
a ***Grace Notes*** course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 305: **Acts 16:13-24**

ACTS, Lesson 305, Acts 16:13-24

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Acts 16:13-24

Acts 16:13

And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was often made; and we sat down, and spoke to the women who gathered there.

by a river side

The little river Gangites was one mile west of the town. The city evidently had few Jews; there is no mention of a synagogue in the city. (There was a synagogue in Thessalonica, but apparently none in Amphipolis or Appolonia, cf. Acts 17:1). But away from the city they noticed a place that was used as a place of prayer, at least for some women.

The Jews often had places of prayer by a river, or by the sea-side, for purposes of ritual bathing and purification. Josephus states that one of the terms of the decree of the city of Halicarnassus was to allow the Jews to “make their **proseuchae** (place of prayer) at the sea-side, according to the customs of their forefathers.” (Antiquities 14:10.23)

we sat down, and spoke ...

Sitting was the normal Jewish practice for public speaking. This was not mere conversation but was a sort of an informal preaching or exposition of scripture. As Luke says “we sat down and spoke...”, it implies that all of them Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, preached in turn.

Acts 16:14

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul.

And a certain woman named Lydia

Lydia was (and is) a common female name. Some commentators wonder whether this phrase should read “a Lydian woman”, because

her home town Thyatira was in the province of Lydia. However, here we have in Greek (*kai tis gunei onomati Ludia*), “and some woman in name Lydia”, which indicates that Lydia was her proper name.

Lydia was wealthy, possibly a widow, and had become a believer in Israel’s God. As a Gentile, she would have been classified by the Jews as a “God-fearer”, and because she is described in this verse as “one that worshipped God” it may be that she was a proselyte. In Philippi, she was regularly at the place of prayer. Now she has change to hear about Jesus Christ. After her conversion she hosted Paul and the others during their stay at Philippi.

TOPIC: LYDIA

a seller of purple

Lydia sold fabric dyed purple, which was in great demand among the wealthier citizens as it was used for part of the official Roman toga. In English, we still use the term “royal purple” to refer to fancy dress.

Purple dye was use by Jews, also, for the fringes of male clothing (tzitzit), among other things.

The Baker New Testament Commentary has some interesting details about working with purple.

“Lydia had left Thyatira, crossed the Aegean Sea, and taken up residence in Philippi as a seller of purple cloth. The purple dye applied to fine linen was obtained from the secretion of shellfish (mollusks) that live in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Since approximately eight thousand mollusks were required to produce one gram of purple dye, purple cloth was extremely expensive. Purple garments were worn by emperors and by private citizens as a status symbol. In Rome, purple stoles were attached to senatorial togas. We conclude, then, that Lydia belonged to the class of wealthy merchants and was the owner of a large house (Acts 16:15, 40).”

of the city of Thyatira

Thyatira was the location of one of the seven local churches mentioned in the book of Revelation. For more information see:

TOPIC: THYATIRA

Lydia refers to a province in the western part of the Roman province of Asia (modern Turkey) bounded on the north by Mysia, on the east by Phrygia, on the south by Caria, and on the west by the Greek cities in Ionia. It is listed among the provinces taken by the conquering Romans from the Syrian king Antiochus the Great and given to Eumenes II, the king of Pergamum, after the battle of Magnesia in 190 BC.

The capital of Lydia, Sardis, was considerably inland, and the province never showed any significant maritime development. Herodotus referred to Lydia as a fertile land and to its abundance of silver (Persian Wars 5.49), while Tacitus spoke of the rich countries around Sardis (Annals 4.55). According to Herodotus, the Lydians “were the first nation to introduce the use of gold and silver coin, and the first who sold goods by retail” (Persian Wars 1.94).

By New Testament times, Lydia had become a part of the Roman province of Asia, having been given to Rome in 133 BC by the Attalus III, king of Pergamum. Five of the churches to which the book of Revelation was addressed were in Lydia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea).

who worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened,

“Heard” is the imperfect active of (*akouo*), so she continued to listen to the preaching and give it good attention. The Lord opened her mind, so we see the work of the Holy Spirit in the initial phases of a person’s developing faith in Christ.

She “attended” or “gave heed” to Paul’s preaching, and the fact that she and her household were baptized gives proof of her true acceptance of the gospel.

that she attended unto things that were spoken by Paul.

Paul spoke concerning the person and work of Christ, especially about justification by faith, and redemption by the blood of Christ. She understood what she heard and gladly received it, submitting to the ordinance of baptism.

Acts 16:15

And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

The members of Lydia’s household would have been her immediate family members and servants who lived under her roof. Lydia’s spiritual influence extended to all of them. Luke does not describe her family any further, but he does portray Lydia’s household as the core of the growing local church in Philippi.

They were all baptized in the river Gangites.

if you have judged me to be faithful in the Lord

The best translation of this phrase is probably that of the NIV, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord” (*ei kekrikate me pistein to Kurio*). Gloag states that it would have been premature for Paul to have judged whether she was faithful, and that translation of the Greek favors the word “believe”.

come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Nevertheless, she immediately begins to show the love of God in her heart and her faithful willingness to serve Him. It may be that Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke had thought the burden of hospitality might be too much for her. But, she not only invited them, but insisted that they go with her to her house.

Acts 16:16

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of

divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

Wherever the church develops, Satan tries to obstruct the work of God's servants. For instance, in Samaria Simon the sorcerer offered Peter and John money to obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-19); on the island of Cyprus, Elymas opposed Paul and Barnabas by trying to persuade the proconsul Sergius Paulus not to believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 13:7-8). Likewise, in Philippi Satan uses a demon-possessed girl to thwart the work of the missionaries.¹

a certain damsel

This young woman followed Paul and the others around Philippi.

possessed with a spirit of divination met us

Spirit of divination is (*pneuma puthona*), literally, the spirit of Python. Python, or Pythios, was one of the names of Apollo, the Greek god of medicine, music, and poetry. There were temples dedicated to Apollo at Delphi, Delos, Claros, and many other places, and his worship among Greeks was almost universal. The name Python is said to have been given to him because, when he was born, he destroyed the serpent called Python.

Whatever was the cause of this woman's delusion is not described; plainly Paul regarded this as a case of demon possession and treated it as such.

Demon possession occurs when an actual fallen angel, a demon, enters and occupies the body of an unbeliever. Demons cannot enter the bodies of Christian believers because the Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Inviting demons can be accomplished in a number of ways.

¹ Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953-2001). *Vol. 17: New Testament commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles.*

- Through idolatry (Satan's communion table), 1 COR. 10:19-21*.
- Through drug addiction, called in Greek, (*farmakeia*), "the use of drugs, potions, or spells; poisoning, witchcraft, sorcery" GAL. 5:20 ("witch-craft, sorcery"), cf. also REV. 9:21; 18:23.
- Through religious backsliding, religious sensitivity activities such as dabbling in the occult, consulting mediums, necromancy. cf. ISA. 8:19.

which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying

A soothsayer is a person who foretells events. It was a pagan practice; and soothsaying was forbidden in Israel (Deut. 18:10, 14). In Scripture, soothsaying was practiced by Balaam, (Josh. 13:22) and King Manasseh of Judah (2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chr 33:6). Jacob's descendants were likened to the soothsayers of Philistia (Isaiah 2:6); they were listed among the false prophets of Judah (Jer. 27:9). Now we see that soothsaying was a lucrative trade in Philippi. In Samaria, Simon Magus, who became a believer, was famous and successful as a magician and sorcerer, before his conversion (Acts 8:9-24).

It's quite understandable that this woman's masters would be very upset that Paul cast the demon out of her.

TOPIC: SATAN

TOPIC: DEMONS

Acts 16:17

The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.

This cry was not a spiritual testimony to the gospel; it was a sarcastic uttering of the demon to ridicule the preaching of the gospel. The demons knew about Christ and made every effort to His name from being proclaimed. This

demon tried every trick to destroy their credit and ruin their usefulness.

Luke 8:26-28 Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee.

And when He came out onto the land, He was met by a man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs.

Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me."

Luke 4:40,41 While the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them.

Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ.

Acts 16:18

And this she did many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

The young woman kept up her harassment for several days, which would have given Paul and the others an unpleasant reputation among the people who lived in Philippi.

Paul was sore troubled and worn out with this opposition from the demon. The word involves both grief and indignation, grief for the girl's unfortunate condition, and indignation for the affront to the gospel of Christ.

Mark 16:17,18. These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues;

they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Exorcisms were performed to liberate afflicted persons from the influence of demons. They are distinguished from other forms of cures involving the restoration to health of those whose disease or affliction was not regarded as having a demonic cause. For further details:

TOPIC: EXORCISM

Acts 16:19

And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,

This girl's owners were intent on their profit, and they were now losing a lot of money when she no longer served as a fortune-teller. They had no more tricks to play; they couldn't hoodwink the gullible people any more.

In New Testament days, the marketplace was the social center of a city. Here magistrates judged court cases, the sick were healed by physicians, the unemployed sought work. A plaintiff could bring a defendant into court and ask the judge to pass a verdict. Justice was usually swift and fines or punishment immediate.

The owners of the slave girl were acting according to Roman law when they laid hands on Paul and Silas and put their grievances before the city authorities. (Archaeologists have uncovered the judgment seat in Philippi's ancient marketplace.)

Luke calls these judges magistrates (*archon*). They were the chief officials in a Roman colony like Philippi. Sometimes the dignified title of *praetor* was used for these officials.

Acts 16:20

And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

The usual title of the two chief magistrates of a Roman colony was *duumviri*, in Latin meaning “two men”, and they answered to the Roman consul.

When they said “these men, being Jews”, they did so in the most contemptuous manner, to excite the magistrates and the people against the disciples. The Jews at this time were in special disgrace in the whole Roman empire, because the emperor Claudius had just recently banished all Jews from Rome. The magistrates would be especially enraged if they found that Jews were spreading their obnoxious opinions among the citizens.

The “business men” claimed that the disciples were destroying the public peace and endangering the city.

Acts 16:21

And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

The Romans were usually tolerant of other religions; in conquered countries they allowed people to follow their religions without interference. But Jews were not allowed to propagate their religion among Romans, and there were heavy penalties for promoting circumcision among Romans.²

The opponents of the disciples, however, were very clever in that they are charging them with introducing a new religion. This was against Roman law³, so it was a cunning accusation. There were many Romans in Philippi, and even many of the native Macedonians had become Roman citizens.

² Neander’s *Church History*, Vol. 1, page 123.

³ Tertullian, *The Apology*, in speaking of Roman treatment of Christians.

Acts 16:22

And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

The crowd joined in the physical attack against Paul and Silas. The magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. The lictors (rod bearers), or executioners among the Romans, used to tear the garments of criminals when they beat them. The lictors were officers who carried the Roman symbols of law and order, the *fasces*, bundles of rods with an ax (the symbol of fascism, by the way). With these rods the lictors would carry out corporal punishment, and sometimes capital punishment. But here any semblance of legal procedure disappeared. There was no hearing or trial – only punishment.

This is one of the three times Paul was beaten in this manner (2 Cor. 11:25), and he spoke elsewhere of this terrible treatment he received in Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2).

Acts 16:23

And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely:

TOPIC: PAUL AND SILAS IN THE PHILIPPIAN JAIL

Acts 16:24

Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

Paul and Silas were nearly beaten to death, then they were thrown into the inner prison. Usually, there was an outer part of a prison where prisoners had freedom to walk about and meet with friends and relatives, but the inner part was dark and designed to keep prisoners in strict confinement. The jailer was probably an army veteran, and he knew that if these men should escape from prison, he would have to pay with his life (see verse 27).

Being confined to stocks was added torture; the wooden blocks could be stretched away from one another, and sometimes a prisoner's legs were forced apart so much that their joints were dislocated.⁴ Paul and Silas were treated as criminals unworthy of the slightest human comfort, yet God's power became evident, even in their darkest hour.

This seems to be the first mention of a persecution of Christians by Romans. In other places, such as Jerusalem, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, the Jews were either the sole perpetrators, or else they stirred up the pagan multitude. This is just a prelude to the horrific treatment Christians were to receive from the Romans over the next three centuries, until the time of the Emperor Constantine.

Exorcism

In the New Testament exorcisms are primarily found in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts. No exorcisms are referred to in the Gospel of John.

Jesus is depicted as an exorcist in the Gospels, and He is able to delegate this ability to His disciples (Mk. 3:14f; 6:7 [par Mt. 10:1; Lk. 9:1; 10:17-20]; 9:18, 28 [par Mt. 17:16, 19; Lk. 9:40]; 16:17f).

Exorcisms, which are acts of liberating afflicted persons from the malevolent influence of demons, are distinguished from other forms of cures involving the restoration to health of those whose disease or affliction was not regarded as having a demonic cause (Mk. 1:32-34 [par Mt. 8:16; Lk. 4:40f]; 1:39 [par Mt. 4:24]; 3:10f [par Lk. 6:17f]; Lk. 13:32).

Jesus' method of curing the sick usually involved the touch of His hand, but in performing exorcisms He avoided the use of His hand and focused on addressing the demon with short, authoritative commands. Six accounts of exorcisms performed by Jesus are preserved in the Synoptic Gospels

⁴ Compare Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1.27, who describes the suffering of imprisoned Christians in southern France.

1. Mk. 1:21-28 par Lk. 4:31-37;
2. Mk. 5:1-20 par Mt. 8:28-34; Lk. 8:26-39;
3. Mk. 7:24-30 par Mt. 15:21-28;
4. Mk. 9:14-29 par Mt. 17:14-21; Lk. 9:37-43;
5. Mt. 9:32-34;
6. Mt. 12:22f par Lk. 11:14.

That Jesus' ministry was characterized, among other things, by the performance of exorcisms, is indicated by a number of editorial summaries and comments by the Synoptic evangelists (Mk. 1:32-34 par Mt. 8:16; Lk. 4:40f; Mk. 1:39 par Mt. 4:24; Mk. 3:10f par Lk. 6:17f; Lk. 7:21; 8:2).

In two of the six exorcism stories of the Gospels, Mt. 9:32-34 and Mt. 12:22f (par Lk. 11:14), nothing is said of the technique used by Jesus.

In three exorcism stories Jesus expels demons with short, succinct commands: "Jesus rebuked him, saying 'Be silent and come out of him!'" (Mk. 1:25 par Lk. 4:35); "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" (Mk. 5:8 par Lk. 8:29); "He rebuked the unclean spirit and said to it, 'I command you, come out of him and never enter him again!'" (Mk. 9:25 par Mt. 17:18; Lk. 9:42).

The brevity and authority of such commands and the absence of the invocation of divine or angelic names contrast with the lengthy adjurations and invocations that characterize formulas seen in the papyri which describe magic and sorcery in early times. That Jesus could confidently command demons and expect instant obedience indicates that He regarded Himself as in full possession of all the supernatural powers necessary for the performance of such acts.

The dumbness caused by some afflicting demons depicted in the Gospels may be regarded as a way to keep the healer from starting the "therapeutic interview" (cf. Mt. 9:32; 12:22 par Lk. 11:14; Mk. 9:17, 25). In one instance Jesus asked a demon for his name (Mk. 5:9 par Lk. 8:30), and the occasional convulsions and collapse of the victim would provide visible proof of the expulsion of the demons (Mk. 9:26), while according to Mk. 5:13

(par Mt. 8:32; Lk. 8:33) the demons abandoned the Gerasene demoniac for a herd of swine which then stampeded into the sea in an act of self-destruction.

In addition to the references to exorcisms performed by Jesus, three sayings of Jesus deal specifically with exorcisms.

1. In Mk. 3:19–27 (par Mt. 12:25f, 29; Lk. 11:17f, 21f), Jesus is accused by His enemies of performing exorcisms “by Beelzebul” (i.e., “in the name of Beelzebul”), an indirect way of charging Jesus with the practice of magic. Jesus, however, is not recorded as having invoked any supernatural being in the performance of exorcisms.
2. In Lk. 11:19f (par Mt. 12:27f) it is clear that Jesus’ primary purpose in performing exorcisms was not to relieve afflicted individuals (though the element of compassion is not unimportant), but to demonstrate the presence and power of the Kingdom of God through His activities and message.
3. Lk. 13:32 shows that Jesus’ ministry of curing and exorcism was integral to His ministry, the goal of which was His last fateful trip to Jerusalem. Jesus’ battle against demons should be viewed within the setting of the Jewish eschatological hope that the unclean spirit would finally and decisively be banished from Israel (Zech. 13:2)

Acts of the Apostles The Gospels themselves contain evidence that the name of Jesus was used during His lifetime by disciples in the performance of exorcisms (Mt. 7:22; Lk. 10:17; cf. Mk. 16:17), as well as by other Jewish exorcists not formally associated with Him (Mk. 9:38f par Lk. 9:49). In Acts it is primarily through the utterance of the name of Jesus that healings and exorcisms are effected (3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 30; 9:34). The name of Jesus was regarded as so effective that it was also taken up by non-Christian exorcists (Acts 19:13). Origen noted that the name of Jesus was so

powerful that it was even effective when used by evil men.

In Acts there is a general emphasis on miracles, exorcisms, and magic, since the author wishes to demonstrate not only that the gospel proclaimed by the apostles was confirmed by supernatural demonstrations of power, but also that Jewish and pagan magic and exorcism was impotent by comparison. The occurrence of exorcisms is only generally referred to in Acts (5:16; 8:7; 19:12). The only exorcism specifically narrated in Acts (and in the entire NT apart from those performed by Jesus) is that performed by Paul in Acts 16:16–18. Harassed by a demon-possessed slave girl, he turned and said, “I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18).⁵

Lydia, the Seller of Purple

At the time of the visit of Paul and Silas on their 2nd missionary journey, the congregation at Philippi, which met here for worship on the Sabbath, consisted chiefly, if not entirely, of a few women; (Acts 16:13,14) and these were not all of Jewish birth, and not all residents at Philippi. Lydia, who is mentioned by name, was a proselyte; and Thyatira, her native place, was a city of the province of Asia. The business which brought her to Philippi was connected with the dyeing trade, which had flourished from a very early period, as we learn from Homers in the neighborhood of Thyatira, and is permanently commemorated in inscriptions which relate to the “guild of dyers” in that city, and incidentally give a singular confirmation of the veracity of St. Luke in his casual allusions.

In this unpretentious place, and to this congregation of pious women, the Gospel was first preached by an Apostle within the limits of Europe. St. Paul and his companions seem to have arrived in the early part of the week; for “some days” elapsed before “the Sabbath.” On

⁵ Bromiley, G. W. (1988; 2002). *Vol. 2: The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (244–245). Wm. B. Eerdmans.

that day the strangers went and joined the little company of worshippers at their prayer by the river side. Assuming at once the attitude of teachers, they "sat down," and spoke to the women who were assembled together. The Lord, who had summoned His servants from Troas to preach the Gospel in Macedonia, (Acts 16:10) now vouchsafed to them the signs of His presence, by giving Divine energy to the words which they spoke in His name. Lydia "was one of the listeners," and the Lord "opened her heart, that she took heed to the things that were spoken of Paul."

Lydia, being convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and having made a profession of her faith, was forthwith baptized. The place of her baptism was doubtless the stream which flowed by the proseucha. With the baptism of Lydia that of her "household" was associated. Whether we are to understand by this term her children, her slaves, or the work people engaged in the manual employment connected with her trade, or all these collectively, cannot easily be decided. But we may observe that it is the first passage in the life of St. Paul where we have an example of that family religion, to which he often alludes in his Epistles. The "connections of Chloe," (1 Cor. 1:11) the "household of Stephanas," (1 Cor. 1:16) the "Church in the house" of Aquila and Priscilla, (Rom. 16:5) are parallel cases, to which we shall come in the course of the narrative.

It may also be rightly added, that we have here the first example of that Christian hospitality which was so emphatically enjoined, (Heb. 13:2) and so lovingly practiced, in the Apostolic Church. The frequent mention of the "hosts" who gave shelter to the Apostles, (Rom. 16:23 ff) reminds us that they led a life of hardship and poverty, and were the followers of Him "for whom there was no room, iii the inn." The Lord had said to His Apostles, that, when they entered into a city, they were to seek out "those who were worthy," and with them to abide. The search at Philippi was not difficult. Lydia voluntarily presented herself to her spiritual benefactors, and said to them, earnestly and

humbly, that, "since they had regarded her as a believer on the Lord," her house should be their home. She admitted of no refusal to her request, and "their peace was on that house"

Thus the Gospel had obtained a home in Europe. It is true that the family with whom the Apostles lodged was Asiatic rather than European : and the direct influence of Lydia may be supposed to have contributed more to the establishment of the church of Thyatira, addressed by St. John, (Rev. 2) than to that of Philippi, which received the letter of St. Paul. But still the doctrine and practice of Christianity were established in Europe ; and nothing could be more calm and tranquil than its first beginnings on the shore of that continent, which it has long overspread.

The scenes by the riverside, and in the house of Lydia, are beautiful prophecies of the holy influence which women, elevated by Christianity to their true position, and enabled by Divine grace to wear "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," have now for centuries exerted over domestic happiness and the growth of piety and peace. If we wish to see this in a forcible light, we may contrast the picture which is drawn for us by St. Luke, with another representation of women in the same neighborhood given by the Heathen poets, who tell us of the frantic excitement of the Edonian matrons, wandering, under the name of religion, with disheveled hair and violent cries, on the banks of the Strymon.

Thus far all was peaceful and hopeful in the work of preaching the Gospel to Macedonia: the congregation met in the house or by the riverside; souls were converted and instructed ; and a Church, consisting both of men and women, was gradually built up. This continued for "many days." It was difficult to foresee the storm which was to overcast so fair a prospect. A bitter persecution, however, was unexpectedly provoked: and the Apostles were brought into collision with heathen superstition in one of its worst forms, and with the rough violence of the colonial authorities.

As if to show that the work of Divine grace is advanced by difficulties and discouragement, rather than by ease and prosperity, the Apostles, who had been supernaturally summoned to a new field of labor, and who were patiently cultivating it with good success, were suddenly called away from it, silenced, and imprisoned.

Paul and Silas in the Philippian Jail

Paul and Silas had undoubtedly been doing what in some degree exposed them to legal penalties; and were beginning a change which tended to bring down, and which ultimately did bring down, the whole weight of the Roman law on the martyrs of Christianity. The force of another part of the accusation, which was adroitly introduced, namely, that the men were "Jews to begin with," will be fully apprehended, if we remember, not only that the Jews were generally hated, suspected, and despised, but that they had lately been driven out of Rome in consequence of an uproar, and that it was incumbent on Philippi, as a colony, to copy the indignation of the mother city.

Thus we can enter into the feelings which caused the mob to rise against Paul and Silas (Acts 16:22), and tempted the Praetors to dispense with legal formalities and consign the offenders to immediate punishment.

The mere loss of the slave's prophetic powers, so far as it was generally known, was enough to cause a violent agitation: for mobs are always more fond of excitement and wonder than of truth and holiness. The Philippians had been willing to pay money for the demoniac's revelations, and now strangers had come and deprived them of that which gratified their superstitious curiosity. And when they learned, moreover, that these strangers were Jews, and were breaking the laws of Rome; their discontent became fanatical. It seems that the Praetors had no time to hesitate, if they would retain their popularity. The rough words were spoken: "Go, lictors strip off their garments: let them, be scourged." The order was promptly obeyed, and the heavy blows descended. It is

happy for us that few modern countries know, by the example of a similar punishment, what the severity of a Roman scourging was. The Apostles received "many stripes;" and when they were consigned to prison, bleeding and faint from the rod, the jailer received a strict injunction "to keep them safe." Well might St. Paul, when at Corinth, look back to this day of cruelty, and remind the Thessalonians how he and Silas had "suffered before, and were shamefully treated at Philippi." (1 Thess. 2:2)

The jailer fulfilled the directions of the magistrates with rigorous and conscientious cruelty. Not content with placing the Apostles among such other offenders against the law as were in custody at Philippi, he "thrust them into the inner prison," (Acts 16:24) and then "forced their limbs, lacerated as they were, and bleeding from the rod into a painful and constrained posture, by means of an instrument employed to confine and torture the bodies of the worst malefactors. Though we are ignorant of the exact relation of the outer and inner prisons, and of the connection of the jailer's "house" with both; we are not without very good notions of the misery endured in the Roman places of captivity.

We must picture to ourselves something very different from the austere comfort of an English jail. It is only since that Christianity for which the Apostles bled has had influence on the hearts of men, that the treatment of felons has been a distinct subject of philanthropic inquiry, and that we have learnt to pray for all prisoners and captives: "The inner prisons of which we read in the ancient world were like that dungeon in the court of the prison," into which Jeremiah was let down with cords, and where "he sank in the mire." They were pestilential cells, damp and cold, from which the light was excluded, and where the chains rusted on the limbs of the prisoners.

One such place may be seen to this day on the slope of the Capitol at Rome. It is known to the readers of Cicero and Sallust as the place where certain notorious conspirators were executed. The Tullianum (for so it was called) is a type of

the dungeons in the provinces; and we find the very name applied, in one instance, to a dungeon in the province of Macedonia. What kind of torture .was inflicted by the “stocks,” in which the arms and legs, and even the necks, of offenders were confined and stretched, we are sufficiently informed by the allusions to the punishment of slaves in the Greek and Roman writers ; and to show how far the cruelty of Heathen persecution, which may be said to have begun at Philippi, was afterwards carried in this peculiar kind of torture, we may refer to the sufferings “ which Origen endured under an iron collar, and in the deepest recesses of the prison, when, for many days, he was extended and stretched to the distance of four holes on the rack”

A few hours had made a serious change from the quiet scene by the water side to the interior of a stifling dungeon. But Paul and Silas had learnt, “in whatever state they were, therewith to be content.” They were even able to “rejoice” that they were “counted worthy to suffer” for the name of Christ. And if some thoughts of discouragement came over their minds, not for their own sufferings, but for the cause of their Master; and if it seemed “a strange thing” that a work to which they had been beckoned .by God should be arrested in its very beginning; yet they had faith to believe that His arm would be revealed at the appointed time.

Joseph's feet; too, had been “hurt in the stocks,” and he became a prince in Egypt. Daniel had been cast into the lions’ den, and he was made ruler of Babylon. Thus Paul and Silas remembered with joy the “Lord our Maker, who giveth songs an the night.” Racked as they were with pain, sleepless and weary, they were heard “about midnight,” from the depth of their prison house, “praying and singing hymns to God.” What it was that they sang, we know not; but the Psalms of David have ever been dear to those who suffer; they have instructed both Jew and Christian in the language of prayer and praise.

And the Psalms abound in such sentences as these: 'The Lord looketh down from His

sanctuary: out of heaven the Lord beholdeth the earth: that He might hear the mournings of such as are in captivity, and deliver the children appointed unto death” 'O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die” “The Lord helpeth them to right that suffer wrong: the Lord looseth men out of prison the Lord helpeth them that are fallen: the Lord careth for the righteous”

Such sounds as these were new in a Roman dungeon Whoever the other prisoners might be, whether they were the victims of oppression, or were suffering the punishment of guilt, debtors, slaves, robbers, or murderers, they listened with surprise to the voices of those who filled the midnight of the prison with sounds of cheerfulness and joy. Still the Apostles continued their praises, and the prisoners listened. “They that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death: being fast bound in misery and iron; when they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, He delivered them out of their distress. For He brought them out of darkness, and out of the shadow of death; and brake their bonds in sunder. O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men: for He hath broken the gates of brass, and smitten the bars of iron in sunder.” (Psalm 107:10 16)

When suddenly, as if in direct answer to the prayer of His servants, an earthquake shook the very foundations of the prison (Acts 16:26), the gates were broken, the bars smitten asunder, and the bands of the prisoners loosed. Without striving to draw a line between the natural and supernatural in this occurrence, and still less endeavoring to resolve what was evidently miraculous into the results of ordinary causes, we turn again to the thought suggested by that single but expressive phrase of Scripture, “ the prisoners were listening” “

When we reflect on their knowledge of the Apostles’ sufferings (for they were doubtless aware of the manner in which they had been brought in and thrust into the dungeon), and on

the wonder they must have experienced on hearing sounds of joy from those who were in pain, and on the awe which must have overpowered them when they felt the prison shaken and the chains fall from their limbs; and when to all this we add the effect produced on their minds by all that happened on the following day, and especially the fact that the jailer himself became a Christian; we can hardly avoid the conclusion that the hearts of many of those unhappy bondsmen were prepared that night to receive the Gospel, that the tidings of spiritual liberty came to those whom, but for the captivity of the Apostles, it would never have reached, and that the jailer himself was their evangelist and teacher.

The effect produced by that night on the jailer's own mind has been fully related to us.

Awakened in a moment by the earthquake, his first thought was of his prisoners (Acts 16:27): and in the shock of surprise and alarm," seeing the doors of the prison open, and supposing that the prisoners were fled," aware that inevitable death awaited him," with the stern and desperate resignation of a Roman official, he resolved that suicide was better than disgrace, and " drew his sword"

Philippi is famous in the annals of suicide. Here Cassius, unable to survive defeat, covered his face in the empty tent, and ordered his freedmen to strike the blow. His messenger Titinius held it to be "a Roman's part" to follow the stern example. Here Brutus bade adieu to his friends, exclaiming, "Certainly we must fly, yet not with the feet, but with the hands;" and many, whose names have never reached us, ended their last struggle for the republic by self inflicted death. Here, too, another despairing man would have committed the same crime, had not his hand been arrested by an Apostle's voice. Instead of a sudden and hopeless death, the jailer received at the hands of his prisoner the gift both of temporal and spiritual life.

The loud exclamation of Paul, "Do thyself no harm :for we are all here," gave immediate reassurance to the terrified jailer. He laid aside his sword, and called for lights, and rushed to

the "inner prison," where Paul and Silas were confined. But now a new fear of a higher kind took possession of his soul. The recollection of all he had heard before concerning these prisoners and all that he had observed of their demeanor when he brought them into the dungeon, the shuddering thought of the earthquake, the burst of his gratitude towards them as the preservers of his life, and the consciousness that even in the darkness of midnight they had seen his intention of suicide, all these mingling and conflicting emotions made him feel that he was in the presence of a higher power.

He fell down before them, and brought them out, as men whom he had deeply injured and insulted, to a place of greater freedom and comfort; and then he asked them, with earnest anxiety, what he must do to be saved. We see the Apostle here self possessed in the earthquake, as afterwards in the storm at seas able to overawe and control those who were placed over him, and calmly turning the occasion to a spiritual end. It is surely, however, a mistake to imagine that the jailer's inquiry had reference merely to temporal and immediate danger.

The awakening of his conscience, the presence of the unseen world, the miraculous visitation, the nearness of death, coupled perhaps with some confused recollection of the "way of salvation" which these strangers were said to have been proclaiming, were enough to suggest that inquiry which is the most momentous that any human soul can make: "What must I do to be saved ?" Their answer was that of faithful Apostles. They preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. "Believe, not in us, but in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved; and not only thou, but the like faith shall bring salvation to all thy house." From this last expression, and from the words which follow, we infer that the members of the jailer's family had crowded round him and the Apostles.

No time was lost in making known to them " the word of the Lord." All thought of bodily comfort and repose was postponed to the work of

saving the soul. The meaning of “faith in Jesus” was explained, and the Gospel was preached to the jailer’s family at midnight, while the prisoners were silent around, and the light was thrown on anxious faces and the dungeon wall.

And now we have an instance of that sympathetic care, that interchange of temporal and spiritual service, which has ever attended the steps of true Christianity. As it was in the miracles of our Lord and Savior, where the soul and the body were regarded together, so has it always been in His Church. “In the same hour of the night” (Acts 16:33) the jailer took the Apostles to the well or fountain of water which was within or near the precincts of the prison, and there he washed their wounds, and there also he and his household were baptized. He did what he could to assuage the bodily pain of Paul, and Silas, and they admitted him and his, by the “laver of regeneration” (Tit. 3:5) to the spiritual citizenship of the kingdom of God.

The prisoners of the jailer were now become his guests. His cruelty was changed into hospitality and love. “He took them up into his house,” and, placing them in a posture of repose, set food before them and refreshed their exhausted strength. It was a night of happiness for all. They praised God that His power had been made effectual in their weakness; and the jailer’s family had their first experience of that joy which is the fruit of believing in God.

At length morning broke on the eventful night. In the course of that night the greatest of all changes had been wrought in the jailer’s relations to this world and the next. From being the ignorant slave of a Heathen magistracy he had become the religious head of a Christian family. A change, also, in the same interval of time, had come over the minds of the magistrates themselves, Either from reflecting that they had acted more harshly than the case had warranted, or from hearing a more accurate statement of facts, or through alarm caused by the earthquake, or through that vague misgiving which sometimes, as in the case of Pilate and his wife, “haunts the minds of

those who have no distinct religious convictions, they sent new orders in the morning to the jailer. The message conveyed by the lictors was expressed in a somewhat contemptuous form, “Let those men go.”

But the jailer received it with the utmost joy. He felt his infinite debt of gratitude to the Apostles, not only for his preservation from a violent death, but for the tidings they had given him of eternal life. He would willingly have seen them freed from their bondage; but he was dependent on the will of the magistrates, and could do nothing without their sanction. When, therefore, the lictors brought the order, he went with them to announce the intelligence to the prisoners, and joyfully told them to leave their dungeon and I go in peace”

But Paul, not from any fanatical love of braving the authorities, but calmly looking to the ends of justice and the establishment of Christianity, refused to accept his liberty without some public acknowledgment of the wrong he had suffered. He now proclaimed a fact which had hitherto been unknown, that he and Silas were Roman citizens. Two Roman laws had been violated by the magistrates of the colony in the scourging inflicted the day before. And this, too, with signal aggravations. They were uncondemned. There had been no form of trial, without which, in the case of a citizen slighter punishment would have been illegal, even if it had been done “publicly”

In the face of the colonial population, an outrage had been committed on the majesty of the name in which they boasted, and Rome had been insulted in her citizens. “No,” said St. Paul; “they have oppressed the innocent and violated the law. Do they seek to satisfy justice by conniving at a secret escape? Let them come themselves and take us out of prison. They have publicly treated us as guilty; let them publicly declare that we are innocent”

“How often,” says Cicero,” has this exclamation, I am a Roman citizen, brought aid and safety even among barbarians in the remotest parts of the earth.” The lictors returned to the Praetors,

and the Praetors were alarmed. They felt that they had committed an act, which, if divulged at Rome, would place them in the utmost jeopardy. They had good reason to fear even for their authority in the colony; for the people of Philippi, "being Romans," might be expected to resent such a violation of the law. They hastened, therefore, immediately to the prisoners, and became the suppliants of those whom they had persecuted. They brought them at once out of the dungeon, and earnestly "besought them to depart from the city"

The whole narrative of St. Paul's imprisonment at Philippi sets before us in striking colors his clear judgment and presence of mind. He might have escaped by help of the earthquake and under the shelter of the darkness ; but this would have been to depart as a runaway slave. He would not do secretly what he knew he ought to be allowed to do openly. By such a course his own character and that of the Gospel would have been disgraced, the jailer would have been cruelly left to destruction, and all religious influence over the other prisoners would have been gone.

As regards these prisoners, his influence over them was like the sway he obtained over the crew in the sinking vessel (Acts 27). It was so great, that not one of them attempted to escape. And not only in the prison, but in the whole town of Philippi, Christianity was placed on a high vantage ground by the Apostle's conduct that night. It now appeared that these persecuted Jews were themselves sharers in the vaunted Roman privilege. Those very laws had been violated in their treatment which they themselves had been accused of violating. That no appeal was made against this treatment, might be set down to the generous forbearance of the Apostles. Their cause was now, for a time at least, under the protection of the law, and they themselves were felt to have a claim on general sympathy and respect.

Departure from Philippi

They complied with the request of the magistrates. Yet, even in their departure, they

were not unmindful of the dignity and self possession which ought always to be maintained by innocent men in a righteous cause. They did not retire in any hasty or precipitate flight, but proceeded "from the prison to the house of Lydia;" (Acts 16:40) and there they met the Christian brethren who were assembled to hear their farewell words of exhortation ; and so they departed from the city. It was not, however, deemed sufficient that this infant church at Philippi should be left alone with the mere remembrance of words of exhortation.

Two of the Apostolic company remained behind: Timothy, of whom the Philippians "learned the proof" that he honestly cared for their state, that he was truly like minded with St. Paul, "serving him in the Gospel as a son serves his father," (Phil. 2:19 25) and "Luke the Evangelist, whose praise is in the Gospel," though he never praises himself, or relates his own labors, and though we only trace his movements in connection with St. Paul by the change of a pronoun, or the unconscious variation of his style.

Timothy seems to have rejoined Paul and Silas, if not at Thessalonica, at least at Berea. But we do not see St. Luke again in the Apostle's company till the third missionary journey and the second visit to Macedonia. (Acts 20:4 6) At this exact point of separation, we observe that he drops the style of an eyewitness and resumes that of a historian, until the second time of meeting, after which he writes as an eyewitness till the arrival at Rome, and the very close of the Acts. To explain and justify the remark here made, we need only ask the reader to contrast the detailed narrative of events at Philippi with the more general account of what happened at Thessalonica.⁶ It might be inferred

⁶ Observe, for instance, his mention of running before the wind, and staying for the night at Samothrace. Again, he says that Philippi was the first city they came to, and that it was a colony. He tells us that the place of prayer was outside the gate

that the writer of the Acts was an eye witness in the former city and not in the latter, even if the pronoun did not show us when he was present and when he was absent.

Thyatira

Thyatira was the location of one of the seven local churches in the book of Revelation. The city was founded by the Lydian kingdom and later captured by Seleucus, Alexander's general. It then served as a border settlement to preserve his kingdom from Lysimachus, his rival to the west.

After the kingdom of Pergamum was founded (282 BC), Thyatira became the borderline between Pergamum and the Syrians. The city was without natural defenses. It was not built on a hill and therefore was subject to repeated invasions. The strength of the city lay largely in its strategic location and also upon the fertility of the area surrounding it. Its inhabitants were descendants of Macedonian soldiers and retained much of their ancestors' militancy. They were formidable defenders of the city.

When Rome defeated Antiochus in 189 BC, Thyatira was incorporated into the kingdom of Pergamum, Rome's ally. Peace and prosperity followed. Under the Roman emperor Claudius (AD 41–54), Thyatira rose to new prominence and was permitted to issue its own coins. The emperor Hadrian included this city in his Middle East itinerary (AD 134), a hint of the importance of Thyatira in the second century AD.

Prosperity attracted many Jews to this area. Among the commercial activities of the city were textiles and bronze armor. The armorers were in a guild, like the silversmiths in Ephesus. The first known Christian convert in Europe was a businesswoman from Thyatira named Lydia (Acts 16:14–15, 40). She specialized in the costly purple garments that were exported from Thyatira to Macedonia. Here the purple dye, from the madder root, offered a much

and near a riverside. There is no such particularity in the account of what took place at Thessalonica.

cheaper cloth to compete with costlier garments dyed with the expensive murex dye from Phoenicia.

In the message to the church in Thyatira, the members are commended for their love, faith, service, and endurance (Rev. 2:19). But the influence of paganism is still reflected in the sharp rebuke of those who tolerate the heresy of which "Jezebel" was the leader. Their temptation was similar to that of the Corinthian believers who were uncertain about eating food that had been dedicated to idols (1 Cor 8:1–13). The trade guilds held periodic festivals in which food offered to idols was consumed. This was sometimes accompanied by licentious rites in which religion and sex were mingled. This church was condemned for its accommodation to these pagan practices. Immorality was so rife among the pagans that the early church, with its uncompromising attitude toward unchastity, stood in constant tension with the mores of the community. Superstition and devil worship were apparently a great temptation as well. The "deep things of Satan" (Rev. 2:24) is probably an allusion to one of the Gnostic sects that stressed "depth" and carried on secret rites in which only initiates participated. So serious was the temptation that the best hope was for survival of the remnant—hence, the exhortation "hold fast what you have, until I come" (Rev, 2L25).

Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). Tyndale Bible dictionary. Tyndale reference library (1256–1257).