

ACTS 16:11-40: To Europe with Power

16:11-15: First Convert in Europe

Facts about Philippi:

It was the largest city in the Province of Macedonia and a Roman colony. It was a commercial city. As a Roman colony it was a place for veteran Roman soldiers to live who possessed the rights of self-government under Roman law and did not pay taxes.

It didn't have an official synagogue because they weren't enough Jewish males in Philippi to establish one. It took at least 10 Jewish males to have a synagogue. So, a group of Jewish women met outside the city gate by a river for prayer. There were also some God-fearing Gentile ladies among them.

Paul's message to the God-fearing ladies was probably like this, "I know you are praying here because you want to know the one true God the Jews have worshiped for thousands of years. But your Jewish friends probably told you that to be accepted by God, to be saved, you must obey all the laws of Moses. I have good news for you. God loves you and He sent the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to die for your sins on the cross. Through faith in Jesus, God will forgive your sins and give you eternal life in His family. You don't need to become Jews. You can remain a Gentile as you have always been."

Dr. Luke made a theological statement. He contributed her conversion to the fact that "the Lord opened her heart" to hear and believe Paul's Gospel message. (She was already halfway there as a God-fearer.) This is Paul's theology. When the veil is lifted then people believe. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4: *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

I was watching my favorite apologist Frank Turek debate an atheist. The debate was theoretical with no conclusion. I thought, "This is spiritual warfare. Frank needs to have intercessory prayer going on while he debates because only the Holy Spirit can lift the veil of darkness from the mind of that atheist."

Paul had a night vision of a man from Macedonia, but the first person he met was a woman. I would have been looking for a man. P & S actually met a group of women, but Dr. Luke only mentioned the conversion of Lydia. I'm sure she wasn't

the only woman in the group to believe. Dr. Luke provided details about Lydia indicating a personal interest in her. She was a wealthy business woman who sold expensive purple cloth. She owned a house in an upscale suburb of Philippi. She was the head of her “household” which indicates she was either single or widowed. The members of her household would have included any dependents (children & older parents) and servants.

Interesting Speculation: The pronoun changes in Acts 17 from “we” to “they.” When P & S were released from prison they all went to Lydia’s house. It seems Dr. Luke stayed in Philippi. Why would he stay? Was there a romance between Luke & Lydia? Was this a divine arrangement? I think this would make a good Christian romance novel or movie.

16:16-18: Power Encounter

This is the third power encounter recorded by Dr. Luke.

Philip’s encounter with Simon the magician in Samaria (Acts 8). No demon was cast out and he had a false conversion. Simon tried to buy the power of the HS.

Paul’s encounter with Bar-Jesus (Elymas) the magician on Cyprus.

Paul’s encounter with a fortune-telling slave girl in Philippi.

I have watched magicians on AGT that use occult power.

The slave girl with a spirit of divination made money for her owners as a fortune-teller. This reminds me of New Orleans, Jackson Square in front of St. Louis Cathedral. There are several tables with fortune-tellers in front of the cathedral.

A spirit of divination is a demonic spirit. The Greek name for her spirit of divination is *pneuma pythona* or “Python spirit.” It was linked to the famous “Oracle of Delphi” who was a priestess who lived under the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, the spiritual center of Greece. The priestess was named Pythia because she was possessed by the most powerful Python spirit.

What is the significance of this information?

The slave girl was probably the best fortune-teller in Philippi because of her accuracy. The demonic spirits in Philippi could reveal to her many events that would occur in the future simply because they had control over the city of Philippi and had the power to determine much of what would happen in the future. Evil spirits have limited knowledge of a person (based on observation not mind reading) and can manipulate future events so the person thinks the fortune-telling is real.

The demon-possessed slave girl followed P & S and shouted to the crowd, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” The demon in the slave girl spoke the truth. Why? Why didn’t the demon lie and say, “These men are not servants of God. Don’t listen to what they say.” Probably to taunt the missionaries or to protect itself by disguising itself as a good spirit. Paul waited to avoid confrontation. But finally Paul became “greatly annoyed” - I assume by the HS - he rebuked the demonic spirit. The HS in Paul didn’t want any confusion between the Himself and the demon. “What she’s saying is correct, but we’re not on the same team!”

Paul spoke to the demonic spirit, not the slave girl, and said, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” This is the use of the authority of Jesus’ name. Demons must obey Jesus Christ and the HS. This glorifies Jesus Christ. He is the LORD of all.

Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Jesus said he cast out demons by the “finger of God” (Luke 11:20). It’s an OT reference to the power of God. In this case, it is an unusual reference to the HS. (Matthew uses “Spirit of God.”) When Jesus walked on earth he was fully human and empowered by the HS. The HS in him empowered him to cast out demons. Jesus never said to a demon, “I command you in my name, Jesus Christ, to leave.” His name didn’t have authority until he defeated Satan with his death, resurrection, and ascension.

Jesus gave the disciples temporary authority over evil spirits. Luke 10:17-20: *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*

Now that Jesus has ascended we can use his name in spiritual warfare to overcome Satan’s opposition.

16:19-24: Accusation and Arrest

The accusation was public disturbance. There was also prejudice in the accusation (anti-Semitism). Judaism was a *religio licita* (legal religion) in the Roman Empire so it wasn’t a crime. It could be practiced without persecution. The real issue

was money. The owners of the slave girl lost money and so did the city officials who took their portion of the profits. The crowd also attacked P & S. It probably also affected tourism to Philippi and the businesses linked to tourism as people came from around the empire to have their future revealed.

P & S were beaten with rods. The jailer put them in the “inner prison,” the deepest darkest part of the prison, and locked their feet in the stocks. (Stocks were 2 pieces of wood that locked together over the ankles.)

16:25-40: Opposition Foiled

What can the HS do to turn Satan’s opposition back on him and cause a good result that advances the Gospel?

It must be frustrating for Satan. Every time he opposes the Gospel his opposition is turned back on him (like a ricochet or boomerang) and the HS produces a greater good. Satan must do evil to stop the Gospel because he cannot do nothing, but his evil ricochets or boomerangs back at him, and Jesus gains the victory.

16:25: How did P & S respond to being beaten and imprisoned? P & S were praying and singing gospel songs in prison.

Prayer and praise is spiritual warfare. I imagine Satan plugging his ears and saying, “Shut up! I just had you beaten and thrown in prison and you’re still praising God!?”

When I became a Christian in high school I read some books about praise. Merlin Carothers wrote a series of praise books in the early 1970s: *Prison to Praise*, *Power in Praise*, *Praise Works!*

Merlin was drafted into the army during WWII. He was rebellious and impatient with basic training so he stole a sergeant’s car and went AWOL. He was caught by the FBI and had a trial in a military court. He served 6 months in a military prison. He became a master parachuter in the 82 Airborne and was credited with some heroic actions during the D-Day Normandy Invasion. But he was still drinking and gambling. He even became a guard for General Eisenhower. (The theft of the car was a felony and he was supposed to serve time in prison, but he was pardoned by President Truman for heroism during WWII.) When he returned from the war his grandparents invited him to church and he received Jesus Christ as his Savior. When the pastor gave an invitation to receive Jesus Christ he actually heard the Holy Spirit speak in his ear, “Now is the day of salvation. If you don’t do it now then you will not have another opportunity.” He became an army chaplain, Chaplain Carothers.

But he became frustrated because he felt like a failure; he had no power to help the soldiers who came to him with their problems. He became sick and while he was recuperating in the hospital he came to understand the power in praise. He read Romans 8:28 and understood that if we really believe it - that God works all things together for good for those who love him - then we must thank and praise God for whatever circumstance we are experiencing. Praise God in advance. Praise God even when we don't know the outcome. His counseling as a chaplain became more effective when he discovered the power in praise. Soldiers and their wives came to him with difficult problems and Chaplain Carothers told them to trust God and praise him. 1 Thess. 5:18: *Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* If you want to see God make something good out of your situation, then thank and praise him before you even know how it will turn out.

Praising God was P & S's witness in prison. The HS wanted the Gospel shared in the prison. Maybe all the prisoners were saved and not just the jailer. If they weren't saved then they were too scared to flee. I assume Paul told them to stay in their prison cells. I imagine Paul said, "An angel of the God I serve caused the earthquake, opened the prison doors, and unlocked your chains. So, you better stay where you are and not flee or an angel will kill you." They feared the angels who caused the earthquake, opened the doors, and unlocked their chains.

The Philippian jailer must have known about P & S's power over the demonic slave girl. He also heard P & S singing gospel songs even after being beaten. He asked, "What must I do to be saved?" He wasn't asking about being saved by death from suicide (16:27), but salvation from SIN. P & S responded, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."

The jailer and his family were baptized the same night they believed. No baptism class required. The jailer rejoiced not just because his life was spared, but because he believed in God. After his salvation the jailer saw his job as a ministry and shared the Gospel with prisoners.

When the city officials called for P & S to be released, Paul used his "get-out-of-jail-free" card, his Roman citizenship. The city officials were afraid because they beat and imprisoned a Roman citizen without a trial. Paul could have had them fired and imprisoned, but he only asked for them to publicly admit their fault and escort him and Silas out of the city. P & S went to Lydia's house.

Application: Can you claim household salvation? Lydia and her household were saved and baptized (16:15). The Philippian jailer and his household believed in Jesus Christ and were baptized at once (16:31-34). Is household salvation just cultural? If the HEAD of the household believes then it is more likely all the other family members will believe.

Application: There's deliverance power in prayer and praise! Prayer and praise is not a "get-out-of-jail-free" card. It isn't a guarantee of deliverance. It's an expression of trust in God's good plan. It keeps you in God's peace. God's peace guards your heart and mind. Paul was imprisoned in Philippi and praised the Lord. It's appropriate that Paul wrote to the Philippian believers: *Philippians 4:4-7: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Paul wrote this based on his experience in Philippi. The Philippian believers had Paul's experience to know what he wrote was true.

Application: Act is a training manual for modern Christians.

If you want to move from amateur to professional then you should become proficient in three areas:

1. Know the word of God. Know how to correctly handle the word of truth. The AWANA verse: 2 Timothy 2:15: *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*
2. Know how to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit (A16:6-10).
3. Know the authority you have in Christ and how and when to use it (A16:18). Paul used the authority of Jesus' name to remove Satan's opposition, to cast out demons, and advance the Gospel.

Application: All the events in Acts happen in the context of mission work. If you put yourself out there on the battlefield (the front lines of the war to share the Gospel) then you will experience the power of God. If you prefer complacency and stay safely huddled behind the four walls of the church then you will not experience the power of God.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."