

# AMPHIPOLIS & APOLLONIA

On the second missionary journey, as Paul and his companions traveled from Philippi to Thessalonica on the Egnatian Way, they “passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia” (Acts 17:1). This is the only reference to these Macedonian cities in the Bible.

## **Amphipolis**

Paul’s missionary team traveled southwest from Philippi about 30 miles to Amphipolis. This city was originally founded by the Thracians; it was known as Nine Ways, reflecting its commercial and military importance. Later, after several failed attempts, the Athenians made the city one of its colonies in 437 B.C. According to Thucydides, the name Amphipolis (meaning “on both sides of the city”) was given because the Strymon River ran along two sides of the city (*Peloponnesian War* 4.102.3), before flowing south into the Aegean Sea a few miles away. The fertile river valley aided in the production of oil, wine, and timber; gold and silver were mined from the neighboring hills.

Amphipolis was the battle site where the Spartans defeated the Athenians in 422 B.C. Later, in 334 B.C., Alexander the Great and his troops passed by there as they prepared to invade Western Asia and Egypt (Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander* 1.11). After Rome took control of Greece and divided Macedonia into four districts in 168 B.C., Amphipolis was chosen as the capital of the eastern district.

Excavations at Amphipolis, which took place between 1956 and 1989, have exposed ancient walls, a gymnasium, Roman baths, church buildings, and tombs. Artifacts from these excavations are on display at the Archaeology Museum of Amphipolis.

The Lion of Amphipolis, about 26 feet high (including its base), would have stood near the Egnatian Way. One archaeologist has suggested that it was originally set up to honor Laomedon of Mytilene, a general of Alexander the Great, in the fourth century B.C.

## **Apollonia**

The distance from Amphipolis to Apollonia was 27.5 miles (30 Roman miles), a day’s journey (Livy *History of Rome* 45.28). Apollonia (“dedicated to Apollo”) was located southwest



The Lion of Amphipolis

of Amphipolis and south of Lake Bolbe on the Egnatian Way. The city dates back to about the fifth century B.C. Since the year 2000, many artifacts have been uncovered in the area of ancient Apollonia, including a golden wreath (on display at the Archaeological Museum in Thessaloniki), a statue of Winged Victory, and fortification walls and towers.

### **Observations**

Since Paul and his coworkers “passed through” Amphipolis and Apollonia, it is generally assumed that these cities did not have a significant Jewish population. This is implied in the text, for they went on to Thessalonica “where there was a Jewish synagogue” (Acts 17:1). It was Paul’s custom to begin his missionary work in a city by preaching the gospel to Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogue. After entering Europe on the second missionary journey, he apparently did this at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth (Acts 16:13; 17:1, 2, 10, 17; 18:4). Many assume that Philippi did not have a synagogue, yet the term *proseuchē* (translated “a place of prayer” in Acts 16:13) was used in ancient literature as a synonym for *synagōgē*. Luke may have used the term this way; we do not know why only women were assembled at the hour Paul’s missionary team arrived there.

Since the cities were evenly spaced, Paul and his coworkers probably traveled a day’s journey from Philippi to Amphipolis and spent the night there. The next day, they likely walked on to Apollonia and stayed the evening there. After that, they went on to Thessalonica. All of these cities were located along the Egnatian Way.