

## Thoughts on Acts Sixteen

In the blog about Acts 13, we noted that the Holy Spirit led Barnabas and Paul to the locations and people to give the gospel the greatest possible exposure to the Gentiles. In chapter 16, the Spirit takes more direct action to guide the preacher's journeys. As they started their second preaching journey, the Spirit led them back through Derbe and Lystra, where they found Timothy, and later to Troas, where Luke joined them. The four companions in the gospel, an apostle, a Jewish scholar, a Jewish/Greek youth, and a Gentile doctor, were ready to go from Asia to establish congregations in Europe.

The first gospel lessons the preachers presented in Europe were in Philippi, a Roman city where the future of the Roman Empire was decided. Major battles of the Roman civil war were decided in the area. The seaport provided continual contact with the world and contributed to the city's political importance. The first converts there were the merchant Lydia and her household. As disciples, they meet for prayer beside flowing water (Acts 16:13). The river provided clean water for washing rather than the contained waters in the baths and was referred to in the Old Testament as living water. Where better to encounter the living water of the Word of God?

After a successful start in Europe, trouble came upon Paul and Silas from a different source of opposition. There is a proverb whose origin is unknown, that says, "No good deed goes unpunished." It wasn't a common historical belief since moral philosophers, and religious people believed the opposite. But we can see why some make such a comment as we read what happened as Paul cast a demon from a young girl. She had been able to tell the future for a fee, but with the demon gone, the source of that income was gone. "When her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities" (Acts 16:19). The resulting near-riot caused Paul and Silas to be beaten and thrown into prison. *"And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks"* (Act 16:23-24). Apparently, Luke and Timothy did not receive this punishment.

The jailer placed them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. The inner prison was the third compartment of the prison. The first level was a holding cell where the prisoners had light and fresh air. The second level was secured by solid iron gates with bars and locks. The third level, or dungeon, was usually reserved for prisoners condemned to die. Paul and Barabas were put in the inner prison with their feet placed "in the stocks." The jailer did not want to allow these men to escape. But The Lord had other plans. Over 700 years earlier, God said through Isaiah, *"Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 'I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison'"* (Isa 42:5-7). The prophecy referred to the prisoners in Satan's place of eternal death. But the physical evidence of God's power is shown in the release of men from physical prisons.

The delivering power of God was demonstrated many times to the apostles so that they could speak boldly from a first-hand standpoint. An angel opened even Jesus' tomb, *"And behold, a severe*

*earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it*" (Mat 28:2). At other times an angel appeared and freed apostles without the earthquake, *"But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison"* (Act 5:19, 12:7-10). But in Phillipi, there was a need to call attention to what was happening. Paul and Silas were praying and singing, and with no angel visible, an earthquake opened all locks on doors and chains. Paul and all other prisoners were free but did not leave their cells.

The earthquake may have been God's way of keeping the prisoners in the inner safety of the prison. The overall effects of the preaching, notoriety within the city, prayers, and singing, followed, but the Spirit's demonstration of power brought the jailer to humble himself before God. Obedience to the gospel message brought two households into fellowship with the Risen Savior. One household of a wealthy merchant, the other a hard-working jailer, now joined in the work of the Gospel in the city of Phillipi. Writing to them years later, Paul commended them for their *"participation in the gospel from the first day until now"* (Philippians 1:5-6).

Would Paul say the same for us?