

## Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

May 15, 2013

### Lectionary Readings

Psalm 68:1–20; **Acts 16:16–34**; Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20; John 17:20–26

### Context

After parting ways with Barnabas, Paul chose Silas to accompany him on his second missionary journey at the end of Acts 15. Paul has a vision that prompts them to travel over to Macedonia, the mainland of Europe. One of the first cities they visit is the Roman colony of Philippi, a thoroughly pagan metropolis. Unlike other cities Paul had visited, this one did not have a large enough Jewish population to support a synagogue (at least ten Jewish males), but he did discover a regular place of prayer where he met a group of Gentile women who were apparently drawn to Judaism. One of the women, Lydia, a prominent and well-to-do businesswoman, came to faith in Jesus, and her entire household is baptized. She invites Paul and his friends to lodge at her home during their time in Philippi. It is from here that the following events occur.

### Acts 16:16–34

<sup>16</sup> One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup> She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

<sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities.

<sup>20</sup> When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews <sup>21</sup> and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup> Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” <sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down

trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” <sup>31</sup> They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” <sup>32</sup> They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. <sup>34</sup> He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

### **Commentary**

Paul and his friends quickly encountered a number of malicious forces. There were spiritual forces: the outbursts of a demon-possessed girl begin to harass them on a daily basis. There were also economic forces: the girl’s owners used her for their own financial gain, and so took out their anger on Paul and Silas when their money-making scheme came to a halt. And then there were the religious-political forces that beat and dragged them into prison because they weren’t Roman.

Even though the cause of the earthquake is kept implicit in the narrative, the hopelessness of the situation coupled with Paul and Silas’ incredible acts of faith in song and prayer strongly suggest that God sent the earthquake not only to free Paul and Silas from prison, but also to bring the jailer and his family to faith in Christ. However, it might be somewhat presumptuous to assume that the jailer’s question—“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”—carried with it the full theological freight of what is typically meant by salvation. In light of the trouble the jailer faced for the prisoners’ escape, it’s possible that he meant something like, “Gentlemen, will you please tell me how to get out of this mess?” This would be all the more remarkable in that Paul and Silas would have ministered to the jailer at his point of need before proceeding to share Jesus Christ with him.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are some things that stand out to you in this story?
2. What kind of malicious forces—spiritual, economic, political, or otherwise—work together to harm the advance of God’s kingdom today? How might this story encourage us to respond to them?
3. What do you think Paul and Silas were praying for? Why? What kind of hymns do you imagine them singing? Why?
4. Describe a time when someone shared the gospel with you in an inauthentic way. What made the approach inauthentic?
5. What are some authentic and respectful ways to point people to faith in Jesus?
6. How does this story encourage you and your faith?