

Acts of the Apostles – Paul and the Spread of the Church

New Testament Survey – Lesson 17 (Part 4)

**I DID IT!!! CALL THE MEDIA!!! POST IT ON THE INTERNET!!!
ANNOUNCE TO THE WORLD: MARK LANIER DID IT!!!!**

“Did what?” you ask. Well, before I tell you, let me set the scene.

I was on vacation with my family, high up in the Colorado Rockies. The altitude was over 9,500 feet, and my body did not immediately adjust well. One of the casualties of health, when I am adjusting to the oxygen deprivation that accompanies this altitude is sleep. It does not come readily to me in those conditions.

So on vacation, I found myself waking up inordinately early, even for me. By 4 each morning, I was at the computer, drinking some nice mint tea, and reading my daily dose of news. As pathetic as it may sound, one of the best things about vacation for me is the ability to get caught up on things that I have not been able to accomplish. One of my biggest problems is keeping up with emails. By my count, I get about 350 a day, not counting junk and spam (which our filters do a fairly decent job of detecting). Being able to get caught up on emails was one of my major vacation goals!

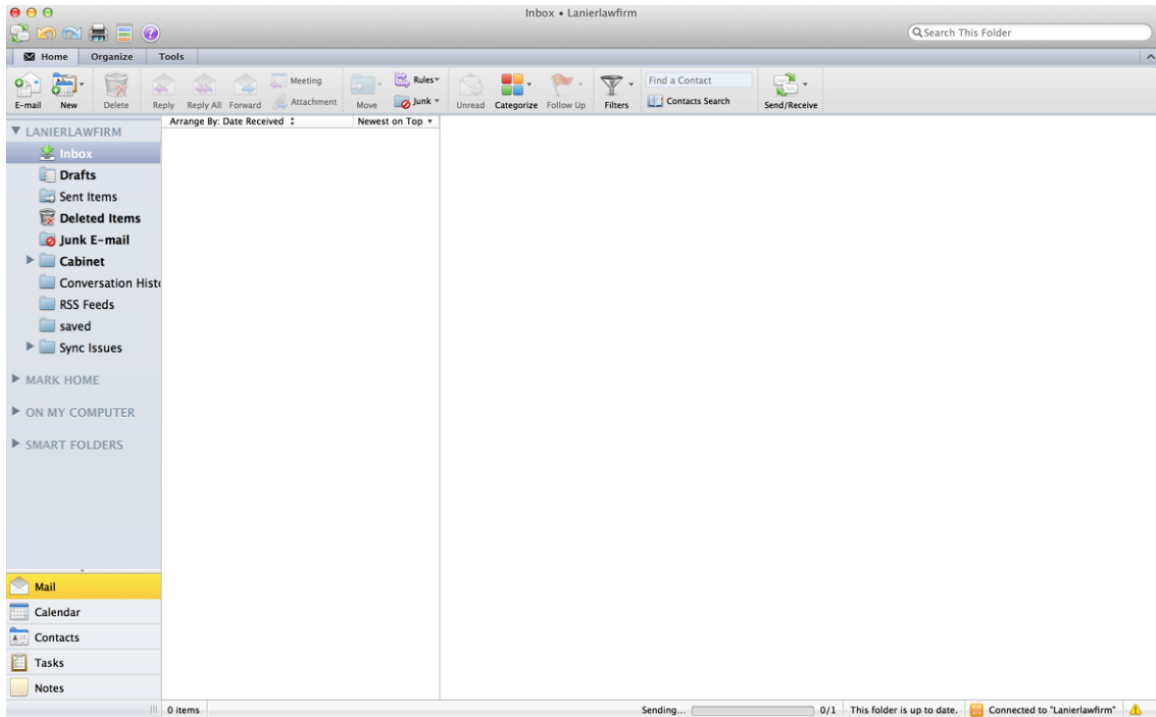
Here is where the 4 a.m. waking came in handy. I was able to take that quiet calm time, and begin addressing the piles of emails in my INBOX. They numbered well over 1,000 at the time. I began with triage! I sorted the emails, not by date received, but by sender. This allowed me to quickly dispose of many that had no real significance, even though they were neither junk nor spam (Example, list serves for news feeds). I then sorted the INBOX by conversation. That way I was able to deal with chains of emails all at once, rather than one here and one there. I continued triaging in different ways until I got the emails down to 30 particularly vexing or difficult ones. At that point I decided to go one by one.

Like pulling teeth, I dealt with each remaining email until ... hold your breath ... I got my INBOX down to ONE EMAIL!!! I refilled my teacup, and went for it. It took 15 minutes, but I answered and fully dealt with that last email – and now we return to where I started this story:

**I DID IT!!! CALL THE MEDIA!!! POST IT ON THE INTERNET!!!
ANNOUNCE TO THE WORLD: MARK LANIER DID IT!!!!**

I GOT MY EMAIL INBOX TO ZERO!!!!!! I was so happy I took a picture!

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My joy lasted three minutes, then the flood started again. I will likely never see zero again, but my, oh my, it felt mighty fine!

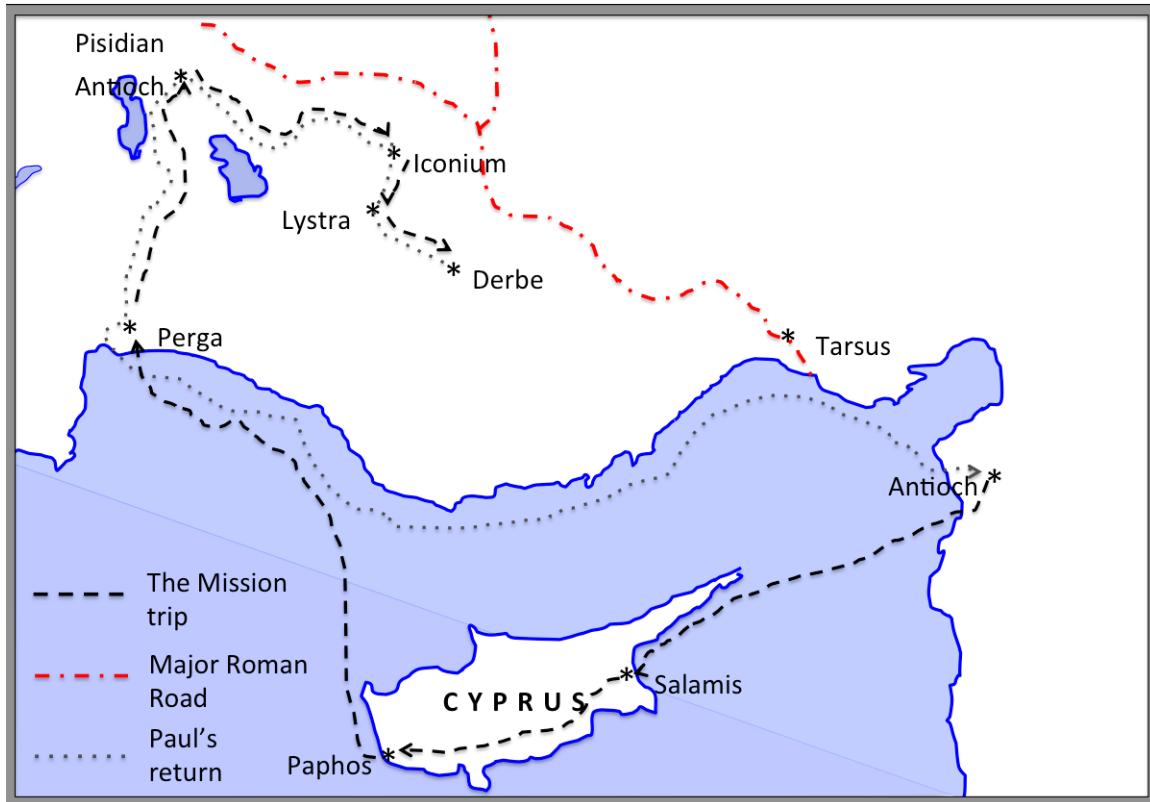
How are you at keeping up? Do you find email helpful for keeping up with others? Do the blessings of email outweigh the burdens? For me, the answer is “Definitely!” It is a marvelous way to keep up with folks. My letter writing is MUCH less, and my communication is much greater and swifter. I suspect the future generations will have trouble relating to the days of “snail mail.” Of course, today’s snail mail is a jet compared to mail in the days of Paul. The only official postal system took care of the correspondence of the Roman government, especially related to military matters. Others depended upon travelers for private conveyance of mail. Naturally letters were less common, and more of an event than in our lifetimes. Still, they were a marvelous way to accomplish many of the things mail accomplishes today. They allowed people to transmit news and ideas without traveling and making the communication face-to-face.

This brings us to Paul, and his ways of reaching out to his world in ministry to the church and the Gentiles.

PAUL’S CORRESPONDENCE

In our working through Acts and the growth and spread of the church, our last lesson ended with Paul and Barnabas’s return from their first missionary trip into Cyprus and the regions of Pisidia and Galatia.

We have used the following map for orientation to their journey:



At the completion of their journey, they went back through the same towns out of a concern for the churches. They wanted to “strengthen the souls of the disciples,” and encourage them “to continue in the faith.” They appointed elders in each church and then committed the churches “to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:22-23).

This concern for the fledgling fellowships did not wane with Paul’s return to Antioch. There is good reason to believe it was while back in Antioch in the weeks and months after the journey’s finish that Paul wrote to the churches a letter we call “Galatians.”¹

¹ Unfortunately, first century letters did not contain the modern convention of a date on the letter. Therefore, we cannot pinpoint exactly when Paul wrote the Galatian letter. Scholars give a number of different dates ranging from shortly after Paul’s first missionary journey to much later in Paul’s ministry.

We think it most likely that Paul wrote the letter shortly after the first missionary journey and likely *before* the conference held in Jerusalem that we discussed in class last week (found in Acts 15). While there are many reasons for accepting this date, two core reasons are:

Writing a letter was something that, while not too common in Paul's day, was something he was well trained to do. As a student of the Jewish rabbi Gamaliel, Paul would have been aware of his mentor's ready usage of letters to encourage synagogues.²

Reading Galatians gives us insight into the reason (scholars use the term "occasion") behind Paul writing, although it is a bit like determining a telephone conversation by only listening to one side of the call. Consider these passages from Paul:

- "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6).
- "There are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7).
- "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).
- "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" (Gal. 3:1).
- "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3).
- "Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?" (Gal.

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1. Paul is writing about a problem that was a hotbed of concern during that time period. The Galatian letter addresses some of the very same issues debated at the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15. Paul is fresh off his missionary trip into the Galatian region and it seems sensible that he would write them to clarify the issues circulating in the churches.
 2. Paul's letter to the Galatians does not make any mention of the Jerusalem conference and its resolution. The elders and apostles in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the Antioch church addressing related concerns to Paul's Galatian letter. If Paul were writing *after* the conference, one would expect Paul would have made some reference to it in his Galatian letter.

For those wishing to study the dating of the letter more fully, see the arguments set forth in a thorough commentary. Some commentaries with good discussions of the issues involved in dating include F. F. Bruce, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary – The Epistle to the Galatians* (Eerdmans 1982); Ronald Fung, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament – The Epistle to the Galatians* (Eerdmans 1988).

² In the *Tosefta* (an early Jewish writing that captures the events and sayings of many 1st and 2nd century sages), we read of Gamaliel dictating letters to a scribe to send to synagogues in Galilee and beyond. He wrote on their need to tithe, on the changes to the calendar, and more. *Sanhedrin* 2:6. In English, see Neusner, Jacob, *The Tosefta* (Hendrikson 2002), Vol. 2, at 1147.

4:9).

- “Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?” (Gal. 4:21).
- “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).
- “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you” (Gal. 5:2).
- “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).
- “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal. 5:7).

Although these verses give us only one side of the conversation, from them we get a good indication of why Paul wrote. Since Paul had evangelized the churches, some others had come in with a different teaching. This was a doctrine that Paul considered a distortion of the true gospel. Rather than reinforce faith in Christ, this teaching sought to enforce works of human effort under the Law of Moses, including circumcision (“the flesh”). Paul saw this as enslavement. It removed the purpose and role of Jesus the crucified Savior. It removed truth. This was no mere tampering with a recipe; it was much more serious! This was not a handy way to live. This was God’s eternal plan for the church!

Later in our study, we will focus on the book of Galatians and dig deeper into Paul’s concerns, but for now, we consider simply that having sent the letter, Paul was undoubtedly wondering about its reception! It is in this sense that we are not surprised to find that Paul one day threw out an idea to Barnabas:

“Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are” (Acts 15:36).

Luke informed his readers that before this idea, Paul and Barnabas were teaching in Antioch, but were not alone. The church at Antioch was loaded with teachers.

Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, *with many others also* (Acts 15:35).

It does not take great imagination to think of Paul seeing daily the presence of “many others” teaching in Antioch and wondering whether Antioch was where he was most needed and most useful. Add to this Paul wondering how the churches he and Barnabas had started were doing. How had they received Paul’s letter we call Galatians? Did the churches understand Paul’s reasoning and positions? Were they following his counsel and instructions? Were the false teachers set right?

Luke does not give us those inward thoughts of Paul, but they can fairly be assumed as we read, right after the statement that “many others” were also teaching in Antioch, “Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are’” (Acts 15:36).

Barnabas was all for the trip, but there was a sticking point. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark again. Paul was against it. Paul did not want to take Mark after Mark had prematurely abandoned the last mission effort, leaving in Pamphylia. Luke says, “there arose a sharp disagreement” (Acts 15:39). Luke does not pull any punches in his writing. The word he uses for “sharp disagreement” we find in other passages like Deuteronomy 29:28 and Jeremiah 32:37.³ In those passages we read, “the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath” and “Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation.” This was not a mild difference in opinion. These two godly men truly struggled with each other as they tried to determine what was right for them to do before God.

The net result of the disagreement was the separation of Paul and Barnabas. We should remember here that initially Paul wanted the two to go out together. It was Paul’s suggestion, “Let *us* return and visit the brothers in every city.” Instead of the two going together, Barnabas took John Mark and returned to the first churches started on the first missionary trip, those on the island of Cyprus. (This made sense because Cyprus was Barnabas’s home and was also the one part of the first mission trip where Mark was present.) Paul took Silas and went back to Galatia and Phrygia.

From here, the Acts history follows Paul. Barnabas is not mentioned again in the New Testament beyond a reference by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:6 about Barnabas and Paul both having to work for a living.

There is a writing called *The Acts of Barnabas*, which claims to be John Mark’s account of the activities and death of Barnabas on Cyprus. The writing, however, is quite late. Some scholars date it in the 400’s to 500’s.⁴

³ Luke uses *parazusmos* (παράζυσμός) translated “sharp disagreement.” The Old Testament passages cited are from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the “Septuagint.” This is the Old Testament version used most often by Paul. It gives a good sense of how the Greek word was used in his circles.

⁴ J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford 1993) at 523.

Paul sets out on this trip taking Silas as his partner. This time when Paul went to the southern Galatian churches, he did so by the land route rather than by sea.



Luke tells us that Paul and Silas used the trip as an opportunity to strengthen the churches in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41).

Silas made a wonderful choice as a traveling companion for Paul.⁵ The Jerusalem church had just used Silas as a voice for their opinions on the Jew/Gentile issue (Acts 15:22ff), so he was in a position to speak of (if not for) the Jerusalem church. Because Paul was likely taking the Jerusalem decree with him, Silas was also another voice to explain the decree. From the notes Paul adds in later letters (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:19) Silas was obviously a good co-worker and probably either a coauthor or a secretary of at least two of Paul's letters. Silas also

⁵ These points are made, albeit a bit differently, by Ben Witherington III in *The Acts of the Apostles – A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans 1998) at 473.

(just like Paul) was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37). This would come in handy in the traveling as well.

Paul then went through Derbe and into Lystra. In Lystra, Paul came upon a young man whose mother and grandmother were Jewish, but whose father was a Greek. The church spoke highly of this young man, not only in Lystra, but also in nearby Iconium. Paul decided to bring the young man on the journey, and so we find Timothy making his first appearance in the New Testament.⁶

Paul chose to have Timothy circumcised before they ventured out together. One might fairly ask why Paul, who had written such a clear letter to the Galatian churches about NOT circumcising Greek Christians in order to comply with the law, would have Timothy circumcised? The answer likely lies in Timothy's heritage. Timothy's father was Greek, but his mother ("Eunice"—2 Tim. 1:5) and her mother ("Lois," Timothy's grandmother—2 Tim. 1:5) were Jews. Under Jewish law and custom, one's Jewish heritage was passed on through the mother, not the father!⁷ Because Timothy was Jewish through his maternal side, he was deemed by Jews (including Paul) to be Jewish.

Paul never had a problem with Jews following their laws and customs. Paul himself followed a number of Jewish traditions. Paul still considered himself a Jew and a Pharisee even after accepting Jesus as his Lord and risen Savior. (See, e.g. Acts 23:6). For Paul, who would be going into synagogues on the trip teaching the Jews about their Deliverer, it seemed best to have Timothy the Jew circumcised. Luke noted Paul circumcised Timothy, "because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3).

Timothy would be a visible testimony whether Paul was teaching that the Christian faith was a fulfillment of Judaism or simply a way out of it. Paul wanted there to be no doubt. Bruce writes, "Paul therefore recognized his status (and, in Jewish eyes, legitimized him) by circumcising him."⁸

As Paul and Silas continued through these young churches, Paul took with him and delivered to them the decisions about binding Jewish law on the Greeks

⁶ Acts is not too clear on when or how Timothy was converted. Witherington believes that Luke implies that Timothy was converted "through the previous efforts of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra." *Ibid.*, at 474. Some argue support for this in Paul's characterization of Timothy as his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord" in 1 Cor. 4:17.

⁷ For a good discussion on the matrilineal Jewish heritage laws, see "Who is a Jew?" at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/whojew1.html>. See also Witherington at 475.

⁸ Bruce, *ibid.* at 308.

“reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). This was the letter referenced in Acts 15 that would have come about *after* Paul had written his letter to the Galatians churches. One would suspect that Paul took delight in the confirmation that the Jerusalem decision gave to Paul’s instructions and guidance written in our Galatian letter.

Luke tells us that Paul went through Phrygia and Galatia, but was “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6). For that reason, when Paul and his crew came to Mysia, their attempts to go into Bithynia were stopped by the Holy Spirit. We are not told *how* the Holy Spirit closed that door, but we are told it happened! Instead, Paul, Silas, and Timothy went over to Troas!

Guess who Paul found in Troas? Luke! Our author of Acts was there and joined the mission effort. Luke goes into no detail, but simply changes how he writes the events. For the first time in Acts, Luke begins speaking of what “we” did, instead of what “Paul” did or what “they” did. The transition verse is Acts 16:8-10:

So, passing by Mysia, *they* went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately *we* sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding God had called *us* to preach the gospel to them.

Luke kept a good accurate narrative of the journey with his involvement. Suddenly, instead of writing about what was done in generic terms (“after some days” or “he went through...” or “they went on their way”), Luke writes with great precision, initially with a day-by-day diary!

Setting sail from Troas, *we* made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis and from there to Philippi (Acts 16:11-12).

Samothrace was a full day’s sail from Troas. Neapolis was yet another day’s sail.

In Philippi, Paul and the team did not go to a synagogue. Rather, we find them in the city for some days. On the Sabbath, they “went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer” (Acts 16:13). Scholars believe that there must not have been enough males to constitute the quorum needed for an official synagogue. We read in the Mishnah that 10 males were needed. It makes additional sense when we see Luke adding that at “the place of prayer” (as opposed to a synagogue) were “*women* who had come together” (Acts 16:13).

The women were receptive! One, a wealthy merchant named Lydia, asked the missionary team to return to her home. Luke explained her motive,

the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14).

Lydia and her household were baptized at that time. She then hosted Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy as guests in her home.

While Paul and his team were in Philippi, they reached a point of frustration over the behavior of a slave girl who had a spirit of divination.⁹ She started following them daily crying out,

these men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

After it continued on for a number of days, Paul put a stop to it. While walking to the “place of prayer,” Paul finally had had enough. As Luke saw it,

Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the Spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18).

The spirit immediately left the girl, much to the chagrin of her owners. The slave girl had been making her owners a good bit of money by her divining. Luke explained,

when her owners saw that their hope¹⁰ of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers (Acts 16:19).

⁹ Her possession in the Greek is noted by the word *pythona* (πύθωνα). We get the word “python” from it. Bruce calls the slave girl a “Pythoness” noting that these possessed diviners were deemed to be “inspired by Apollo, the Pythian god, who was embodied in a snake (the python) as Delphi (also called Pytho).

¹⁰ This is a hallmark verse in the New Testament that illuminates the difference in meaning between the Greek idea of “hope” and the English connotation. The Greek word is *elpis* (ἐλπίς) translated as “hope.” The owners had a moneymaking machine in the girl. She had made them money before and was thoroughly expected to make them money in the future. Now, the future money was not made yet, but it was confidently expected – business as usual! It was this confident expectation that was taken away. That is the thrust of meaning in the Greek word *elpis*, confident expectation. Too often in English, we use “hope” to mean a long shot or a desire that might possibly come about, but not likely! So, when we read of our “hope” in God (1 Tim. 6:17), the “hope” to which we are called (Eph. 1:18), or Christ in us, the “hope” of glory (Col. 1:21), we think of something speculative, but wished for. We should understand that these are not pie-in-the-sky wishes, but confident expectations!

It is worth noting that the people would have seen Luke and Timothy as Greeks. These two were left alone and just Paul and Silas the Jews were arrested.

The owners managed to incite the town magistrates and the crowd against Paul and Silas. The men were stripped and beaten. Their feet were shackled into a torture instrument that forced the legs far apart¹¹ and they were thrown into prison. Paul and Silas reacted by singing hymns and praying to God in the depth of their cell well into the night. Around midnight, an earthquake gave Paul and Silas release and freedom. But instead of taking flight, Paul and Silas remained in their cells.

The jailer awoke and saw that the prison doors were open. Fearing the prisoners had escaped, the jailer decided to kill himself (for his life would be forfeited had the prisoners escaped under his watch). As the jailer pulled his sword, Paul called out to him loudly, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). The jailer was no doubt stunned. He called for lights, ran in before Paul and Silas, and fell trembling with fear. The jailer brought them out and asked them the most important question in his entire life, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

This jailer would certainly have been hearing the prayers and praises Paul and Silas proclaimed while in the cell. Paul and Silas had something that enabled them to stay in a prison hole, when most anyone else would have disregarded the consequences to the jailer and fled when the opportunity presented itself.

Paul and Silas answered the jailer’s question, instructing him,

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:31).

Luke then recorded that Paul and Silas told the jailor and his house “the word of the Lord.”

Then Luke captured a beautiful contrast on the usage of water. The jailer took Paul and Silas out “the same hour of the night” and used water to wash their wounds. Paul and Silas then took water and used it to baptize the jailer and his household, washing them as well.¹²

¹¹ The translators use the English “stocks” for the torture device. The device, a *zulon* (ξύλον), had multiple holes to force the legs wide in a torture position. Bruce at 318.

¹² John Chrysostom (347-407), whom we studied in Church History (see lessons at www.Biblical-Literacy.com), comments on this passage saying, “Do you mark what happened? There a girl was released from a spirit, and they cast them into a prison...Here, they...show the doors standing open, and it opened the doors of his heart, it loosed two sorts of chains...And he took

He was baptized at once, he and all his family (Acts 16:34).

Luke does not want the poetic symbolism missed, so he puts it together in the Greek, something we readily see even in the English:

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family (Acts 16:33).

Through the centuries the joy of that moment is not lost. Each word of Luke brings the smile and happiness current over that incredible night in Philippi!

The jailer brought Paul and Silas into his house and set food before them. “And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God” (Acts 16:34). What a story Luke must have heard upon awakening the next morning! The town went to sleep with Paul and Silas in chains under the jailer’s watchful eye. The dawn came with Paul and Silas in the jailer’s home fed, washed, and celebrating the Christian birth of the jailer and his family!

We are not surprised that later when Paul, again imprisoned in another city, writes the church at Philippi and begins by saying, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy” (Phil. 1:3).

The next day, the magistrates ordered that Paul and Silas be let go! Paul, however, was not leaving so easily! Paul wanted the actual people responsible for beating and imprisoning Paul and Silas without a trial to come confront them face-to-face. At this time, Paul let the authorities know that he and Silas were Roman citizens. Of course, this made the beatings and imprisonment illegal. The authorities were mortified! They came to Paul and Silas with great apologies on their lips. After receiving the apologies, Paul and Silas willingly left Philippi (but not without first going back to see Lydia and the other Christians and encouraging them).

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “*You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace*” (Gal. 5:4).

It is interesting that when we speak of people “falling from grace,” we rarely do so scripturally. There is only one place in the Bible where it

them...and washed their stripes, washed them and was washed: those he washed from their stripes, himself was washed from his sins: he fed and was fed” (*Homilies* 36:2).

uses the phrase “falling from grace,” and it is in Galatians 5:4. It does not refer to one who has left the faith for a pagan lifestyle. It refers to one who lives their life based on their own goodness, rather than on the goodness of Christ. The ones who believe that they are personally living the requisite holy life have “fallen from grace,” because they have no perceived need for it! They think they are fine – doing all they need to individually. This is a fall from grace into works of law. That, as Paul makes the point in Galatians, is not good news at all! The goal for the believer is to live a life that illustrates the conviction that the gospel message is true. This is a life that abhors sin, seeks holiness, but never begins to think that a holy walk is a substitute for the saving faith in Jesus!

2. *“...they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers... The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison ... put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”* (Acts 16:19-24)

I am always amazed at how well Paul and Silas handled the setbacks in Philippi, after all the closed doors elsewhere and the clear direction to go to Macedonia. I'm afraid I would have been whining to God about how He should have smoothed the path since I had carefully followed His direction to this place. But, even in the stocks while being illegally mistreated, Paul and Silas are singing praises. Let me be more like them!

3. *“...suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.”* (Acts 16:25).

Darkness and chains are no match for God! We worship a God who brings people “out of darkness and the deepest gloom,” who breaks “away their chains” (Ps. 107:14). We worship a God who turns “mourning into gladness” (Jer. 31:13). As Paul would later write to these same Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4).