The Early Church of Jesus Christ

A Bible teaching commentary on the Acts of the Apostles in easy-to-read English

Written by Fred Morris

Paul and Silas in an earthquake

Acts Unit 9 of 12

Chapters 16:1-17:15

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Unit 9, Chapters 16:1 to 17:15.

Acts Chapter 16.

The Second Missionary Journey of Paul.

Paul and Silas went to Derbe and Lystra. In each place the letter from the church leaders in Jerusalem was read and the believers were encouraged.

In Lystra, Paul met a young man named Timothy. Timothy's mother and grandmother were both Jewish believers in Jesus as their Saviour (2 Timothy 1:5).

Paul trusted young Timothy and took him along with them. Timothy's father was not a Jew. Timothy was not accepted by some of the Jews, so Paul circumcised him (Acts 16:3). Circumcision is not necessary to make men right with God (Galatians 2:16), but Paul wanted to show respect to the Jews.

Paul, Silas and Timothy visited the churches in that area to encourage them. Their numbers grew daily (Acts 16:5). Then they went to towns which Paul had not visited before.

Every day Paul waited on God to find out what he should do. He went to Galatia because the Holy Spirit told him not to go north (16:6). It is always important to know what we should not do as well as what we should do.

One night, Paul had a vision. A man from Macedonia called to him, "Come over and help us." Next morning they set out for Macedonia (16:10). Paul and his fellow workers obeyed the Holy Spirit quickly.

Paul's vision of the call to Macedonia

At this time Luke joined Paul and the others. Luke wrote down these acts or actions of the apostles for us all to read.

Like Paul, we too must wait and trust the Holy Spirit to guide us, and then obey. The Holy Spirit does this in many ways and at many times:

1. When we ask for the Holy Spirit in our lives (Luke 11:13).
2. When we do what pleases the Lord (Acts 16:5).
3. When we witness to others about Jesus (Luke 21:13 to 15).
4. When we study the written word of God (2 Timothy 3:16,17).
5. When we are ready and waiting to obey (Acts 16:10).

6. When we move forward in the work God has told us to do (16:6).

Paul was doing all these things when the Holy Spirit spoke to him and moved him onwards (16:6 to 10).

They travelled by boat to southern Macedonia.

There was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi so they went outside the city to the river. There they found a special 'place of prayer' (16:13). Paul and the others spoke to some women who were praying there. They were now in Europe so there were fewer Jews there. However, they knew that the Holy Spirit was with them and guiding them. It was a special time and place to talk about Jesus.

A businesswoman listened to the truth from God. She was not a Jew but she believed in God. She accepted Jesus as the Son of God and was filled with the Holy Spirit. She and her family believed and were baptized. Then she asked Paul and the others to stay at her house (16:14 to 15).

It was important for Paul, a Jew, to learn to respect the role of women among the believers. Paul also learnt that God calls poor slave girls to believe in Christ as well as rich business women.

God Saves Paul and Silas from Prison.

The apostles often went to the river to pray quietly. One day a slave girl with a demon spirit followed them. 'She earned a lot of money for her owners by telling fortunes (16:16). People paid money to hear what the demon spirit in

the girl was going to tell them. These people listened to demon spirits instead of listening to God.

Paul was upset when this slave girl followed after them shouting "These men are servants of the Most High God" (16:17). She spoke the truth but Paul knew it came from a demon spirit. Paul was God's messenger; the slave girl with the demon spirit was not. She was used by her owners to deceive people about the future.

After several days, Paul spoke to the demon spirit in the girl. "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the demon left her (16:18).

Paul believed that the power of the Holy Spirit of God is greater than the controlling power of evil spirits. He knew and believed that the authority of Jesus Christ is greater than the power of Satan.

The owners saw that the girl had lost her power and they were angry. They could no longer make money through the girl telling the future. They took hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them to the marketplace. They caused a riot and shouted, "These Jews are doing things which are against the Roman law" (16:20 to 21). This was untrue and unfair. The city leaders ordered Paul and Silas to be whipped and put into prison. But God brings glory to His name if we continue to trust Him when we are persecuted for our faith.

In prison, in the middle of the night, Paul and Silas sang hymns and prayed to God. As the other prisoners listened, an earthquake shook the prison. The head prison officer woke up and saw the doors open. He thought the prisoners

had escaped. He drew his sword to kill himself, but Paul shouted, "Do not harm yourself! We are all here!" (16:25 to 28).

God Saves the Prison Officer.

The prison officer was frightened. If the prisoners escaped, the Roman authorities would blame him.

The man fell on his knees in front of Paul and Silas. He cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved" (16:30 to 31). Then they told him and his family about Jesus. The jailor and his family believed. At midnight, he took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds and gave them food. This showed that he was a changed man.

Paul baptized the prison officer and his whole family. For Paul and Silas, this was the most important thing to do: obey the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 to 20, "Go and teach all people in all countries to believe and follow Me. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do all things I have told you to do." Their troubles in prison did not stop the power of God from working.

In the morning, the city leaders told the prison officer to set Paul and Silas free (16:35). They begged them to leave (16:39) because Paul was a Roman and it was wrong to whip Romans.

This story shows how we should trust God in all things. This story also gives us a wonderful picture of the love of God. There was no arrest or punishment but complete

forgiveness of sins for the jailor and for all who believed and followed Jesus, God's Son.

Then Paul and Silas went back to the house of Lydia. They stayed there only a short time, before going on to the next town. They obeyed God's call to preach the Good News in Macedonia.

The believers in Philippi grew strong in their faith. They loved Paul and cared for his needs when few others did (Philippians 1:3 to 5; 4:14 to 16).

Acts Chapter 17.

Paul Preaches from City to City.

Paul and his friends went to Thessalonica. On three Sabbath days, Paul went into the synagogue and taught the Jews. He proved from the Old Testament "that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. This Jesus I am reporting to you is the Christ," he told them (17:3). Some Jews believed. Many Gentiles believed.

Jason, a Greek believer, opened his house to them. Certain Jewish leaders were jealous. They gathered some bad men and rushed to Jason's house looking for Paul and Silas. They could not find them, so they dragged Jason before the city leaders. "These men have caused trouble all over the world; now they come here and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They disobey the Emperor and say that there is another king called Jesus" (17:6,7).

Jason paid money and was freed. At night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to safety.

In Berea many Jews received their message. They studied the Old Testament eagerly and carefully every day (17:11). It is important to check all preaching and teaching with the Word of God. The Jews also kept an open mind for new understanding of the Scriptures from the Holy Spirit. Many of the Jews and Gentiles believed, both men and women (17:12). But jealous Jews followed them to Berea, too, in order to make trouble for those who preached the Good News. So the believers took Paul and Silas away to Athens, the capital of Greece.

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