

Greece Pioneers - Prison Earthquake

V 1-2 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.

He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

“Then he came to Derbe and Lystra.” Lystra was the place where Paul and Barnabas on the previous journey had been mistaken for Zeus and Hermes (Mercury and Jupiter).

“A certain disciple. . . Timothy.” Timothy became Paul’s right hand man, taking over where John Mark left off. He was an ideal addition to the team of Paul and Silas, because he was *“the son of a certain Jewish woman. . . but his father was Greek”*; this kind of mixed parentage gave him access to both cultures - very useful in their missionary work. And so it was that, after Barnabas and John Mark had moved on to other ministries, Paul was not left without help, but the Lord raised up new helpers - Silas and Timothy.

V 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

“Paul. . . circumcised him.” It seems this was just a simple way to avoid needless problems, even persecution, from the Jewish community. The team could now expect unhindered access to the synagogues they would be visiting. If he had not gotten circumcised, the Jews would have assumed Timothy had renounced his Jewish heritage and had chosen to live as a Gentile, which for them would have been a major issue.

V 4-5 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

“They delivered to them the decrees.” This was the letter from the

Jerusalem church declaring the official stance of the Church on the issue of salvation by faith through grace. (15:23-29) *“So the churches were strengthened in the faith.”* The truth set the new Gentile believers free from the uncertainty and confusion created by the Circumcision faction in the Jerusalem church and their false doctrine of salvation by the works of the Law.

V 6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.

“Through Phrygia and the region of Galatia.” The new team retraced the route that Barnabas and Paul had made on the previous journey. They were about to go to *“Asia”*, which meant cities along the west coast of Turkey, such as Ephesus, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colosse, Sardis, Pergamos, and Thyatira but *“were forbidden by the Holy Spirit”*. As we know from Revelation 2-3, these later did become major centers of the Early Church, but for now the Holy Spirit had a different plan for Paul and his team.

V 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.

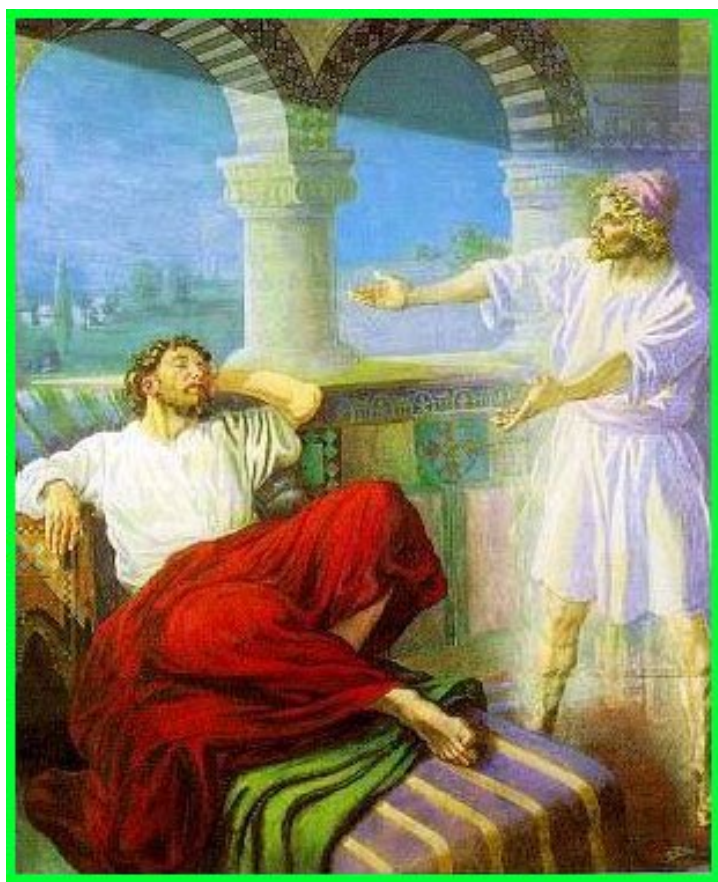
“Mysia.” The northwest part of the province of Asia Minor. *“They tried to go into Bithynia”* along the southern coast of the Black Sea.

“But the Spirit did not permit them.” Several translations say *“Spirit of Jesus”*, which recognizes the fact that the Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus (John 15:26 and 16:7).

And why did the Spirit “not permit them”? Perhaps it would have been too easy, or too dangerous, to reach the people there, or just too far off the beaten track. Not that those people weren’t deserving, but the priority at this point was to search for those who could become future leaders. And the best way to do that was to establish training centers in the cosmopolitan hubs of trade and traffic in the ancient world, and to places where people were apt to be less superstitious and mired in tradition than those who lived on the outskirts of the Roman empire.

V 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

“Troas.” Or Troy which 1,000 or so years earlier had been conquered by the Greeks in the famous war that featured the “Trojan horse”. Since they couldn’t go to Bithynia, the only place left in Turkey to go to now was Troas, which just happened to be the main jumping-off point for travelers going to Macedonia.



V 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

“A man of Macedonia.” Now and then God sends or allows a departed spirit to appear at crucial times to His children to serve as their guides or protectors. In this case, someone who, during his earthly life had lived in Macedon, appeared to Paul, beseeching him to bring the Gospel to Macedon. This land, the birthplace of Alexander the Great, lay across the Aegean Sea on the mainland north of Greece. (See map below.)

V 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

“Immediately we sought to go to Macedonia.” Paul and his team wasted no time in obeying what the Lord had shown them. Note the change from the third person to the first person “we”. This would indicate that the author of the Book of Acts - most likely Luke - had now joined the team.

Some quotes on planning and being led of the Spirit (similar to how Paul and his team were operating):

If you're organized, you'll think ahead, you'll plan ahead, you'll schedule ahead - and that gives you time to hear from the Lord about those plans, and [to] make sure they're right. Being spirit-led means letting the Spirit lead you to the right plan, and then following the Spirit as you enact the plan.

. . .You should actively seek out the direction of the Lord's Spirit in your times of planning. . .

What you do have to be careful about is not locking yourself so tightly into your plan - even if it's one that the Lord has confirmed - that you don't leave yourself open to changing if circumstances change and the Lord is trying to lead you to do something differently. You can't say, “Well, sorry, Lord, we have a plan already. This new open door doesn't fit in with our plan.” [Twice Paul and team, following the direction of the Spirit, abandoned their plans - of going to Asia then Bithynia.]

. . .You could liken it to being in a river - where the current is swiftest in the center and it moves more slowly at the edges. We need to be in the center of the current, flowing wherever it leads, no matter how fast it goes.

. . .We have to diligently seek to find exactly where the Lord is moving, and then move along with Him.

(from publication of [The Family International](#) - 12/2008)

You cannot look to your own wisdom, you cannot rest in your own understanding, you must look for the supernatural, miraculous and powerful leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It's

impossible to solve these problems on your own. Lean not to your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.

Most of the time I don't know what to do. We always have to ask God and look to Him for His direct revelation, or His impression, or His leading, or His burden, or His guidance, with it being confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses, or by His Word, or by some fleece, or by some revelation, or by some leading. God has always worked with us that way.

We've tried to never depend upon our own wisdom, our own understanding, or what we think is the thing to do, but to look directly to Him and expect His direct revelatory, revolutionary, immediate guidance.

(from lecture by [David Berg](#) - 22 Oct, 1970)

"Missionaries are expected to set goals, [make] action plans and work towards fulfilling them. . . I personally don't mind putting things down on paper. Knowing what one is trying to achieve and working towards ministry goals brings a sense of direction and satisfaction. Only one problem, though: Year after year, only a small percentage of what is put down on paper happens as it was envisioned. We plan, but He leads. As He leads, we follow. More often than not, He leads in directions we had not anticipated."

It has always been thus in missionary work - or any other ministry. When the Apostle Paul and his companions tried to go to Bithynia on one of their carefully planned mission journeys, ". . .the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them." (Acts 16:7). Later, Paul had a vision of someone standing and appealing to him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9b).

"What usually happens when our plans don't come to fruition as envisioned is we double the effort, work harder and plow forward, insisting at all costs we be permitted into Phrygia and Bithynia," Muse observes. "After all, Asia needs the Gospel and we know that it is just Satan that is standing in our way! But Paul didn't blame Satan for not having been allowed to go to these places and do what he had planned. He understood it was Jesus who was calling the shots."

Planning is good. Biblical, even. Just remember who calls the

shots.

(Excerpt from ["When 'Plan A' Fails"](#) - by Erich Bridges, Baptist Press, Mar 10/2011)



Map of Second Missionary Journey

V 11-12 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.

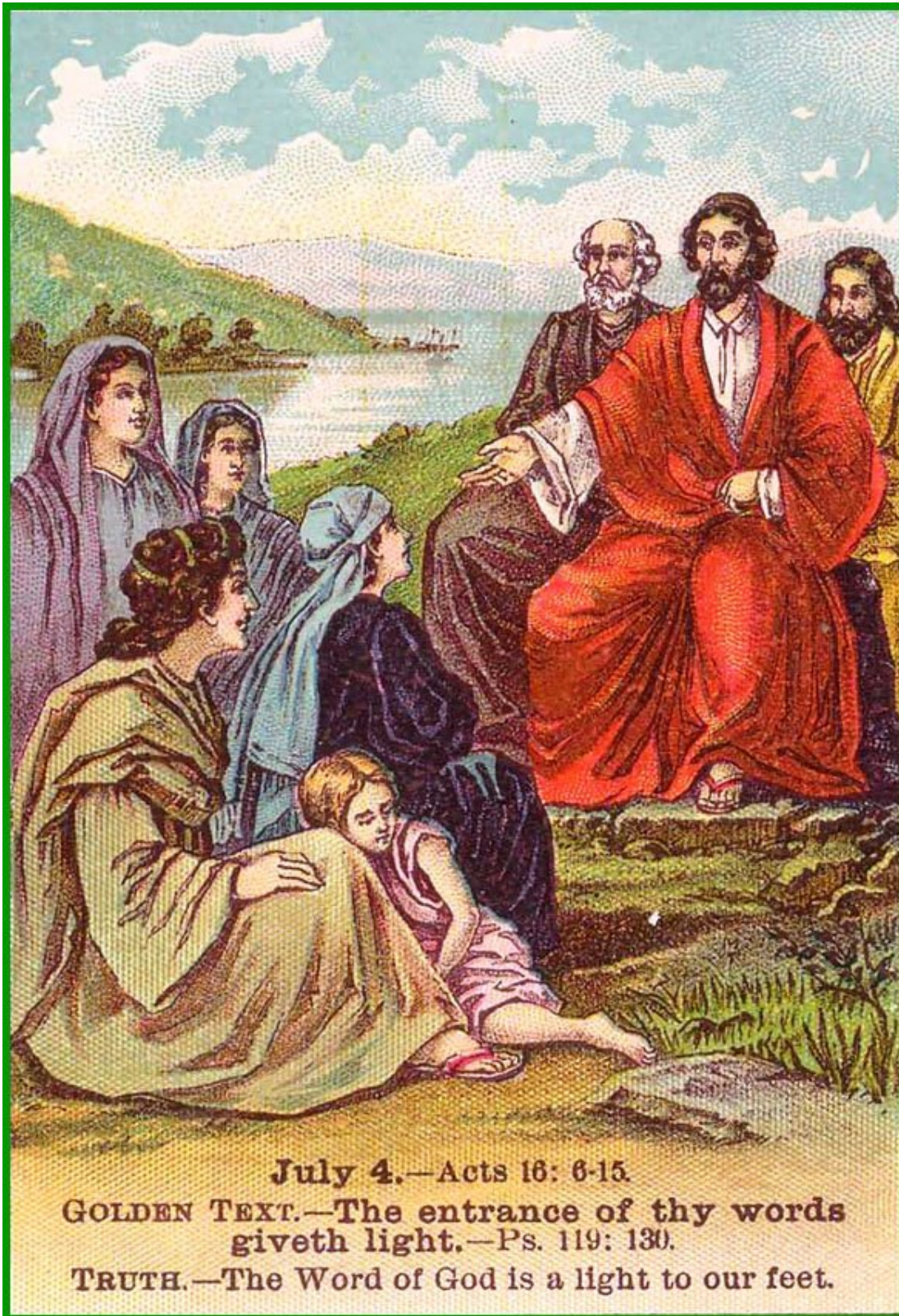
"Samothrace." An island in the Aegean Sea about halfway between Asia and the Greek mainland. They stayed there overnight to avoid the hazards of night traveling. ***"Neapolis."*** Port city for Philippi. So here they made the

historic landing on the shores of Europe about to bring the Gospel from Asia to this new continent.

“Philippi. . . the foremost city. . . a colony.” Philippi lay 10 miles inland from Neapolis and was named after Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. It had become a Roman *“colony”*, meaning it had special status in the Roman empire. The city was given the right of freedom (that is, was self-governing and independent of the provincial government), had tax exemption status, and its citizens had the right to hold land in full ownership.

V 13 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.

“We went out of the city. . . and spoke to the women.” Evidently, the required number of 10 Jewish men who were heads of households (the number that was needed to form a synagogue) did not exist in Philippi. The group were all womenfolk as well. So for their meetings they had to go *“out of the city to the riverside”*.



July 4.—Acts 16: 6-15.

**GOLDEN TEXT.—The entrance of thy words
giveth light.—Ps. 119: 130.**

TRUTH.—The Word of God is a light to our feet.

V 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

“A certain woman named Lydia.” Lydia was *“from the city of Thyatira”*, Asia, in the Roman province of Lydia in what is now western Turkey. *“Seller of purple.”* Purple dye was extremely expensive and only the wealthy or royalty could afford purple garments. She already worshiped God but didn’t know yet about Jesus until *“the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul”*.

V 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us.

“She begged us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful.” Because of her newly gained understanding of what Paul and his team represented, Lydia considered it a great honor to host these “ambassadors” of the Kingdom.

“Come to my house.” Lydia likely had a prosperous business selling purple garments to important people, and along with that a large enough house that could be used to accommodate the missionary team.

V 16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

“A certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination.” *“Divination”* was the translation given for the Greek word “*puthon*” (a “python spirit”). In Greek mythology Python was a snake that guarded Pythia, the oracle/prophetess at Delphi, a city in Greece. As the priestess of Apollo (the Greek god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine), she was reputed to be a source of divine wisdom and prophetic counsel. The spirits of divination were associated with her and were known as “python spirits”. The *“slave girl”* whom Paul’s team encountered was a medium through whom one of these particular demons could tell fortunes, give special knowledge, etc. It was a lucrative business: the woman *“brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling”*.

(Incidentally, some scholars have interpreted this passage to mean that the young woman was a ventriloquist; perhaps, but it's hard to see how that would tie in with the words "*divination*" and "*fortune-telling*" used in this verse to describe the woman's gifts.)

V 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

"This girl followed. . . and cried." "Cried" suggests the spirit was clamoring with a fairly loud voice. It was proclaiming what they were doing: *"These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation"*. What the Enemy was hoping to accomplish by this is hard to say, but since it was a demon speaking, the tone likely would have been a mocking one, and if nothing else, the woman was a distraction and irritation to Paul and his team; her pestering spirit was undermining and interfering with their work of spreading the Gospel.

V 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

"Paul, greatly annoyed." Paul had let this go on "*many days*". Perhaps he suspected that confronting the demon would cause trouble in the city, or maybe there was some other reason for his delay. Had Paul let the demon continue, it would have appeared that the woman was his partner in spreading the Gospel; this certainly would have created the wrong impression in the minds of those Paul and his team were trying to reach.

Finally, Paul commands the demon *"in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her"*. Note that Paul spoke directly to the demon, commanding it to leave. This was the kind of spiritual authority that Jesus exercised and passed on to His disciples.

V 19-21 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.

And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;

“and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.”

“These men, being Jews.” Anti-Semitism was rampant in the Roman empire around that time, so it was easy to use their Jewish nationality against them. The Emperor Claudius already **“had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome”**. (Acts 18:2) Thus, Paul and Silas were seized on trumped-up charges, whereas Timothy and Luke, who were Greeks, were spared.

“Teach customs. . . not lawful for us. . . to receive.” Technically, it was true that Roman citizens were not to engage in any foreign religion that had not been sanctioned by the state. It was not true, however, that they did **“exceedingly trouble our city”**. (v 20) But to abide in their calling, the apostles could not let the laws of the land stop them from carrying out their God-ordained commission of preaching the Gospel.

V 22-23 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.

And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

“Magistrates.” Every Roman “colony” had two of them. They were supposed to uphold Roman justice, but these ones in Philippi failed to do so: there was no investigation of the charges, no holding a proper hearing or giving Paul and Silas a chance to defend themselves; they had not been convicted of a crime, so the beatings they received were illegal.

It was an absurd chain of events caused by the simple fact that Paul and his team had dared to invade the Devil’s territory - this was the crux of the matter - and it made the Enemy so angry he whipped the city and the magistrates into a big frenzy over it. He instigated them to act quickly and irrationally before taking time to consider more carefully what they were doing: **“the multitude rose up together. . . the magistrates tore off their clothes. . . laid many stripes on them.”**

“Rods.” These were wooden rods that were used as symbols of the magistrates’ authority.

V 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

“Put them into the inner prison.” The most secure part of the jail. *“In the stocks.”* In this form of punishment the legs were fastened into an uncomfortable, spread-apart position.

V 25-26 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.

“Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns [sang praises - KJV].” The two apostles rose above their dire circumstances, pulling out the weapon of extreme praise. And as a result *“there was a great earthquake”* and *“all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.”*

How amazing the power of praise! The two apostles simply called the Devil’s bluff. They knew their treatment was unjust; they knew they had a powerful God on their side, and they didn’t have anything to worry about. So they acted on their faith by singing praises to the Lord.

Their praise and attitude of faith, like some kind of magic potion, reached directly into the heart of God, releasing His power, which was soon followed by extraordinary results - the earthquake, something only God could have done - as He reacted forcefully to uphold and protect His servants.

V 27-28 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

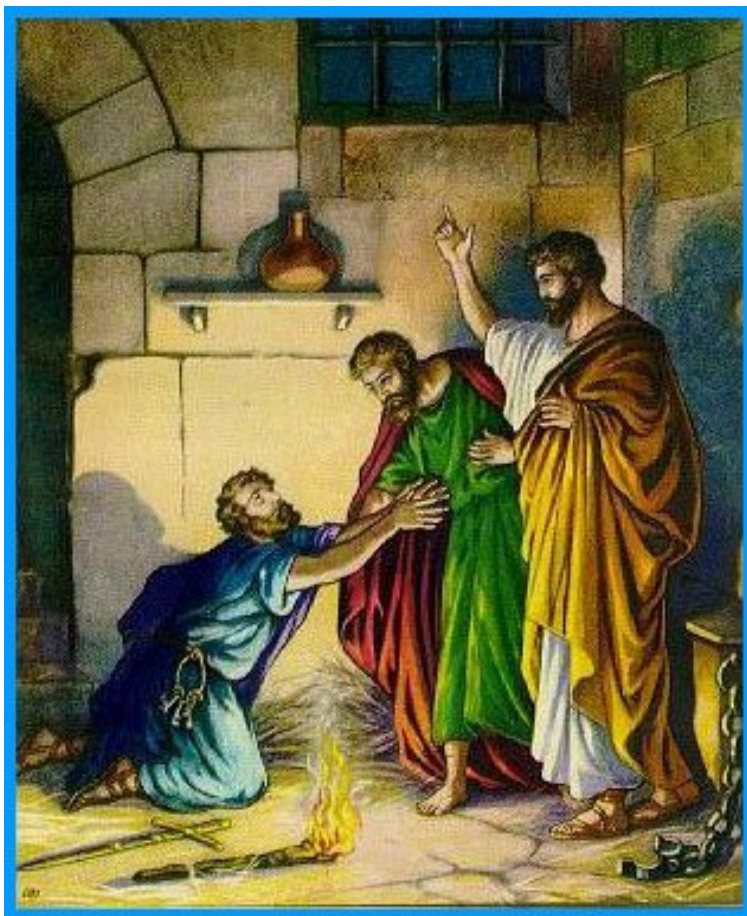
“The keeper of the prison. . . was about to kill himself.” To the jailor this seemed a preferable course of action, rather than face a painful execution. A Roman soldier who let a prisoner escape paid for it with his own life. *“But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm,*

for we are all here.'"

Why the prisoners did not try to escape at this point we are not told. Perhaps after listening to the comforting words of Paul and Silas who were *"praying and singing hymns to God"* and then witnessing the earthquake, they came so under the spell of the two apostles that they were afraid to disobey their wishes. In those days people were very conscious of and respectful of the supernatural and of those who had power in that realm.

V 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

"Fell down trembling before Paul and Silas." The jailor was extremely grateful that the prisoners had not escaped.



V 30-34 And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

The jailor then *“brought them out”*. Having witnessed the miraculous earthquake and unlocking of the doors and shackles, he was more than ready to find salvation: *“What must I do to be saved?”* And the answer to that was very simple: *“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* And *“he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”*

V 35-37 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.”

So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.”

But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.”

The magistrates had ordered to *“Let those men go”*. What brought on this sudden change of heart we are not told. Likely, the earthquake was regarded as an omen of divine displeasure, and this could have pricked their consciences. Or, if the jailor had given an account of what had transpired that night, this also would have affected the magistrates’ thinking.

“But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly [in the marketplace], uncondemned Romans. . . and now do they put us out secretly?’” To inflict corporal punishment on a Roman citizen was a serious crime, especially since it was done without a trial. (The Romans were known in history for their superior system of laws and ideals of

justice and would have taken a dim view of the magistrates' actions.)

“Let them come themselves and get us out.” Paul and Silas didn't just think, “Well, thank God, that's over with. Now let's get out of here fast while we can.” Rather than exit too quickly, Paul and Silas wanted to summon the magistrates first and make them feel somewhat accountable for their deeds. Rather than letting them off the hook too easily, Paul wanted the officials to realize the disciples were not pushovers and would fight for their rights if need be. This would have the effect also of making it clear to the Philippians that the apostles were not troublemakers or lawbreakers, which would thereby legitimize and protect the fledgling Philippian church.

I'll tell you, if you let people push you around you'll never get anywhere in this kind of world! You've got to fight for your rights!. . . So the moral of the whole thing is: Don't let people push you around. Fight! Even if you can't win, fight just the same. . . What have you got to be afraid of? God's on your side. You're with the Lord. He's the winner. He can't possibly lose! (from lecture by [David Berg](#) - 5 Apr, 1980)

V 38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.

“They were afraid.” The magistrates realized they were in danger of losing their offices; there was even the possibility that Philippi's privileges could be revoked over this incident. In spite of her greater autonomy, the city was still under the dominion of an outside power; as a conquered territory, Philippi had to tread carefully so as not to offend the ruling power of Rome.

V 39-40 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.

So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

“They. . . pleaded with them.” The magistrates had to beg Paul and Silas *“to depart from the city”*. At this point Luke, the apparent author of the Book of Acts, stayed in Philippi and didn't rejoin Paul's team until six

years later. (Acts 20:6) Of all the churches founded by Paul and his team, Philippi turned out to be one of the best.

[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 17\)](#)