

Acts Chapter 16 Continued

Acts 16:16 "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:"

“A spirit of divination”: Literally “a python spirit.” That expression comes from Greek mythology; Python was a snake that guarded the oracle at Delphi. Essentially, this girl was a medium in contact with demons who could supposedly predict the future.

Soothsayers pretend to be able to tell the future. Their power that they do have is from Satan and not God. This girl could be compared to palm readers in our day. Certain people (away from God), make a living doing this. They prey on the people who are uncertain about their lives and their relationship with God. The whole thing is demonic.

Acts 16:17 "The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation."

“The most high God”: El Elyon, the Absolutely Sovereign God, is an Old Testament title (used about 50 times), for the God of Israel (see Gen. 14:18-22; Dan. 5:18).

The strange words of the demon-possessed girl, that Paul is proclaiming “the way of salvation,” reveal Satan’s insidious attack upon the work of God. His method is to counterfeit that which is genuine, thereby confusing and corrupting it (Luke 4:41; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Paul does not need a demon possessed woman following around after him, proclaiming him to know the way to salvation. Her message is true, but coming from an unclean vessel. Paul does not want to indicate that she is with his group.

Acts 16:18 "And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour."

“I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ”: The demon left the girl in obedience to Paul’s command and his apostolic authority. The ability to cast out demons was a special ability of Christ’s apostles (Mark 3:15; 2 Cor. 12:12).

Her continued crying out finally began to disturb Paul, and he commanded the evil spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ, and it did.

Acts 16:19 "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew [them] into the marketplace unto the rulers,"

These rulers were probably city judges, since they were holding court in the market place. Those who took Paul and Silas to be tried were the men making a living from this girl.

Acts 16:20 "And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,"

“Being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city”: Anti-Semitism was alive even then. The Emperor Claudius issued an order around that time expelling the Jews from Rome (18:2). This may explain why they apprehended only Paul and Silas, since Luke was a Gentile and Timothy half-Gentile.

These magistrates were not Jewish, because the people who brought Paul and Silas accused them of being Jews (as if there were something wrong with that). The one they were troubling was them, keeping them from making a living from this girl.

Acts 16:21 "And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans."

“Teach customs ... not lawful for us ... Romans”: It was technically true that Roman citizens were not to engage in any foreign religion that had not been sanctioned by the state. But it was a false charge that they were creating chaos.

Rome ruled here in Philippi at this time and everything was based on the Roman law, not on a moral code of Christianity or Judaism. The Romans, at this time, were not Christian or Jews, but heathen.

Acts 16:22 "And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat [them]."

“Magistrates”: Every Roman colony had two of these men serving as judges. In this case, they did not uphold Roman justice: They did not investigate the charges, conduct a proper hearing, or give Paul and Silas the chance to defend themselves.

“Beat”: This was an illegal punishment since they had not been convicted of any crime. The officers (verse 35), under the command of the magistrates administered the beating with rods tied together in a bundle Paul received the same punishment on two other occasions (2 Cor. 11:25).

They incited a mob against Paul and Silas. Actually, this was without cause. Paul and Silas had not attacked Rome. These magistrates forcibly tore off Paul and Silas' clothes and commanded them to be beaten.

Acts 16:23 "And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast [them] into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:"

This punishment was a public whipping and then they were thrown into jail. As much as for the pain inflicted, the public whipping was to embarrass the one receiving the whipping. The jailer was specifically instructed to keep them from getting away.

Acts 16:24 "Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

“Inner prison ... in the stocks”: The most secure part of the prison. The jailer took further precautions by putting their feet “in the stocks.” This particular security measure was designed to produce painful cramping so the prisoner’s legs were spread as far apart as possible.

It was not enough to have them in the inner prison. The jailer put them in stocks, as well. There should be no possible way for them to get out, but they had not taken into consideration their God.

Verses 25-31: Verse 25 is the key to the prison episode, since the earthquake was not intended to deliver Paul but to convert the jailer. God knew that Paul would be released the next day; therefore the earthquake was not merely for Paul and Silas’s benefit. The earthquake would have been meaningless had not the jailer and prisoners heard Paul’s testimony in prayer and song.

Their singing brought about the divine intervention in the earthquake, and all would understand its significance. Hence, the jailer would run to Paul asking how he could be saved. God’s purposes of Peter’s deliverance of chapter 12, and Paul’s of chapter 16, are apparent. The purpose of Peter’s imprisonment was his execution; for Paul, the intention was only to threaten him.

Surprisingly, Peter sleeps whereas Paul prays and sings. Neither is controlled by his circumstances. In Peter’s case God puts the guards to sleep and delivers Peter by means of a silent angel. The guards are executed. In Paul’s case God awakens the sleeping jailer with an earthquake. The jailer is saved; Paul chooses to remain in jail.

Acts 16:25 “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.”

1 Thessalonians 5:18 "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

It is always the correct time to praise God. Of course, the other prisoners could hear their prayers and praise. They are right there with them.

Acts 16:26 "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed."

We know that all who will live Godly lives will suffer persecution. Tribulation comes to all. Our attitude about the problem is what can free us from bonds. We must know that victory is only in Jesus Christ. We see the divine power of God in action here.

Earthquakes are God dealing with man. In this case, all the doors flew open. The bands breaking off were even more unusual.

Acts 16:27 "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled."

“Prison doors open” ... would have killed himself”: Instead of waiting to face humiliation and a painful execution. A Roman soldier who let a prisoner escape paid for his negligence with his life (12:19; 27:42).

This keeper of the prison was going to kill himself to keep from being tortured for letting the prisoners go.

Acts 16:28 "But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."

This was perhaps, the greatest surprise this keeper of the prison had ever had. He could not believe they were all still here. They could have gotten away so easily.

Acts 16:29 "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,"

He literally jumped in when he got a light. He was afraid of the ruler from Rome before and now he is afraid of God. He has forgotten about Rome's ruler here. He too, was aware that Paul and Silas had prayed and praised and caused this to happen. He ran to them and fell down before them for help.

Acts 16:30 "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

This miracle of the earthquake and the bands falling off has convinced this jailer that Paul and Silas have the truth. Now, he asks what must I do to be saved? This should be the question of all people.

Acts 16:31 "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”: One must believe He is who He claimed to be (John 20:31), and believe in what He did (1 Cor. 15:3-4; see note on Rom. 16).

“Thou shalt be saved, and thy house”: All of his family, servants, and guests who could comprehend the gospel and believe heard the gospel and believed (see note on 11:4). This does not include infants (verse 15).

This is a wonderful promise that all believers can stand on. Not only will we be saved, but our family as well.

Verses 32-34: Some assume that the baptism of the jailer's household implies infant baptism. This is an unfortunate inference. Note carefully that they all heard the "word" preached (verse 32), and were all "baptized" (verse 33), after they all had believed (verse 34; Greek perfect tense). All who hear and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ are fit candidates for baptism.

Hearing, believing, and being baptized are the consistent pattern in Acts (see 18:8).

Acts 16:32-33 "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed [their] stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."

It seems that Paul and Silas went to the jailer's home and preached to him and his family. The jailer and his family doctored Paul and Silas, and Paul and Silas baptized the jailer and his family.

Acts 16:34 "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."

This jailer was truly excited and happy over his salvation and the salvation of his family. He prepared a meal and invited Paul and Silas to eat with them.

Acts 16:35-36 "And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go." "And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace."

Those above the jailer had been sent to tell Paul and Silas they could go. It seems the magistrate did not know about the happening of the earthquake.

Acts 16:37 "But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast [us] into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out."

"Romans": To inflict corporal punishment on a Roman citizen was a serious crime, and made more so since Paul and Silas did not receive a trial. As a result, the magistrates faced the possibility of being removed from office, and having Philippi's privileges as a Roman colony revoked. (See note on verse 12).

Luke's purpose for the Book of Acts as an apologetic to the Roman world, showing that Christianity is not subversive, is demonstrated here. Though "Paul" does not claim his Roman citizenship to protect himself, he will not quietly leave Philippi, allowing the citizens to assume that the church was begun by a criminal.

Paul is not going to let them ease out of this. He reminds them that he is a Roman citizen. It is illegal to punish a citizen of Rome without a free trial. Paul lets them know they will have to come themselves in the way of an apology before they will leave.

Acts 16:38 "And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans."

"And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates": They returned to them, and acquainted them with what the prisoners said.

And they feared when they heard that they were Romans. They were not concerned for the injury they had done them; nor for the injustice and cruelty they had been guilty of. Nor did they fear the wrath of God, and a future judgment. But they were put into a panic, when they found the men they had so ill-used were Romans. Lest they should be called to an account by the Roman senate, and be found guilty, and have their places taken away from them, and their persons punished.

Acts 16:39 "And they came and besought them, and brought [them] out, and desired [them] to depart out of the city."

This could have gotten them in a whole lot of trouble. Romans were not to be punished or imprisoned without a trial. If their carelessness were known in Rome, they might lose their positions. They wanted Paul and Silas to leave town before word got back of what they had done.

Acts 16:40 "And they went out of the prison, and entered into [the house of] Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed."

The believers were gathered at Lydia's house. Paul and Silas went by to report what had happened to the brethren. This was undoubtedly a home church. Paul comforted the others, and then they left.

Acts Chapter 16 Continued Questions

1. What type of spirit possessed this woman following Paul?
2. How had she brought her masters much gain?
3. What is a soothsayer compared to in our day?
4. What was she saying about Paul and Silas?
5. After many days, Paul said what to the spirit in the woman who followed him?
6. What happened when Paul said this?

7. What did her masters do when they realized the hope of gain from her was gone?
8. Who did they take Paul and Silas to?
9. Who did they accuse them of being?
10. In verse 21, the masters claim to be whom?
11. Who tore off their clothes?
12. What did they command be done to Paul and Silas?
13. Who was in charge of them?
14. What did he do with them?
15. What time was it when Paul and Silas prayed in prison?
16. What did they do besides pray?
17. What Scripture tells us "In everything give thanks..."?
18. What happened when they prayed?
19. When the jailer saw the doors open, what did he start to do?
20. Why did he not go ahead and do it?
21. When he got a light, what did the jailer do?
22. What question did the jailer ask Paul and Silas?
23. What did they answer him?
24. Who did Paul tell him would be saved besides him?
25. What did the jailer and his family do for Paul?
26. What did Paul do for the jailer and his family?
27. After Paul baptized them, what did the jailer do for Paul and Silas?
28. When it was day, who sent to the jailer to release them?
29. What did Paul answer the magistrate?

30. Who did Paul tell them he was?

31. Did they come and let Paul out?

32. Where did Paul go when he got out of jail?