

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## ACTS 15-16

Every year our church hosts a pastors conference for the Calvary Chapel churches in the Deep South.

Pastors make the pilgrimage with their leaders. It gives us an opportunity *to catch up, brief each other on what God is doing in our area, ask questions, listen to encouraging teaching...* and **eat lots of barbecue...**

Our conference is a vital time for the churches! And, in Chapter 15 we follow Paul to a pastors' conference!

Acts 15 opens 20 years after the Day of Pentecost.

In the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples it was like a rock splashing into a lake. Ripples of Christian faith went out in all directions.

The Gospel spread... *Judea, Samaria, North Africa, Damascus...* **Then THE breakthrough occurred...**

*Gentiles, people other than Jews, came into God's family.* In Caesarea God saved a Roman soldier and his household - full-blooded Gentiles. Soon a church was established in Antioch that targeted Gentiles as candidates for the Gospel. In Acts 13-14 Antioch sends out Paul and Barnabas on a mission to reach Gentiles.

Which brings us to Acts 15... **“And certain *men* came down from Judea (to the church at Antioch) and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”**

When you think of *villains*, the following words come to mind: "Nazis," "Al Qaida," "Mafia," "Hell's Angels."

But add another name to that list, "**Judaizers.**"

These were *theological thugs!* These were the bullies on the playground. The Judaizers picked on believers, and robbed them of their faith and joy.

When Philip brought the Gospel to the Samaritans I'm sure there were Jews who raised an eyebrow...

When Peter preached to the Romans at Centurion Cornelius' house Orthodox Jews began to talk...

But when Paul traveled to Galatia, and deliberately targeted the Gentiles for salvation, the Jewish legalists went ballistic... The Hebrews had spent 1500 years trying to keep the Law of Moses, *and now how dare Paul offer salvation to the Gentiles by faith alone?*

These Judaizers were party poopers. *Where was the blood, sweat, and tears?* How could faith in Jesus accomplish what rigorous legalism had failed to do?

These Judaizers wanted to sentence the Gentiles to the same hard labor they had to served. They wanted to add some elbow grease to the blood of Jesus.

And these prideful Jews came to Antioch to correct Paul. They put more confidence in the *blood of goats* than in *the blood of Christ* - they hoped in their *own righteousness* not *Christ's righteousness* - they relied on *their own good works* rather than in *God's grace*.

These Judaizers scoffed at the all-sufficiency of Jesus. They pushed a “Christ plus” theology. OK, if you put your faith in Jesus as long as you add elements of the Jewish Law. It was *Christ plus* Sabbath keeping - kosher laws - sacrifices - and above all *circumcision*.

Circumcision was the insignia of Judaism - the logo of legalism. The Judaizers wanted to see these Gentile converts go under the knife. *How could you be saved if you neglected such an important Jewish tradition?*

But Paul fought back! He resisted the arguments of legalism. This was a vital issue. Verse 2, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” Luke skips over in one sentence what Paul takes almost a whole chapter in Galatians to describe.

In Galatians 2:5 Paul remembers the moment, “To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”

When these legalists arrived in Antioch even Peter was intimidated. Earlier, in Acts 10 the Apostle Peter was schooled in grace, but in Antioch he preferred his Jewish visitors and treated his Gentile brothers and sisters as second class Christians. Paul wasn’t afraid to go toe-to-toe with ole Pentecost Pete. He rebuked his brother and elder with the truth of God’s grace.

**The Gospel is *grace for every race*.** Jews and Gentiles are to be saved one way - by faith in Christ!

God's righteousness comes apart from the Law.

Paul stood up for the Gentiles Jesus died to save. *He won the argument in Antioch*, but the Judaizers are moving the confrontation to their own turf, Jerusalem.

**“So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.”** It's been said, **“A person who lives out the grace of God brings joy *wherever he or she goes* - a legalist brings joy *whenever he or she goes*.”**

And in verse 4 they finally arrive in Jerusalem.

**“And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.”** Here's the debate in a nutshell - *did a Gentile have to become a Jew before he could be saved?*

In his letter to the Galatians Paul said not only did he and Barnabas go to Jerusalem, but they brought a convert, an uncircumcised Gentile, named Titus.

The Judaizers were outraged. They tried to put Titus under the knife. But Paul refused. He insisted that circumcision just won't cut it - *it's faith in Christ alone!*

Verse 6, “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.” This was the first Church council. Over the centuries, on many occasions the leaders of Christianity have gathered together to discuss and settle disputes, and hammer out doctrine.

In the first 700 years of Christian history there were eight major Church councils. Perhaps the most strategic was in 325 AD in the ancient city of Nicaea in Turkey. There the church *put down* the Arian heresy, and *nailed down* the dual nature of our Lord Jesus.

But the first council also was a crucial conference.

If the requirements for salvation hadn't been clarified there might be no need for future councils. If the Judaizers had prevailed, Christianity would've been reduced to a Jewish sect, and the spread of the Gospel stunted among the Gentiles. This was a vital moment.

“And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up *and* said to them: “Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.” He's referring to his experience ten years earlier in Acts 10. The Holy Spirit fell on the household of Cornelius before Peter finished his sermon. Without clipping a single circumcision God saved the Gentiles.

“So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by *faith*.” *How do you argue with God?*

God required no more from the Gentiles than He had from the Jews on the Day of Pentecost... God *purified their hearts* and *poured out His Spirit on them* for no other reason than faith. It was all about Jesus!

Here were Gentiles... They went to movies on Friday night and football games on the Sabbath, and smoked cigars, and chewed tobacco, and ate pork BBQ, and listened to rock and roll, and wore shorts to church...

They were ignorant of Jewish customs. *They thought Moses was a retired basketball player.* They hadn't kept the Law a day in their lives - yet God accepted, forgave, sealed, and filled the Gentiles ***“by faith!”***

Peter says in verse 10, ***“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”***

The Jews had failed to keep their own Law. They tried, but it was too comprehensive. Certain standards slipped through the cracks. The Hebrews had worked hard to be *good*, but they were never *good enough*.

Despite all their well-meaning effort Jews were sinners just like the Gentiles. *Religious sinners, well-groomed sinners, sanitary sinners, healthier sinners, but sinners nonetheless.* All their legalism had only made them proud and self-righteous. Judaism was a treadmill - ***always doing, but going nowhere.*** So why expect Gentiles to keep a standard that alluded Jews?

Peter confesses, “But we (that is, the Jews) believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

Peter states neither Jews or Gentiles are made right with God by their own good works. We all approach God the same way - **by faith through grace.**

“Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.” They discussed the recent results of their trip to Cyprus and Galatia... *God blinded a sorcerer, healed a lame man.* God worked miracles in the midst of the Gentiles. It was further proof of His acceptance.

Verse 13, “And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me:”

This is James the brother of our Lord. It’s interesting, John 7:5 tells us James didn't believe in Jesus as God until He'd been resurrected. Yet afterwards, James quickly rose to prominence in the Jerusalem Church.

James had several nicknames that characterized his nature. He was called “**The Just**” due to his impeccable character - and “**Ole camel-knees**” because his knees were calloused from the much time he spent in prayer.

Yet it’s interesting, in Galatians 2:12 when Paul mentions the Judaizers who had come to Antioch he calls them, “**certain men came from James.**”

Here, we learn that James believed in salvation by faith through grace, but from the letter he wrote bearing his name,

we know that James had strong convictions on the significance of good works. According to James “we’re saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone.”

Real faith always leaves behind tracks or evidence.

Apparently though, the Judaizers had misinterpreted James - *while claiming to represent him*. This was one of the reasons James spoke up at the council. He wanted to set the record straight. He stood with Paul and Peter in their defense of the Gospel... It helps to recall Acts 15 when you study the book of James.

James continues his speech in verse 14, “Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:”

He quotes Amos 9:11. *‘After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.’* James quotes a verse that speaks of the end times. It won’t be fulfilled until Jesus returns.

The OT predicted Messiah will sit on the throne of David, and the Gentile nations will flock to Jerusalem to seek the Lord. James adds his conclusion in verse 18, “Known to God from eternity are all His works.”

It’s interesting, James turns to the OT to support the NT. There are pastors today who teach the OT is irrelevant to Christianity. It’s outdated and hinders the spread of the



Gospel. James thought the opposite. He saw the OT as the crucial validation of the Gospel.

Here's James' point... the Scripture teaches God's love for the Gentiles and His desire to save all men. What was happening *at the time, in the Church, among the Gentiles* was in harmony with God's eternal plan.

Peter recalls God's work in the **past**. Paul recounts His work in the **present**. James speaks of God's work in the **future**. When *God's Word* and *God's works* line-up - when the *past, present, and future* all align - you can be sure you're witnessing the hand of the Lord.

[What bothered the Judaizers, was no bother to God.](#)

It's interesting, Peter and Paul wanted to *shut the mouth* of the Judaizers, but James hoped to *open their eyes*. He wasn't just trying to win an argument his goal was to win a brother - and this is the motivation behind what happens next. Yes, we're reconciled to God by faith, but the Gospel also seeks to reconcile us to our fellow man. Jews and Gentiles should be one in Christ.

James empathized with Jews and their loyalty to the Law. He refers to the Law ten times in his letter. He knew how difficult it was for an Orthodox Jew to transition from a legalism to a life governed by grace.

Remember, this was before the books of Romans, and Galatians, and Hebrews had been written. Relating to God by grace was new to Jewish believers.

It was clear to James and the council in Jerusalem that God was forging a new direction. But James wanted to take his Jewish brethren with him, rather than leave them behind, so he makes a suggestion...

Verse 19, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." James wants to ease the Jews into grace.

He insists that Gentiles maintain their freedom from the Law, but not offend their Jewish brothers unnecessarily. He offers a suggestion. Why can't the Gentiles limit their freedom until the Jews can catch up.

Dwight Eisenhower once referred to *the art of compromise* as "the ability to employ all of the usable surface." He said, "the extremes, right or left, are in the gutters." If James had sided with legalism without seeing the Gentile perspective he'd been in *the right hand gutter*. If he'd sided with Gentiles without any sensitivity to the Jews he'd been in *the left hand gutter*.

Instead, James stands for truth and love for both groups. He finds usable surface where he can both support the Gentiles, and encourage the Jews.

The Mosaic Law contained 613 rules, James whittles them down to four prohibitions of particular importance to Jews -

*meat sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, meat not properly prepared, and drinking blood.*

Later in the NT, once the Jews had an opportunity to grow in grace, Paul will even remove these last four sanctions. Of course, sexual immorality is never permissible, but not because of law - because of love.

Verse 22, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.” Here’s an irony. The name “*Barsabas*” means “*son of the Sabbath*.” So the Son of the Sabbath goes with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to free Gentiles from having to keep the Sabbath rules.

And they took with them a letter, verse 23, “They wrote this, *letter* by them: the apostles, the elders, and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.” How sweet the sound of that - of Jews calling Gentiles “*brethren*.” The Gospel can bridge the steepest divide between people.

“Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “*You must be circumcised and keep the law*” - to whom we gave no *such* commandment - it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same

things by word of mouth.” And here’s the verdict they had reached...

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” These words were the official document that resulted from the first Church council.

Leaders in Jerusalem recognized that in Christ God frees us from the demands of the Law, and by showing some sensitivity they hoped to bring the Jews, along with the Gentiles, into the liberty paid for by Jesus.

Once a millionaire was explaining his financial success to a young protégé. He said, "Son, I started out by buying an apple for a nickel. I took that apple home and shined it until it was brilliant red. The next day I sold it for a dime... I took that dime and bought two apples - shined them and sold them for 20 cents...

I took the 20 cents and bought four apples. I turned the four apples into eight, and the eight into 16, and the sixteen into 32 - or \$3.20... At that point my father-in-law died - and left me \$10 million..." And as a child of God this is your story. You’ve been blessed with tremendous spiritual treasure, but your windfall has nothing to do with your hard work and cleverness.

*We’re rich because someone died!* Jesus paid for God's incredible mercies - and as *the Gentiles learned* and *the Church confirmed* - we receive it all by faith.

Verse 30, “So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.”

Antioch was a cool church - obviously, it was a grace place - and Silas just wanted to hang out for awhile.

“Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and* see how they are doing.” Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.

The Greek word translated “*determined*” means “*to keep on insisting.*” Barnabas was adamant. Mark's presence on their second trip was a non-negotiable.

“But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.” Remember, when they left Cyprus, and sailed to the Turkish coast Mark *bailed*. He proved *chicken* to go to *Turkey*.

Now Uncle Barnabas wants to console his young nephew, with a second chance. Paul, on the other hand, sees the work as too vital to take a chance on a boy who'd proven he wasn't

up to the challenge. When you're in a battle you've got to be able to trust the men in your platoon. Paul had lost confidence in John Mark.

“Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.” *And we gasp!* These men were apostles, founders. Yet they argued so violently they split ranks. It occurred even in the early Church...

“And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

Here are two men of great spiritual stature. They've just resolved a major schism in the Church at large. They've averted a colossal bust-up between Jew and Gentile - but just days later, they get so mad at each other they decide they can no longer work together and part company. It proves even apostles are subject to disagreements and friction. Mark may've been a *chicken*, but both Paul and Barnabas were *turkeys*.

**They should've gotten along, but they didn't.** And yet, here's an amazing truth... God still used them.

Commentator Warren Wiersbe states the obvious, "If God had to depend on perfect people to accomplish His work, He would never ever get anything done."

God actually used their *obstinacy* for *His glory*. Instead of one team doing missions among Gentiles there're now two! The division doubled their efforts.

It's amazing that years later, Paul writes to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:11), and says to him, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry." Paul's attitude toward Mark changed. Perhaps his time with Barnabas helped him grow. Though Acts tracks only Paul and Silas, it seems God blessed both teams.

He continued to bless Paul in Chapter 16...

Verse 1, "Then he came to Derbe and Lystra."

On Paul's first missionary mission he sailed to Galatia. This time he and Silas come overland.

"And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek." The woman's name was "Eunice." And her mother was named "Lois."

These two ladies helped nurture the growing faith of a young boy named Timothy. 2 Timothy 3:10 describes the impact Paul had on this young man while in Lystra.

"You have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Lystra." Six times in the NT Paul calls Timothy, "my son in the faith."

Every Christian should be a Paul and a Timothy.

Like Timothy, we need to be mentored by an older, wiser Paul... and like Paul, we need to take a younger Timothy under our wing and invest in their life. *Who is your Paul? Who is your Timothy?* There should both.

Verse 2 continues to speak of Timothy, “He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him.

And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.” *Now wait just a minute!*

Paul just fought tooth and nail in Jerusalem to keep the Gentiles from being circumcised. *Why is he now clipping Timothy?...* Remember Paul's strategy. When he entered a city he went first to the local Jewish synagogue, and then to the Gentiles. If Timothy wasn't circumcised he wouldn't be able to accompany Paul into the synagogue. This had nothing to do with *righteousness*, but with *effectiveness* for the Gospel.

Often in ministry we have to forego a freedom for love's sake. We don't want someone to stumble...

As a Christian I'm free to smoke a big, fat cigar while I teach, but it would probably be a bit awkward for most folks. Thus, I'm happy to forego that liberty. This is the maturity needed in a leader. He or she is willing to put their own freedoms on the shelf to spread the Gospel.

Verse 4, “And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.”

They passed on the letter written from the Council.

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone through



Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.

After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.”

This is such an illustrative segment. *Jesus said go into all the world, but the Holy Spirit tells us where in the world to go.* Paul is traveling west. He turns south toward Asia, and the Holy Spirit says “*no, don’t go.*” He turns north to Bithynia, and again the Spirit says “*no.*”

We need to be as quick to obey the “*no’s*” as we are the “*go’s*.” When the Holy Spirit puts a check in our heart it’s best to wait or move in another direction.

Don’t knock down a door God’s Spirit has closed.

How the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul we're not sure.

Some Bible teachers believe it was through his thorn in the flesh - his physical infirmity. An eye-disease or migraines flared up and pushed him west toward dryer climate. At times the Spirit guides us through illness.

After HS I wanted to play college basketball. But the summer after my senior year got mononucleosis. It sapped my strength and ended my career. At the time it was a bummer, but now I thank God for the setback.

He used that illness to redirect my life. I probably would’ve gone on to be a NBA superstar instead of a pastor. In retrospect I’d much rather be your pastor.

Back to Paul, verse 8, “*So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.*” Ancient Troy was near the Aegean Sea, south

of the Dardanelles Strait. If you were traveling westward, Troas would've been the last stop before crossing over onto the continent of Europe.

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Macedonia was the region west of the Dardanelles in Europe. It included the cities of Philippi, and Thessalonica, and Berea.

Verse 10, “Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Realize, when Paul obeys this vision, for the first time in history God's Gospel comes to Europe.

And don't overlook a vital lesson, **God doesn't close one door without opening another.** We may have to wait, and be open to change, but God is faithful to lead.

Notice also the change of pronoun in verse 10.

Suddenly Luke starts writing in the first person. He now says **“we sought to go to Macedonia.”** Apparently, Doctor Luke joined Paul in Troas. It could be he treated Paul's illness. He also accompanied him to Macedonia.

In fact, it's interesting, some Bible students believe Luke was the man from Macedonia in Paul's vision.

“Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis...” which was 150 miles northwest of Troas.

“And from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city

for some days.” Philippi was ten miles inland from Neapolis. Some folks believe Philippi was Luke's hometown because of the glowing terms he uses to describe the city. Notice in verse 12, he calls it, *“the foremost city of that part of Macedonia.”*

*“And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.”*

Apparently, there was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi. The few Jews who lived there would go to the river to pray, and read Scripture on the Sabbath.

Remember it was a man in Paul's vision, yet when he arrives in Macedonia all he finds is women. The rabbis taught, and I'm sure Paul had once believed, *“It is better that the words of the Lord be burned than be delivered to a woman.”* Yet as a Christian Paul has put aside his Jewish chauvinism. In Christ we're all one.

*“Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”* Lydia was a businesswoman.

She was the Mary Kay of Philippi. She was a successful importer of purple cloth. And she now holds the distinction as *“Europe's first Christian convert.”*

*“And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us. Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave*

girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.” This slave girl told fortunes and made a fortune for her owners. Yet no one cared about the poor girl trapped, and controlled by demons.

“This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” And this she did for many days.” What this girl was saying about Paul was true, *but what minister of the Gospel wants publicity from a demoniac?* You could say, *the message was right, but the medium was wrong.*

“But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour.” She was instantly delivered. And you'd think her masters would be rejoicing for her, *but...* “When her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.” They cared about *gold* not the *girl*.

“And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” It’s amazing how intolerant folks are of the Gospel when it cuts into their profits. Opposition can arise for financial reasons.

“Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods.”

This was justice Singapore style. Think of a caning with bamboo rods. Jewish justice was tempered with mercy. Jews limited a scourging to 39 lashes. But a Roman beating was brutal. There were no restrictions. The severity of the whipping was left up to the judge.

Verse 23 tells us, “And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.”

“Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

Prisons at the time were usually in the jailor's basement. They were cold, dark, damp, rat infested.

And the stocks stretched the victim's arms and legs. It wasn't just for restraint. They were a form of torture.

So imagine Paul and Silas... *their torso a crisscross of cuts and oozing tissue - their limbs dislocated, pulled out of their sockets - their lacerated backs bumping up against the cold dirt wall - the prison rats nibbling at a set of fresh toes - unrelenting pain is ricocheting through their bodies...* If this were me, I'd be having a New Year's Eve size pity party, but not Paul and Silas.

Verse 25, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Rather than sulk they sing. Rather than whine they worship. They've been beaten within an inch of their lives, and they still praise God.

Spurgeon wrote, “Any fool can sing in the day. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skillful

singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by... Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men.”

And God is the reason Paul sings here!

Then “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 chains were loosed.”

Praise is powerful. As Paul and Silas glorify God, and sing His praise, God breaks their chains, and sets them free. He shakes the prison.

It’s amazing, Paul is so in touch with his spiritual blessings - his joy in Jesus - he doesn’t get depressed by his physical circumstances. *What an example...*

“And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.” Suicide would be a kinder fate for a jailer who let his whole prison population escape. Under that scenario the jailer would’ve been severely punished.

“But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” *All accounted for...* “Then he (the jailer) called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The earthquake had sure shaken up the jailer!

“So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Now some people draw the wrong conclusion from this verse. They teach a “household salvation.” That if a man gets saved, then everyone under his authority is also saved. But they need to read verse 31 in context.

For verse 32 follows... “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.”

If the jailor's salvation included the rest of his family; then why did Paul make a house call and share the Gospel with each family member? A father influences his family, but faith is always a personal decision.

Verse 33 tells us, “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized.” This is beautiful!

The jailer washes and nurses Paul's wounds; then Paul baptizes the jailer. *They wash each other.*

This jailer shows the mark of true repentance... he's willing to bring healing to the wounds he has inflicted.

“Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” Notice, the jailer believed not *for his house*, but “*with his household.*”

They all had faith. Each person was saved... Now the family invites the pastor into their house for a meal.

“And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.” So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.” It's amazing, Paul and Silas stay in the custody of the jailer until

the magistrates - the city officials - give permission for their release.

And you'd think their freedom would be welcomed news to Paul, *but* "Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." Paul had a Roman passport. He had the documentation to prove his citizenship. And as a citizen he was due a fair trial. *But that didn't happen.*

The authorities acted illegally. Now they want to save face, and brush the whole thing under the carpet.

Paul isn't going to comply. His integrity is at stake. He doesn't want people thinking he's guilty of a crime.

"And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city." Mistreating a citizen was a crime and could bring down the wrath of Rome. To keep from being reported the magistrates try to smooth things over with Paul.

Paul agrees to leave town, but not before he encourages the church. He was always thinking about the welfare and care of the churches he planted.

"So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of Lydia*; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed." Later, Paul writes a letter to the believers - the book of Philippians.



