

# POSTCARDS FROM PHILIPPI

The story of Lydia - the first Christian in Europe.

## Cast

Narrator  
Lydia  
Lady 1 (and stall helper)  
Lady 2 (and stall helper)  
2 or 3 ladies as extras for scene 1 if available  
Paul  
Silas  
Other stall owners if you have the numbers  
Group of singers at the market  
Cassandra  
Owner of Cassandra  
1<sup>st</sup> person at market (and one of the singers)  
2<sup>nd</sup> person at market (and one of the singers)  
3<sup>rd</sup> person at market (and one of the singers)  
Jailer  
Prisoners: 4 or 5 persons

## **Scene 1: By the riverside.**

(Lydia is seated at a table writing a postcard.)

Narrator: To my dear family in Thyatira, Greetings from Lydia in the Roman colony of Philippi, Macedonia.

This postcard is to let you know I arrived safely in Philippi. It took longer to get here than expected as one of the waggons carrying our precious materials broke an axle and the wheel split in two. This delay cost us about a week. Romans roads are first class but some of their waggons are not so good! After arriving in Philippi and some tough haggling with a Roman estate agent, I found a comfortable villa to rent. It's large enough to accommodate the servants and all the goods I brought from Thyatira. It's also in a good position, with a view over the river and a short walk to the market place. I even have a friendly Jewish lady as a neighbour.

Now for the interesting part of my news. Having found a few ladies of our Jewish faith and seeing there was no synagogue here, we decided to meet each Sabbath by the river to read and pray together.

(Enter ladies and Lydia with children and sit in a semi-circle. Cassandra also enters but sits some distance away just listening.)

Lydia: It's so good to be able to get together specially on a beautiful summer's day.

Lady 1: And it's so good to be able to sit down and have a rest one day a week. I really look forward to the Sabbath when I don't have to think about cooking and cleaning. **(With a deep sigh)** Thank God for the Sabbath!!

Lydia: I agree, but what I love most about the Sabbath is that we can read the Scriptures and have time to talk about them.

Lady 2: Lydia, do you think those men will come again today? You know, the ones that came along last week. What were their names?

Lydia: Their names were Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke. And yes, I hope they turn up they certainly had some interesting things to say.

Lady 1: What about the one called Paul and his story about how he used to persecute Christians. He would rounding them up - throwing them in prison - even had them put to death!

Lydia: He said he did it because he was so passionate about the laws and traditions of the Jews that he couldn't bear the thought of someone like Jesus of Nazareth being Israel's Messiah. How could he be a Messiah - he was crucified by the Romans on a cross and our law says, anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed!

Lady 1: But then he went on to say he'd had a change of heart about killing people. I'll tell you what, was pretty relieved to hear that!

Lydia: Yes, now that's the interesting part of his story. How he was travelling to Damascus and that very Jesus who had been killed by the Romans, suddenly appeared to him in a bright light and spoke to him. How he was blinded by the light for days. How that he was given a message from Jesus that he was specially chosen to be an apostle to the Gentiles. It all must have been so confusing for him.

Lady 1: Lydia - I think I can see them coming. Only two of them this time - Paul and Silas I think.

**(Enter Paul and Silas)**

Paul: Hello ladies. We've come to join you again. What scriptures are you going to read today?

Lydia: We haven't decided.

Paul: May I suggest a few?

Lydia: Of course. What will they be.

Paul: First of all there's a passage in the book of Samuel I'd like to read. It's the promise made by God to Israel's King David:

(Reads): “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.”

And there’s another passage I’d like Silas to read in Isaiah:

Silas: (Reads): “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Lydia: I have always believed those Scriptures are speaking about our Messiah. He will restore the Kingdom of David and bring peace to Israel and the world.

Lady 1: The end of Roman rule! Yeah!

Paul: You are partly right. I’ll get Silas to read another part of Isaiah - a bit further on. This is the part we didn’t expect of our Messiah. Listen.

Silas: Who would have thought God's saving power would look like this?  
The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling,  
a scrubby plant in a parched field.  
There was nothing attractive about him,  
nothing to cause us to take a second look.  
He was looked down on and passed over,  
a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.  
One look at him and people turned away.  
We looked down on him, thought he was scum.  
But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—  
our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us.  
We thought he brought it on himself,  
that God was punishing him for his own failures.  
But it was our sins that did that to him,  
that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins!  
He took the punishment, and that made us whole.  
Through his bruises we get healed.  
We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.  
We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.  
And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong,  
on him, on him.

Paul: Let me continue Silas - listen to this:

He was beaten, he was tortured,  
but he didn't say a word.  
Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered  
and like a sheep being sheared,  
he took it all in silence.  
Justice miscarried, and he was led off -  
and did anyone really know what was happening?  
He died without a thought for his own welfare,  
beaten bloody for the sins of my people.  
They buried him in a grave with a rich man,  
threw him in a grave with a rich man,  
Even though he'd never hurt a soul  
or said one word that wasn't true.

Paul: Did you hear that! It describes exactly what happened to Jesus of Nazareth. He's the king we read about in Samuel and Isaiah, but he had to come first of all to set people free from their sins - not from the Romans.

Silas: And then God raised him from the dead because he'd lived a sinless life. He is now at the right hand of God and will return soon. That is when he will be King of all the nations.

Lydia: You know, in my heart I'm sure what you have been saying over the past weeks is true. I believe Jesus is the Messiah. So what must I do to be saved?

Paul: Commit your life to living it the way Jesus taught us. We'll help you. And start by being baptised. Wash away the old way of thinking and believe that through Jesus, God will save you. Think about it Lydia and we'll talk again. We must be going now - come along Silas.

(They all walk out Paul and Silas in one direction, the others in another.  
Lydia goes back to her writing.)

Narrator: So my dear family. Thanks to Paul, Silas, Timothy and Peter I came to realise that Jesus is Messiah. He is the son of God but he came as a servant to die for our sins and to show us how God wants us to live. It's all about changing us from the inside, out. It's something the Law of Moses couldn't do. So I was baptised in the river, along with all my household.

I have persuaded Paul and his friends to stay at my villa for as long as they are in Philippi. I'm so glad they agreed because I had so much to catch up on about the life of Jesus. If you ever hear of any Christians travelling through Thyatira, please invite them home to talk about these things. Peace be with you.

(End of scene)

## Scene 2: Market Place at Philippi.

(Main stall (Lydia's) with purple material/fabrics/clothes plus one or two other stalls selling goods. Another stall some distance from those, on the other side of stage, for Cassandra (the fortune-teller) and her owner.)

(To start this scene - Lydia is seated at a table writing a postcard, far left or right of the stage.)

Narrator: To my dear family in Thyatira, Greetings from Lydia in Philippi. This is my second postcard to let you know how things are going here. I must admit I'm not as committed to selling our textiles as I used to be. My mind has been taken up with all the wonderful things my four visitors are teaching me about Jesus. Paul rightly says, we shouldn't be obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. God piles on all the riches we could ever need - to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If we do that, we'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life. Paul certainly has a way with words!

But please don't get me wrong, I'm still working hard - it's just not number one priority in my life.

Paul and Silas have been visiting the Philippi markets, talking to as many people as will stop and listen. Our fabric stall at the markets is where I sell and take orders for our famous purple cloth as well as other textiles. It is a busy, bustling, place where absolutely everything is sold. My stall has become very well known. Perhaps it is because I have my own advertising team.

(Lydia moves to be on her stall with her helper.)

(Enter singers all wearing something purple. The song is sung to the tune, "Never Smile at a Crocodile.")

Singers: You will always smile if you shop a while  
In this market place here in Philippi  
You might find a fish or a Roman dish  
Or perhaps a lovely scarf that makes you look quite swish.

You will always smile if you shop a while  
In this market place here in Philippi  
Why not buy a bunch of grapes, or a tasty bag of dates  
Or some sandals for your feet to make them look just great.

(spoken): Come on, let's sing some more

You will always smile if you shop a while  
And spend a couple of den-ari-i  
You might buy a scroll or a large bread roll  
Or a walking stick for when you're getting old.

Yes, you'll always smile if you shop a while  
In this market place here in Philippi  
If you've nothing much to wear, there is no need to despair  
Lydia's purple clothing stall is - just - over - there!

(Some singers move up to the stalls and look at the goods. Other singers move over to the fortune-teller's stall when the owner speaks. Paul and Silas also enter and start talking to Lydia and then move to owner of the second stall.)

Owner of

Cassandra: Come on, come on. Over here. Get you're fortune told. Only a silver coin to learn your future. Ask Cassandra the pithian prophetess. Get the answer. Money-back guarantee if her prediction doesn't come true, (aside) and if you can find us!

1<sup>st</sup> person: (hands over a coin): I want to know is this a good year to plant more olive trees or would next year be better?

Cassandra: (Sways as if in a trance talking to the snake around her neck). Plant them this year. Yes, definitely plant them this year. 49 AD is a very good year for planting olive trees.

2<sup>nd</sup> person: (hands over coin): I want to know whether I should travel to Rome to find work, or would it be better if I went to Athens?

Cassandra: (sways etc.) Go to Rome. Go to Rome. All roads lead there and that's where the best jobs are.

3<sup>rd</sup> person: (hands over coin): My father is very ill. Please, what can I do to save him from dying?

Cassandra: Save? Save! (She points to where Paul and Silas are talking. Shouts): Those men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling us the way to be saved! (She then runs closer to Paul and Silas and shouts again): These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling us the way to be saved! Listen to them.

(Cassandra's owner runs over and drags her back.)

3<sup>rd</sup> person: Hey - answer my question. Or give me my money back!

Owner: (To Cassandra) Cassandra. Listen to me - answer the question.

Cassandra: (Points to Paul and Silas): Those men are telling you the way to be saved! They are servants of the Most High God.

(Paul and Silas move over toward Cassandra.)

Paul: (Points at her): Look, you've been following us for days. It's time to stop your shouting. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray that the evil influences possessing this poor girl will be gone.

(Cassandra sinks to the ground.)

Owner: What are you doing! Cassandra! Get back to work!

Cassandra: No. No. How can I. I don't know what to do. What do you want me to do.

Owner: Fortune-telling. That's what you should be doing.

Cassandra: No. I can't. I can't (Holds her head)

3<sup>rd</sup> Person: I want my money back!

Owner: (To Paul): Look what you've done. You've ruined my business. (To everyone else): Call the magistrate. I'm as good as bankrupt. I have eight children at home - how will I feed them. Everyone will be bankrupt soon if these men are allowed to interfere with our market place.

Everyone: Get rid of these men. Call the magistrate.

(The Magistrate enters and exit with Paul and Silas with everyone except Lydia and Cassandra following. Lydia goes over to Cassandra and helps her to her feet and leads her to where she continues writing her postcard.)

Narrator: I can't sleep so I'll finish this postcard and send it by Macedonia Post in the morning. When the magistrate took Paul and Silas away, we followed from a distance to see what would happen. The crowd convinced the magistrates that Paul and Silas were troublemakers acting in an unlawful manner, so they were arrested and given a terrible beating. It was horrible. They are now locked up in the city jail.

I have brought Cassandra home with me - her owners have abandoned her now she is no use to them. Timothy and Peter are also with me and we are praying for Paul and Silas.

(End of Scene)

### Scene 3: Philippi Prison

(Lydia is seated at a table writing another postcard. Prisoners in chains on stage.)

Narrator: To my dear family in Thyatira, Greetings from Lydia at Philippi.

I am writing to tell you what happened to Paul and Silas after they were beaten and taken to the local jail. The jailer put them in the stocks in the inner prison. He was told to keep them secure so that they could be brought to trial the next day. Security seemed to have been of the utmost concern. I suppose they thought that if Paul could cast out a fortune-teller's spirit, what will prevent him from using that power to escape from jail!

(Enter Jailer with Paul and Silas.)

Jailer: You're both going in the high security section tonight. My life depends on getting you both to the Procurator's office tomorrow. Rome has no mercy for jailers who lose their prisoners!

(Paul and Silas are put in stocks, in a separate section that is screened off from the other prisoners who are in chains around most of the stage. Jailer lights a candle and the stage lights are dimmed.)

Prisoners: (Lots of groans and moans and comments from the prisoners. Improvisation would be good in this scene, such as "water! water!" "I was eaten alive by mosquitoes last night" "I was eaten alive by rats")

Paul: (To Silas) We are in for a long night, Silas. We need to lift our spirits to see us through the night - and so do those poor prisoners. We'll sing some of our favourites.

(Paul and Silas sing some verses from 1 or 2 appropriate hymns, accompanied by other singers standing off stage.)

(Earthquake noises - rumbling getting louder and louder. The prisoners' chains probably made of paper or cardboard are easily ripped off).

Silas: (Moving out from the screened area calls out to the prisoners) Come on all of you. Over here. You'll be safe in here with us. (They all crowd together. Earthquake stops.)

Jailer: (Runs up the hall to the platform) No! What will I do! They've all escaped. I'm done for. (Draws out a knife.)

Paul: (Coming out from screen): STOP! Don't harm yourself. We are all in here. Every one of us.

(All the prisoners come out.)

Jailer: (Drops the knife). Your God must certainly be with you. We're all safe because of you. (Drops down on his knees.) Look, I've not led a very good life - in fact I've done some dreadful things. Please - tell me what I have to do to be saved?

Paul: (Helps the jailer up.) Jesus came to save sinners. I'm living proof of someone who could never have made it apart from the sheer mercy and forgiveness of God. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved.

Jailer: Come with me to my home and I'll bathe your wounds and you can tell me more. (They exit).

(All those on stage exit.)

(Lydia writing again.)

Narrator: I began to realise at this stage that by becoming a Christian, I had put myself, my household and my business in a precarious position. The measure of hostility we experienced at the markets would most probably be aimed in my direction when Paul moved on.

It came as a great relief to me, then, to learn that the judges panicked when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. They hurried over and apologised, personally escorted them from the jail, and then asked them if they would please leave the city.

(Knock on the door. Paul and Silas enter.)

Paul: Well, we're all packed and ready to leave.

Lydia: Wish you didn't have to leave. But I know you have to. Thank you again for all you have done for me and my household. Remember, I'll be expect a letter or two from you Paul!

Paul: Yes it's time to go we must be moving on. And don't *worry*. Instead of worrying, pray. Let God know your concerns. He won't let you down.

(End with an appropriate song by all the whole cast.)