

# BEREA

Situated at the base of Mount Bermius, Berea (modern Veria) is in central Macedonia, about forty-five miles west of Thessalonica and twenty-five miles from the Thermaic Gulf. While the origin of the city is unknown, Thucydides apparently wrote about it in his *Peloponnesian War* (1.61.4). If he was referring to the same place, then Berea's history would go back at least to the fifth century B.C. Polybius also mentioned the city in his *Histories* (28.8) from the second century B.C.

Berea was the seat of the League (*Koinon*) of the Macedonians, a political organization that governed the region (under the ruler) and minted its own coins. Berea was the first city listed by Livy to surrender to the Romans after the Battle of Pydna in 168 B.C. The Romans later divided Macedonia into four districts, and Berea fell into the third one (Livy *History of Rome* 44.45.4; 45.29.5, 8). Cicero referred to Berea as "a town off the beaten track" (*Against Piso* 36 [89]); it was south of the Egnatian Way and had to be accessed by minor roads. Even so, it was "a large and populous city of Macedonia" (Lucian *The Ass* 34).

On the second missionary journey (c. A.D. 50), after encountering hostility in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas were sent away by night to Berea. Upon arrival, the missionary duo entered the Jewish synagogue and shared the good news (Acts 17:10). Luke commended their audience on this occasion: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). Several observations can be made from this statement: (1) The Berean Jews were receptive and eager to learn; (2) they respected the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God; (3) they were diligent in their search, engaging in Bible study every day; and (4) their ultimate goal was to discover the truth. The end result was that the Old Testament prophecies convinced many of the Jews to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, as well as "a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men" (Acts 17:12). Paul's work with the fledgling church in Berea was interrupted when unbelieving Jews came from Thessalonica and stirred up the crowds (Acts 17:13). Silas and Timothy remained at Berea, whereas Paul was escorted to Athens (Acts 17:14, 15).

Paul must have returned to Berea, since he received the collection from the Macedonian churches near the end of the third missionary journey (Acts 20:1, 2; 2 Cor. 8:1, 2). During that time, he probably picked up Sopater of Berea (Acts 20:4) and took him to Corinth. This man—who could be the same as "Sosipater" in Romans 16:21—was one of the "representatives of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23) who would accompany Paul to Jerusalem with the gift for the poor saints there (Rom. 15:25, 26; 1 Cor. 16:3, 4; 2 Cor. 8—9). Instead of sailing to Syria, a plot against Paul's life caused him to alter his travel plans. The apostle "decided to go back through Macedonia" (Acts 20:3), which may have included another stop at Berea.

Very few ruins of the ancient city of Berea are visible today. Nevertheless, the Archaeological Museum of Veria does contain artifacts from the surrounding area, mainly from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Further, the modern city has a statue of Paul and a sizable monument, recalling his missionary endeavors there.



Statue of the Apostle Paul

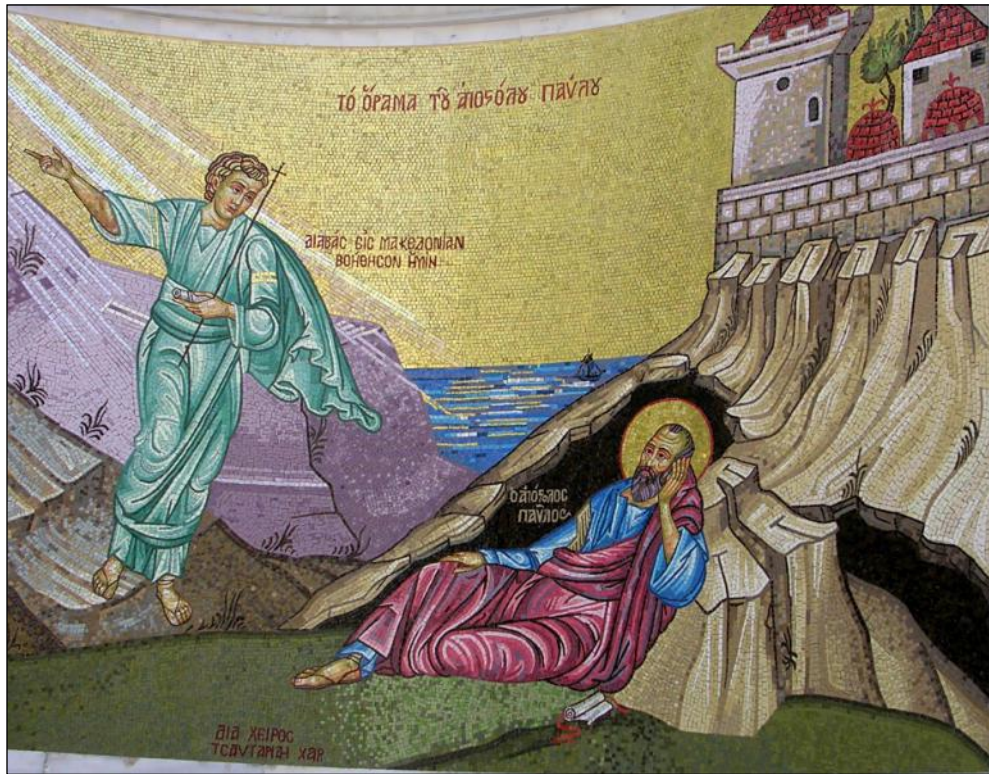




Monument (*Bēma*) of the Apostle Paul







Paul's Vision of the Man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9)

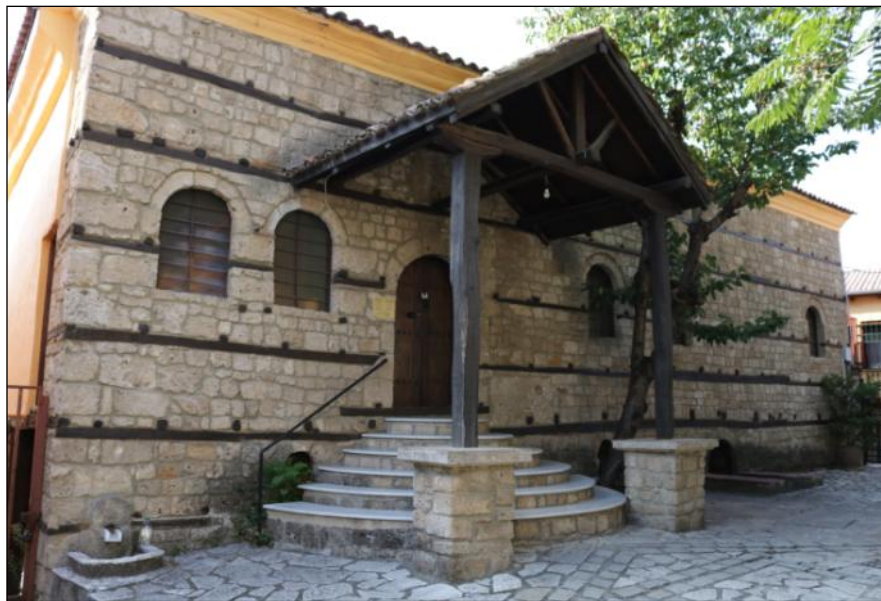


Paul's Preaching to the Noble Bereans (Acts 17:10-12)



Dubbed “Little Jerusalem,” Veria is known for the large number of church buildings that were constructed there during the Byzantine era. Many artifacts from this period are displayed at the Byzantine Museum.

The Jewish population of Veria grew over time in the Barbouta quarter of the city until 1943, when the Jews were captured by German forces and taken to concentration camps. Many of them died at Auschwitz; others relocated after World War II was over. Therefore, the Jews do not have a community living in Veria today. The stone-built synagogue below was constructed in 1850; it was renovated and reopened in 2002. It is visited by Jewish pilgrims who go there to pray, as well as by Christians tourists who are contemplating the Berean Jews in Acts 17. Whether this is the same location as the first-century synagogue is uncertain.



Jewish Synagogue

