

## Cities of the New Testament: Puteoli

This is the ninth in a continuing *Ekklesia Then & Now* series on the cities of the New Testament. Previous installments have been Corinth (ET&N 23), Ephesus (28), Laodicea (33), Antioch (40), Rome (53), Alexandria (60), Lystra (63), and Tarsus (68). The purpose of the series is to examine the history, geography, religion, culture, and people of each city and to consider how they relate to us today. Additional installments of this series will discuss Caesarea, Athens, Arimathea, Colossae, Thessalonica, Philippi, Perga, and Troas. Additional cities may be added.

### Then

Puteoli can hardly be considered a major city in the text of the New Testament, yet the single passage in which it is mentioned speaks quite loudly. It comes as Paul, Luke, presumably Aristarchus, and his Roman guard, Julius, disembark on the Italian peninsula after surviving a lengthy voyage, including the shipwreck on Malta:

*"After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome"* (Acts 28:11-14).



Puteoli and the Bay of Naples

At that time, Puteoli served as one of the two major seaports for Rome. The other, Ostia, lies about 25 miles west of Rome at the mouth of the Tiber (Ostia, in fact, is Latin for "mouth"). Larger ships had some difficulty docking at Ostia because of its rough shoreline and ever changing depths. Consequently, it would not be unusual for a grain ship coming from Alexandria to land at Puteoli, where cargo would be transferred to smaller boats.

Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) lies on the eastern side of the beautiful Bay of Naples in a smaller inlet known as the Bay of Baiae (see map). The entire Bay of Naples area was a resort area for wealthy Romans, who had opulent villas in the towns of Misenum, Baiae, Puteoli, Neapolis, Herculaneum, Pompeii, Stabiae, and Surrentum where they escaped the oppressive Roman summer. The fabled island of Capri lies at the southern end of the Bay.

One of the most famous incidents involving Puteoli occurred in about 39 A.D., when Emperor Caligula (Gaius Caesar) had a makeshift bridge built across the Bay of Baiae, a distance of approximately three miles. Boats, some built on the spot, others brought in, were anchored in a double line and covered with planks on which dirt was

piled. Caligula then mounted his chariot and led his army across the bay. Modern and contemporary historians offer several possible explanations for this bizarre behavior, the most fanciful being that it was his answer to the prediction by the astrologer Trasyllus that "Caligula had no more chance of becoming emperor than of crossing the bay of Baiae on horseback." More mundane but no less eccentric explanations include that he disliked walking around the bay, that it was a military-discipline project, and that it was a centennial celebration of Pompey's eastern triumph in 61 B.C. The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus is more direct, simply citing the incident as an example of Caligula's insanity, particularly since the bridge project so reduced the number of available grain ships that a serious famine ensued in the capital.

Additional imperial involvement in Puteoli includes Nero's (54-68) attempt on his mother's life by putting her in a boat designed to fall apart as she crossed the Bay of Baiae (suspecting his treachery, she put a disguised maid, in that boat and boarded another), Domitian's (81-96) building of a spur road to Puteoli from the famous Appian Way which reduced the distance between Rome and Puteoli from 142 to 129 miles, and Hadrian's (117-138) burial at Cicero's former estate on the outskirts of Puteoli.

According to the Roman historian Tacitus, Puteoli was the site of a significant civil disturbance in 58:

"During the same consulship a hearing was given to two conflicting deputations from Puteoli, sent to the Senate by the town council and by the populace. The first spoke bitterly of the violence of the multitude; the second, of the rapacity of the magistrates and of all the chief citizens. That the disturbance, which had gone as far as stoning and threats of fire, might not lead on to bloodshed and armed fighting, Caius Cassius was appointed to apply some remedy. As they would not endure his rigour, the charge of the affair was at his own request transferred to the brothers Scribonii, to whom was given a praetorian cohort, the terror of which, coupled with the execution of a few persons, restored peace to the townspeople" ([The Annals XIII](#), written ca 109, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb).

As a port city, Puteoli itself may not have been the most impressive city in the area, but its status as a port also made it a shopping mecca for consumers seeking mosaics, pottery, and perfume from the east. One of Puteoli's primary exports was "puzzuoli earth," a particularly strong form of cement combining volcanic ash with mud.



Remains of the Temple of Neptune

The city had been founded by Greeks as Dicearchia in about 520 B.C., but it came under Roman control by the end of the 4th century B.C. When Paul landed there in 60 A.D., Puteoli was at the height of its prosperity and had a population of nearly 100,000. Puteoli had its share of major buildings, including its own aqueduct and an impressive amphitheatre (still in use today), but the most notable is probably the Temple of Neptune.



The view of Vesuvius from the Puteoli mole, W.H. Bartlett, 1856

The entire Bay of Naples is an active geologic area, most notably evidenced by the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D., when the towns of Herculaneum and Pompeii were completely destroyed and terrified residents of other nearby towns endured swaying buildings and dodged falling pumice stone for hours. While Puteoli was largely unaffected, its residents would have witnessed the event, particularly in the illuminated night sky. Just north of Puteoli, the Phlegraean (Greek for "burning") Fields featured numerous craters emitting sulfurous fumes and producing copious mineral waters. These healthful waters were piped into Puteoli, where Romans could enjoy baths at the Temple of Neptune's thermal facilities.

Given these recreational features of the Puteoli area, it may be surprising that Paul found a fledgling church there, but the fact that he remained there for a full week suggests that it was an active group who sought the apostle's teaching. It is also a commentary on the freedom or respect Paul had earned from Julius, who would normally have been expected to convey his prisoner immediately to Rome for an imperial hearing.

We know nothing of the Christians in Puteoli, although Orthodox Church tradition holds that Patrobas (see Romans 16:14) was among the 70 apostles appointed by Jesus (Luke 10:1-16) and became the first bishop of Puteoli (or Neapolis). The Roman Catholic Church considers this a fabrication of Dositheos, although it counts Puteolians Proculus, Acutius, Eutyches, and Artemas among the early martyrs of the church. The Orthodox Church considers Patrobas a saint and celebrates his feast on November 5.

## Now

Puteoli suffered steady decline shortly after Paul's time, having been upstaged by an upgraded port in Ostia. Much of the ancient city was only recently found and some lies under the waters of the bay. Today, Pozzuoli may be best known among Italians as the birthplace of the archetypal cinema sex symbol of the 50's and 60's, Sophia Loren.



The waterfront of modern Pozzuoli (Puteoli)

How did the church come to a town like Puteoli prior to Paul's arrival? No ancient document provides the answer, but it is reasonable to surmise, given the strong relationship between Rome and Puteoli, that believers from Rome founded the church. My own theory, fictionalized in [Peculiar People](#), is that Aquila and Prisca were somehow instrumental. We know that "visitors from Rome" were in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:10), and we know that Aquila and Prisca were in Corinth, having been expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius (41-54) when Paul arrived (Acts 18:2). In *Peculiar People*, the Roman church is founded by Aquila and his father. Ampliatus (see Romans 16:8), the son of a wealthy Roman, is converted through the change he notes in two of his servants. Vacationing at his father's villa in Puteoli, he witnessed Caligula's pontoon bridge over the Bay of Baiae and when the construction collapses, he courageously saves numerous people from drowning. A young perfume-maker named Cynthia questions him about the incident,

and they soon fall in love and are married, forming the foundation of the church in Puteoli. The majority of that is fiction, of course, but it made a nice story. Other than Aquila and Prisca, Ampliatius and Cynthia are my favorite characters in the book.

The real church in Puteoli is shrouded in the sands of time, but the fact that it existed, separate from the influence of the apostles, demonstrates the power of the gospel and the degree to which it rapidly spread across the Roman world. A port like Puteoli would have all manner of individuals passing through as cargo ships arrived. Someone planted the gospel there and it took root.

The experience of early Christians in Puteoli, a resort town, must have been a lot like modern Christians who carry the gospel to the resort areas of the United States. While it may seem hard to imagine, there are undoubtedly committed Christians facing the challenges of American materialism in places like Vail, Key West, Las Vegas, Maui, and Hilton Head, reminding us that the wealthy need the gospel every bit as much as the poor--maybe even more.

## Discussion

There were no comments on the "Justin Martyr, Heretic?" issue; however, there were some additional comments about "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs":

Sterling from West Virginia:  
Dick,

I certainly appreciate your reluctance to dive into this issue evidenced by your comment that you have "avoided it for nearly three years." It is not on my Top 10 list of critical issues in one's relationship to God either, but it is an issue that is dividing fellowship unnecessarily. I completely changed my own position on this issue after some honest and complete Bible study in the early 1990's. I grew up hearing that "a capella singing" was one of the "marks of the church"!

A study of God and Covenant has had more impact on my understanding of my relationship with God than any other study I have undertaken. Once one understands God's Covenant, issues such as this become totally meaningless. I no longer think in CENI terms. I have a much broader view of worship. While I try to avoid these controversial discussions, I believe the still must take place from time to time to expose the silly reasoning that sectarian thinking produces.

One example of this silly thinking is by those who claim that Paul is identifying the heart as the literal instrument which therefore eliminates all other instruments of praise. I have attached a short discussion on this from a study I did on the subject at hand [Note: [click here](#) to read Sterling's excellent analysis].

I suppose the final nail in the coffin of this argument for me was the understanding of the origin of the synagogue and the rabbinical system during the Babylonian captivity. Psalm 137 certainly sheds some light on this. A realization that the NT church was 100% Jewish for nearly a decade easily lets one see how the Jewish a capella synagogue tradition evolved into the Christian a cappella tradition.

Keep plugging away, brother!

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The next two were follow-ups from the discussion section

Darryl from Texas:

Very good rebuttal, Dick. As far as difference between psalms and hymns I couldn't say for certain. However, as a poetry and literature aficionado I would say there are several stylistic differences between any of the psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures and the hymns found in the New Testament (e.g., Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13). By the time of the first century a Psalm may have been a very distinct class of lyric—or it may have referred to the

Hebrew psalter itself as distinguished from the newer Christian compositions (hymns perhaps?). Such a distinction really isn't a great stretch.

However, you are still on target. The argument is really just an exercise in thinking for me. Clearly there is little evidence for a ban on musical instruments in the New Testament; so little as to be non-existent. Your point is well taken and very well presented.

God's blessings!

Jim:

Expected you would receive a flood of replies on your music posit. And I expected some would refer to the Col 2:13-14 argument(while ignoring verses 16-17). Justification by keeping the regulations of the Mosaical Law was nailed, or done away with, in favor of grace and faith as the means for justification, not music!. It is amazing to me what some choose to include in that passage as justification for one's stance on some issues, which Paul never intended nor could have ever imagined! I have NEVER had anyone who saw no sin in the use of instrumental music in worship ever come to me as their Elder and tell me, much less insist, that the use of instruments be included in our worship. I wish those who have repeatedly insisted that acapella worship was the only "acceptable" form of corporate worship could be as gracious.

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And, finally, I heard back from Alphaia:

Brother Dick. I am of like mind as you said so skillfully. However, you evidently missed my points about our ability to earn or pay for our salvation. No way do I believe that we are able to pay or earn salvation!!!! You asked: "I have to ask, which is it? Are we saved by grace or by 'working in His vineyard.' If we cannot be saved without the latter, what is the value of grace?" The simple answer is: "A Faith without works is dead." Jam. 2:17-24. Since it is impossible to please God without Faith (showing our works), Heb 11:6, wouldn't it void "grace"?

[DS] Our works verify our faith, but since they do not earn grace, as Alphaia admits, they also cannot void grace. If a lack of works could void grace then God's grace is not a free gift and, as Paul says, if there were a role for works in salvation, "grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6). And if it takes works to be saved, then we are all under a curse (Galatians 3:10), for we can no more perfectly follow all of Christ's commands than Israel could follow the Law. The works we do are themselves the result of God's grace, prepared by God for those who are already saved (Ephesians 2:10). James' point is not that we are saved by works, nor that God sees our faith through our works (He knows our hearts) but that a lack of works displays a lack of faith.

[Alphaia] As I stated in my first response trying to explain if "This truth, does not say that we can do anything to earn salvation, Our salvation is free and paid for, provided we follow the Master's words. WE SURE CAN NOT BE SAVED WITHOUT "Working in his vineyard."

[DS] I want to edit Alphaia's words so that perhaps we can mean the same thing (I'm sure he'll tell me if he disagrees). As stated, I find a contraction--"our salvation is free and paid for" BUT then Alphaia states a condition ("provided we follow..."). If someone handed me the keys to a new Mercedes SUV and told me it was "free and paid for," but then said I had to use it to transport a dozen or so poor people to their jobs, is the Mercedes truly "free and paid for"? I would suggest not--payment was expected in the form of free rides for others. If I refused to give the rides, and the giver took the Mercedes back, the gift was never given. So, I would disagree that "we sure can not be saved without 'working in his vineyard.'" Instead, I would suggest that we have not been saved (have not accepted God's free gift) if we are not working in his vineyard (doing the works he prepared for us). The distinction may seem minor, but it is critical.

The Scriptures Alphaia quoted to "prove" his wording (John 6:29, Philippians 2:12, Colossians 1:10b, 2 Thessalonians 1:11b) all support the idea that part of being saved is having divinely-prepared works that are not volitional once we are saved, not because we are under an obligation, but because "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). By submitting to God's will in our lives through the Holy Spirit, we will do good works **because** we are saved (under grace), not **in order** to be saved.

[Alphaia] The apparent difference that I understand about "Grace" is, God provides us everything necessary for life and godliness, (2 Peter 1:3), this was given by God's grace, His word absolutely shows us the way He desires us to live in this life. These directions or instructions, including 2 Pet. 1:5-11, are some of the "work" of God as the Spirit had Paul write in Eph. 2:8-10. When we receive, believe or have faith in God's WORD (Christ), who said we would be judged by His word (John 12:48), we will follow "the meaning" of the "word" to the best of our ability. We fail often, just like Paul. And as you said words like: "When we fall (Sin), Christ has paid for the error. But that payment did not relieve us from obedience of His words, {Law}.

[DS] I certainly agree that God's grace, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, provides us everything we need to serve Him when we submit to the Spirit. 2 Peter 1:5-11 gives the prescription to keep from falling away (losing faith in Christ Jesus as the sole source of salvation), but it does not say that the failure to do such things in itself voids God's grace. Again, this is a subtle distinction. To maintain our hope in the grace exclusively available through Christ, Peter advises us to add goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God, concern for others, and love to our faith. The manifestations of these fruits are possible only through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us through the grace of God.

[Alphaia] If we hold that we are not under Christ's Law we must explain away another passage in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, especially verse 17, "that the man of God may be complete (or perfect, Greek 'artios') **thoroughly equipped for every good work**", NKJV. To be perfect simply means to be of a complete, perfect or right mind to serve or work in the vineyard. Note Luke 1:3, "Perfect"--{a different Greek work-"teleios" meaning "exactly:--circumspectly, diligently}. If I understand the scripture this boils down to doing all we can to please the Lord and Master and follow His word or commands as close as possible, exercising our own desires and decisions **only** on matters necessary to fulfill His "instructions, word or law" as He has given, applying Romans 14, where it fits.

[DS] I don't see why it might be necessary to "explain away" 2 Timothy 2:16-17. The Greek word **artios** is used only here in the New Testament, but it is apparently derived from **aro**, meaning "to fit." The meaning of the passage therefore seems to be that Scripture outfits the believer with the means to carry out the work God prepared. Being "under Christ's Law," however, is contrasted with the Levitical Law. The latter calls for external works, the former calls for an internal attitude (which is then externally displayed). The difference lies in being obligated by regulation (the old Law, an external force) versus compelled (the new "Law," an internal force) by love (cf 2 Corinthians 5:14).

Ultimately, despite the comments back and forth, I don't think Alphaia and I disagree that much. We might quibble about the motivation for good works, but we certainly agree on God's desire for us to work for the cause of Christ in a lost world.

[Alphaia] If these scriptures do not mean something like what I have tried to say, then Christ has/will **save all mankind, without works of any kind???** Commonly called "Universal salvation!" And I do not believe either of us believe that to be true.

From Lou:

Thank you for adding me to your mailing list. I find your articles and the discussion very interesting. I would like to read the analysis by Sterling but the link will not open for me. How do I make it work? Thanks... - Lou

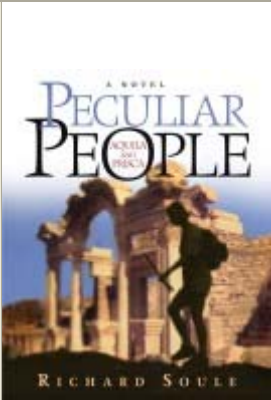
"One example of this silly thinking is by those who claim that Paul is identifying the heart as the literal instrument which therefore eliminates all other instruments of praise. I have attached a short discussion on this from a study I did on the subject at hand [Note: click here to read Sterling's excellent analysis]. "

[DS] The InJesus communication service is wonderful for many reasons, but there are a couple of downsides. When I copy articles from DreamWeaver (which I use to manage my website) to InJesus, the correct links are not transferred, so I have to hunt through the InJesus composition window for the links and correct them. Sometimes, I miss a couple, as I did with Sterling's comments, so here's a direct link to it: [http://www.peculiarpress.com/ekklesia/resources/Music\\_SterlingDye.htm](http://www.peculiarpress.com/ekklesia/resources/Music_SterlingDye.htm). You should be able to link by clicking that url or you can copy it into your browser.



Unsure about or don't agree with something in *Ekklesia Then & Now?* First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, respond (click "respond" at top or bottom) so we can all share in the discussion!

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