

PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 16:9-40.

LESSON 334 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 16:9-40

⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

¹⁰ And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

¹¹ Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next *day* to Neapolis;

¹² And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, *and* a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

¹³ And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted *thither*.

¹⁴ And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

¹⁵ And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought *us*, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide *there*. And she constrained us.

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

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Paul's Call to Macedonia

1. In a vision, Paul saw a man who said: "Come over into Macedonia, and help us," Acts 16:9.
 2. Paul and Silas sailed to Macedonia and held a service by the riverside, Acts 16:10-13.
 3. Lydia extended hospitality to Paul and Silas, Acts 16:14,15;
- 1 Timothy 5:10**
¹⁰ Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

Hebrews 6:10

¹⁰ For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

II Grieved by a Devil-Possessed Woman

1. She brought her masters much gain by her divination, Acts 16:16.
2. She followed Paul and cried, "These men are the servants of the most high God," Acts 16:17.
3. Paul cast the evil spirit out of her, Acts 16:18.
4. Her masters, incensed by the loss of their source of gain, laid hold on Paul and Silas, Act 16:19.

III Beaten and Imprisoned by the Magistrates

1. Paul and Silas were accused before the magistrates, Acts 16:20, 21.
2. The magistrates tore off the accused men's clothes and commanded that they be beaten, Acts 16:22, 23.
3. They were put into the inner prison, Acts 16:24.

IV Prayer and Praise and a Great Earthquake

1. A prayer and praise service was held while their feet were in the stocks, Acts 16:25.
2. A great earthquake came, the prison doors were opened and the prisoners' bands loosed, Acts 16:26.
3. The jailer attempted to kill himself but Paul intervened, Acts 16:27, 28.
4. The jailer and his household were saved and better care was given the prisoners, Acts 16:29-40.

NOTES:

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

At the time of our lesson Paul was on his second missionary journey. He had visited a number of the cities where he and Barnabas had preached the Gospel and established churches on his first trip. Barnabas did not accompany Paul on this second trip, but went to his homeland of Cyprus instead. Paul took Silas as his companion and, in addition to visiting the areas covered on his former trip, went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. Then the two went northward and westward into Galatia and Mysia. Paul had planned to go farther north into Bithynia, but the spirit of the Lord said No, so they came to Troas

soothsaying:

¹⁷ The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

¹⁸ And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

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,

²⁰ And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

²¹ And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

²² And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat *them*.

²³ And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast *them* into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

²⁴ Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

²⁵ And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

²⁶ And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

²⁷ And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

and it was there that Paul had the vision that led him from Asia to Europe.

The Macedonian Call

Twice the Spirit of the Lord had forbidden Paul to go farther into Asia, and possibly he came to Troas wondering just where the Lord wanted him to go. But he was not left in doubt very long. In a vision at night, a man of Macedonia stood before him and said: "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." The Lord knew that in the country of Greece souls were ready to receive the Gospel. The "Macedonian" call has resounded in the ears of many missionaries, to inspire them, from that day to this.

It is evident that the Holy Ghost was directing the course of these first European missionaries. We are living nearly two thousand years later, but the Holy Ghost still directs the course of true missionaries and overseers today.

A new epoch was to commence in Paul's apostolic labours. The Macedonian call showed the deep need in that country for the Gospel and the readiness of the people's hearts to receive it.

The First European Christian

These first missionaries to Europe made their way to Philippi, which was the chief city in that country. Apparently there were not many Jews there. But the first Sabbath found Paul and his company outside the city by the riverside where prayer was wont to be made. There a few women had gathered; some were Jews and some were Jewish proselytes.

Paul and Silas sat down and spoke to the women. Because of the surroundings, it must have been a simple service, but at least one woman in that gathering had a hungry heart. She opened her heart to the truth. Hers was the first response to the Gospel message after the Macedonian call was given to Paul. Her whole household accepted the Gospel of the new covenant. Paul must have included water baptism in his message that morning, for Lydia and her household were baptized. Immediately Lydia wanted these ministers of Christ to come and stay in her house. She used such entreaties and persuasions that they consented to go. She embraced Christianity, and was fulfilling the law of love that Jesus proclaimed — a love for God's ministers and for His people — and laying up for herself a good foundation against the time to come (**1 Timothy 6:19** ¹⁹ Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.). The Bible states: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

Persecutions

The missionaries' work was not going to continue without opposition. The devil is very cunning in his tactics as he attempts to overthrow the work of the Lord. Often he uses a lie wrapped up in some truth, to try to deceive. A young woman followed Paul and Silas, with the cry, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). It was the truth, but the testimony of a devil-possessed person is not edifying. The devil was speaking through her, undoubtedly with the purpose of drawing unfavourable attention to the Apostle and his companion, and thereby trying to hinder the work that God was doing through them. It was the spirit in which she said it that grieved Paul. It was the same spirit that the Gadarene maniac had when he saw Jesus.

The Law said: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:31). All dealing with familiar spirits, necromancers, or fortune-tellers was forbidden. God hates that, for it is from the devil. To attempt to find out through fortune-

²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

²⁹ Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

³⁰ And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

³¹ And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

³² And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

³³ And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

³⁴ And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

³⁵ And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.

³⁶ And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

³⁷ But Paul said unto them, 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.

³⁸ And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

³⁹ And they came and besought them, and brought *them* out, and desired *them* to depart out of the city.

⁴⁰ And they went out of the prison, and entered into *the house of* Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

tellers and spiritualist mediums what God has not thought proper to reveal to us is a sin against His wisdom. In His great mercy, God has hidden much of the knowledge of the future from man and has given him hope in its place.

Paul cast out the unclean spirit from this woman, and it stirred her masters. The possibility of their making money from her divinations was gone. So they caught Paul and Silas and brought them before the magistrates. These magistrates heard the accusations against Paul and Silas but did not give them a trial — a chance to witness for themselves — which was an unlawful thing for the Romans to do. After beating them with many stripes, the authorities thrust the men of God into prison and charged the jailer to keep them safely, and he, in turn, cast them into the inner prison and placed their feet in stocks.

Prayer and Praise Service

It is not always easy to sing in the midnight hour of our trials. Many times the burdens seem heavier than one can bear. But Jesus has promised to be our burden bearer. Paul and Silas prayed and cast their burden upon God, who said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." As they prayed, such joy filled their soul that they began to sing aloud the praises of God.

The other prisoners heard the song of joy. Imagine the surprise of the prisoners at being awakened at midnight by prayer and songs from men whose backs were bleeding and whose feet were in stocks. The prisoners would not have been surprised to have heard groaning and cursing, but praying and singing were unexpected. Those prayers and praises caused Heaven to bow low and listen. Suddenly the old prison shook to its very foundation. The doors swung open and the bands of every prisoner were loosed. Nothing like that had ever happened before in that Philippian jail. The power of God must have been great, for not a prisoner tried to escape.

Salvation of the Jailer

The earthquake woke the jailer who, springing out of bed, saw the prison doors standing open. "By the Roman law, the jailer was to undergo the same punishment which the malefactors who escaped by his negligence were to have suffered." In many cases the jailer took his own life rather than be slain by an officer. Supposing that the prisoners had fled, this Philippian jailer drew out his sword to kill himself. Although it was midnight and dark, there was enough light flickering through the open doors for Paul to detect what the jailer was about to do, and he cried out, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."

Conviction gripped the jailer. He wanted the salvation that Paul and Silas had. He called for a light and came trembling and fell down before the men of God. Then he brought Paul and Silas out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" It must have brought back memories to Paul of the days when he persecuted the Christians. The Lord had arrested him on his way to Damascus and he cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

The answer to the jailer was simple: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The jailer was under heavy conviction for his sins and in an attitude that he could believe from his heart. It is heart-belief — belief that embraces full obedience to God — that brings the born-again experience. Many people give a mental assent to the truth and think they are saved, but that alone does not bring about the new birth. The Word of God says: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth

confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9, 10).

What a memorable night! First the prayer meeting, and then the singing, the earthquake, the salvation of the jailer and his household, the bathing of the bleeding wounds of Paul and Silas, the baptismal service, and finally a great feast where everyone rejoiced and praised God for His great salvation.

This was the first great spiritual battle and the first victory won for God on European soil by these two missionaries of the early Church. Europe was destined to be the battlefield for many a future conflict between the forces of Satan and our Christ. The fight is still on, but some day martyred saints will stand triumphantly on that continent to wave the unfurled banner of Jesus Christ their King. Glorious day!

Ten years later Paul wrote his marvellous Epistle to the Philippians, which expresses the great love he had for Lydia and her household, for the jailer and his household, and for all those who were saved at Philippi. He wrote:

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

**"Always in every prayer of mine for you all
making request with joy,**

**"For your fellowship in the gospel from the first
day until now;**

**"Being confident of this very thing, that he which
hath begun a good work in you will perform it
until the day of Jesus Christ:**

**"Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all,
because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as
both in my bonds, and in the defence and
confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers
of my grace.**

**"For God is my record, how greatly I long after
you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ."**

**"Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and
longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in
the Lord, my dearly beloved" (Philippians 1:3-
8; 4:1).**

QUESTIONS

1. What do we mean by the Macedonian call?
2. At what place was the Gospel first preached in Europe?
3. Who was the first European convert to Christianity?
4. What brought about Paul's and Silas' imprisonment?
5. What does the Bible say about fortune-telling?
6. Where do these necromancers get their power?
7. Tell how the jailer was saved.
8. What word did the magistrates send to Paul and Silas the following morning?
9. How did Paul answer the magistrate?
10. Name eight important things that happened the night Paul and Silas were in jail.