

Our **GUIDE**

for little ones

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IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 73

Conversion of the Philippian Jailer

Acts 16:26-40

The keeper of the prison in Philippi, the man who locked Paul and Silas in the stocks, was a “pagan.” That’s a hard word, isn’t it? It means that this man was not a Christian. He did not believe in the one true God, but in *many gods* — all of them *false*. He had heard about these two Jews. He knew about the slave girl who had followed them for many days shouting, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” But it meant nothing to this pagan. Most high God? Way of salvation? What strange ideas these Christian missionaries have! The jailer was certain that they had gotten the beating they deserved.

At midnight, the jailer was sleeping. But Paul and Silas were not. They

were singing. The other prisoners heard it. Can you imagine what those other prisoners must have thought? Curses and swearing — that’s what they would have expected to hear from the dungeon. But *praying*? And *singing*? What kind of men are these, who can do such a thing? And what kind of a God do they serve?

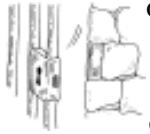
Yes, what kind of a God *is* this? It didn’t take the prisoners long to find out. For suddenly there was an *earthquake*. The prison shook. And so did the prisoners.



Note to Parents: These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the “off” season.

They were *terrified!* God must have shaken the earth! How great and powerful must be the God of the Christians. He must be...“the most high God.”

Then something else. All the locked doors of the prison were thrown open. And all the chains that bound the prisoners were loosed. The prisoners could escape — if they wanted to.



But who could think of running at a time like *this*? The God of Paul and Silas had just shaken the *earth* in answer to their prayer. The other prisoners must have crowded around these two strange missionaries.

The keeper of the prison, meanwhile, had been awakened by the shaking of the earth under him. As soon as he dared to move, he hurried to the entrance of the prison. The doors stood wide open. “It’s empty,” he thought. “Surely the prisoners have escaped.” And it was his fault. He had failed in his duty. He will surely be punished — by death.

So he drew his sword ... to kill himself.



But Paul, from inside the prison, saw him. He knew what the jailer was planning to do. “Do thyself no harm,” Paul cried, “for we are all here.”

Can it really be true that none of the prisoners have escaped through those wide-open doors? The jailer couldn’t believe his ears. He ran inside to look. And there they all were.

All so amazing! All so frightening! Who are these two men? Who is

their God? Compared to *Him*, the gods of the pagans are ... *nothing*. Truly He is the *most high God*. The jailer trembled. He fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas.

Then he led them out of the prison. And something more amazing happened. Something that could not be seen. Something that could not be heard. The *Holy Spirit* worked. He touched the heart of this ... pagan. “Sirs,” the jailer said, “what must I do to be ... *saved*?”

Yes, *salvation*. For the first time in his life, this pagan jailer understood that the gods of the heathen are ... *nothing*. For the first time in his life he saw God for who He is — the Righteous Judge. For the first time in his life he saw himself for what he was — a sinner who could not stand before the Righteous Judge. And he believed that what the slave-girl said was true — Paul and Silas could show him the “way of salvation.” “Sirs, what must I do to be ... *saved*?”

By this time the man’s family were gathered around him. They all stood there, looking anxiously at the two missionaries.

Can you imagine what a thrill that must have been for Paul and Silas? True, the terrible wounds on their backs still hurt — *bad*. But behind it all was *God* — who had used the whips, and the stocks, and the earthquake, to bring this one pagan family to *salvation*.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” the missionaries said, “and thou shalt be saved, and thy house — that is, thy *family*.”

Yes, believe on Jesus. That's the only way. But the jailer and his family didn't know Jesus. They had to be told. So Paul and Silas taught them. Taught them about God's Son, who became man — to suffer and die for the sins of His people. But He arose. He ascended to heaven. He rules. And He gathers His church. Even from among ... pagans.

All of this the jailer and his family had to learn. And they did learn it. With hearts touched by the Spirit of Christ, they *believed*. And right there, in the middle of the night, they were *baptized*. What an amazing *change* — from paganism to ... the family of God.

The jailer did what he could to ease the pain of Paul and Silas. He washed their backs, and brought them to his house to give them something to eat. But then, because he was only the *jailer*, and not the *ruler*, he had to put them back in jail. But there was joy — in the house ... and in the dungeon.



The magistrates, meanwhile, were worried. Yesterday, they had ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten and then put in prison. Afterwards — that's right, *afterwards* — they started asking questions. And they learned that Paul and Silas were *not guilty*. The howling mob had loudly accused the missionaries of being troublemakers. But it wasn't true. The magistrates had punished two *innocent* people.

So now, what can they do? "Maybe," they thought, "maybe if we just

sneak them out of jail, no one will notice, and everyone will forget about yesterday's mistake." So, early in the morning, they sent sergeants to the prison, saying to the jailer, "Let those men go."

The jailer was happy to hear that. But the missionaries were not. They knew they were *innocent*. And they wanted the people of this city to know that too. They wanted the people to know that the missionaries who preached the gospel to them were not *criminals*. They were not *lawbreakers*.

To Paul and Silas, that was very important. Not because they were worried about what the people might think of *them*. They cared only about the name of *Jesus* and about the *gospel*. Paul and Silas, you see, were preachers of the gospel. Who in Philippi would *believe* them — if they were *criminals*?

Paul understood that. So he said to the sergeants, "Tell the magistrates that 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."

And that's what the magistrates did. They knew that they had made a serious mistake. So they went to the prison and brought Paul and Silas out. In broad daylight. So that everyone could see that the missionaries were *innocent*.

Think of it. At every step, the devil was trying to hinder the building of the church in Philippi. He would heap

shame upon the missionaries through the slave girl, and by the mob, and by the whipping, and by the dungeon and the stocks. But none of it worked. Oh, yes, the painful stripes on the backs of Paul and Silas would be a long time healing. But did it hurt the church? Just the opposite. It helped. Just ask the Philippian jailer — and his family.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. How did it happen that all of the prisoners could have escaped in the middle of the night?
2. The jailer thought that the prisoners were all gone. What did he decide to do? Who stopped him from doing that?
3. After Paul told the jailer and his family about Jesus, what did Paul do for them?
4. Why did the jailer put Paul and Silas back in prison?
5. What did the sergeants tell the jailer the next morning?
6. The missionaries did not leave at once. Who came to the prison and led them out?

The Church of Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-10

The Christians in Philippi wished that the apostle Paul would stay with them for a good long time. But Paul knew that he couldn't. He had other work to do. He was missionary to the *Gentiles*. And the Gentile-world was *huge*. So, while Luke and Timothy stayed

behind to care for the young church in Philippi, Paul moved on, with Silas, to other places.

The next place was a city by the name of Thessalonica. Like Philippi, Thessalonica was a city mainly of *Gentiles*. But some Jews had long ago come to live there too. And they brought their religion with them. Soon they built a synagogue, where they could worship the one true God of heaven and earth.

Yes, the Jews in Thessalonica did worship God. But they didn't know ... Jesus. They looked still for the coming of the Messiah, who, they believed, would bring glory to His people Israel.

Paul was a Jew too, you remember, and he wanted his own countrymen to know the *truth*. He wanted them to know that the Messiah had *come* — and that He did what had to be done to save His people Israel. He had *died*. And He arose from the dead.

For Jews everywhere, that was oh so hard to believe. *A suffering Messiah? A dying Messiah?* What kind of a Messiah is *that*? They wanted a Messiah who would reign on a throne in the city of David. And they were sure that that's what God had promised.

So Paul went straight to the synagogue. For three sabbath days in a row he showed the Jews, from their Scriptures, what God had really promised. God had promised to send a Savior who would *die* — for the sins of His people. And who would *arise from the dead*.



What an amazing promise! Who could want anything more wonderful, more glorious, than that? But most of the Jews of the synagogue in Thessalonica didn't want it. They wanted instead the Messiah of their own imaginations. So Paul and Silas left the synagogue.

Some of the Jews did too. And, wonderful to behold, a great many Gentiles believed also.

The unbelieving Jews, the Jews of the synagogue, saw it happening. They saw a church of Jesus Christ springing up in Thessalonica, right under their noses. And they didn't like it.

The devil didn't like it either. We can be sure that he will do whatever he can to wreck that church. What did he do? He stirred up the *whole city* — against Paul and Silas. Listen.

The Jews of the synagogue hired some bums on the street to start making a lot of noise in the city, to rile up the people, and then to storm the house of Jason, where Paul and Silas were staying. There was a lot of hollering against Paul and Silas — by a mob of people who hardly knew who Paul and Silas were. The whole city was soon in an uproar.

But when the mob got to the house of Jason, they found that Paul and Silas were not there. Just Jason and a few of his Christian friends. So the Jews grabbed *them* instead and brought them to the rulers of the city.

So there they all were, shouting

bad things about Paul and Silas. Listen to what they said: “These (Paul and Silas) that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.”

Sounds serious, doesn't it? But it was a lie. The kingdom that Paul preached about was *spiritual*, not *earthly*. And the Jews knew it. That's why they didn't even try to bring *proof* of their charges. They brought instead ... a mob!

The work of the *devil* it was. An angry, howling mob — just what he wanted! And he was aiming at ... Jesus. Get rid of Paul and Silas — to cripple the church of Jesus in Thessalonica.

Did he get what he wanted? Well, maybe at first it looked like he *did*. The magistrates in Thessalonica made Jason promise that the missionaries would not again make trouble in the city. The Christians therefore, that very night, sent Paul and Silas on their way to another place. So Paul and Silas were gone. Just what the unbelieving Jews wanted.

But did that cripple the church in Thessalonica? Paul later wrote two letters to the Thessalonians. They're in our Bibles. From those letters we know that the church in Thessalonica not only *survived*, it *spread*. From Thessalonica, Paul said, the Word of the Lord was “sounded out” — in Macedonia, and Achaia, and beyond. The victory was *Christ's*. All of the fury of the devil and



of the enemies of the church came to ... nothing.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. To what city did Paul and Silas go, after they left Philippi?
2. When the Jews of the synagogue in Thessalonica did not believe the gospel, what did Paul and Silas do?
3. The unbelieving Jews started a riot in the city against Paul and Silas. What did the mob do with Jason and his friends?
4. The Jews hoped to have Paul and Silas forced out of their city. Did that happen?
5. The Jews hoped to destroy the church in Thessalonica. Did that happen?

How Well Do You Understand?

1. Why did the jailer in Philippi decide to kill himself?
2. The jailer had before treated the missionaries roughly. Now he trembles before them and asks, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Do you know what made this great change?
3. Why did Paul refuse to leave the prison right away, when the

sergeants said, "Let those men go"?

4. In the synagogue in Thessalonica, what did Paul use, to prove that *Jesus* was the promised Messiah?
5. Why did the unbelieving Jews want to drive Paul and Silas out of the city?
6. In the battle for the church in Thessalonica, who had the victory?

Memory Verse

Acts 16:31b "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

