



Walking Through the Scripture Together

July 27 - August 2, 2008

Acts 16:16-40

## Prison Break

**Text** Acts 16:16-40 (TNIV)

**16** Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. **17** She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." **18** She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

**19** When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. **20** They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar **21** by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

**22** The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. **23** After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. **24** When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

**25** About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. **27** The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. **28** But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

**29** The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. **30** He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

**31** They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." **32** Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. **33** At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. **34** The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

**35** When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." **36** The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

**37** But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

**38** The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. **39** They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. **40** After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the believers and encouraged them. Then they left.

### Thought

It was the first foothold in Europe for the good news of Jesus. It had started off promisingly enough.

A group of quiet women in prayer by the river; Paul tapping on a door that was already open, as Lydia swung it open wide to invite in not only Jesus, but Paul and his three companions. Then began the daily trips to the Agora, the marketplace, the center of life in the town. And then it was another woman — a young woman, no more than a girl, really — who provided the first of three powerful obstacles to shoring up this new beachhead on a new continent.

It was a culture obsessed with oracles, with seers who could help steer people through the decisions of life whether big or small. And this young oracle was drawn to Paul and Silas like a magnet. Her frenzied testimony was hardly helpful. Day after day it was the same routine, Paul ultimately growing weary as he bumped into the demonic barrier — and grieved as he saw the plight of the young woman. Her dramatic rescue brought Paul into immediate contact with the second obstacle. Greed.

The young woman's handlers are incensed — their prized possession has been freed of her "gift" ...and they of their prospects. A burning desire for revenge is stoked.

Enter obstacle number three.

"These men are Jews!" Cultural and religious prejudice shows its hideous face, and the reason for the town's lack of a synagogue seems suddenly clear. "Dirty, troublemaking Jews disturbing our refined Roman haven." Prejudice was the third of three obstacles forming multiplied bars in what was in fact a prison, not a haven. It was not merely the jail that was shaken as the apostle of joy sang hymns in the dark, but the entire prison of a fallen culture. As the good news moves on relentlessly towards Rome, we see ever more clearly that the gospel doesn't merely rattle the cage, it knocks it flat.

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Lean In

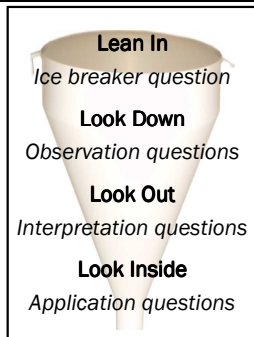
- Relate a time when you really felt trapped — either literally, circumstantially, emotionally, etc. How did you handle it? What happened?

### Look Down / Look Out

- Describe the girl that Paul encountered in the marketplace. What did she yell out as she followed Paul? Why was this a problem for Paul? Why did he wait “many days” before doing something about this? What did he finally do? What was the immediate response?
- What accusation was made about Paul and Silas? What was the real issue? What was done to Paul and Silas?
- What enabled Paul and Silas to sing hymns and pray in the dark? What kept them from being sullen, bitter and depressed?
- Where, emotionally and spiritually, do you think the jailer was when Paul cried out to him? What question does he ask? What was Paul’s answer? Why is Paul careful to include the jailer’s entire household in his assurance of salvation?
- Why the change in heart with the city officials? Why does Paul now make a big issue over his Roman citizenship? Why is he so hard on the officials — and how does that harmonize with “turning the other cheek”?

### Look Inside

- In this season of your life, with whom do you most readily identify: the demon-possessed girl powerless and exploited; Paul unjustly treated; Paul singing in the dark; the jailer crying out for help and getting it; Paul holding others accountable for their actions. Explain.



## Family Discussion Guide

### Day One Acts 16:16-18 & Luke 10:18-20

What best describes how you feel about the devil and demons: (a) they don’t really seem real to me (b) I know they are there, but I’m not afraid (c) they scare me! (d) I don’t know. What can we learn about them from this story and from Jesus’ statement?

### Day Two Acts 16:19-24 & 2 Timothy 3:11-12

Why are Paul and Silas beaten and thrown in prison? Why do people who are just trying to follow Jesus suffer like this sometimes? How does it make you feel when you are pushed around or treated unfairly?

### Day Three Acts 16:25-28 & Psalm 107:13-16

How could Paul and Silas be singing praises when they were locked up in a dark prison and even confined in stocks? How is it possible for us to rejoice even when things aren’t going well?

### Day Four Acts 16:29-34

How did Paul show kindness to the jailer (the man who had Paul locked up)? How did the jailer show kindness to Paul and Silas? To whom can you show kindness today?

### Day Five Acts 16:35-40

Why did Paul insist on an apology from the city leaders? Shouldn’t he just forgive and forget? When is it right to ask for an apology and when might it be better just to let it go? Why?

## Life in Bible Times

### Philippi

Philippi was founded by the king of Macedon, Philip II, near the head of the Aegean Sea at the foot of Mt. Orbelos (the modern Mt. Lekani). The objective of founding the town was to take control of the neighboring gold mines and to establish a garrison at a strategic passage: the site controlled the route between Amphipolis and Neapolis, part of the great royal route which crosses Macedonia from the east to the west and which was reconstructed later by the Roman Empire as the *Via Egnatia*.

During the Roman civil war that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar, his heirs, Mark Antony and Octavian, confronted the assassins of Caesar, Brutus and Cassius, at the Battle of Philippi in the plain to the west of the city in October, 42 BC. Antony and Octavian were victorious in this final battle and they released some of their veteran soldiers and colonized them in the city, which was refounded as *Colonia Victrix Philippensium*. In 30 BC, Octavian became emperor, reorganized the colony, and established more settlers there, veterans possibly from the Praetorian Guard and other Italians. The city was renamed *Colonia Iulia Philippensis*, and then *Colonia Augusta Iulia Philippensis* after January, 27 BC, when Octavian received the title *Augustus* from the Roman Senate.

Following this second renaming, and perhaps after the first, the territory of Philippi was *centuriated* (divided into squares of land) and distributed to the colonists. The city kept its Macedonian walls, and its general plan was modified only partially by the construction of a forum, a little to the east of the site of Greek agora. It was a "miniature Rome," under the municipal law of Rome and governed by two military officers, the *duumviri*, who were appointed directly from Rome.

The colony recognized its dependence on the mines that brought it its privileged position on the *Via Egnatia*. This wealth was shown by the many monuments that were particularly imposing considering the relatively small size of the urban area: the forum, laid out in two terraces on both sides of the main road, was constructed in several phases between the reigns of Claudius and Antoninus Pius, and the theatre was enlarged and expanded in order to hold Roman games. There is an abundance of Latin inscriptions testifying the prosperity of the city.

## details, details...

### Servants of the Most High God

“Most High God” was originally a Phoenician designation for the god Baal, and was also picked up by the Greeks and applied to Zeus. Israel appropriated the name to the one true God of Israel as the One who indeed was the “Most High God.” So while Paul was getting some free publicity, it was a mixed message at best and downright harmful at worst — particularly since it came through demon-inspired lips.

### They seized Paul and Silas

People often wonder why only Paul and Silas were singled out and not Timothy or Luke. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that Paul and Silas were the clear leaders and speakers — and perhaps they also looked the most Jewish (Timothy being partially Greek and Luke a full fledged Gentile, or so it’s thought) seeing as the public basis of the charge against them was that “these men are Jews.”

### Beaten with rods

A *rabdos* was a rod or stick (think police baton or billy club) that was carried by the *rabdouchos* (“police” = guy who holds the stick). Paul says he received forty lashes (minus one) from the Jews five times, and three times he was beaten with rods (see 2 Cor. 11:24-25). Jewish authorities used whips in punishing offenders, Romans used whips with metal and bone attached, and pagan police typically used rods.

### Even though we were Roman citizens

People who possessed Roman citizenship had the right to appeal to Rome itself for judgment, and thus could choose to bypass local authorities. It was a serious offense to ignore the claim of Roman citizenship. Ignoring Roman citizenship had resulted in the removal of the proconsul Gaius Verres in a famous case tried by Cicero in Rome 100 years earlier.