

Expository Bible Study for Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Lesson #2 • Miracle at Midnight

•HANDOUT•

► Last time we covered the introductory material for this in-depth study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. Philippi was a Roman Colony located in Macedonia, 10 miles northwest of Neapolis on the Aegean Sea. Philippi was considered wealthy by Roman standards. The city was built adjacent to one of Rome's famous stone-paved roads, the Via Egnatia. In fact, this road was Rome's first major road outside of Italy, connecting the East to the West. Not only was Philippi vital to both trade and travel, but it was considered a "gateway city" to Europe.

For the purpose of developing an understanding of the people and culture in Paul's day, we began our study in Acts. Paul's team initially consisted of Silas and Timothy; Luke was a late arrival, who joined the team at Troas. The account in Acts is actually written by Luke. We started by looking at the vision recorded in Acts, which sent Paul to Philippi to preach and establish a church there.

Upon arrival in Philippi, Paul and his team found the Jewish community was too small to support a Synagogue. So, on the Sabbath, Paul took his team down to the local river where they found a group of women who had gathered for worship and prayer, and the reading of the Torah. There they met Lydia, who was from Thyatira, and was a dealer in purple-dyed cloth, which was both rare and expensive. She was a Gentile but was a worshiper of God. In response to Paul's preaching, her heart was opened to the Gospel message of Jesus, and she and her household were baptized that same day. Paul and the team accepted Lydia's invitation to stay at her house. In the future, Lydia's home would become the center for Christian outreach in Philippi.

Shortly thereafter, a slave girl with an indwelling demonic spirit, began following Paul around, screaming to everyone that Paul and his Team were preaching about the Most High God and "way to be saved." Though her words held truth, what she spoke was distorted with Gnostic teaching; Paul ended up delivering the girl from the indwelling demon. The slave girl's owner was furious because he had been making a great deal of money from her ability with divination and, thanks to Paul, that was now gone. The slave owner trumped up charges and, based on his own bigotry, stirred up the town against Paul and his men. He then dragged Paul and Silas to the Magistrate. This resulted in the two men being stripped of their clothing, and enduring a severe flogging, after which they were thrown into an inner cell in the prison where their feet were put into stocks. This was a gross miscarriage of justice because both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and should have been exempt from such brutal treatment.

Our study ended as midnight approached ...

► **Midnight is coming and God is about to intervene. This should have been a time of their deep resentment. It was unfair that they should suffer when they had been so faithful to the leading of God. But it will soon become a time of great triumph! God is a gracious God who works miracles even though His ways are sometimes beyond our understanding.**

► **Acts 16:25-28** • About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 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. 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.

But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

Q: Instead of bemoaning their plight and suffering, what were Paul and Silas doing in response to this gross miscarriage of justice?

Q: How did God intervene in the situation?

Q: Why in the world would the jailer want to kill himself? If the prisoners escaped it certainly couldn't be his fault – he didn't cause the earthquake.

Q: What was Paul's response when he realized what the jailer was about to do?

Q: How can it be that none of the prisoners took advantage of the situation and ran free?

Since it was midnight, the jailer called for torches to dispel the darkness of the prison.

► **Acts 16:29-30** • The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Q: Why was the jailer's first words to Paul and Silas "what must I do to be saved?" Why didn't he ask them why they hadn't run? The latter is more logical.

The jailer's question opened the way for Paul and Silas to teach him about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

► **Acts 16:31-34** • They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." Then they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.
At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.
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.

Q: After telling the jailer he needed to "Believe in the Lord Jesus" to be saved, the scripture adds that they "spoke the Word of the Lord" to the jailer. What would be included as the "Word of the Lord?"

Q: Where was this all happening?

Daylight comes with new orders from the magistrates ..

► **Acts 16:35-36** • When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

Q: The new orders make no mention of the earthquake. Were the new orders because of the earthquake or were there other reasons behind the order to release Paul & Silas?

But Paul wasn't about to let the magistrates dismiss them so easily ...

► **Acts 16:37** 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."

Q: What was the Law regarding Roman citizens that Paul is referencing here?

Q: Up until this moment, Paul was accepting whatever happened to him and his team as the Will of the Lord. Why does he now make demands?

► **Acts 16:38-40; 17:1** • The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.

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. When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

Q: Who were the "officers" who reported to the magistrates?

Q: What happened when the officers reported back to their bosses, the magistrates?

Q: How should we view the statement that the magistrates were "alarmed" when they heard Paul & Silas were Roman citizens?

Q: A better question which remains unanswered: Why didn't the magistrates know that Paul & Silas were Roman citizens?

Q: How did the magistrates respond to the officers' report?

Q: What did Paul & Silas do upon their release from prison?

Q: The text says they met with the “brothers” although previously, their interaction was with only women. How should we understand this difference?

► Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Philippi and traveled westward toward Thessalonica. But many scholars believe Luke stayed at Philippi to help grow the church that they had established there. They believe the “true companion” Paul mentioned in his letter to the Philippians was Luke. Luke had already been involved with Paul in establishing the Church at Syrian Antioch so it makes sense for Paul to want him to do the same at Philippi. We know that Luke traveled with Paul on his Third Missionary Journey. We also know that it would be Luke who would remain with Paul during his various imprisonments, including his last in Rome. It was Luke's close proximity to these events with Paul that enabled him to write the Book of Acts.

**We have now established a background for Paul's Letter to the Philippians.
It is now time to look at the letter itself.
This propels us at least ten years into Paul's future.**



Next Time ◆ Lesson #3
“Greetings to the Faithful ”

