

IN ACTS 16 WE SEE THE GOSPEL spread to Philippi, a town in western Macedonia near the border of Thrace. . Originally established in the fourth century BC as a mining town and military garrison on an important east-west road, Philippi stood at the northernmost tip of the Aegean Sea, and was a prosperous city in the first century AD. It was considered a “miniature Rome,” governed by the laws of the capital by Roman officials. Almost 900 miles from Jerusalem, Philippi was the northernmost place visited by St Paul in his journeys and the first place in Europe evangelized by the Apostle. Between AD 45 and 58 St Paul had visited a number of cities in Cyprus, Crete and Asia Minor (Turkey today) and would go on to visit the Greek cities of Thessalonica, Athens and Corinth. In all he made three circuits of this area, visiting some cities several times and spending over a year in some places where his message was well received. Some ten years later, while in a Roman prison, Paul sent this community his Epistle to the Philippians, a letter included in the New Testament. In it we learn that the Philippians were the most generous to Paul personally in his travels. *“Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need”* (Phil 4:15-16). The next generation of Fathers – notably St Ignatius of Antioch and St Polycarp of Smyrna – visited and wrote to the Philippians

Christians. In the following generation St Irenaeus of Lyon referred to Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians as a forceful witness to the Gospel and a guide to salvation. During the fourth through sixth centuries AD Philippi was a recognized Christian center in the Roman Empire. Its churches, particularly the great cathedral, were said to rival the churches of Constantinople. Weakened by invasions of Slavic tribes at the end of the sixth century, Philippi was largely destroyed by an earthquake in 619; after that it was little more than a village.

Philippi was rebuilt as a garrison in the tenth century as a defense against the neighboring Bulgur tribes. It prospered again at least until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks when it fell into ruin. After the Greek War of Independence (1821-32) the area became part of the Kingdom of Greece. It was not until the twentieth century that archeologists began excavating the ruins of Philippi, identifying a number of structures including the great basilica of St. Paul.

#### **Other Cities Visited by St Paul**

Chapters from the Acts of the Apostles read in Church this week record St Paul’s ministry in the following places as well:

**Phrygia and Galatia** (Acts 16) – Provinces in western and central Anatolia, in what came to be called “Turkey in Asia;”

**Troas** (Acts 16, 20) – On the Aegean Sea, the chief port of north-west Asia Minor. With a population of 100,000 at its height, Troas was the seat of a bishop at least until the tenth century. The city was destroyed during

the Ottoman invasions of the fourteenth century.

**Thessalonica** (Acts 17) – Already 400 years old when St Paul visited it, this city, Thessalonica remained an important center through the later history of the Roman Empire. It fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1430 and remained as capital of their Balkan province until 1912 when it was surrendered to Greece. In Byzantine times and again today it is considered its nation’s Second City.

**Berea** (Acts 17) – A small city in southwestern Macedonia, it has much the same history as its larger neighbor, Thessalonica.

**Athens** (Acts 17) – One of the oldest cities in Europe, it was the intellectual capital of ancient Greece. When St Paul was there, Athens had been given the status of a “free city” of the Roman Empire because of its classical past. It remained a center of pagan learning until AD 529 when the emperor closed its philosophical school. Conquered during the Fourth Crusade (1204), Athens quickly fell to the Ottomans until the Greek War of Independence in the nineteenth century. In 1838 it became the capital of modern Greece.

**Corinth** (Acts 18) – Julius Caesar founded the Roman city of Corinth in 44 BC on the site of the ancient Greek city destroyed a century earlier. It has been rebuilt again and again after successive invasions and earthquakes After a particularly devastating earthquake in 1858, New Corinth was built a few miles away. This too suffered a major

earthquake in 1928. Its location on the Gulf of Corinth has always made it a hub for the transport of goods and materials to Europe. **Ephesus** (Acts 19, 20) – One of the largest cities in the Mediterranean world (c. 250,000) in Paul’s day, Ephesus had been founded in the tenth century BC and prospered as the shrine city of the goddess Artemis through successive political regimes. Destroyed in AD 263 by Gothic invaders it was rebuilt as a Byzantine city. Its commercial importance declined as its harbor silted up and, by the time of the Ottoman conquest in the fourteenth century, Ephesus was a mere village. The town was completely abandoned in the fifteenth century.

#### **These Churches Today**

The Church in Athens believes itself in continuity with the first century Christians in the city. It names as its first bishops Hierotheus, who lead the Church from before AD.52, and Dionysius (53-96). The eparchy of Corinth looks to the apostles Onesiphorus, Silas and Apollos as its first-century leaders and the eparchy of Thessalonica traces itself back to the apostles Aristarchus and Silvanus, two of Christ’s Seventy disciples, and names Gaius as its first bishop, in the first century. These eparchies, placed under the Patriarch of Constantinople in the fourth century, are currently dioceses in the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece. The Archbishop of Athens is the first hierarch of this Church, formed after the War of Greek Independence. The Apostolic Church of Cyprus, consisting today of twelve eparchies, traced its history back to the apostle St Barnabas who

accompanied St Paul to the island in the first century. Five years later Barnabas returned to Cyprus and established the Church there. The Apostolic Church of Crete, consisting of nine eparchies, is an Autonomous Church dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It claims the Apostle St Titus, the disciple of St. Paul, as its first head.

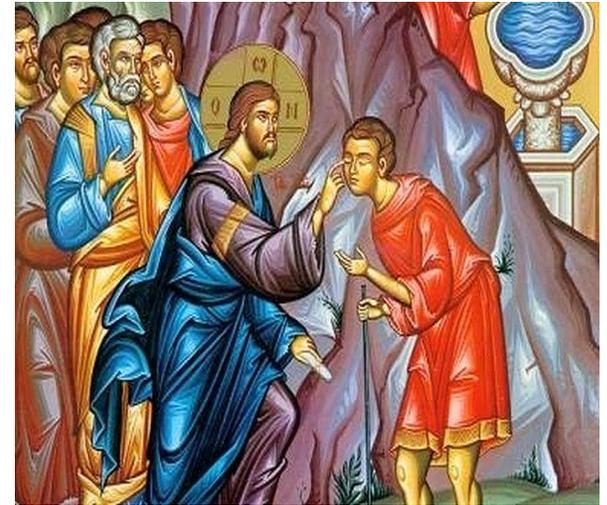
The provinces of Asia Minor were placed under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Constantinople when that city was made the capital of the Roman Empire (AD 335). This is still the case, but few Christians reside there. In 1923 The "Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations" was signed by the governments of Greece and Turkey. Around 1.5 million Christians in Asia Minor were deported to northern Greece and 500,000 Muslims from Greece were relocated to Turkey. – around two million persons. Many of these Christians emigrated to North and South America as a result.

The patriarchate consists of five eparchies in Asia Minor and the “New Territories” ceded to Greece after the twentieth-century Balkan Wars and six eparchies in the Greek Islands (the Dodecanese). Some 30 eparchies in Western Europe, the Americas and Australia are also subject to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

## **Sunday of the Blind Man**

*Acts 16:16-34*

*John 9:1-38*



**The Gospel Reaches Europe (Acts 16:16–34)**