

The Holy Spirit – 6 – Acts chapter 16, verses 19 - 40:-

Last week we saw how the Holy Spirit guided Paul and his fellow missionaries to ministry in Macedonia.

We continue to read the same chapter with a slight overlap on last week's verses.

Verses 19 – 21:- The owners of the 'slave girl' blamed Paul and Silas for the disturbance. Reading back to verse 17 it would appear that the slave girl caused the trouble by following and shouting. Not just once but for "*many days*". With the girl freed from the control of the "*spirit of divination*" (literally '*a python spirit*' which was supposedly inspired by the god Apollo) the owners had lost their profitable business. This led to the accusation and arrest of Paul and Silas.

Verses 22 – 24:- The government of the Roman city of Philippi was vested in two magistrates. Roman law permitted Jews to practice their own religion, but forbade the propagating of foreign religions among Roman citizens. Paul and Silas were not recognised as Christians but as Jews who had transgressed the law.

No investigation was made of the charges. Rather the magistrates yielded to the mob. Paul and Silas were stripped of their clothing and beaten. Paul tells us that he suffered this indignity on three different occasions (see 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 25). However this is the only such incident which is recorded in Acts. Paul and Silas were then locked up in the "*inner prison*" with their feet securely fastened in wooded stocks.

Verses 25 – 26:- This is the key verse! "*Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them . . .*". This spontaneous worship is also recorded as taking place on the release of Peter and John from prison when the place they were in was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts chapter 4, verse 31) and before the release of Peter from prison (Acts chapter 12, verse 5). Here we read that Paul and Silas were singing and praying "*and the prisoners were listening to them,*". Notice, that because of the earthquake "*All the doors were opened and everyone's fetters were unfastened*". They were all free to escape if they so wished!

Verses 27 – 34:- The jailer would have been executed for allowing the escape of the prisoners. He was prepared to take the honourable way out and commit suicide! The warning cry from Paul prevented this. The witness of Paul and Silas must have had an effect on their fellow prisoners because none of them tried to escape after the earthquake! We have no record of what happened to the other prisoners only the jailer himself who asks the vital question - "*Men, what must I do to be saved?*". Notice that the Gospel ("*the Word of the Lord*") was spoken to him and all that were in his house. His response must have been positive because "*he was baptised at once, with all his family*".

Verses 35 – 40:- There is a hint that they returned to prison after the events of the night. In verse 36 the jailer invites them to "*come out and go in peace*". At this late stage Paul reveals his Roman citizenship! He was illegally arrested, beaten and imprisoned - see also Acts chapter 22, verses 25 -29. The magistrates could have lost their positions of authority if it became known, so Paul and Silas were asked to leave without a fuss.

Notice that they paid a farewell visit to Lydia and the brethren before leaving, giving some words of instruction and encouragement. The foundations of the church at Philippi were laid and we can read of their growth and faithfulness in the Letter of Paul to the Philippians.