



ACTS

“...BE MY WITNESSES...”

Acts 16:1-5

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ² The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Review 16:1-5.

- It must have been an honor to be chosen to learn and minister under Paul. But the price of admission was not cheap.
- ❖ Given what we know about the Jerusalem Council, why would Paul take Timothy to be circumcised? (Hint: Look at **1 Corinthians 9:20-23**).
- It seems completely backward for Paul to ask Timothy to be circumcised. After all, a large part of his journey was to tell the believers about the decisions that were made at the Jerusalem Council. Though the Council had decided circumcision wasn't mandatory, Paul was willing to go to great lengths to remove any stumbling blocks that might have prevented anyone from coming to faith in Christ.
- ❖ Fill in the blanks below to complete **16:5**

So, the churches were _____ in the faith and _____ in _____.
- ❖ What do you think the correlation is between strengthening in faith and increasing in numbers?
- ❖ Why do you think spiritually healthy believers and churches often become spiritually influential ones? Can you think of real examples where strengthened faith led others toward Christ?

Acts 16:6-10

Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Review 16:6-10.

- **Acts 16:6-7**, might feel jarring. *Why wouldn't God want Paul to go to those people? Didn't God want them to be saved?* The questions are valid.
- God desires that all might know Him (**1 Timothy 2:3-4**), and God's perfect timing and unfolding revelation are also in play. So, the *no* here is more of a *not yet*. Throughout the New Testament, Paul eventually visits all these places. God's guidance is seen not only in opened doors, but also in closed ones.
- The gospel moves according to God's direction, not merely human strategy. Faithful discipleship requires both obedience and sensitivity to the Spirit.
- ❖ Have you ever felt discouraged by God saying *no* to a desire of yours, only to later discover the better plan God had been working out? If so, describe your experience.
- Sometimes it's hard to see God's sovereign hand working all things for His glory (**Romans 8:28-30**). This section seems to be as much about where Paul didn't go as it is about where he was called to go. Paul's eyes were on the region, while God's eyes were on a completely different continent.
- ❖ Where might we be resisting God's greater vision because we are committed to our own smaller one?
- ❖ There was a shift between **16:8** and **16:10** so subtle you might have missed it. Can you find it?

Acts 16:11-15

Lydia's Conversion in Philippi

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Review 16:11-15.

- Lydia was not only the first recorded convert in Europe, but also a woman whom God chose to become a leader and supporter of the early Christian movement. In a world where women were often overlooked, God saw Lydia, opened her heart, and used her home as a place where the Gospel could grow.
- ❖ Why did Paul and his companions go to the riverside outside Philippi?
- ❖ What does it mean that Lydia was a “worshiper of God” before meeting Paul?
- ❖ What does it mean that “the Lord opened Lydia's heart?”
- ❖ What does Lydia's story teach us about how God views women?
- ❖ What does Lydia's hospitality teach us?
- Lydia challenges us to ask: What has God placed in my hands that I can use for Him? It may be our home, our time, our money, our talents, or simply our willingness to welcome others. True discipleship is not only believing in Jesus but also making room for Jesus to work through us to bless others.

Acts 16:16-18

Paul and Silas in Prison

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.’ ¹⁸ 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.

Review 16:16-18.

- ❖ Look up the word divination (16:16). What does it mean? <https://www.bibleref.com/Acts/16/Acts-16-16.html>

Acts 16:16–18 — What We Know About the Slave Girl

- She was a slave, showing she lived under human control and lacked freedom or dignity in society.
- She was involved in fortune-telling (“a spirit of divination”), which the Bible presents as a counterfeit spiritual power, not from God.
- Her ability was used by her owners to exploit her for financial gain, turning her life into a source of profit for others.
- She is described as being trapped in both spiritual bondage and human exploitation, which a picture of double oppression.
- She repeatedly follows Paul and declares truth about them, but Paul ultimately confronts the spirit in the name of Jesus Christ.
- When Paul commands the spirit to leave, it reveals that Christ has authority over every power that binds and deceives.
- ❖ Why do you think Paul might have been annoyed at her behavior and proclamations?

Acts 16:19-24

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Review 16:19-24.

- It is clear that the owners of this formerly demon -possessed girl were more concerned with their financial gain from her fortune-telling abilities than with her as a person. We learn nothing about the girl after the demon was cast out.
- We can only hope that her freedom from demon possession also led to freedom from her spiritually abusive situation and freedom in Christ. Luke's silence reminds us to be careful not to assume details that Scripture does not provide.
- Her situation raises important questions:
 - Did her owners continue to exploit her in other ways?
 - Did Lydia and the believers in Philippi care for her afterward?
 - Did she become part of the Philippian church?
- While we do not know the answers, the questions remind us that deliverance is not merely freedom *from* something but ideally freedom *for* a new life in Christ and Christian community.

Review 16:19-24.

- ❖ What does the owners' reaction reveal about the nature of idolatry? (see **Exodus 20:3; Colossians 3:5; Matthew 6:24**)
- ❖ Why does gospel ministry often provoke opposition? (see **John 3:19–20; John 15:18–20; Ephesians 6:12**)
- ❖ What does the treatment of Paul and Silas reveal about discipleship? (see **John 16:33; Luke 9:23; Philippians 121:29**)
- ❖ How does this passage demonstrate the conflict between two kingdoms? (see **Daniel 2:44; John 18:36; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Colossians 2:15**)

Acts 16:25-40

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

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

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ 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 household.

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

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."

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Review 16:25-40

- Paul and Silas had been wrongly profiled, beaten, arrested, secured in leg shackles, and thrown into a maximum-security prison. Even in those treacherous and unfair realities, they were filled with joy.
- With prayer and singing, they reminded themselves of what was true despite their circumstances. Had they been focused on what was happening *to* them, they may have missed an opportunity for what God wanted to do *through* them.

❖ Compare and Contrast the Prison Narratives in Acts

- Acts 12:6–11 — Peter's Miraculous Deliverance
 - Acts 12:18–19 — The Guards' Judgment
 - Acts 16:25–29 — Paul and Silas in the Philippian Jail
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- ❖ What do these accounts reveal about God's power, purposes, and methods? How does God work differently in each situation, and what does that teach us about His sovereignty?
 - The Holy Spirit does not always work the same way. Peter is freed by an angel, the guards face judgment, and Paul and Silas remain in prison long enough for a jailer to be saved. To assume God must repeat the same miracle in every situation is to misunderstand His sovereignty. God's goodness is not proven by doing the same thing every time, but by accomplishing His perfect will every time.

The Philippian Earthquake: More Than a Prison Break

- Greece was and still is one of the most seismically active regions in Europe, so an earthquake itself would not have been unusual. What made this earthquake extraordinary was its divine timing, precise effects, and redemptive purpose.
- The earthquake was *not* ultimately about freeing Paul and Silas from prison. If that had been God's primary purpose, they could have simply walked out through the open doors. Instead, they remained.
- Through the discernment of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Silas recognized that God was doing something greater than securing their release. The opened doors created an opportunity *not* for escape, but for evangelism. By staying put, they prevented the jailer's suicide, shared the gospel, and witnessed the salvation of the jailer and his entire household.
- Sometimes God's miracles are not designed to remove us from a difficult situation but to position us for a greater kingdom purpose within it.

Confidence and Humility in the Service of the Gospel

- After the earthquake, Paul and Silas did not seize the opportunity to escape. Instead, they remained where God had placed them, resulting in the salvation of the jailer and his household
- Though innocent, they willingly endured imprisonment, beating, and humiliation without complaint or retaliation.
- When the magistrates attempted to quietly release them, Paul revealed that he and Silas were Roman citizens who had been beaten and imprisoned without a trial, which was a serious violation of Roman law.
- Paul was not seeking personal revenge or vindication. He sought public justice to expose the wrongdoing and protect the credibility of the gospel and the future of the church in Philippi.
- The magistrates came personally, apologized, escorted them from prison, and respectfully asked them to leave the city. This public acknowledgment of wrongdoing would have made local authorities think twice before mistreating Christians in Philippi again.
- Paul demonstrates that humility is not weakness and confidence is not pride. He willingly suffered when suffering served God's purposes, but he also wisely leveraged his rights as a Roman citizen when doing so would advance the gospel and strengthen the church.
- ❖ What rights, resources, influence, opportunities, or privileges has God entrusted to you, and how can you leverage them not merely for personal benefit, but for the glory of God, the advancement of the gospel, and the good of others?