

## The Book of Acts - Chapter Sixteen

### VII Acts 15:36-18:22 - The Witness in Greece (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Sixteen

Having departed Antioch in Syria, Paul and Silas travelled into Cilicia, through the Gülek Pass, or Cilician Gates, over the Taurus Mountains into Cappadocia, before arriving in Derbe and then Lystra. Here they were joined by a young disciple named Timothy, who would become a faithful companion for the remainder of Paul's life.

Although Paul would normally speak passionately against circumcising new believers, Timothy was the son of a Jewess and his family situation was well known in the region, so Paul had Timothy circumcised in order to make him acceptable to any Jews they encountered on their journeys, thus ensuring this did not become an issue of contention with opponents or a barrier for Jews who wanted to come to faith.

They travelled generally northwest across modern central Turkey, stopping in some places but being guided by the Spirit to avoid others. Eventually, they reached Troas on the Aegean coast, where Paul received a vision of a man of Macedonia, who asked the evangelists to come over to bring the word to them.

Immediately, Paul and his team set out by sea across the Aegean, arriving in its principle city, Philippi. There was no synagogue in Philippi but after several days, on the Sabbath, Paul encountered a group of women, probably God-fearers, who were holding a worship meeting by the river outside of the city. Paul and the disciples spoke with the women and many of them, including their leading lady, came to faith. Their leader, called Lydia, was a wealthy woman and offered to accommodate the whole group, and her whole household came to faith.

One day, when they were on their way to pray, Paul encountered a demon-possessed slave girl, who had the power to predict the future. She had been following the group for several days, making a scene about their ministry, apparently quite factually as the spirit who possessed her recognised the Holy Spirit's power in the apostolic group. Paul eventually lost patience and commanded the spirit to leave the girl in the name of Jesus, an instruction it immediately complied with.

This upset the girl's owners, who had made a good living out of her spirit-possession, so they roused a mob against Paul and Silas. They were taken before the magistrates, who had them severely beaten and put in prison.

Paul and Silas found themselves in a dire situation yet, around midnight, they were still praising God and singing hymns, which had the attention of the prisoners. The prison was

suddenly struck by an earthquake, the prisoners' chains were broken and the prison doors opened by the force of it.

The jailer awoke, feared all the prisoners had escaped and, as this would cost him his life at the hands of the magistrates, he was going to commit suicide. But the prisoners had not left the prison, and Paul called out to the jailer not to harm himself. The jailer then went into the prison and saw for himself what had happened, recognised the hand of God in it all and asked the two men to help him come to faith.

Paul and Silas spent the rest of the night with the jailer and his family, having their wounds tended to. They baptised the jailer and his household, sharing and explaining the Gospel message with them all.

The next day, the magistrates sent word for Paul and Silas to be released, hoping they would leave Philippi quietly, but Paul revealed that the two of them were Roman citizens, thus the magistrates had transgressed Roman law and could themselves face trial for not giving Paul and Silas a fair hearing and treating them so harshly without a conviction against them. So the magistrates, out of fear, came personally, requesting Paul and Silas accompany them out of the city. They did so, stopping at Lydia's house first to say goodbye to the church, thus ensuring they left Philippi with their heads held high.



The map indicates the route taken by Paul and his companions on their second missionary journey, which took the Gospel into Europe for the first time. Although dates cannot be certain, this journey occurred circa AD49-52.

## VII.b Acts 16:1-5 - Timothy joins Paul and Silas

Timothy joined Paul and Silas at Lystra. Because Timothy's mother was Jewish, Paul had him circumcised. They continued on their way, revisiting the churches of the first mission.

<sup>1</sup> He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek.

### Acts 16:1

It is likely that Timothy, his mother and his grandmother had been led to Christ during Paul's first witness in Lystra (Acts 14:8-23), which seems to be confirmed by: <<I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also>> (2 Timothy 1:5). Having a Greek father, Timothy had not been circumcised, although by Jewish law the child of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother was considered to be Jewish.

<sup>2</sup> The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

#### Acts 16:3

The brothers, spoke well of him. It is essential that Christians maintain a good reputation in their community, otherwise it weakens the Gospel message they are trying to share, whether they do so verbally or by their lifestyle choices.

Because of the Jews who lived in that area. Paul never abandoned his Jewish heritage, and so he circumcised Timothy. It was all the more necessary if Timothy was to join his mission. He did not want to fight on nonessentials: <<Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law>> (1 Corinthians 9:19-21). Paul always began in the synagogues, and to have an uncircumcised Jew with him would have made any witness to Jews much more difficult. For those who opposed the Gospel would use it as a reason to find fault with the ministers of Christ, and those who were Jews and interested in hearing the Gospel would have found it difficult to associate with Timothy due to his uncircumcision, for the law stated: <<Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" >> (Genesis 17:14). Since Timothy had grown up in this region, the Jews would have known of his mixed family background. It would also have made Timothy's independent ministry more difficult later on as well. It was probably at this time that Paul baptised him in the Holy Spirit: <<For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands>> (2 Timothy 1:6).

Timothy had gained an excellent reputation in regard to his character, not just in his local community but in other towns as well. He would become a dedicated disciple of Paul and Jesus, was soon trusted to go out on his own to plant and support churches and to lead others. He was clearly devoted to Paul: <<Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy>> (2 Timothy 1:4).

Deuteronomy 7:3 forbids Jewish men from marrying Gentile women or giving their daughters to Gentile men. Thus presumably Eunice's father was in error and also Eunice herself. However, some read the law as referring only to the Gentile tribes of Canaan.

<sup>4</sup> As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.

#### Acts 16:4

The decisions of the Jerusalem council were addressed specifically to believers in Antioch and throughout Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:23), but since the issue of Gentile converts affected all the churches, Paul reported those decisions as he travelled from town to town.

For the people to obey. Although over 1,000 miles away, the authority of the Jerusalem church still had an impact on the Diaspora Jews living in those regions.

<sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

## Acts 16:5

As is frequent in Acts, the section ends with reference to the growth of the church. Every single day people gave their lives to Christ on hearing the good news of Jesus. It is no wonder the workers were always filled with such joy.

## VII.c Acts 16:6-10 - Paul's vision of the man of Macedonia

Through divine direction, Paul was led to the town of Troas, where he received a vision directing him to witness in the Greek province of Macedonia.

### Acts 16:6-7

Paul's route is not altogether clear. After revisiting his earlier churches, undoubtedly travelling on the Via Sebaste, a Roman military road, he proceeded farther west into Phrygia. Had he continued in that direction he would have travelled through Asia with its prosperous coastal cities like Ephesus. The Spirit of Jesus prevented this, and he went north through Mysia. He was also prevented from witnessing in Bithynia.

<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

### Acts 16:6

Having been kept by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in Asia. From Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and his group travelled far northward, and then westward. Natural human wisdom would have led them to think they should preach the Gospel in all the cities that they passed through, but instead the Holy Spirit directed them on a 400 mile or 644 km journey by foot to Troas (v.8). They must have had a strong sense of the Spirit's direct guidance and concluded that he would guide others to preach the Gospel in the northern regions of Asia and in Bithynia, since Peter writes to churches in that region: <<Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia>> (1 Peter 1:1).

We are not told why the group could not go to Asia, whether it was someone else's work, the people's hearts were not yet right, or simply that Paul was required elsewhere, i.e. in Macedonia and the rest of Greece. We don't know either whether the instruction had come through the Holy Spirit or a prophet speaking his words. They were simply prevented from speaking in a couple of locations, unlike Ezekiel who could not speak at all: <<I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be silent and unable to rebuke them, though they are a rebellious house>> (Ezekiel 3:26).

<sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

### Acts 16:7

Bithynia was also out of bounds for them but it was to here that Peter would write to an apparently thriving church, see 1 Peter 1:1.

Nicæa was a city in Bithynia where the first council against the Arians was held circa 320 AD. The outcome letter was: 'Having concocted a council in Bithynia, they wrote to all the bishops, instructing them to fellowship with the Arian group as having proper beliefs, and to pressure Alexander to fellowship with them as well'.

The Spirit of Jesus. Another name for the Holy Spirit, who had been sent by Jesus to the church in new power at Pentecost: <<Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear>> (Acts 2:33), resulting in: <<When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me>> (John 15:26).

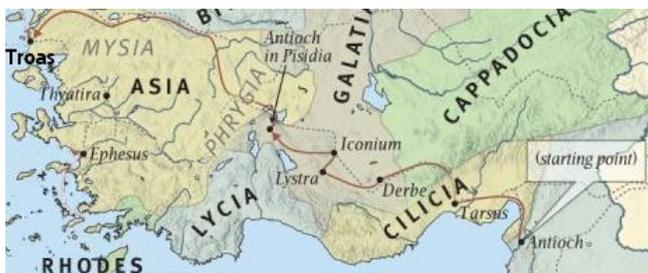
<sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

#### Acts 16:8

Mysia had a bad reputation but they went there anyway, as Paul explains generally when stating: <<I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish>> (Romans 1:14). Some translations say he passed by Mysia and others he passed through it.

Troas was a major Aegean port, 14 miles or 23 km south of ancient Troy, the legendary site of the Trojan Wars. Troas was the primary Asian harbour for ships destined for Macedonia and the harbour of Troas is still visible, although it is silted over. Ongoing excavations at the site of Troas have yielded a pagan temple and an adjacent agora, or marketplace, from the time of Paul. Though not very distant in nautical miles, Macedonia was a different part of the world, i.e. Europe, instead of the East, to which the Gospel had hitherto been confined.

<sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."



The group travelled across modern-day Turkey to the Aegean port city of Troas.



A mosaic depicting Paul's vision of the man requesting they travel across to Macedonia to bring the Gospel to them.

#### Acts 16:9

A vision of a man. Because some kind of visible image of a man came in such a forceful way, accompanied by such a strong sense of God's presence, that Paul concluded that the Holy Spirit was guiding him. God has historically spoken to people in visions, the Greek word horama, elsewhere, as recorded in both Acts and the rest of Scripture, e.g. Acts 7:31, 9:10, 10:3, 12:9 and 18:9; Genesis 15:1 and 46:2; Exodus 3:3; Daniel 7:1 and 7:13; and Matthew 17:9.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

#### Acts 16:10

The occurrence of we is the first time in the narrative that the first person plural occurs in Acts and most likely indicates that at this point Luke, the author of Acts, joined the missionary group as they set out for Macedonia.

Paul had the vision but the others had no hesitation in following him, even though they had not had a similar one. They were not following Paul but following Jesus through Paul, just as the six brothers followed Jesus through Peter to Cæsarea in Acts Chapter 10.

#### VII.d Acts 16:11-40 - Paul witnesses in Philippi

Philippi was the first Macedonian city in which Paul witnessed. His ministry there is related in four parts: the conversion of Lydia (vv.11-15), the arrest of Paul and Silas (vv.16-24), the conversion of the Philippian jailer (vv.25-34), and the release of Paul and Silas by the magistrates (vv.35-40).

#### VII.d.i Acts 16:11-15 - Lydia's conversion in Philippi

Because there was no synagogue in Philippi, Paul began his witness to a group of women, who believed in the God of Israel, and who had gathered outside the city for prayer. One of them, Lydia, responded to the Gospel and was baptised along with her household.

<sup>11</sup> From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis.

#### Acts 16:11

Samothrace was an island on the direct route between Troas and Neapolis, the port for Philippi, which lay 8 miles or 14 km inland. Paul's ship would likely have stopped, probably simply to anchor offshore for the night, on the north side of Samothrace. Neapolis, most probably modern Kavalla, was built on a natural harbour still in use today.

<sup>12</sup> From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

#### Acts 16:12

Philippi was a Roman colony, the most privileged status for provincial cities. As such, many of the local inhabitants would not be Greek but Romans. This would again have been a new challenge for the ministry team to face, adapt to and overcome.

Philippi was named after Philip, King of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Although they had been invited by the vision to go to Macedonia, there was no one to welcome them in Philippi nor did they know anyone, so they had to find accommodation, presumably at their own expense, until the conversion of Lydia. This is not untypical of ministry throughout the ages when many feel they have been called to go to a specific place and have felt unwelcomed there for some considerable time in some cases.

After their victory at the Battle of Philippi in 42BC, Antony and later Augustus, re-founded this Macedonian city with army veterans. Its special status as an Augustan colony exempted the city from significant forms of taxation and gave it additional privileges of land ownership. The city encompassed good agricultural land, and it was on the Egnatian Way, an important Roman commercial road, built in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC. The Roman ethos of

the colony is evident in Philippi's Latin civic inscriptions and in their polytheistic worship of various Roman gods.

Extant archæological remains from Paul's day testify to the presence of a theatre, a large forum beneath the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD forum, shops, and two city gates, designated Krenides to the west and Neapolis to the east. There is a speaker's platform in the existing 2<sup>nd</sup> Century forum between a pair of large fountains. One small stone crypt, built over a cistern, near the forum was designated in later church tradition as the prison site of Paul and Silas (vv.23-34). Other structures dating from NT times and the early centuries of the church, e.g. a sports facility, pagan temples, octagonal and basilica style churches, can still be seen in Philippi.

<sup>13</sup> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

#### Acts 16:13

Philippi seems to have had no significant Jewish population. Like Lydia, the women who attended the prayer meeting may have been God-fearers and not Jews. At least three locations among the remains of Philippi have been suggested for this place of prayer.



The baptistry by the Krenides River is a favoured location for where Paul encountered Lydia and her group of worshippers.

<sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

#### Acts 16:14

Lydia came from Thyatira (see Revelation 2:18-29), a city of the province of Asia in the district of Lydia, after which she may have been named.

#### Comments on Lydia, she:

1. Is one of the few people mentioned by name in the bible, which is especially rare for women. However, it is more important to have our names written in the book of life, see Luke 10:20, Philippians 4:3, and Revelation 20:15.
2. Had her own business of dealing in purple cloth, a valuable and prized material, and her trade would bring her into contact with many influential people wherever she went, making her wealthy in her own right. She was clearly not a woman such as those referred to by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:13.
3. Was from Thyatira, so in Philippi she was a long way from home, perhaps on business or due to marriage, yet she was there to do the work of God, which always makes us believe it is providential.

4. Had faith in the one true God. She already worshipped God, probably as a God-fearer, but then found it insufficient to come to him as the Father, without being able to come through Him who is the moderator.

Thyatira was a politically and culturally marginalised city, finding its identity economically, through the guilds dealing in metals and fabric. Guilds celebrated their patron deities in periodic festivities, so Christians may have been tempted toward the message of a prophetess who advocated participation in illicit sex and food sacrificed to idols (see Revelation 2:18-29), both staples of the social scene. Archaeological soundings at modern Ak-Hissar have yielded evidence of a few ancient architectural elements from Thyatira. Coins point to the ongoing NT-era worship of Apollo, who had been assimilated with the Lydian sun-god Tyrimnos.

As a dealer in purple cloth, she would probably have been wealthy. Thyatira was famous for its expensive purple dyes, and purple was a favoured colour among the wealthy including governors, kings and senior religious leaders.

The Lord opened her heart. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, not the wisdom or persuasiveness of the preacher, that ultimately draws people to Christ.

Christ, however, is dealing with the soul. He knocks at the door that is shut against him (Revelation 3:20), and when a sinner is effectually persuaded to embrace Christ, when the heart is open to receive the divine light, the will then open to receive the divine law, and the emotions open to receive the divine love; when the heart is open to Christ, the mouth open in prayer, the hand open in giving and the steps enlarged in all manner of Gospel obedience, then we are in a position to come before the throne of grace in full subjection.

<sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

#### Acts 16:15

Lydia's household likely included servants as well. Her house eventually became the gathering place for the Christians (v.40).

She invited us to her home. Paul seemed reluctant to stay with Lydia so as not to be a burden on a new convert: <<What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it>> (1 Corinthians 9:18), and: <<You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions>> (Acts 20:34), but she insisted, indicating her sincere joy at what they had just revealed to her, the Gospel truth.

It should be our delight to entertain others of the faith, just as Abraham did in Genesis 18:3. Of course, there are benefits in doing so: <<Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway>> (Proverbs 8:34). Those that know something of Jesus can do no other than desire to know even more.

#### VII.d.ii Acts 16:16-40 - Paul and Silas in prison

Paul did what was right by casting out a demon from a young slave girl, which had tormented her but gave her predictive powers. Her owners were dismayed as they had cruelly made a large profit out of her affliction as, through this spirit, she could give divinations and tell fortunes to a higher degree than standard fortune tellers, which is why she earned so much money by being in great demand and she: <<earned a great deal of money for her owners>> (v.16c).

Up until now, apart from within Lydia's group, the ministers' profile had been relatively low. They were perhaps starting to come to prominence but Satan seems to have designed this distraction. However, the Holy Spirit would now change that by creating a situation that would get them noticed, and would again win a victory over Satan and his servants, even though Paul and Silas would be beaten and imprisoned for it.

#### VII.d.ii.1 Acts 16:16-24 - Imprisonment of Paul and Silas

Paul cast out a spirit that possessed a slave girl and gave her predictive powers. Losing their means of income, her owners brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates, who had them beaten and imprisoned.

<sup>16</sup> Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.

#### Acts 16:16

A spirit by which she predicted the future indicates she was possessed by a spirit of divination, i.e. a demonic spirit, who gave information to the slave girl, so that she could tell people secrets about their lives. Fortune-telling was forbidden to God's people in the OT, see Deuteronomy 18:10, 1 Samuel 28:8, 2 Kings 17:17, and Micah 3:11. The Septuagint uses the same Greek verb for fortune-telling, manteuomai that is used in this verse.

<sup>17</sup> This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." <sup>18</sup> She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

#### Acts 16:18

Telling you the way to be saved. What she said about them though was true and accurate, for even evil spirits recognise a power far greater than their master, and they cannot help but acknowledge it, just as they had done with Jesus: <<Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!">> (Mark 1:23-24).

The words of the fortune-telling girl (v.17) were true in a formal sense, but Paul was so troubled, probably because he did not want it to appear that she was his partner in the Gospel.

In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her. Rather than praying to God, Paul speaks directly to the spirit and commands it to leave. Such a verbal command is consistent with the authority over demons that Jesus himself had: <<When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick>> (Matthew 8:16), and: <<"Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!">> (Luke 4:34-36), and that he had given to his disciples: <<When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons>> (Luke 9:1a), and: <<The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name">> (Luke 10:17). The NT epistles elsewhere

discuss spiritual battles against the forces of evil, e.g. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, Ephesians 6:12, James 4:7, and 1 Peter 5:8-9.

Of course, Paul himself was known of by the evil spirits: <<Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" >> (Acts 19:13-15), but he never tried to use his own name but always used that of the Lord Jesus, thus Paul demonstrated what Jesus should and will do to their master: <<He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him>> (Revelation 20:3a).

<sup>19</sup> When the owners of the slave girl realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

#### Acts 16:19

The slave girl's owners were upset by their loss of revenue. Throughout Acts, the financial gain motive often works against the Gospel, e.g. as with Simon Magus in Samaria (Acts 8:18-24), Elymas the sorcerer on Cyprus (Acts 13:8-12), and Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus (Acts 19:24).

<sup>20</sup> They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar

#### Acts 16:20

The magistrates, Greek stratēgoi, were responsible for maintaining civil order, and were the officials for a Roman colony, with two appointed to each colony.

Throwing our city into an uproar. The men are unjustly charged with causing trouble, just as King Ahab had charged Elijah when he spoke the truth of God in his time: <<When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" >> (1 Kings 18:17).

<sup>21</sup> by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

#### Acts 16:21

The Romans were tolerant of all faiths providing they did not clash or cause public disorder, and so they would be concerned that they were teaching directly against polytheism and idolatry, a key part of Roman culture, and that they were stirring up a mob against them.

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.

#### Acts 16:22

Responding to the unruly crowd, the magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped and ordered them to be beaten with rods. The magistrates in Roman cities were served by attendants, who carried bundles of wooden rods, bound together as symbols of the magistrates' authority, and their right to inflict corporal punishment. Paul and Silas were severely beaten with these wooden rods (v.23). This would not be the only time as Paul confirms: <<Three times I was beaten with rods>> (2 Corinthians 11:25a).

The entire process was a miscarriage of justice, since there was no fair trial to ascertain the facts or to allow Paul and Silas to speak in their own defence. In 1 Thessalonians 2:2a, Paul

says: <<We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi>>. There would be no limitation on the number of blows, such as there was under Jewish law, i.e. 40 (see Deuteronomy 25:3), so the Romans could beat them as much as they wished.

<sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

#### Acts 16:23

Severely flogged. This would have caused them a lot of pain and damage to their skin and flesh, just to appease the crowd.

Prison. The stone structure, often designated as Paul's prison in tourist literature on Philippi, was so designated only in later church tradition. They had a reputation for being terrible places to be.

<sup>24</sup> Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

#### Acts 16:24

He put them in the inner cell. Being locked so securely in the inner prison indicates further charges were likely to be brought against Paul and Silas, perhaps even those that would carry the death penalty. The inner prison would have been a terrible place: dark, dreary, cold, damp and infested; there would be no sanitary facilities for the men. Jeremiah had suffered a similar imprisonment in a pit for prophesying the capture and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians: <<So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud>> (Jeremiah 38:6). True discipleship has always been a hard life for many but it always leads to a worthwhile life.

Fastened their feet in the stocks. The jailer may have heard of the escapes of other apostles in Jerusalem, see Acts 5:19 and 12:9. Others treated in this way were: <<he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the Lord's temple>> (Jeremiah 20:2); the Psalmist writes of Joseph: <<They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons>> (Psalm 105:18), and all those in the post-bible era.

#### VII.d.ii.2 Acts 16:25-34 - Conversion of the jailer

But what great witness! Their situation was dire and their pain intense, yet they gave prayers of thanksgiving and sang praises to God. The other prisoners, perhaps woken by the noise, as it was midnight, could not help but listen to them as they sang so loudly and with so much energy and passion. No doubt they would marvel at these men and wonder if what the girl had said about them was true. Some may have ridiculed them, as is the case today. But being motivated to praise God whilst suffering is something that will always gets people's attention: <<The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name>> (Acts 5:41), <<Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire>> (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19), and: <<Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise>> (James 5:13).

Paul and Silas were then miraculously freed from their confinement. They did not view their freedom as a means of escape however, but as an opportunity for further witness, as did the other apostles in Jerusalem in Acts 5:17-21. As a result, the jailer and his household came to saving faith in Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

### Acts 16:25

About midnight. <<At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws>> (Psalm 119:62), <<Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds>> (Psalm 149:5), and: <<Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you>> (Zechariah 9:12). **We are all prisoners of hope, captive to joy in the love of Jesus.**

Praying and singing hymns to God. Amid their suffering, Paul and Silas experienced the strong presence of the Holy Spirit, filling their hearts with joy and praise: <<For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps>> (1 Peter 2:19-21), and: <<Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you>> (1 Peter 4:12-14). **Joy for the honour of suffering is a common theme in Acts, e.g.** <<When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.'" Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus">> (Acts 4:24-30).

<sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

### Acts 16:26

Violent earthquake. God again shows his displeasure with an earthquake, perhaps not as powerful as at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:51), but still sufficient to shake the foundations of the prison and release the prisoners' chains. There were no reports of any casualties, which was also the case in the shipwreck on Malta, see Acts 27:24, and: <<The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound>> (Isaiah 61:1 KJV).

Everybody's chains came loose. The other prisoners could have escaped but stayed behind after being freed from their bonds. We are not told if any of them came to faith, but the fact they did not try to run away would indicate they at least wanted to hear more from Paul and Silas about what they had witnessed that night.

<sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

### Acts 16:27-30

The jailer woke up and called for lights, he was perhaps roused from his spiritual sleep as well: <<But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you">> (Ephesians 5:4), and: <<The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish">> (Jonah 1:6).

Don't harm yourself! Just as we saw with Herod in Acts Chapter 12 when Peter escaped, the jailer knew he would be put to death for losing his prisoners, so he was going to commit suicide, something that was not taught against by the philosophers of the day. He might have seen this as honourable, or perhaps a better option to the suffering he would face at the hands of his employers. But he didn't have to die, as the power of Grace was upon his life now.

Had the jailer killed himself before knowing and accepting Jesus as his Lord, he would have lost more than his life; he would have lost his soul, or at least his soul would have been lost!

What must I do to be saved? The jailer's question most likely refers to being saved from the judgment of God, which he would have heard about through listening to his prisoners' prayers and songs.

The jailer had known who and what Paul and Silas were, what they were proclaiming and how they had reacted to their painful and terrible treatment because of their beliefs. He had the account of the earthquake, in fact, he had experienced it and known it to be something special, for the prisoners had not escaped but stayed. Either his logic or, more likely, prompting from the Holy Spirit, made him realise a response was needed. The apostles answer: <<Believe in the Lord Jesus>> (v.31), is correct and sufficient, but of course more is needed, just as Paul later writes in Philippians 2:12b <<continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling>>. But he must enquire (Isaiah 21:12) of the way (Jeremiah 50:5), for we cannot know the way by ourselves: <<Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me">> (John 14:5-6), and it comes with a guarantee: <<The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call">> (Acts 2:39).

<sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household."

### Acts 16:31

For belief in Christ as the key to salvation, we read: <<All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name>> (Acts 10:43), <<For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life>> (John 3:16), <<I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes:

first for the Jew, then for the Gentile>> (Romans 1:16), and: <<For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame">> (Romans 10:10-11).

You and your household. Speaking to Zacchæus in Jericho: <<Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham">> (Luke 19:9). Lydia's household too had come to saving faith a few days earlier (v.15).

<sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptised.

#### Acts 16:33

Spoke the word of the Lord to him. He had to know who Jesus was, just as the man who was healed of blindness had to know: <<"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him">> (John 9:36).

The jailer, washed their wounds, leading Chrysostom, circa 347-407AD, to comment: "He washed and was washed; he washed them from their stripes, and was himself washed from his sins" (Homilies on Acts 36.2). He was a belated Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), then his whole household was baptised.

He and all his family were baptised. The jailer seems to have called forth his whole household to listen to Paul's message. Christians disagree as to whether the baptism of household members included infants or was confined to older members of the household, who were capable of making their own decision and statement of faith.

<sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.

#### Acts 16:34

Filled with joy or rejoiced translates the Greek word *agalliaō*, a word not used by secular Greek writers, and which always in the NT signifies a deep spiritual joy, as in Matthew 5:12, Luke 1:46-47, Luke 10:21, John 8:56, Acts 2:26, 1 Peter 4:13, and Revelation 19:7.

He had come to believe in God, linking to the deity of Jesus, and he was filled with joy, as was the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40), an inward and outward expression of our love for and hope in Jesus as the Christ of God, and equally, as God: <<May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth">> (Psalm 67:4), and: <<Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it">> (Psalm 96:11), being joyful glorifies God.

Matthew Henry wrote: 'One cheerful Christian should make many'.

#### VII.d.ii.3 Acts 16:35-40 - Release of Paul and Silas

Perhaps the earthquake had troubled the consciences of the magistrates, for they seemed to have a change of mind and wanted to release Paul and Silas. It was only at this time that Paul mentioned that they were Roman citizens, and should not have been beaten or imprisoned in the first place, at least not without a fair trial under Roman law. We're not told why they didn't make that clear before, as they could have avoided this hardship. However, it certainly spoke volumes about their character and the strength of their beliefs. Perhaps they were prompted by the Holy Spirit to do so. They insisted that the magistrates personally escort them

out, via Lydia's church, to the city boundary. This again would be a good witness as they didn't want to be seen to run away quietly but to openly display their courage in the city. They also wanted it known that they were not guilty of any crime as they had been proclaiming the truth about God.

Philippi would come to have a strong church of ex-proselytes, Greeks and Romans, a truly miraculous work of God. The magistrates did Paul and Silas no further harm. God could, of course, just as easily opened the hearts of the magistrates but he chose the jailer and his family: <<Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?>> (James 2:5).

<sup>35</sup> When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men."

#### Acts 16:35

Release those men. Why the magistrates decided to release the two prisoners is not specified. Perhaps the jailer had told them about the night's events or they had been alarmed by the earthquake, or perhaps they thought that the beating and overnight imprisonment was enough punishment, and that Paul and Silas would leave the city.

<sup>36</sup> The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

<sup>37</sup> But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

#### Acts 16:37

Do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Paul was concerned for the public reputation of his Gospel message and also, no doubt, for the good standing of the church that was being established at Philippi. Thus he insisted on public vindication lest the people of Philippi continue to believe that he was a troublemaker and a lawbreaker, ideas that would have presented barriers to the Gospel in Philippi for years to come. Paul wanted to make it clear that a mistake had been made. Christianity was no threat to Rome in a military sense.

Roman law forbade scourging or imprisoning Roman citizens without a formal hearing and a conviction of a suitable crime warranting such punishment.

<sup>38</sup> The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.

#### Acts 16:38

They were alarmed. Roman historians give instances where cities have lost their charter through the inappropriate treatment of Roman citizens, this is not just a loss of status but would have cost the city and its residents a lot of revenue and taxation payments.

The magistrates had broken God's law but only had concern because they had transgressed Roman law. How sad it is that people should fear the wrath of authority, e.g. Rome, yet care so little for the wrath of God. <<I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him>> (Luke 12:4-5).

<sup>39</sup> They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.

#### Acts 16:39

Requesting them to leave, as Moses prophesied the Egyptians would: <<All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, 'Go, you and all the people who follow you!' After that I will leave." Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh>> (Exodus 11:8), and as the people of the Gerasenes had done to Jesus: <<Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left>> (Luke 8:37).

<sup>40</sup> After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

#### Acts 16:40

After visiting Lydia's house to encourage the brothers, Paul and Silas left Philippi and went to the next town: <<Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" >> (Mark 1:38). They had not seen a lot of fruit from their costly labours this time, despite the divine calling of the vision that led them there, yet Philippi would soon benefit from their work to become a strong and giving church: <<Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons>> (Philippians 1:1), and: <<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>> (Philippians 4:25).