in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment there (AD 60-62). He thanked the Lord for their fellowship in the gospel and expressed his desire to visit with them again (Phil. 1:3-8, 26,27; 2:24). He was also going to send Timothy to visit on his way to minister in Ephesus (Phil. 2:19-23; cf. I Tim. 1:3).

After Paul was released from his first imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:16), he went on a fourth missionary journey (Kent 1986:13-15,21,47-50). His desire was to go to Spain (Rom. 15:28). Church history seems to indicate that Paul visited this country. He was also on the island of Crete (Tit. 1:5) and wrote his first epistle to Timothy from Macedonia (I Tim. 1:3; 3:14,15). There is a good possibility that he wrote this epistle from Philippi before he went to Asia Minor.

Was Philippi Dr. Luke's Hometown?

Some scholars have suggested that Dr. Luke's hometown was Philippi. This is a possibility. When one examines

the pronouns in the book of Acts this observation is borne out. Up until chapter 16, Luke is writing about the work of Peter and Paul. When Paul, Silas and Timothy get to Alexandria Troas the pronouns change from “they/them” (Acts 16:7,8) to “us/we” (Acts 16:9,10). Dr. Luke escorts the group to Philippi (Acts 16:11,12). He is with them when they go to the place of prayer (Acts 16:13,16,17). When Paul and Silas leave Philippi, Dr. Luke stayed behind (Acts 17:1). Paul picks him up on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:5,6). Luke appears to have stayed in Philippi for at least six years. More than likely it was because it was his home.

After Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl, he and Silas were tried before the magistrates and accused of being Jewish, but Luke was not (Acts 16:19,20). Dr. Luke was a respected member of the community so they did not bring him before the magistrate. But also, Luke was a Gentile (cf. Col. 4:11,14), so the accusation of being Jewish would not have applied.

This possibility will never know for certain unless an archaeologist uncovers an inscription in Philippi with Dr. Luke’s name on it, although this is not outside the realm of possibility. A number of years ago an inscription was found in Corinth with the name of Erastus on it (Rom. 16:23; Acts 19:22; 2 Tim. 4:20).

The Book of Philippians

The central theme of the book of Philippians is: “the Philippians’ partnership in the gospel” (cf. Phil. 1:5,6; Swift 1984:237; Luter and Lee 1996). This theme is the reason Paul wrote to implore two sisters, Euodia and Syntyche, to be reconciled to one another and have the

same mind in the Lord (Phil. 4:2-3). Apparently these two sisters were murmuring and disputing and this was hindering the gospel work (Phil. 2:14). James, the son of Zebedee, addresses the issue of fighting in the church and states that the root cause of this problem is pride (James 4:1-12).

Paul uses an interesting word picture when he described the women as those who had “labored with me in the gospel” (Phil. 4:3 NKJV). This word comes from the gladiatorial arena of two gladiators that fought side by side against the beasts (Hawthorne 1983: 180; Witherington 1994: 105,106). In the second and third centuries AD (after the time of Paul), the theater of Philip II was converted into an arena for spectacles between gladiators and beasts (Koukouli-Chrysanthaki and Bakirtzis 1995:23,24). Imagine the gladiators going into the arena to fight the beasts and then turn on each other. The lion would turn to the bear in bewilderment and say, “Aren’t they suppose to be fighting us?” The bear would growl, “Who cares, once they finish each other off, we’ll have them both for lunch!” The apostle Paul would say, “Hey ladies, what’s wrong with this picture? You’re supposed to be fighting the “beasts”, not each other!” (cf. Eph. 6:10-17).

Paul brilliantly lays the theological foundation and solution to the problem before he addresses the women. This was the same pattern used by Nathan when he confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite. After Nathan told a parable about a rich man taking a poor man’s lamb, he asked David what should be done. David correctly responded, “The man ought to die”. Nathan

pointed to David and said, "You are the man!" (II Sam. 12:1-12).

The fighting was caused by pride. Apostle Paul addressed the subject of the mind of Christ that entailed humility in chapter 2. In that chapter, Paul gives four examples of humility; the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5-15), himself (Phil. 2:17,18), Timothy (Phil. 2:19-24), and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30). In chapter three, Paul addresses the issue of trusting the flesh.

One can imagine the first time this epistle was read in the church at Philippi. Euodia is sitting on one side of the room listening and thinking to herself, "Amen, preach it Paul, we need to be more humble." On the other side of the room Syntyche is saying, "That's right Paul, we should not trust the arm of the flesh." When chapter 4 was read, Paul in essence said, "Euodia and Syntyche, you need to kiss and make up!" That must have been a tense, yet powerful, moment in the meeting.

A plausible background / setting for Philippians 2:1-10 might be a prominent building on the north side of the Via Egnatia on the edge of the Forum (marketplace). This building was the Haroon for the cult of dead king Philip II (Koukouli-Chrysantaki 1998:19). People worshiped him, believing him to be a god (Fredricksmeier 1979).

Philip II was, in many ways, like King Uzziah of Judah. Both had material possessions (gold and silver) and a strong military, and because of that, both had hearts that were lifted up with pride (2 Chron. 26; Isa. 2). In the spring of 336 BC, Philip II celebrated the wedding of his daughter Kleopatra to Alexandros, king of Molossia, in the theater at Aigai. Diodorus describes the wedding

procession and Philip's arrogance. "Philip included in the procession statues of the Twelve Gods wrought with great artistry and adorned with a dazzling show of wealth to strike awe in the beholder, and along with these was conducted a thirteenth statue, suitable for a god, that of Philip himself, so that the king established himself enthroned among the Twelve Gods" (Library of History 16:92:5; LCL 8:95). Moments later he was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. Truly "pride goes before destruction and the haughty spirit before the fall" (Prov. 16:18)! Another example of a king struck down in a theater because he thought he was a god was Herod Agrippa I at Caesarea (Acts 12:20-24; Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 19:343-350; LCL 9:377-381).

Diodorus of Sicily goes on to summarize the life of Philip in these terms: "Such was the end of Philip, who had made himself the greatest of the kings in Europe in his time, and because of the extent of his kingdom had made himself a throned companion of the Twelve Gods (Book 16:95:1; LCL 8:101).

I believe the Apostle Paul was thinking about the Haroon of Philip II when he penned the words, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but he made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8 NKJV). With these verses, he set forth the ultimate example of humility, the death of the Lord Jesus, for the two sisters to follow.

Paul went on to say, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:9-11 NKJV). With one sentence from Paul’s pen, he has set the Lord Jesus, God manifest in human flesh, apart from every god or goddess in Philippi, even Philip II, for whom the city was named and the people worshiped!

Paul had admonished the believers to “esteem others better than themselves” and to “look out for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3,4). A Biblical example from the life of the Lord Jesus that Paul might have had in mind was when the Lord Jesus paid the Temple tax for Himself and Peter. This is a great example of humility and esteeming Peter better than Himself (Matt. 17:24-27; Franz 1997:81-87).

In chapter three, Paul writes about having confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:4). In essence, he is saying, “If anybody could gain God’s righteousness by works, it would be me. I was circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5,6). Yet Paul realized all these things were “rubbish” (NKJV) when it comes to gaining God’s righteousness (Phil. 3:8,9).

Paul used the vulgar term *skybala* to describe his utter revulsion of the qualifications he thought would merit

his salvation. Today we would use a four-letter word for excrement! Shocking? Yes, but in so doing, Paul was following the example of the prophet Isaiah who describes all our righteousnesses as “filthy rags” (64:6). In today’s vernacular, that would translate to menstrual rags! (cf. also Zech. 3:3-5).

There is absolutely nothing we can do to gain God’s righteousness. If we try to work for our salvation it would be an affront to God because He abhors anything we do to merit salvation because it detracts from the finished work of His Son on the Cross.

To the west of Basilica B of the excavations at Philippi, there are remains of a public toilet (Koukouli-Chrysanthaki and Bakirtzis 1995: 45,46). This structure was built in the 2nd century AD (after the time of Paul), yet it should remind us of the skybala. Paul realized that the only way to gain salvation was to be “found in Christ”. Only He could give us His righteousness whereby we could stand before a Holy God. This righteousness was freely given by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus and not by keeping the Law (3:9).

The Glory in Philippi

Paul describes the Thessalonian believers as “our glory and joy” (I Thess. 2:20). He would have said the same thing of those in Philippi, but he also calls them his “joy, crown and beloved” (Phil. 4:1). When we read the account in Acts 16, we see the Lord opening the hearts of Lydia and her household (16:14,15). Also, the demon-possessed girl was delivered from Satan’s hold (16:19). The Philippian jailer and his household believing on the Lord Jesus Christ (16:31,33).

In his letter to the Philippian church he mentions the Praetorian guards (“palace guards” NKJV, 1:13) who had heard the gospel while Paul was in chains in Rome. This would have been significant for the people at Philippi. Some of the coins of Philippi from the reign of Claudius-Nero were minted with the Latin inscription COHOR PRAE PHIL. This commemorated the “settlement of veterans from the Praetorian cohort at Philippi” (Burnett, et. al. 1992: 208; coin 1651). Perhaps some of the believers in Philippi knew Praetorian guards in Rome and would be interested in Paul’s outreach there. This would help them to pray more effectively for their former colleagues and friends (Phil. 1:12).

The Peace of God

Philippi was the scene of a terrible battle in 42 BC and peace in the region was shattered. Emperors Claudius and Nero seemed to have brought a measure of peace to the region. However, neither of them could bring peace to the hearts of men and women.

The Apostle Paul had written to the church at Rome and stated how they could have “peace with God” through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). To the church at Philippi he will write about the “peace of God” which will surpass all understanding (Phil. 4:7). This peace would come by meditating on the God of Peace and the things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, a good report, virtuous and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8,9).

Oh sinner, do you have “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1)? Oh saint, do you have the “peace of God” (Phil. 4:7-9) and know “the power of His resurrection” even while suffering (Phil. 3:10)?

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Paul at Isthmia --Going For The Gold!

A sport shoe company ran an advertisement during the 1996 Olympics, with the line, “You do not win the silver medal, you lose the gold!” That line caught the essence of athletic competition. The athlete enters the competition with the goal of winning the event, not losing it. The legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi, tried to instill this winning attitude in his football players when he said, “Winning is not everything, it is the only thing.”

The epitaph of a boxer named Agathos Daimon found on a funerary monument at Olympia in Greece said:

Here he died boxing in the stadium

Having prayed to Zeus for a wreath or death. Age 35.
Farewell.

For this competitor, second place was not an option. He went for the gold and died trying to win it (Milavic 1992: 11).

The Apostle Paul described the Christian life in terms of athletic metaphors. His goal was to win the “race” of the Christian life, not to lose it (Phil. 3:12-14; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 4:6-8). He died winning the race!

Paul at Corinth

Dr. Luke does not explicitly state why Paul went to Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). However, the discerning Bible student, knowing the historical-geography of the city of Corinth could surmise three reasons for Paul going to this city. First, Corinth was on the strategic lines of communications. There was

the major east-west maritime trade route that went via the Isthmus of Corinth, which was a vital link in trade between Rome and the eastern part of the empire. There were also the north-south land roads that went from the Greek mainland to the Peloponnesos. Many people passed through this area and Corinth would be strategic for the spread of the gospel. The second reason for Paul going to Corinth was that there was a Jewish community in Corinth (Acts 18:4). As a general rule, Paul sought out the Jewish community because he had a desire to reach his kinsmen according to the flesh with the gospel (Rom. 1:16; 9:1-5). The third reason was that the Isthmian Games were held during the spring of AD 51 and Paul knew there would be many people from throughout Greece at this event. The games were a golden opportunity to reach many with the gospel. All three reasons for going to Corinth have one common denominator. The Apostle Paul wanted to reach as many people as he could with the gospel. The message that Paul preached to these people was that the Lord Jesus died for all the sins of fallen humanity and rose again from the dead on the third day to prove that sin had been paid for. Paul taught that the Lord offers eternal life, a home in heaven and forgiveness of sins to any and all who would put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. Good works, baptism, or any other meritorious deeds had nothing to do with one's salvation (1 Cor. 15:3,4; Eph. 2:8,9; Rom. 4:5; 5:8).

The Isthmian Games

Athletes throughout Greece would converge on the Isthmian Games every two years during the spring. These games were in honor of the Greek god Poseidon

(the Roman counterpart was Neptune), the “earthshaking god of the sea”. The most prominent building at Isthmia was a temple dedicated to Poseidon. There was also a stadium, theater and hippodrome used for the athletic competitions. A small structure called the Palaimon was situated near the Poseidon temple. Within this structure, the athlete took an oath to abide by the rules of the Games. If they broke the oath, they were disqualified from the Games.

The athletes would compete in footraces, wrestling, boxing, throwing the discus and javelin, the long jump, chariot racing, poetry reading and singing. (You did not know singing was considered an athletic event, did you?). According to several inscriptions that are contemporary to Paul, women competed in these games as well. The inscriptions mention women winning the 200-meter dash as well as the war-chariot races.

Since there were no permanent accommodations at the site, the people stayed in tents in the surrounding fields. Fixing or selling tents would have given Paul and his new found colleagues, Aquila and Priscilla, ample employment as well as opportunities to share the gospel with those attending the Games (Acts 18:3). Joining him also were two of his disciples, Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

Paul’s Use of Athletic Terminology

Let us examine four passages of Scripture where Paul probably has the Isthmian Games in mind when he penned the words.

The first passage is 1 Cor. 9:24-27. This section introduces the next portion concerning Old Testament

examples of believers who were tempted with various sins (10:1-13). Paul encourages them to exercise self-discipline in their Christian life so they will not be disqualified from the race.

Unlike the modern Olympic games where gold, silver and bronze medals are awarded to the first three places respectively, in the ancient games, only the winner received the crown. There was no second place award – winning was everything! Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth to run the race of the Christian life to obtain the prize (verse 24). According to Paul, believers are to “compete” by being temperate or exercising self-control, in their personal behavior (verse 25a). In the Isthmian Games, those who won the competition were awarded a celery crown for the prize. Paul describes it as a “perishable crown”, yet focuses the believers attention on the goal of the “heavenly race”, an “imperishable crown” (verse 25b).

The two word pictures that Paul uses in verse 26 are that of a runner who runs focused on the finish line and the boxer who doesn’t shy away from his opponent like a shadow boxer, but rather engages him to the finish. In the Olympics, boxing was the most brutal of events. The boxer wrapped his knuckles with leather straps. In the Roman competition, which the Isthmian games probably followed, the wrapping “incorporated lead, irons and even spikes”! The athletes boxed, sometimes up to four hours, until one competitor was knocked out. Or one boxer “signaled defeat by a raised index finger” (Milavic 1992: 14). Boxing was serious and brutal competition. At times, the Christian life could be also (2 Tim. 3:12).

Paul goes on to say that he disciplines his body so he will not be disqualified from the Christian “race” (verse 27). Paul is not saying he could lose his salvation. He knew that was eternally secure in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:12; Rom. 8:31-39). He was, however, concerned that the Lord would not be able to use him in preaching the gospel to others and that he would suffer the loss of rewards as well as be “ashamed at His coming” at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-17; 1 John 2:28; 2 Tim. 2:11-13).

The second athletic passage to examine is 1 Tim. 4:7,8. Paul admonishes Timothy to “exercise yourself to godliness”. He had in mind the gymnasium, which is common in every Greek City, where the athlete would spend time exercising his body in preparation for the upcoming games. The priority for the Christian should be on exercising the “spiritual life” before the “physical life.” Paul is not against exercising one's body because he points out there are some temporal benefits for it. However, exercising the spiritual life should be a priority because it has both temporal and eternal consequences.

The third passage is 2 Tim. 2:5. Paul states, “If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” Most likely Paul had in mind the oaths that the athletes took in the underground cave of the Palaimon. Here, the athletes swore that they would follow the rules in their training as well as not cheat in order to win the Isthmian crown. In the Christian “race”, we must follow the rules as well. In order to know what the rules are, one must know the “Rule Book”, the Word of God. It behooves the believer in the Lord Jesus to read, study and apply the Word of God to his / her life.

The final passage, 2 Tim. 4:6-8, was penned by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome awaiting his execution in June of AD 67. One of the archaeologists that excavated at Isthmia described Paul's words here in this way. "The words in Greek have a more distinctly athletic flavor. To bring this out the passage might be rendered: 'I have competed in the good athletic games; I have finished the foot race, I have kept the pledge (i.e. to compete honestly, with reference to the athletic oath). What remains to me is to receive the crown of righteousness, which has been put aside for me; it will be awarded to me by the Lord, the just umpire, on that day' (an allusion to the last day of the games when, presumably, the prizes were handed out to the winners)" (Broneer 1962:31, footnote 23).

It is interesting that Paul brings up the same two word pictures that he uses in 1 Cor. 9, the boxer and runner, when he describes his disciplined Christian life. Now at the end of his life, the discipline had paid off. He was a winner and the fear of being disqualified is behind him.

Paul addressed this passage to his disciple Timothy who had spent time with him in Corinth during his second missionary journey. He instructed Timothy to go to (Alexandria) Troas and bring his winter garments and books that he left in the care of Carpus (2 Tim. 4:13,21). Paul apparently had left them in Troas during his fourth missionary journey on his way to Nicopolis where he was eventually arrested and taken to Rome (Tit. 3:12).

At this point, permit me to use my "sanctified imagination". On his journey from Troas to Nicopolis, Paul stopped in Corinth to meet the believers. While there, he heard of Emperor Nero's performance in the

singing competition or actually saw it himself. Emperor Nero was visiting Corinth in order to inaugurate the beginning of the Isthmian canal project. While there, he wanted to compete in the Isthmian Games, so the people accommodated him by changing the date of the event to the fall of AD 66.

Suetonius, a Roman historian, wrote about Nero's singing exploits in Greece in his *Lives of the Caesars*, Nero. He described Nero's voice as "weak and husky" (Nero 20:1) and even commented that one of Nero's generals, probably tongue-in-cheek, called it a "divine voice" (Nero 21:1). The singing competition did not involve just one song, but a whole oratorio usually lasting several hours. Suetonius describes some humorous events that transpired while Nero sang. "While he was singing no one was allowed to leave the theatre even for the most urgent reasons. And so it is said that some women gave birth to children there, while many who were worn out with listening and applauding, secretly leaped from the walls, since the gates at the entrance were closed, or feigned death and were carried out as if for burial" (Nero 23:2). This is hardly a description of a prize-winning performance. Yet Nero won almost all the contests he entered. How did he do it?

There were four ways Nero could win the singing competition. First, he could win on his own merits because he had an excellent voice. Suetonius put the lie to that. Second, he could bribe his competition to "throw" the contest. Some of them did take the money Nero offered them (Nero 23:2). One greedy competitor thought he could take advantage of this and ask for 10 talents (of gold?). Nero thought this was extortion so he

reverted to his third option, which was to send his thugs out to intimidate this competitor. Needless to say, he was convinced to drop out of the event! The final way for him to win was to bribe the judges. That Nero did very effectively by offering the judges Roman citizenship and a large sum of money (Nero 23:3; 24:2)!

I believe Paul was aware of what transpired at Isthmia and used this as the backdrop for his final words to Timothy. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who love His appearing." The Apostle Paul knew he had played by the rules and that he had won the race. The Lord Jesus, the righteous Judge, would reward him for his victory. This was a marked contrast with Nero who did not play by the rules and had bribed the unrighteous judges!

Perhaps Paul stopped at the office of the Agonothetes, the president of the Isthmian Games, at the southern side of the Agora of Corinth. He noticed the athletic scene on the mosaic floor. In the midst of the circular panel an athlete stood wearing a leafy crown and holding a palm branch, and giving thanks to the seated Eutychia, the goddess of good fortune, for his recent victory. Paul probably chuckled when he wrote Timothy because his crown came from the Lord Jesus, not Eutychia (2 Tim. 4:8) and it was to Him he gave all the glory for the strength to stand firm in the conflict (2 Tim. 4:18).

Paul's Outreach Strategy

There are at least three lessons that can be gleaned from Paul's visit to the Isthmian Games. The first is that he went where the people were. There are some Christians who have expressed concerns about Christians going to athletic events, especially the Olympics, because of the commercialism and the pagan New Age influence. Yet this is nothing new. Paul had Poseidon and commercialism to contend with at the Isthmian Games. It would be helpful to keep in mind that Paul did not go to the Isthmian Games to worship Poseidon, he went to witness to people! Christians should take advantages of local and state fairs, athletic events, and religious festivals to present the gospel to a multitude of people.

Second, when Paul communicated with the people in his epistles, he used familiar illustrations. His epistles are peppered with athletic terminology (Sauer 1956: 30-67). The teacher of the Word of God should know his audience and use word-pictures from everyday life that is familiar to them. In the event that believers are going to large events to pass out tracts, the gospel literature should be pertinent to the event and clearly presents the gospel.

Third, Paul was not a "Lone Ranger" missionary when he engaged in mission work. He always did his outreach with others. He was able to work side by side with transplanted "locals", Aquila and Priscilla as well as continue his discipleship of Silvanus and Timothy (2 Tim. 2:1,2).

The Challenge

We in the assemblies claim to follow the New Testament pattern of worship and missions. Do we? Are we seeking the lost where they are at? Do we speak in terms that people can understand? Are we disciplining younger people to continue the work after we are gone? Well might we be imitators of Paul as he followed the example of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

Remember that we are not running the “race” for celery leaves, but eternal crowns!

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Skeletons On The Table

Gordon Franz and Ernie McGinnis

Introduction

The term “skeletons in the closet” conjures up secrets from our past that we do not want other people to know about. But here is an unusual twist from the ancient Greco-Roman world: skeletons on the table! Recently we visited the Getty Villa in Malibu, CA. Gordon was working on a self-guided tour of the Biblically related objects in the Villa for the students in the Talbot School of Theology’s Bible Lands program, and Ernie was photographing the objects on display for the courses he instructs on Greek and Roman archaeology at Burbank High School. In the Coin Room (212), we observed a small bronze skeleton. When Ernie saw this object he said with excitement, “Cool, my high school kids would love this!” Gordon stared at it with a quizzed look on his face and said, “What was this used for?” Well, inquiring minds wanted to know, so we began our search, (not in closets), but on library bookshelves!

The Skeleton at the Getty

The small bronze skeleton was acquired by the Getty Museum in 1978 and published in their museum journal (Frel 1980: 171-172; accession number: 78.AB.307). The Romans called these skeletons a *larva convivalis*, which means “banquet ghost.” The Latin term *convivalis* bases its roots on the term *vivo*, which literally means “to be alive” or “to be lively”. The term itself suggests not only the contradictions between life and death, but also the

Greco-Roman view of the futility of life in the face of impending death.

The skeleton in the Getty collection is made of bronze and is preserved to a height of 6.6 centimeters. It has its skull, collarbone, ribs, spine and pelvic bones and left femur bone. The arms, right leg, and the lower portion of the left leg are missing. The metal “joints and sockets” can still be seen where the limbs were attached to each other in order to give the skeleton flexibility, so when shaken it gives the impression of jumping or dancing. This skeleton reminded people “of the brevity of human life and the necessity of profiting from the short time which remained” (1980:171).

There are ten similar skeletons scattered in museums throughout Europe; one is made of silver, another of wood and the rest are made of bronze. Dr. Frel has dated all these skeletons from the first century BC to the first century AD and associated them with Roman Epicureanism (1980:171, 172). Epicureanism bases its roots in the ancient Greek philosophy of Epicurius of Samos (341-270 BC) who taught man’s greatest accomplishment is to be found in his tranquility of mind, which is subject to those most base activities that bring man his fleshly pleasures. Epicureans believed that the gods existed, but they were impersonal and off somewhere living a life of eternal, undisturbed happiness. They thought that the gods should be admired and respected, but not to expect favors or even punishment from them (Furley 1996:533). The Apostle Paul had some encounters with Epicurean philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:18).

A picture of this skeleton can be seen at the Getty Museum website:

<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=9522>

Party Time in Puteoli

Titus Petronius Arbitor lived during the reigns of Emperors Claudius and Nero. Tacitus, a Roman historian (ca. AD 55-AD 120), recounts some aspects of Petronius' life this way: "He was a man whose day was passed in sleep, his nights in the social duties and amenities of life: other industry may raise to greatness —Petronius had idled into fame. Nor was he regarded, like the common crowd of spendthrifts, as a debauchee and wastrel, but as the finished artist of extravagance. His words and actions had a freedom and a stamp of self-abandonment which rendered them doubly acceptable by an air of native simplicity. Yet as proconsul of Bithynia, and later as consul, he showed himself a man of energy and competent to affairs. Then, lapsing into habit, or copying the features, of vice, he was adopted into the narrow circle of Nero's intimates as his Arbiter of Elegance; the jaded emperor finding charm and delicacy in nothing save what Petronius had commended" (Annals 16.18; LCL 5:363-365). In other words, Petronius was a competent, happy-go-lucky, administrator, yet also a consummated "party animal" par excellent!

As an intimate with Nero, Petronius was falsely accused by his rival, Tigellinus, of being involved in the Piso conspiracy to overthrow Nero. When this was known, Petronius took matters into his own hands and committed suicide in AD 66, by slitting his arteries and

slowly bleeding to death as he ate his final meal listening to music and poetry. He died, but not before revealing the skeletons in Nero's closet! Tacitus goes on to say, "Not even in his will did he follow the routine of suicide by flattering Nero and Tigellinus or another of the mighty, but — prefixing the names of the various catamites [boys kept for sexual purposes] and women - detailed the imperial debauches and the novel features of each act of lust, and sent the document under seal to Nero. His signet-ring he broke, lest it should render dangerous service later (Annals 16:19; LCL 5:367, brackets added by authors).

Most likely, Petronius was the author of the satiric novel, *Satyricon*, written during the reign of Emperor Nero. In chapters 26-78 of this lengthy novel (LCL 43-183), he described a debaucherous party, a *Cena Trimalchionis*, (Latin for "banquet of Trimalchio", the host of the meal) at the home of a freedman named Trimalchio, most likely in Puteoli (Harrison 1996:1150).

At one point in this extravagant comic meal, served with exotic dishes and lavish "entertainment", the host, Trimalchio, brings in vintage wine that was said to be 100 years old. He notes, "Ah me, so wine lives longer than miserable man. So let us be merry." Petronius goes on to say that the guests "drank and admired each luxury in detail, a slave brought in a silver skeleton, made so that its joints and sockets could be moved and bent in every direction. He threw it down once or twice on the table so that the supple sections showed several attitudes, and Trimalchio said appropriately: 'Alas for us poor mortals, all that poor man is is nothing. So we shall all be, after the world below takes us away. Let us live

then while it can go well with us'" (Satyricon 34; LCL 61).

The bronze skeleton on display at the Getty Villa is the kind of object mentioned by Petronius. Interestingly, a silver skeleton was found in the excavations at Pompeii, not far from Puteoli. It is now on display in the Museo Nazionale in Naples (Frel 1980:171, footnote 2; Caetani-Lovatelli 1895:10, fig. 1). The Apostle Paul, Dr. Luke and Aristarchus visited the believers in Puteoli for seven days as they made their way to Rome for the first time in AD 60 (Acts 27:2; 28:13).

The Greek historian Herodotus (484 —ca. 430 BC), describes drinking bouts at banquets in Egypt several hundred years before the time of Petronius. He wrote: "At rich men's banquets, after dinner a man carries round a wooden image of a corpse in a coffin, painted and carved in exact imitation, a cubit or two cubits long. This he shows to each of the company, saying 'Drink and make merry, but look on this; for such shalt thou be when thou art dead.' Such is the custom at their drinking-bouts" (Persian Wars 2:78; LCL 1:365).

Eat, Drink and be Merry?

The Mosaic Law describes the punishment for a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his parents, even after being disciplined by them. The parents would bring him to the elders of the city and state that he was a stubborn and rebellious son, and also a glutton and a drunkard. If he was found guilty, all the men of the city would stone the rebellious son to death (Deut. 21:18-21).

Solomon, the wisest man in his generation, passed on some wisdom to his son: “Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags” (Prov. 23:19-21).

Yet this wise man (Eccl. 12:9; cf. I Kings 4:29-34), nicknamed Koheleth (“the preacher”), anticipating the Epicurean philosophy, put eating and drinking in their proper perspective. He begins and ends his sermon by stating: “Vanity of vanities. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2; 12:8), but sets this concept in the context of his concluding remarks: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:13, 14; see also 11:9, 10).

The Apostle Paul has both these themes in mind when he penned his epistles to the Romans and the Corinthians. He understood the whole creation to be subject to futility, or vanity (Rom. 8:18-22), and also that the believers in the Lord Jesus will one day appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive rewards for the work they do in their bodies for God’s glory (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2Cor. 5:9, 10).

The theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes is the search for the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of life. Solomon states: “He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their

lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor — it is the gift of God” (Eccl. 3:11-13). The concept of eating and drinking and enjoying the fruits of one’s labor reoccurs over and over in the book (Eccl. 2:24; 3:12, 13; 3:22; 5:18, 19; 8:15; 9:7-9).

God has put eternity in the hearts of people who wish to know the end from the beginning, but who will not fully understand the plans and purposes of God this side of eternity. Thus, the believer in the Lord Jesus must walk by faith and not by sight, believing that God is sovereign and in control of history and all things will work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). While walking by faith, they are to eat and drink and enjoy the labor of their hands because it is a gift from God. [For a full development of the theme of the book of Ecclesiastes, see Wright 1972:133-150].

The Epicureans, on the other hand, eat and drink to excess, and do not recognize that life is a gift from God and have no thought of a future judgment. Petronius, who did not labor with his hands, exemplified this philosophy. For him, life was one big party. He thought, “Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!”

Jesus, a Glutton and Winebibber?

Jesus ate with tax-collectors and sinners, and was falsely accused of being a glutton and winebibber (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). Apparently He ate at some extravagant banquets and one wonders if a silver or bronze skeleton was thrown on the table during these meals.

Ironically, it was Jesus that held the key that unlocked the door to the meaning of life, as well as eternity. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 9:56; 19:10), and to give His life for a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). The Lord Jesus was sinless, (He had no skeletons in His closet), so as God manifest in human flesh, He could die on the Cross and pay for all the sins (the "skeletons in our closets") of humanity (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; James 1:13). He rose again from the dead three days later to prove that sin had been paid for, Satan conquered, and death vanquished.

He offers the free gift of eternal life and God's righteousness to any and all, including Petronius and other Epicureans, who would put their trust in Him and Him alone for their salvation, and not their works or any merits of their own (Rom. 4:1-8; 5:8; Phil. 3:9). All who trust in Him would receive an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-10). Since believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will have new bodies and live forever in Heaven; at this banquet they will also sing the lines from Handel's Messiah, "O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Hosea 13:14; 1 Cor. 15:55, 57). Alas, there will be no servants walking around that banquet throwing skeletons on the table!

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Lovers of Husbands and Children

Introduction

Ancient funerary monuments, sarcophagi, and ossuaries can tell much about the dead that can be instructive for the living today. The inscriptions about the dead can tell the living today what life was like in the past and can teach us lessons for life today. A visit to a cemetery can be an interesting, instructive, and a very informative experience.

When I was a student, and later a field trip instructor, at the Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem, I would give tours of the Protestant cemetery located behind the old Bishop Gobat School on Mount Zion. This cemetery contained the graves of the “Who’s Who” of the 19th and early 20th century Protestants living in Jerusalem. Most would recognize the name Horatio Spafford (1828-1888), the composer of the well loved hymn “It Is Well With My Soul.” As an archaeologist, I was keenly interested in the gravestones of Dr. Conrad Schick (1822-1901), an architect and early explorer of Jerusalem; Sir Flinders Petrie (1853-1942), the father of modern Biblical Archaeology; Dr. Clarence Fisher (1876-1941), one of the excavators of Samaria; James Leslie Starkey (1895-1938), the first excavator of Lachish; and other archaeologists and explorers of Jerusalem. As a believer in the Lord Jesus, I was moved by the epitaphs on some of the tombstones that expressed the assurance of eternal life for those who had placed their trust in the Lord Jesus as their personal Savior (I John 5:13).

The Older Women in the Church

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to his co-worker, Titus, who was laboring on the island of Crete that instructed him to “set in order the things that are lacking [in the churches on Crete], and appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5, all Scripture quotes are from the New King James Bible). He also told Titus to instruct the people in the churches about “things which are proper for sound doctrine” (2:1).

Of the older women in the churches, the Apostle Paul says they should be “reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – that they admonish the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God may not be blasphemed” (2:3-5). I would like to look at two phrases in this admonition: “to be lovers of (their) husbands, lovers of (their) children (philandrous einai philoteknous).”

Funerary Inscriptions

The epitaphs on tombstones reveal much about an individual and how people viewed their life. In the graveyard of Trinity Church Wall Street in New York City is the tombstone of Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804). Among other things, he was an army officer in the American Revolution, the first Secretary of the Treasury (1789-1795) and lost his life in a duel with Aaron Burr the vice president of the United States. His epitaph reads: “In testimony of their respect for the Patriot of incorruptible integrity, the Soldier of approved valour, the Statesman of consummate wisdom; whose

talents and virtues will be admired by grateful posterity long after this marble shall have mouldered into dust.” The one thing we admire about Hamilton today is that we can carry him around in our wallet because he is on the front of the ten dollar bill! I can also report that after 204 years, his marble gravestone is still there. It has survived the air pollution in New York City, as well as the September 11th attack.

A Sarcophagus from Aphrodisias

The ancient city of Aphrodisias is located in the Caria region of southwestern Asia Minor in Turkey today. It was named after its patron goddess Aphrodites, the goddess of love and beauty, and had an impressive sanctuary built in her honor. The city was situated next to a marble quarry and was famous throughout the Greek and Roman world for the marble statues that were sculptured there.

Just outside the entrance of the Museum of Aphrodisias, there is a marble sarcophagus that was found in the area at the end of the 19th century. On it there is a Greek inscription with three panels that describe why this sarcophagus was made and who was placed in it. It said that the city council and the people of Aphrodisias wanted to honor the deceased – Pereitas Kallimedes, and his wife Tatia, because of certain characteristics and virtues they had observed in this couple. On the third panel, on the right side of the sarcophagus, is the dedication to Tatia. It is translated: “The City Council and the People honored Tatia, daughter of Diogenes, son of Diogenes, grandson of Demrtrios Phileman, a woman who was modest, who loved her husband and children and throughout her life was endowed with dignity and

virtue, and who was wife of Pereitas Kallimedes, son of Diogenes, grandson of Apollonios a man who acted piously and munificently in his public offices, embassies and public duties and in his capacity as temple overseer” [emphasis mine]. She was known for her modesty, dignity, virtue, and she loved her husband and children. The same Greek words for “loved her husband and children” are used on this epitaph that is mentioned in Titus 2:4. There are hundreds of tombstones and sarcophagi in the Greek and Roman world that has these two phrases on them describing the deceased women, several were even found on the island of Crete.

Conclusion

There is no indication that Tatia was a Christian (her husband was the priest of a pagan temple), but we do know that she exemplified some of the things the Apostle Paul instructed the older women to teach the younger women to do in the book of Titus. Today, the older Christian woman should be modeling by her life and reaching by her lips, so that the younger Christian woman will know how to love her husband and children. Perhaps someday he tombstone will also read, “She loved her husband, she loved her children.”

Aristarchus

Introduction

Queen Victoria, the longest reigning monarch of the British Empire during the 19th century, reportedly said: “I thank God for the letter M”. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, she knew I Cor. 1:26. It says: “For you see your calling brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” The verse did not say not any noble, but rather, not many. Because there was an “m” in front of “any”, she was included in those who were called to Christian service. She was used of the Lord during her lengthy reign.

Aristarchus’ name hints at a noble birth or an aristocratic upbringing. Yet he was one whom God called to a nobler pursuit, the work of the ministry, and was used mightily for His glory.

Aristarchus the Thessalonian

The name Aristarchus was a common Macedonian name and means “best ruling”. The word “aristocrat” is at the root of his name (Thomas 1983-84:150). One gets the distinct impression that he was born into a noble family and would have been part of the ruling class.

Aristarchus was a Diaspora Jew living in the free Greek city of Thessalonica in the Province of Macedonia. His name appears three times in the Book of Acts. The first time Aristarchus appears in Scripture, he is identified as a Macedonian (19:29). The second time he is mentioned, it is stated that he is a Thessalonian (20:4). The final

time he appears, he is identified as a Macedonian of Thessalonica (27:2). The Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the church in Colosse states that Aristarchus was “of the circumcision”, i.e. of Jewish heritage (Col. 4:10, 11; contra Thomas 1983-84: 150).

Scripture is silent as to when and how Aristarchus came to faith in the Lord Jesus. The first record of a gospel witness in Thessalonica was around AD 50 when Paul, Silas and Timothy visited the city during the second missionary journey of the Apostle Paul (Acts 17:1-9, 13).

Dr. Luke recounts that there was “a synagogue of the Jews [in Thessalonica]. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ was to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded” (Acts 17:1-4). Those persuaded included Jewish people in the synagogue as well as devout Greeks and leading women, apparently part of the aristocracy of the city (17:4).

It is quite possible that Aristarchus came to faith in the Lord Jesus as his Messiah during the ministry of Paul, Silas and Timothy; or, if his mother was one of the “leading women”, she could have shared the gospel with him and he trusted Christ as his Savior.

Aristarchus is an example of a believer exercising spiritual gifts

One individual has speculated that the person going to Corinth with Titus in AD 56 was Aristarchus (Redlich 1913: 217-218). Paul describes this un-named brother as one “whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the

churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift" (II Cor. 8:18, 19). The words "to travel with us" is the Greek word "sunekdemos". This word appears only one other time in the New Testament and that is in Acts 19:29. In this passage the two Macedonians, Gaius and Aristarchus, are described as "Paul's travel companions". While the connection with Aristarchus is based on the rare use of the word, if this logic is followed, Gaius could also be the unnamed brother.

But let's assume for a minute that the unnamed brother is Aristarchus. What could we learn from this passage? His praise, or proclamation, was in the gospel. In other words, he was an evangelist. About seven years after he had come to faith in the Lord Jesus he was actively involved in the work of the Lord and exercising his spiritual gift of an evangelist (Eph. 4:11).

The Spirit of God has given each believer in the Lord Jesus Christ at least one spiritual gift (some may have more). These gifts were given to the Body of Christ in order to profit all in the Body and to build up the Body of Christ numerically and spiritually (Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:4-14:40; Eph. 4:7-16). Each believer should seek to determine what spiritual gift they have and to exercise that gift to God's honor and glory.

Aristarchus is an example of a believer being persecuted for righteousness' sake

The Lord Jesus instructed His disciples when He gave the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for

so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11, 12). The Apostle Paul would later write: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:12). These words would become personal to Aristarchus and his fellow Macedonian, Gaius.

The Apostle Paul had a very effective ministry in Ephesus for two years and three months during his third missionary journey (AD 52-55). It began in the synagogue of Ephesus, but moved to the School of Tyrannus where he, Timothy and others disciplined younger men in Biblical theology, evangelism and church planting (cf. II Tim. 2:2). This ministry was so effective that Dr. Luke reported, “that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

It is at this point that Aristarchus first appears in the Book of Acts. He and Gaius, his fellow Thessalonians, are described as Paul’s “traveling companions.” One wonders if they had come to faith during Paul’s visit to their hometown during his second missionary journey and then traveled with him as disciples in Paul’s “seminary on the road” with “on the job training” for three or four years. Or, were they laboring with Paul in the School of Tyrannus and traveling with him when he made short trips outside the city. Scripture is silent with regards to their travels.

The city of Ephesus was one of the major trade centers in the ancient world. It was also the location of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Temple of Artemis / Diana. Tourist and pilgrims would flock from all over the Greco-Roman world to visit this magnificent

edifice to the goddess of the hunt. As with any religious tourist attraction, people would be hawking their wares and trying to make money off the shrine. The gospel, the power of God (Rom. 1:16), began to affect the economy of this tourist attraction. So much so, that the silversmiths who had a lucrative idol-manufacturing business making silver trinkets and shrines to sell to the religious pilgrim / tourist began to lose money because people were following the Lord Jesus and not worshipping Artemis. This defection occurred not only in Ephesus, but throughout the Province of Asia Minor.

The shop foreman of the silversmith trade union, Demetrius by name, organized a mob action in conjunction with other craft unions. They met in the large theater of the city, with seating capacity for 25,000 spectators, in order to protest their economic downturn. Demetrius incited the mob by reminding them that they made their lucrative livelihood off the tourist that visit the Temple of Artemis. He pointed a finger at the apostle Paul for turning people away from the temple because he said that those things made with hands are not gods. Demetrius ratcheted up his rhetoric by defending the honor of the goddess and saying the Temple of Artemis would be despised throughout the Greco-Roman world (Acts 19:24-27). The crowd in its frenzy shouted with one accord for two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians".¹ During the uproar in Ephesus, the union thugs manhandled Gaius and Aristarchus and dragged them into the theater (Acts 19: 29). Paul, in his holy boldness, wanted to confront the mob in the theater. His disciples, and friendly government officials (the Asiarchs), thought otherwise and strongly advised Paul not to venture forth into the theater for fear the mob

might do him bodily harm. It took the city clerk to quiet the mob and finally disperse them (19:35-41). Presumably Gaius and Aristarchus were released after cooler heads prevailed.

One writer has observed: "When the gospel begins to have a real impact on people and society, as it was beginning to do at Ephesus, their opposition from those who have vested interests is likely to be aroused. As someone has cryptically put it: 'You cannot be the salt of the earth without smarting someone.'" He went on to say, "Whenever the Christian ethic challenges social evils it will meet with opposition from those who stand to gain from them" (Thomas 1983-84: 151). Another example of opposition to the gospel because of economic considerations is when Paul cast the demons out of the slave girl at Philippi. Her handlers were very upset because they were losing money in that she could no longer tell fortunes (Acts 16:16-24).

After the uproar, the Apostle Paul realized the severity of the situation and its dangers, and departed from Ephesus (II Cor. 1:8). His first stop was Macedonia. Most likely Aristarchus and Gaius left with him and returned to Thessalonica. Paul probably went to Illyricum before he went to Greece for three months (Acts 20:1-3; Rom. 15:19).

Aristarchus is an example of a believer who is entrusted with responsibility by the people of his assembly

Aristarchus, along with six other men from Macedonia and Asia Minor, accompanied Paul and Luke to Jerusalem with the collection from the Gentile churches in that region to the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4; Acts

24: 17; I Cor. 16: 1-4; II Cor. 8 and 9). Aristarchus and Secundus were the representatives from the assembly in Thessalonica and both were esteemed and trusted brothers.

Trust is something that is earned, and not arbitrarily bestowed upon somebody. Amongst Christians, when a person proves his character by demonstrating integrity, honesty, faithfulness, hard work, trustworthiness and so forth, more responsibility is bestowed upon him by the local assembly. It must have been a great honor for these two brothers to accompany the collection to Jerusalem and to see the joy on the faces of the believers in Jerusalem when the gift arrived.

Aristarchus is an example of a believer who followed Jesus' instructions to work in teams

Aristarchus apparently stays in the Province of Judea for the two years while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea by the Sea (Acts 24:27). When Paul appealed to Caesar and his request is granted by King Agrippa II and the procurator Festus he is placed on a ship of Adramyttium, Dr. Luke and Aristarchus book passage on the same ship as well (Acts 21:1, 2).

What did Aristarchus do while he was in Judea for these two years? I believe there were two things. First, he probably was traveling with Dr. Luke as he was interviewing the eye-witnesses to the earthly life of the Lord Jesus so he could write his gospel (Luke 1:1-4). The second thing he and Dr. Luke would do is visit the Apostle Paul while he was in prison. The procurator, Felix allowed Paul to have friends visit and provide for his physical needs (Acts 24: 23).

The possibility that Dr. Luke and Aristarchus were working together during these two years makes sense in light of Jesus command, recorded by Dr. Luke, that the disciples go forth “two by two” (Luke 10:1). This team concept allowed for accountability and mutual encouragement towards one another.

Sir William Ramsay opined that Dr. Luke and Aristarchus went on the ship as Paul’s slaves in order to raise his status with the centurion (1905: 316). Most likely this is not the case. It would make more sense that Dr. Luke went on as the ship’s doctor, and Aristarchus was his assistant so they could follow the “two by two” pattern of missions and accompany Paul to Rome.

Lightfoot thinks Aristarchus joined them because he was heading home to Thessalonica and Paul and Luke parted company with Aristarchus at Myra when the centurion found an Alexandrian grain ship going directly to Rome (Acts 27:5, 6; Lightfoot 1927: 35, 36, footnote 2). Scripture is silent on whether Aristarchus was going home or not. When we see Aristarchus next, he is in Rome with Paul (Col. 4:10).

Aristarchus is an example of a believer who puts his life on the line for a friend

The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). The Apostle John gives us the motive for this command, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (I John 3:16). The Lord Jesus demonstrated His great love toward us by dying for all our sins. That is the

motivating factor for believers laying down their life for a fellow believer.

When the Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the church at Colosse, as well as the personal letter to Philemon, he sent greetings from Aristarchus along with other brethren. Somehow Aristarchus was known to the believers in the Lycus Valley. Perhaps he knew Philemon and Epaphras, two leading brothers in the churches there, from the School of Tyrannus, or Aristarchus could have traveled to the Lycus Valley sometime when he was in Ephesus. Scripture is silent on this matter, but he was known to the churches in the valley.

In these two letters, Paul describes Aristarchus as a “fellow prisoner” (Col. 4:10) and a “fellow laborer” (Philemon 24). The word “fellow prisoner” literally means a “prisoner of war”. That identification can not be taken literally because he had not engaged in any physical combat. However, it could be taken metaphorically because he was engaged in spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-17). The Apostle Paul was confined to house arrest hindering him from actively traveling and preaching the gospel to large crowds. It could be that from Satan’s perspective, Paul, Aristarchus, and Epaphras (Philemon 23) were his prisoner’s of war in this spiritual conflict. Paul uses this prisoner metaphor in his epistle to the Philippians (1:13, 14; 4:22) yet it did not prevent him from boldly proclaiming the gospel to the Pretorium guards or those in Caesar’s household. Nor did it hinder him from writing letters to churches that would eventually make up the New Testament. Paul, Aristarchus and Epaphras may have been chained as prisoners of war, but the gospel was not hindered and the work of the Lord continued (Acts 28:30, 31). While

Paul was under house arrest in Rome, Aristarchus proved to be a comfort Paul (Col. 4:11). What he did, we are not told. Yet just his presence would have encouraged the apostle.

Church tradition affirms that Aristarchus was martyred in Rome at the command of Nero (Hippolytus 1994: 256). The Pseudo-Dorotheus states that Aristarchus, Pudens and Trophimus were all beheaded in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero (Redlich 1913:211).

Applications

Granted, some of my historical reconstruction of the life of Aristarchus is speculative, but the principles and applications that I draw from the speculation are Biblical. There are at least five applications that we can draw from the life of Aristarchus for our own life.

The first application we can draw from the life of Aristarchus is that he exercised his spiritual gift. In his case, it was the gift of evangelist. Believers in the Lord Jesus must discern what their spiritual gifts are and exercise them in order to build up the Body of Christ. It would help to ask spiritual mature believers, or elders in the assembly, what they think the individual's spiritual gift might be (McRae 1976:103-138).

The second application for the life of the believer is to understand that we will be persecuted for righteousness sake. Dr. Luke does not record how Gaius and Aristarchus responded while being manhandled by the union thugs. Perhaps they knew of Jesus' teaching and rejoiced and were exceedingly glad (Matt. 5:12), or as James put it, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2).

The third application is that trust is earned and not bestowed. When that trust is earned, the individual will be given more responsibilities because they can be trusted.

The fourth thing we learn from Aristarchus' life is that he followed the divinely ordained pattern of Christian work, the "two-by-two" principle, or team concept set forth by Jesus and reaffirmed by the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1; Acts 13:2; 15:39, 40).

The final application we learn from the life of Aristarchus is that he put his life on the line for his friends. Aristarchus was not afraid to identify himself with his friend and mentor, the Apostle Paul.

Aristarchus was a man of noble birth who could have been part of the aristocracy in Thessalonica, but he chose to follow a nobler pursuit: the ministry of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Because of his life on earth, he received the noblest reward from the King of Kings at the Judgment Seat of Christ, at least two crowns: the crown of rejoicing because of his work in the gospel (I Thess. 2:9) and the crown of life for enduring trials, even to the point of death (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).

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1 The Greek text of the Book of Acts records the Greek name for the goddess of the hunt, Artemis. Some English translations give the Latin name, Diana, for the same goddess.