

# The Macedonian Call

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

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While teaching in a home meeting several years ago on the topic, The Sovereignty of God, I stated that if God wanted someone saved, He could direct that unbeliever to a Christian who would lead him to salvation. The lesson had just ended when there was a knock at the door. We opened the door to find a young man standing there. He asked if this was the home of a certain person. We said, "Yes, it is." His next statement amazed all of us. He said, "I am a sinner and I don't know Jesus. Someone told me that if I came here tonight I could get saved." Obviously the Lord wanted to drive home His sovereignty as well as His plan for salvation for all mankind!

However, we all know that my experience that night was the exception. God's general plan is to send us, as Christians, out into the world to actively seek out the lost and bear witness of His great salvation to them. There are numerous instances in the New Testament demonstrating this principle. Paul's Macedonian call is one of them.

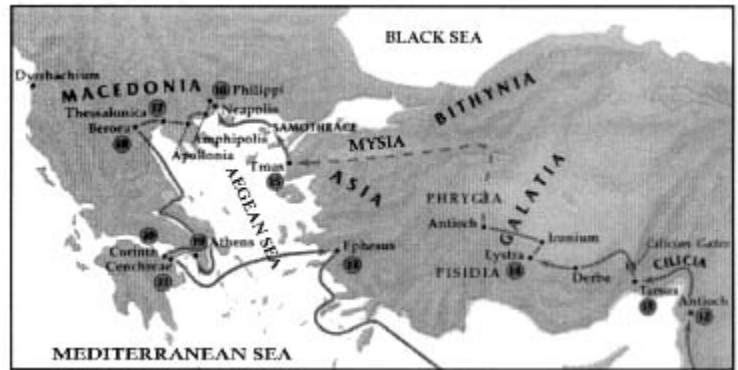
## Paul's Vision and the Macedonian Call

During Paul's second missionary journey, he traveled by land through the province of Galatia visiting some of the churches that he had established on his first journey. Let's examine the geography of this part of Paul's travels and the directives of the Holy Spirit during this time period.

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Act 16:6-10 NIV)

This vision occurred when Paul was in the region north of the Mediterranean Sea. He had intended to go and preach the gospel in the province of Asia. Remember, in the first century, Asia was a small province of the Roman empire, just like Macedonia. It was not the Asia we refer to today as much of the Far East. It was located in the region south of the Black Sea.

During this journey we know from the above passage that Paul tried to go into Asia but the Holy Spirit wouldn't let him. Then he tried to enter Bithynia and the Holy Spirit said, "No" again. So Paul kept traveling west, through Mysia, finally stopping in Troas. In fact, he had to stop because Troas was at the water's edge of the Aegean Sea. It was there that the Lord gave Paul the vision to go into Macedonia, a region he had not intended to include in his travels.



Looking at the distances involved, Paul kept traveling west for about 400 miles or 600 kilometers before he was directed by the Lord to a specific place, Macedonia. The major cities in Macedonia were Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. This journey into and around Macedonia made Paul's trip more than twice the distance he had traveled from Antioch on his first missionary journey.

Even assuming Paul kept moving most every day on foot, this is a good month of traveling. Notice that Paul kept moving while being prohibited from going to certain places to preach. Paul obviously believed that for him to be guided he had to be in motion! Many Christians sit still, doing nothing, crying out to God for guidance. May I suggest that, if we want God to guide us, we should be like Paul was, in motion!

Paul clearly understood that God was leading him to leave the region he was in and go across the Aegean Sea into a region never before reached with the gospel. God alone knows the hearts of men and women. He wanted the able, zealous people in Macedonia to hear the gospel. Just as God saw the heart of Paul when he set out for Damascus, He saw the hearts of the Macedonians. He sent the faithful steward Paul to begin the work among them.

## The Early Spread of the Gospel

In order to properly understand the Macedonian call we need to go back a few years and look at an overview of the earlier spread of the gospel. From the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, believers came and went from Jerusalem, taking the good news message with them wherever they went. The Scripture immediately following Pentecost makes it clear that in those early days the Apostles believed that salvation was for the Jews alone. The early meetings were often at the Temple in Jerusalem because the witness was primarily to the Jews. But God's eternal plan was for the salvation of the entire world. We catch a glimpse of this when Philip went out in evangelistic zeal and witnessed to the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40.

## The Gentile Pentecost

In Acts, 10 we read of Peter's famous vision of the sheet full of unclean animals being lowered from heaven. It was accompanied by a voice commanding, "Get up, Peter. Kill and

eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." (Act 10:13-14 NIV) This happened three times while Peter continued to argue with God! In today's language Peter was saying, "No way, Lord! I'm not eating that stuff!"

While Peter was trying to figure out what the vision meant, some "unclean" men knocked on the door where he was staying. Of course these unclean men were Gentiles asking for Peter. They wanted him to go with them to unclean Cornelius' house. Peter realized that the vision had told him that he was not to call unclean what God had cleansed and that he should go. This was the very first time the gospel was preached to a targeted Gentile audience. Of course, this Gentile Pentecost really opened the way to preach to the nonJews of the world. Thus, Paul's call to the nonJewish people of the Mediterranean area.

It is interesting to note that because of Peter's narrowness of vision, God had to speak to him *three times* in the same vision! It makes me wonder how many times the Lord has to tell me to do something before I obey.

### **The Significance of Macedonia**

Macedonia is located in Europe which makes this region the first European land to hear the gospel. We have already pointed out that the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica were located in the Macedonian province. These two cities were significant Roman cultural and political centers. Major Roman roads intersected them going to other, distant European places. Since Macedonia was strategically located, its importance in the spreading of the gospel cannot be overstated. When Paul and his companions landed in Neapolis they journeyed a few kilometers north to Philippi, a leading city of the province. When Paul preached to a group of women outside the gates of Philippi, he was preaching the first gospel message in Europe. It appears that the first convert in Europe was an influential woman named Lydia. The church in Europe became very wide spread and far reaching. Centuries later it was the European church that evangelized the Americas, Africa, and the far corners of the earth. It was the European church fourteen centuries later that brought forth the Reformation. It was the European church that provided the in-depth theological writings that still feed much of today's church.

### **The Strengths of the Macedonian Church**

The Macedonian church, perhaps more than any other, caught the vision of freely giving. They consistently supported the Apostle Paul. In fact, they even amazed Paul in their zeal to give. Paul used their example of prayer and giving to chide the Corinthian church. Look at what he said.

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. (2 Cor 8:1-8 NIV)

The women of the Macedonia church were prominent believers, a marked contrast to the place women were given in the Jewish/Eastern regions of the first century church. Paul made personal mention of Euodia, Syntyche, and Lydia, as well as other women of the various churches. Apparently Lydia hosted a church in her home where Paul and his companions lived for some time. The fact that she was mentioned by name seems to signify her importance since Paul and Luke both followed the pattern of only mentioning the names of significant people in their writings.

There is no doubt that the Macedonian believers were a powerful force for the gospel. Contrast this with much of the area Paul traveled through during his first missionary journey, such as Galatia, Bithynia, Phrygia, and Mysia. One writer on the subject of Paul's first journey tells us that the people of this region were "rustic, quarrelsome and often unruly and the area was infamous as a haven for robbers and illegal slave traders. When Paul later spoke of the perils of his journeys (2 Cor 11:26) he may well have been recalling his days. . ." here.<sup>(4)</sup> Since Asia is geographically connected to this region, it is a reasonable assumption that at least some of these same disagreeable characteristics mentioned by this writer were common in Asia, too. So, actually God really blessed Paul by causing him to bypass Asia and continue on to Macedonia!

### **1. The Philippian Church**

As you read the first few verses of Paul's letter to the Philippians you get the sense of Paul's deep affection for them. He opens the window of his heart showing affection for the Philippians that is certainly not always present in his other letters.

As we have already seen, Paul refers to the Macedonian church at large as generous. Paul also singles out the Philippian church as a strong participant in his financial support. He used their giving out of their own need to set forth this powerful biblical principle: if we give to the Lord out of our own need we are assured of his abundant provision for us. See what Paul wrote:

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 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 again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* (Phil 4:14-19 NIV, emphasis added.)

## 2. The Berean Church

The Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in Berea were clearly open-minded people who loved God. Luke tells us that "they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Act 17:11 NIV) Luke also wrote in that same verse that they were of noble character.

## 3. The Thessalonian Church

Thessalonica was the principal Roman city of the Macedonian Province. It was the fourth largest city in the entire Roman Empire. Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica was written in the year 50 ad.

As usual when Paul visited a city he went to the synagogue to preach first to the Jews that Jesus is the risen Christ. We know from Acts, 17 that many in Thessalonica received Paul's message, but others stirred up crowds and forced Paul to leave. That church then suffered heavy persecution at the hands of the Jews. But even so, a strong church developed in Thessalonica as God sustained them and prospered them in their persecution.

In summary, the generosity, tenacity and commitment of the Macedonian churches, their activity in spreading the gospel, their open heartedness and joy, their love of the brethren, and their patience in trial, all contributed to the rapid spread of the gospel into Europe. In view of all this we can certainly understand why the Holy Spirit led Paul to (temporarily) bypass the province of Asia and send him to the Macedonians. (Remember though that God did eventually send Paul to Asia. Indeed, the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3 are in Asia!)

### Where is Our "Macedonia"?

Now that we have reviewed the geographic and spiritual significance of Macedonia, let's ask the question, "Where is Macedonia today?" Or, to make it more personal, the question should be, "Where is my Macedonia?" The broadest answer to this question is, of course, found in the great commission of Matthew, 28. We are to go into all the world, preaching our risen Savior, and making disciples in all nations. There is really no question that the Spirit of God is still extending the Macedonian call to all who have ears to hear. Are you willing to go where God calls you? Are you willing to do what He tells you? Are you willing to speak to whomever He sends you? In other words, are you available? If you answer "yes" to these questions, you are just as subject to receiving a Macedonian call today as was the Apostle Paul two thousand years ago.

For many, our Macedonian call is to full time ministry. This ministry call is usually accompanied by the Holy Spirit directing us to a specific geographical location. God wants to send us to some *place*. I believe many of us think that we have God's plan in mind for our ministry, and quite probably we do. But are we willing to let God, by His Spirit, redirect us? We must be willing to set aside our plans. We must be sensitive to circumstances and directives from the Holy Spirit telling us to

do something different or something new, or to go somewhere different and new.

Then, for the rest of us, our Macedonian call is not geographic, but situational. God wants us to live a life above reproach before unbelievers so as to make the gospel message appealing wherever we are and to whomever He has put in our path. God wants us to live a life of love, joy, and peace, not arguing, being hot tempered, or a troublemaker. Then the Holy Spirit can direct us to people with whom we work, our neighbors, the stranger in the market, relatives and friends. But, remember, even in this setting we may end up pursuing one situation or picking one family in our neighborhood as the target of our efforts. But, when the Lord directs us to another situation or another family, do we hear? Do we allow ourselves to be so Spirit led that He can redirect us in a moment?

### The Fruit of the Macedonian Work

Let's look again briefly at the fruit of Paul's obedience in bypassing his original destinations and going on to preach the gospel in Macedonia. The churches of this region formed the bedrock of the gospel in all of Europe. The believers of Macedonia had integrity, were noble, and were superior to many others to whom Paul preached the gospel.

### The Macedonians Continue to Call to God's People

Today there are people all around us, just as the man in Paul's vision, who are calling out to us. They are crying, "come and help me!" Oh, they don't use those words. In fact, their cry is often the opposite. Their cry may come in the form of alcohol or drug addiction. It may express itself in anger, violence or hostility. The cry may be expressed by isolation or loneliness. If we allow the Holy Spirit to sharpen our spiritual sense of hearing, surely we will hear the cry of the Macedonians. They are all around us.

I once knew a young man who was crying out as the man in Paul's vision. His cry was expressed in drugs, violence and anger. God heard his cry and sent a Christian brother to him who led him to Christ. *The Christian brother was sensitive enough to be Holy Spirit directed and to go!* After his conversion that man whose life seemed so useless became a powerful evangelist. Thousands of people will stand before Jesus in that Day because of the nobility and character wrought in this man by the Spirit of Jesus. Just as the Lord saw the wonderful potential in the people of Macedonia, He saw the potential in this angry, violent young man.

### Categories of Today's Macedonians

No, not everyone we witness to is going to respond to the gospel. Neither are all those whom we lead to the Lord going to become powerful, radiant Christians with noble character like the Macedonians. It is therefore helpful to be aware of the different kinds of people to whom we witness. I have divided them into four categories.

#### 1. The Searching

There are those like the Ethiopian eunuch who know

about God and are searching. ( Acts 8:26-39) Some are consciously searching while others may not be aware that they are searching. These people are easy to talk to. They are receptive to the gospel. They may have many questions, but they are eager to know the truth. They know something is missing in their lives and are anxious to find it.

Unfortunately, because of this openness and hunger to know, these people are also very vulnerable to various cults, such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Age, the different world religions, and so on. This is all the more reason we should be on the look out for those who are searching and waste no time telling them about Jesus.

## 2. The Ignorant But Teachable

There are also those who haven't a clue about God but they are willing to listen. In Scripture this group of people are represented by those Greeks who listened to Paul when he spoke to the Aeropagus on Mars Hill in Athens. (Acts 17:19) They followed after Paul and said, "tell us more." It is a pleasure to teach people whose minds are open and who are willing to learn. Anyone who is willing to listen to the gospel is a good candidate for salvation.

## 3. The Ignorant Unteachable

This is a sad, unfortunate group of people. They are quite uninformed about the gospel, but readily tell you that they "know all about religion" and are not interested. They don't want to listen to you because they think they already know everything about the gospel. Few of these people ever come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Personally, I don't spend much time trying to convince these people. It's like trying to plant a seed on a rock.

## 4. The Autosoteric

The Greek word *soter* means *saved*. Another Greek word, *auto*, means *self*. When we combine the two words into "autosoteric," we get a word that means *self-salvation*.

This word identifies a group of people who know about God, but will not humble themselves and ask Jesus for forgiveness of their sins. In fact, many autosoterics will not even admit that they are sinners. The autosoterics are usually very

morale, upright citizens. They pay their taxes, give to charity, often help the poor, and in general are very high quality people of great personal integrity.

When you witness to them, they usually will respond like this, "I'm a good person. I don't cheat, lie or steal. I'm faithful to my wife and am a good father. I'm a good employee and never cause anyone any problems. Surely God cannot turn me away." All of us who have witnessed to many people have run into the autosoteric. Personally I think they are the most difficult of all people to win to Christ.

People who are either ignorantly unteachable or autosoteric are only receptive to the gospel under certain, limited conditions. The conditions I refer to are the times of great personal tragedy or trauma. If someone has just lost a close loved one, suffered personal trauma, been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and so forth, this is the time to run to their side with the witness of Jesus. Even then your witness may fall on deaf ears, but often the heart is softened at such times to listen to and receive the witness of Jesus.

As you answer your Macedonian call, don't let the deaf ears of the unteachable or autosoteric discourage you. You don't save them anyway. That's God's job. Your responsibility is not to win them all, but *to tell* all! Only God can see the heart and true character of the lost. Only He knows the works He has prepared for these noble, lost Macedonians. Our job is simply to lead them to the Master Craftsman and let Him refine the gold and bring forth the finished jewel fit for the Master's service.

Lord, thank you for the Macedonian call to your people. I pray you open our spiritual ears and eyes to hear that call. Send us where the lost are calling out, and let us be your good and faithful servants. Make us your ambassadors, lifting up the name of Jesus wherever we go. Amen.

1. *Reader's Digest Atlas of the Bible*, The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville, New York. Page 191.

## HUNDREDFOLD MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL

P. O. Box 625  
Blue Jay, CA 92317

Telephone 909/336-9701

E-mail: [jim.murphy@hundredfold.org](mailto:jim.murphy@hundredfold.org) Web site: [www.hundredfold.org](http://www.hundredfold.org)

Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

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