

The Apostle Paul, Part 3 of 6: Earthquake in a Philippian Prison!

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We've talked two other times before about the apostle Paul, haven't we? And where do we hear about Paul; do you remember? Yes, in the book of Acts which is in the New Testament part of the Bible.

Well, the first time we talked about Paul was about how he became a Christian when the Lord Jesus appeared to him as he was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians, wasn't it? Then the second time we talked about the first missionary journey that Paul made. Remember, Paul and Barnabas went to the big island of Cyprus and then over to the mainland. John Mark had started out with them, but he had gone back to Jerusalem after they got to the mainland. But Barnabas and Paul just kept on going and went up into the mountains. And they preached to the people as they went. They told them that Jesus had died for our sins and then had been alive again, and that they needed to trust Jesus to save them from their sins. They went to Antioch in Pisidia, then to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Some people believed, but others didn't and those caused trouble for Paul and Barnabas. Paul was even stoned in Lystra, wasn't he?! And Paul and Barnabas had gone back through the cities again and caught a ship and sailed back to Antioch in Syria (a different Antioch, remember) where there was a big church. And that was the end of Paul's first missionary journey.

But do you remember what happened then? Yes, some believing Jews began telling the Gentile believers that they had to become Jews and obey the law of Moses in order to really be saved. Of course, Paul and Barnabas (who were also Jews) argued with them and said, "No! They only have to trust in Jesus to save them!" Finally they went to Jerusalem and talked with the apostles (including Peter) and the elders there. God the Holy Spirit guided them, and it was decided that the Gentiles did not have to become Jews and obey the law of Moses in order to be saved. They decided that the Gentiles only should do 4 of the things, including not eating anything that had been offered to an idol (keeping far away from idolatry!), not to eat blood, and not to eat something that had been strangled. You remember that from the last time we talked, don't you?

Then the apostles and elders in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the Gentiles telling them this good news. (We have a copy of that letter in the Bible in the book of Acts, don't we?) So Paul and Barnabas and a man named Silas went back to Antioch in Syria and told the Gentiles this, and they were happy. And that's where we ended last time, wasn't it? So let's go on now and see what Paul did next. Okay?

Well, a while later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go again and visit the Christians in all of the cities where we preached about the Lord the first time and see how they are doing."

Barnabas thought that was a good idea, and he wanted to take his nephew John Mark with them again. But Paul didn't like this. He said, "No! Mark left us the other time!"

But Barnabas really wanted to take Mark. Well, Paul and Barnabas argued about this, so

finally they decided not to go together. So Barnabas took Mark with him, and they took a ship and went to the churches on the big island of Cyprus. (This is the Mark who later wrote the Gospel of Mark which we have in the New Testament.) And Paul took Silas with him, and they started out overland to the other churches. (That made two pairs of missionaries going out to different places, didn't it?) And this is the beginning of what we call Paul's second missionary journey. But so many things happened on this second missionary journey that I'm going to have to stop talking in the middle of it and finish it next time! Otherwise, it would be way too long!

Now, I keep talking about missionary journeys. But just what does that mean? It means a trip, a journey, that is taken in order to be like a missionary, in order to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ and how we can only be saved from our sins and be able to go to heaven when we die by believing in Jesus, by trusting Him to save us from our sins. Also, missionaries encourage people who have already trusted in Jesus.

So that is what Paul is doing on his missionary journeys. First he tells the people about Jesus, and then he teaches them more about the Lord and encourages them as they live their Christian lives.

So now let's see where Paul and Silas went on this second missionary journey of Paul and what happened as they traveled. Now, when I used to tell my own children about this, I had a big map, and I would draw lines on the map to show where Paul went. I wish I could do that for you, but I can't! Maybe your parents can show you the maps sometime. Why don't you ask them?

All right. As I just said, Paul and Silas traveled overland. They didn't take a ship to start out this time. And they visited the various churches along the way, encouraging them and teaching. And though the Bible doesn't mention it, I'm sure they took with them a copy of the letter from the Christian leaders in Jerusalem, telling the Gentiles that they did not have to obey the law of Moses. Well, they finally came to Derbe and Lystra, two of the towns that Paul had visited on his first missionary journey. Remember, Lystra was where some people had stoned Paul and thought they'd killed him. But he went there anyway, visiting the believers there.

Now, there was there, probably in Lystra, a young man who was a believer in Jesus, and his name was Timothy. Timothy's mother was a Jew, but his father was a Gentile. But Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois were very godly women and had carefully raised Timothy to know about the Lord. Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and in Iconium, another city that Paul had visited on his first missionary journey. And Paul asked Timothy to go with him and Silas as they continued on their journey. So Timothy went with them.

As Paul and Silas and Timothy traveled, they told the Gentiles what the apostles and elders in Jerusalem had said, that Gentiles didn't have to become Jews nor follow the law of Moses in order to be saved. And this made the believers happy! Paul and the others went all over the country there preaching and teaching and encouraging. This part of the country was called Ga-la-tia, and later Paul would write a letter to the Ga-la-tians there to again tell them that they didn't have to obey the law of Moses. We have this letter in the New Testament.

Well, Paul and Silas wanted to go up to a certain place, but some way God the Holy Spirit told them not to, so they went to a city called Tro-as, down in the seacoast. Now I really wish I had a map to show you! You see, Troas has been a very important city all through history, but it's hard to tell you why without a map! Troas was also called Troy 1000 years before Paul, and a man named Homer wrote a long poem called "The Iliad" which had Troy in it. Anyway, Troas is in what we now call Turkey and is right by a narrow strip of water that separates Asia from Europe. And whoever ruled Troas, could control the big Black Sea that leads out into the even bigger Mediterranean Sea. Do find someone who will get out a map and show you all of this! It's so interesting!

But let's get back to Paul!!

Okay, Paul and Silas and Timothy were in Troas. And that night the Lord gave Paul a vision. In this vision there was a man standing there, and this man was from Macedonia (in what we call northern Greece, just a short way across the water from Troas). And this man in the vision was begging Paul and saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us."

So right away Paul decided to go to Macedonia, realizing that the Lord had called for him to go there with the Gospel. At this point a man named Luke joined Paul and the others. Luke was a doctor, and he is the man who wrote the Gospel of Luke and who also wrote Acts. But there is something interesting in this! You see, Luke never says, "I went with them" or "I did such and such" in the book of Acts. No. Instead, we have to watch very carefully and look for when he stops saying "They did this or they did that" but instead he says, "We did this or we did that." Whenever Luke writes "we" or "us", then we know that Luke is with them! So we have to read carefully to see if Luke is with Paul, don't we?! (That's fun to do; sort like being a detective!)

Anyway, Luke was with Paul and Silas and Timothy as they took a ship and went over a stretch of water to Macedonia. They stopped at one little island and spent the night, then the next day they sailed on and landed at a seaport there in Macedonia and went up to the main city of Phil-ip-pi. Now, I'm going to tell you something that I think is very interesting, though it doesn't have anything to do with Paul and his travels. It's about the name of the city of Philippi. You see, places are often given names for a reason. Well, about 500 years before Paul, there was a very important man named Alexander the Great. And he conquered a whole lot of the world at that time and established the Greek empire. And the father of Alexander was named Philip who was also an important man, and Philip was from a place called Macedon or Macedonia! Philip of Macedon! So the big city in Macedonia was named Philippi, after Philip, Alexander the Great's father! Don't you find that interesting?! And often cities can be around for hundreds of years. For instance, the city of Jerusalem has been there for thousands of years. King David lived in Jerusalem, and that is the same Jerusalem where 1000 years after King David that Jesus was crucified in, and it is the same Jerusalem that we hear about in the news today!

Anyway, let's get back to the apostle Paul and his friends! They went to the big city of Philippi, and they stayed there for a while. On the sabbath, what we call Saturday, they went out of

the city itself to a riverside. Prayers were said there. And they sat down and talked with the women who were meeting there.

One of the women was named Lydia. She was a woman who sold purple cloth for a living. (Purple was a very special color then and was expensive.) Lydia worshipped God, so she listened carefully while Paul was talking about the Lord Jesus. Then she believed in Jesus, she trusted Him, that He'd died for her sins and rose from the dead. So Lydia was baptized. Then she said to Paul and the others, "If you have decided that I am faithful to the Lord, please come stay at my house while you're here." And she kept urging them, so they did. Wasn't that kind of her?

Well, one day as Paul and Silas and Luke and Timothy were going out to pray, a girl met them. This girl was a slave girl, and she had an evil spirit in her, and the evil spirit had made it so that she could sort of tell fortunes. And the girl's masters made a lot of money this way. Well, this girl began following Paul and the others, and she would shout out, "These men are the servants of the most high God who show us how to be saved!"

She kept doing this day after day. Now Paul was unhappy about this, though the Bible doesn't actually tell us why. So one day he turned to her and said to the evil spirit in her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And the evil spirit came out of her right away. Wasn't that a good thing for her?!

But her masters didn't like it! Why not? Why, because now the girl couldn't tell fortunes, so they couldn't get money from this! Her masters didn't care about the poor girl's soul, only about making money! So the masters grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the Roman rulers and judges of the city. They said, "These men are Jews and are causing a lot of trouble in our city. Why, they are teaching customs that it would be against the law for us to do, since we are Romans!"

That wasn't true, was it?! But I guess they figured that they couldn't very well just tell the judges that Paul had made it so they couldn't get money anymore! But since they were mad at Paul, they just made up lies hoping to get them in trouble!

Well, the crowd heard all of this, and the crowd got mad at Paul and Silas, and then the Roman judges of Philippi gave orders that Paul and Silas should be beaten! So they were beaten and then thrown into prison! And the man who was in charge of the jail was told, "You keep them here safely!"

So the jailer put them in the very safest part of the prison and tied their feet to something so they couldn't get away.

Well, I'd be pretty unhappy if that happened to me, wouldn't you?! So what do you think Paul and Silas were doing in the middle of the night? Do you think they were just crying because their backs hurt from the beating? No!! They knew they had suffered because of the the Lord Jesus Christ, and they were praying and singing praises to God! And there were other prisoners there, and these other prisoners heard them.

And then what do you think happened?! Why, suddenly there was a big earthquake! And the prison was shaken! And the doors to the prison were opened! And all of the prisoners' chains were loosened! Now, how do you think all of that happened? Why, God had done this, hadn't He?! It was a miracle!

But what do you think Paul and Silas and the other prisoners did then? Do you think they all got up and ran out of the prison? No! They stayed right there.

Well, the jailer had been asleep, and he woke up, and he saw the prison doors open, so, of course, he thought all the prisoners would have run away as soon as they could. And the jailer was very afraid and upset. After all, he was responsible to the Roman rulers for the prisoners!

But Paul shouted out, "We're all here!"

Then the jailer called for a light so he could see. And he ran into the prison. And he was all scared and shaking. And then he fell down in front of Paul and Silas. The Bible doesn't say how he knew, but some way he knew that this miracle was because of them.

Then the jailer took Paul and Silas out of the prison, and what do you think he said to them? Why, he asked them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

And Paul and Silas just said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. And anyone in your house can be saved that way, too."

It's all so easy to be saved, isn't it? Just believe on, trust in Jesus!

So right away the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed where they had been hurt from the beating. And he and his household believed in the Lord Jesus and were baptized that same night. And the jailer took Paul and Silas to his own house and gave them some food. And he and his household were all very happy because they were now saved from their sins by believing in God.

Well, when it got to be daytime, the judges sent some officers to the prison saying, "Let those two men go now."

So the jailer spoke to Paul and Silas and said, "Oh, the judges have sent and said to let you go now. So go out in peace."

So what do you think Paul and Silas did? Do you think they got up and ran out? No! Instead Paul said to the officers, "No! The judges had us beaten and thrown into prison when we hadn't had a trial or been found guilty of anything. And we are Roman citizens, and that's against the law to do to us! And now do they expect us just to quietly leave?! No! Let them come here themselves and take us out!"

Wow!! But what did Paul mean when he said he was a Roman citizen? I thought he was a Jew. Well, he was, but remember another time when I talked about Roman colonies? Well, anyone, Jew or Gentile, who was born in a Roman colony was a Roman citizen. And Paul had been born in a Roman colony, so, of course, he was a Roman citizen. I guess Silas had been, too, though we aren't told about it. And Roman citizens had certain rights. One of these rights was that they couldn't be just grabbed and beaten and thrown into jail without having had a proper trial and without having been found to be guilty of something first. If a judge wasn't careful that way, he could be in big trouble!

Well! The officers went back and told the judges what Paul had said, and the judges got scared when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens! So the judges went to them in the prison and took them out and politely asked them to leave the city of Philippi.

So Paul and Silas went out of the prison and went back to Lydia's house where they had been staying. They visited with the other believers there and encouraged them. Then Paul and Silas left Philippi. But Luke didn't go with them; he seems to have stayed in Philippi. (Later Paul would write a letter to the Philippian Christians encouraging them, and we have that letter in the New Testament.) By the way, this group of believers in the big city of Philippi made up the very first church in what we call Europe. The other churches had all been across in what we call Asia. Again, please ask someone to show you this on a map. It is so interesting!

Now, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to stop talking about Paul's second missionary journey here and finish it up next time. I hope that is all right. But it would just be way too long otherwise.

But what have we talked about today? Let's review very quickly where Paul had gone so far with Silas on his second missionary journey and what happened then. First, do you remember why Paul had gone with Silas instead of with Barnabas as before? Well, remember, Barnabas had wanted to take his nephew Mark with them again, but Paul had disagreed because Mark had left them on the first trip. So God had used this argument to send out two missionary groups instead of just one! Barnabas and Mark went to the island of Cyprus, and Paul took Silas and started out overland to visit and encourage the churches in the cities he'd been to before.

And it was probably in the city of Lystra that they picked up the young Christian man named Timothy who then traveled with them. They continued on overland until they got up to Troas, where the doctor, Luke, joined them. Then Paul had a vision of a man who said, "Please come over to Macedonia and help us." So they got on a ship and went over there, ending up in Philippi.

On the sabbath, they went outside of the city to the riverside where the Jews gathered to pray. And there by the river they sat down and talked to the women who were there. One woman was named Lydia, and she became a Christian and then she insisted that they come stay at her house.

But what happened then in Philippi? Yes, that's where the slave girl who had an evil spirit

in her followed them, shouting out who they were, until finally Paul told the evil spirit to come out of her. And then her masters were mad at Paul and Silas, and they ended up in prison. But what happened that night as Paul and Silas were singing praises to God in the prison and were praying? Yes, there was the earthquake that made the prison doors open and their chains to fall off! And then the jailer and his family were saved by believing in Jesus. And when the judges found out that they were Roman citizens, they politely came and begged Paul and Silas to leave the prison and the city. Luke evidently stayed there in Philippi as we don't hear about him again for quite a while.

And that's where we're stopping for today. Next time we'll finish talking about this second missionary journey. I think you'll enjoy it!