

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 16:11-24 | Session 41 | Trouble in Philippi

After receiving the “Macedonian Call”, Paul, Silas, and Timothy immediately sail across the Aegean Sea to *preach the gospel unto them*.

Verses 11, 12—

Loosing from Troas...to Samothrace...the next day Neapolis. Neapolis is located about 10 miles from Philippi. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony and was named after the father of Alexander the Great, Philip of Macedon. Philip’s tomb was discovered intact. Philippi was the **chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony**. A **colony** denoted it was a Roman military outpost. Today extensive ruins of the city can be visited.

Verse 13—

And on the Sabbath. The Greek says, *on the day of the Sabbaths* (plural). The use of the plural could mean “*On the first Sabbath of the Feast of weeks*” that is, the first of seven sabbaths counted from Passover to Pentecost. This would make Paul’s visit to Phillip in March or April of A.D. 53. **The river side, where prayer was wont** (customary behavior) ...**spake to the women** there. These women may have been Jews, or *God-fearing gentiles*. There was apparently no Jewish synagogue in Philippi, since the prayer is taking place at the river side. In order for a synagogue to be established a minimum of ten men was required—the text seems to indicate only women were present, so we can assume there were few Jews in Philippi. They met by a river since Judaism had many cleansing rituals as part of their religious practice.

Verses 14, 15—

Lydia, a seller of purple. Purple dye was rare and expensive and was considered the royal color of the Roman empire. It was made from a little snail found in the Mediterranean regions. The process was slow and tedious as it took 120 pounds of snails to produce just one gram of pure purple dye powder (for comparison, one gram of sugar is about a ¼ teaspoon). Lydia, may have been a widow, and must have been a woman of financial means. **Whose heart was opened**, we don’t know anything about the others with her but she **attended** (took heed) **unto the things which were spoken of Paul**. Not unlike Timothy being circumcised, Lydia was **baptized**. Was this baptism a Jewish ritual baptism? Perhaps. The late Charles Baker has this comment:

“During the transition period (when God was setting the nation of Israel aside and instituting...the Body of Christ) circumcision, baptism, miraculous healings, angelic appearances, super-natural jail deliveries, visions, tongues and other outward, physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit were evident. Although Paul practiced circumcision during this time, circumcision was surely not part of his commission for this dispensation. Although Paul spoke in tongues more than others, he made it clear that this gift was to pass away. And while he practiced baptism during this time, he made it plain that baptism was not a part of his commission. And while he experiences a miraculous jail delivery in this chapter, after the transition to the full dispensation of grace there was no longer such miraculous deliverances: he remained in prison until his martyrdom. And, although he performed miracles of healing during the transition, he later had to leave behind sick some of his most faithful workers.”

Which gospel did Lydia hear and take heed? Perhaps both. If she was a Jew (or a Jewish proselyte), she would have believed that Jesus was Messiah and was coming to save the world through her nation. As an individual, she accepted the grace-gift of salvation. Aside from her spiritual decision, she was a woman of great hospitality, most likely accustomed to dealing with wealthy or important people, and she had a heart open to the truth.

Verse 16—

When the gospel increases, so does trouble. In this case **a certain damsel** (young girl) **possessed with a spirit of divination** (a fortune teller). **Brought her masters much gain...** Follow the money. When money becomes the focus, trouble is sure to follow.

Verses 17,18—

These men are the servants of the most high God... The people in the city of Philippi would not think of Jehovah God when they heard this. This was a pagan, mythological society (remember 14:12). The **most high God** could have been referring to Zeus, and **the way of salvation** (Greek: *hodos*) could be translated a way, in other words one of many ways to be saved. If you think back to Jesus’s days on earth and his ministry there were times when those who were demon possessed referred to him as “*The Son of God.*” But on each occasion Jesus commanded the demons to shut up...Jesus refused any testimony uttered by demons. Here we probably have the same scenario. If this girl was allowed to continue the Philippians would have assumed her message was similar to the Holy Spirit, and the message of Jesus Christ would then become just another form of sorcery and black magic. **Paul, being grieved...** he was troubled by this girl’s persistence and had had enough **after many days**. Paul **turned and said to the spirit**. The girl was the victim of trafficking and who know what else. Paul speaks directly to the demon and **he came out**. Don’t make a doctrine out of an historical event. Nowhere are we told to confront and speak to demons. Rather, we are told to *resist the devil and he will flee*. We resist through knowing the word of God, rightly divided.

Verses 19-24—

Satan always tries to disrupt the message of God. He tried flattery and failed. The exorcism impacted the economics of the owners—showing that the love of money was the root, and not the girl. **Drew them** (literally, dragged) **into the marketplace** (Greek: *agora*, the place of assembly or public debating...trials, etc.). Since flattery didn’t work, Satan works in the hearts of the masters to throw out false accusations against Paul and Silas, which seems to have stirred up the multitude, i.e., the *mob*. It seems clear that these masters of the girl had political clout by the speed of the attack against Paul and Silas as they **commanded**, they be beaten with **many stripes** as Paul writes about in 2 Corinthians 6:5). The rulers **cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely...thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks**. Why such harsh treatment? Could it be because Paul and Silas had just performed a supernatural act by exorcising the demon from this girl? What else were these men capable of? There was no trial, or any hint that there will be a trial. They were just thrown into maximum security, put in stocks, and are not given a chance for any kind of defense. It is in verse 24 we are introduced to the Philippian jailor, in passing. He is soon to be one of the most famous jailors in Christian history.