

OUR *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

Lesson 73

Conversion of the Philippian Jailer

The Scripture Lesson *Acts 16:26-40*

Paul and Silas lay bleeding and in pain in the prison of Philippi. It was the middle of the night, and, not able to sleep, the two missionaries began to sing and to pray to the Lord. And they did that loudly enough so that the other prisoners knew that these two men were calling on the name of their God.

As the prisoners were wondering about that, the Lord answered the prayer of Paul and Silas. He answered it by sending a great earthquake. The earthquake shook the prison; and at the same time the bands of all the prisoners were loosed.

An earthquake is a very frightening thing. The prisoners were certainly afraid, especially because they could tell that it had been sent by the God to whom those two missionaries were praying. So they did not even think of running away, but gathered instead around Paul and Silas.

The jailer, meanwhile, was awakened by the earthquake. Standing in front of the prison, he saw the door wide open and he guessed that all of the prisoners must certainly have escaped. The man was afraid that he would be put to death for losing the prisoners who were in his charge, so he took out his sword to kill himself. But then he heard a voice from the prison. It was the voice of

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one of those missionaries. Paul said, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." The prison keeper ran quickly inside and, sure enough, all the prisoners were still there.

Then a change began to come over the jailer. He thought about that great earthquake. And he remembered that he had been ready a moment ago to kill himself. Suddenly he began to see himself as a sinner who could not stand before God. The Holy Spirit, you see, was beginning to work in this man's heart, to prepare him to listen to the gospel preached by Paul and Silas. The jailer knew that these men were preachers who spoke about a way of salvation. For the first time in his life the prison keeper understood that he needed salvation. So he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he took them out of the prison and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Paul and Silas could see that the Lord was bringing to them His people, right here in the jail, so that they might hear and believe the gospel. They answered the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." By this time the man's family had also gathered around Paul and Silas, and the missionaries told them about Jesus and about salvation by faith in Him. And God opened their hearts so that they believed, and they confessed their faith

in the Lord Jesus. So, there in the courtyard of the prison, while it was still dark at night, Paul and Silas baptized the jailer and his family.

The man wanted to do as much as he could to help Paul and Silas, so he washed their wounds and brought them into his house for a meal. Then he led them back into their prison cell. But there was joy in the jailer's house. And there was joy in the hearts of Paul and Silas that God had used them, even in prison, to bring to sinners the good news of salvation.

When morning came, the magistrates of Philippi sent to the jailer and told him to let the missionaries go. The jailer was happy to hear that. But Paul was not. Yesterday he and Silas had been unjustly beaten and thrown into prison. The people of Philippi would think that the missionaries were *criminals* — unless the leaders would admit that Paul and Silas had done no wrong. Paul said to the messengers, We are Roman citizens, and they have beaten us openly without giving us a fair trial. And now do they put us out of prison secretly? We will not go unless they come themselves and fetch us out.

When the magistrates heard that, they were very much afraid, for it was against the law to beat Roman citizens. So they came to the prison and apologized to Paul and Silas and begged them to leave the city. The people of Philippi knew, then, that these Christian preachers were not law-breakers. So Paul and Silas left the prison and went back to the house of Lydia.

The Church of Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-10

After Paul and Silas were let out of prison in Philippi they left that city so that they might preach the gospel in another place. They traveled a long way, about 100 miles, to the city of Thessalonica. There was a synagogue of the Jews in Thessalonica, so Paul and Silas went there first, to tell the Jews the good news that the Messiah had come.

Most of the Jews, however, did not believe Paul and Silas. They did not want to hear anything about Jesus. So the missionaries had to

leave the synagogue. But when they left they took with them some Jews who *did* believe. And, what is more, many Gentiles also joined themselves to the church of Christ in Thessalonica.

This made the Jews very angry. They hated Christ and wanted to destroy His church. So they hired some wicked, lazy men who did nothing but loaf around the marketplace, and they told them to storm the house of Jason, where Paul and Silas were staying. They planned then to drag the two missionaries away to trial. But it happened that, when they came to the house, Paul and Silas were not there. So they took away Jason instead and brought him and some other Christians to the judges for trial.

The unbelieving Jews told nothing but lies about Paul and Silas and about the Christians. But the judges did not know that. They saw the angry crowd and thought that maybe the missionaries really were trouble-makers. So they made Jason and his friends promise that the missionaries would not make any more trouble in their city. Then they let them go. And that night the believers gathered together and sent Paul and Silas away. It seemed as if the devil had won another victory; but that really was not true. The church in Thessalonica already had a good beginning, and, by the grace of God, it continued to grow even after the missionaries left.

And where were Paul and Silas? They went to another city, to preach the gospel there. Far from *destroying* the church of Christ, the persecution in Thessalonica served only to hurry the gospel to other cities and lands. Not Satan, but Christ, rules. He will build His church.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

Acts 16:30 & 31 “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

Group B

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

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. When the earthquake loosed the bands of the prisoners, Paul and Silas blocked the entrance so that no one could escape.
- ___ 2. Supposing that the prisoners had fled, the jailer thought at once to kill himself.
- ___ 3. Paul however immediately warned the prison keeper that suicide was a sin against God.
- ___ 4. The jailer fell down before Paul and Silas and asked what he must do to be saved.
- ___ 5. In response to the question of the jailer, Paul and Silas preached the Word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house.
- ___ 6. After washing their wounds and giving them a meal, the jailer put Paul and Silas back in prison.
- ___ 7. The next morning the magistrates sent word to the jailer to let Paul and Silas go.
- ___ 8. Paul and Silas hurried away at once and returned to the house of Lydia.
- ___ 9. Leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas preached next in the city of Thessalonica.
- ___ 10. Unlike Philippi, there were many Jews in Thessalonica, so that Paul could begin by preaching in a synagogue.
- ___ 11. After Paul preached in the synagogue for three sabbaths, most of the Jews and even a few Gentiles were converted to Christianity.
- ___ 12. The unbelieving Jews, however, raised an uproar in the city in order to persuade the rulers of Thessalonica that Paul and Silas were disturbers of the peace.
- ___ 13. The rulers believed the Jews and ordered Paul and Silas to leave the city.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. How did God answer the midnight prayers of Paul and Silas?
2. Why was the jailer going to kill himself? How did it happen that he changed his mind?
3. The Philippian jailer must have known that Paul and Silas were preachers when he put their feet in the stocks that day. At that time he did not care about their suffering. Why did he fall down trembling before them after the earthquake?
4. What did Paul and Silas say when the jailer asked how he could be saved?
5. How did the jailer show his gratitude to the missionaries for showing him the way of salvation? Why did he afterwards put them back into the prison?
6. Paul refused to leave the prison until the magistrates came and apologized to them. Why were the magistrates willing to do that for these two Jews?
7. In Philippi, Paul preached first by a river-side. Where did he first preach in Thessalonica?
8. Why did the unbelieving Jews continue to make trouble for the missionaries even after they left the synagogue?
9. Who was Jason? Why did the unbelieving Jews bring him to the rulers of the city?
10. Why did the wicked Jews want to cause an uproar, a riot, in the city before bringing their false charges against the missionaries?
11. What did the rulers make Jason do?
12. Paul and Silas therefore had to move on to another city. Can you tell why this was not really a victory for the devil?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. The midnight prayers of Paul and Silas were answered in a most remarkable way. Suddenly there was a great _____, so that the _____ of the prison were _____. Occurring at the same time there was another wonder, one by which the doors of the prison were _____ and the bands of all the prisoners were _____ (Acts 16:26).
2. The violent quaking of the earth, which the prisoners must have connected with the missionaries' praying to their God, so unnerved the prisoners that they apparently did not even think of flight. The keeper of the prison, however, knew nothing of this; so, awaking out of his _____, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew his _____ and would have _____ himself, _____ that the prisoners had _____. Seeing at once what the jailer was doing, Paul shouted, "Do thyself no _____, for we are _____ here" (Acts 16:27, 28).
3. The jailer called for a _____ and _____ in, to see for himself if what the preacher had said was really true. Then a change began to come over the jailer. Realizing that had it not been for the intervention of Paul he would have committed suicide, and beginning, by the work of the Spirit in his heart, to sense how unprepared he was to stand before the God who worked so mightily on behalf of these two preachers, he came _____ and _____ down before Paul and Silas. After bringing Paul and Silas out of the prison, he asked, "_____, what must I do to be _____?" (Acts 16:29, 30).
4. To the question of the jailer, the missionaries replied, "_____ on the Lord Jesus Christ, and _____ shalt be _____, and thy _____." The man could not, however, *believe* in One whom he did not *know*. The missionaries therefore had to tell them who the Lord Jesus Christ was and what it meant to be saved by faith in Him. Paul and Silas _____ unto him the _____ of the Lord, and to all that were in his _____ (Acts 16:31, 32).
5. The jailer then took them, that same hour of the _____, and _____ their stripes. It was so clear that the Spirit had worked powerfully in this Philippian family, that Paul was moved to baptize the jailer and all his household _____. Then, because it had been a long time since Paul and Silas had had anything to eat, the jailer brought them into his _____ and set _____ before them. Having no authority to release prisoners, the jailer must afterwards have led Paul and Silas back to their cell (Acts 16:33, 34).
6. Meanwhile, the magistrates had had time to look more closely at the charges against the two missionaries. Apparently they had discovered that Paul and Silas were in fact not the troublers of the city that their accusers had made them out to be. Recognizing their mistake, they quickly sent the _____ saying, "Let these men _____." Perhaps to the jailer's surprise, Paul was not quick to leave the prison. For the sake of the gospel, Paul wanted the people of Philippi to know that the two preachers were not criminals who had deserved to be punished. He therefore answered the sergeants, "They have _____ us _____ uncondemned, being _____, and have cast us into _____; and now do they thrust us out _____? Nay verily; but let them come _____ and _____ us out" (Acts 16:35-37).
7. To beat a Roman citizen was forbidden by law. That the magistrates had done so *unwittingly* (that is, not knowing that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens) was no excuse. They therefore _____ when they heard that Paul and Silas were _____. And they came and _____ them, and _____ them out, and _____ them to depart out of the _____ (Acts 16:38, 39).
8. Paul and Silas went out of the _____ and entered again into the house of _____. And when they had seen the _____ (Philippian converts), they _____ them

and then _____ in order to preach the gospel in other places in Macedonia (Acts 16:40).

9. The Philippians knew that Paul was being paid by no one for preaching the gospel. When he left Philippi, therefore, they several times sent him aid. Paul was touched by that, and in his letter to the Philippians he tells them that they were the only church to do so. Even in _____, he said, “ye sent _____ and _____ unto my necessity” (Phil. 4:14-16).

10. Thessalonica was the next city in which Paul preached. Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of Macedonia, and in it there was a _____ of the Jews. As his _____ was, Paul went first to the synagogue and for _____ sabbath days he _____ with them out of the _____. These Jews and Gentile proselytes knew and believed the Scriptures. Paul did not therefore have to persuade them of the necessity of a Mediator, a Redeemer. He did, however, have to show them that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth is that Redeemer. Here in the synagogue in Thessalonica, as elsewhere, therefore, the apostle reasoned from the Scriptures, opening and _____ that Christ must _____ have _____, and _____ again from the _____, and that this Jesus is _____ (Acts 17:1-3).

11. Some of the Jews did believe. Counted among the converts were also devout Greeks a great _____, and of the chief women of the city not a _____. The Jews who did not believe were moved with _____. In a wicked attempt to create an uproar in the city, these Jews hired certain _____ fellows of the baser sort, gathered a _____ and _____ the house of _____ (probably a converted Jew who had opened his home to the missionaries). When the mob arrived, however, Paul and Silas were gone. They therefore seized Jason and several other Christians and brought them to the _____ of the city, saying that these men who have turned the world _____ down are come _____ also. Jason, they

charged, had received these trouble makers, and they all do _____ to the decrees of _____, saying that there is another _____, one _____ (Acts 17:4-7).

12. A charge of treason had to be taken seriously by the authorities. Here in Thessalonica, too, the rulers were troubled when they heard these things. But they did not let the mob push them into rash action against the missionaries, as had happened in Philippi. They rather took _____ of Jason and of the others and then let them _____. The “security” was a money pledge guaranteeing that the preachers would not again do anything to disturb the peace. For the good of the church in Thessalonica, therefore, the missionaries had to move on to another field of labor. So the brethren immediately sent them away by _____ into Berea (Acts 17:8-10).

13. Two of Paul’s inspired epistles were written to the church in Thessalonica. From the first letter to the Thessalonians we learn that, soon after Paul left Thessalonica, when he was in Athens, he sent _____ to Thessalonica to comfort the believers concerning their _____, that, in the face of continued persecution, no man should be moved by these _____. When Timothy returned, Paul said, he gave _____ tidings of your _____ and charity (I Thess. 3:1-7). Apparently Timothy also informed Paul that there were some problems — as, for example, that the Thessalonians had difficulty in understanding how Christians who die before Christ’s return can share with the living in the glory of His kingdom. Paul therefore wrote that he would not have them to be _____ concerning them which are _____, that they sorrow not, as do others who have no _____. For, Paul said, when the Lord Himself will descend from heaven, the _____ in Christ shall rise first; and then we who are _____ and remain shall be _____ up together with them in the _____ to meet the Lord in the _____, and so we shall ever be with the _____ (I Thess. 4:13, 16, 17).

14. Some time later Paul learned that many in the church in Thessalonica were convinced that the Lord's return was imminent — that is, that it would be so soon that people could just as well quit their jobs and simply wait for a speedy return. Paul therefore wrote a second letter to warn them that many things had still to happen before Christ's return. Let no man _____ you, he said, for that day shall not come except there be a great _____ away first, and that man of sin (the Antichrist) be _____ (II Thess. 2:3). The general picture in Thessalonica, however, was of a church that showed patience and _____ even in the face of _____ and tribulations (II Thess. 1:4), and of a church that _____ out the word of the Lord in Macedonia and _____ and elsewhere where their faith in God was spread _____ (I Thess. 1:8).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. How is the story of the shaking of the foundations of the prison in Philippi and the loosing of the bands of the prisoners a source of comfort to the church of Christ throughout the new dispensation?
2. Twice before in the book of Acts, apostles were miraculously delivered from prison. How was the situation different here in Philippi, so that Paul and Silas understood that the open doors were not intended for escape? The other prisoners did not understand that. Why then did *they* not flee?
3. If Paul and Silas were in the *inner* prison (Acts 16:24), and if the entire prison were *dark*, how, do you suppose, could Paul know that none of the prisoners had escaped (Acts 16:28)?
4. The jailer was undoubtedly a pagan Gentile. Can you explain why he would spring into the prison and fall down trembling before Paul and Silas?
5. Acts 16:33 is often used as part of the biblical evidence for the doctrine of infant baptism. Do you understand how this can be done, in spite of the fact that the passage gives no clue as to the ages of the members of this household?
6. What advantage could there be, for the cause of the gospel in Philippi, in having the magistrates come and fetch the preachers out of prison, rather than simply sending the sergeants to release them?
7. Why, do you think, did the magistrates, after they brought the missionaries out of prison, beg them to “depart out of the city” (Acts 16:39)?
8. Paying attention to the pronouns used in Acts 16:11 and 12, as compared with those in Acts 17:1, do you see evidence that, when Paul and Silas left for Thessalonica, Luke remained in Philippi?
9. Read Philippians 4:14-18. Can you tell from those verses how the Philippian church later distinguished itself in affection for the apostle Paul? Where was Paul when he wrote this epistle to the Philippian church, according to chapter 1:13? How did it happen that Epaphroditus was there? (Phil. 2:25; 4:18).
10. How does Paul's experience in Thessalonica illustrate the truth of what he wrote in I Corinthians 1:23, 24?
11. From I Thessalonians 1:9, can you tell which were more numerous in the church in Thessalonica, the Jews or the Gentiles?
12. According to Acts 17:5, the unbelieving Jews who tried to make life miserable for the missionaries were “moved with envy.” Of what were they jealous?
13. Read the beginning of the charge brought against Paul and Silas by the unbelieving Jews as it is found in Acts 17:6. Do you see how their setting “all the city on an uproar” (Acts 17:5) was well calculated to help their cause before the rulers of the city? How would you describe their success (Acts 17:8-10)?
14. Paul wrote the first epistle to the Thessalonians not long after he left the city. After reading I Thessalonians 1:6-8, how would you describe the church that was established there through the preaching of Paul and Silas?
15. From II Thessalonians 2:1-4, can you tell what was probably the main reason for Paul's writing his second epistle to the church in Thessalonica?