

Acts 16:25-34

November 24, 2020

Acts 16:25-34. Suddenly there was a great earthquake

25. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26. 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 loosened. 27. The jailer, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, "Don't harm yourself, for we are all here!" 29. He called for lights and sprang in, and, fell down trembling before Paul and Silas, 30. and brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31. They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32. They spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house. 33. He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was immediately baptized, he and all his household. 34. He brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his household, having believed in God.

25a. "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God"

Luke gives no information concerning the content of these prayers, but the hymn-singing makes it clear that Paul and Silas are anything but depressed, defeated prisoners.

25b. "and the prisoners were listening to them"

Some of these prisoners have probably spent many days in this terrible place, and this would surely be the first time that they have heard anyone praying and singing hymns. The actions of Paul and Silas become a powerful witness to the rest of the prisoners.

26a. "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken"

Philippi is in a seismically active area, so it would not be unusual to experience an earthquake there, but an earthquake this violent would be unusual.

26b. "and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were loosened"

This is the point. Using an earthquake for his purposes, God opens the prison doors and unfastens the prisoners' chains so that Paul and Silas are free to escape.

Here is a little history lesson from previous scripture about earthquakes.

1. Peter and other disciples were healing large numbers of people in the temple when the high priest had the disciples arrested and put in public prison. "But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, 'Go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life'" (5:20).
2. In the second instance, Herod arrested Peter "and delivered him to four squads of four soldiers each to guard him" (12:4)—an extraordinary measure of security. However, even though Peter was bound with chains and sleeping between two soldiers, an angel freed him (12:6-11).

These stories are intended to show that even powerful men, using their utmost to stifle the Gospel, cannot defeat the people whom God has sent to proclaim the Gospel.

27. “The jailer, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped”

I think there is another reason, too, why the jailer would contemplate suicide.

- he will also be humiliated before his peers
- some of them might carry out his execution.

I can assume that fear of humiliation is a factor in suicide.

28. “But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Don’t harm yourself, for we are all here’”

Not only have Paul and Silas remained in prison, but the other prisoners have done the same.

- Perhaps God caused the prisoners to delay their escape.
- Perhaps Paul and Silas persuaded them to stay.

Your thoughts on this observation: The miracle that God has worked is not just for the deliverance of Paul and Silas, but also for the deliverance of the jailer.

29. “He called for lights and sprang in, and, fell down trembling before Paul and Silas”

The jailer understands that Paul has saved his life, so he falls down before them in respect.

30. “and brought them out”

A lesser manuscript (known as the Western text of Acts) says that the jailer secured the other prisoners before bringing Paul and Silas outside, but the better manuscripts say nothing about this.

30a. “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

The jailer’s panic and his relief on discovering that the prisoners are still present has made him receptive to guidance from Paul and Silas. Now, he thinks of them as his saviors in this crisis.

The jailer’s question reminds me of the people’s response to Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, where they asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (2:37).

- He could be asking what he must do to be saved from execution by the authorities.
- Paul and Silas hear the jailer’s question as having to do with his eternal salvation.

31. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved”

Paul and Silas use the jailer’s question as an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to him.

31a. “you and your household”

Paul and Silas make it clear to the jailer that his household can enjoy the same salvation that they are offering him.

32. “They spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house”

The proclamation of the Gospel continues, this time to the jailer and “all who were in his house” including his family and possibly servants as well.

33. “He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was immediately baptized, he and all his household”

The jailer demonstrates his new faith by taking care of their wounds and by being baptized. His family is also baptized.

34. “He brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his household, having believed in God”

Like Lydia earlier, these new converts extend genuine hospitality to Paul and Silas.

ACTS 16:35-40. EPILOGUE

Take time to read these verses from your study bible, and based on what I have written here, we can discuss our observations.

As this story continues through the end of chapter 16, the following morning the magistrates send word to the jailer to let Paul and Silas go. When the jailer relays that information to Paul and Silas, Paul says, “They have beaten us publicly, without a trial, men who are Romans, and have cast us into prison! Do they now release us secretly? No, most certainly, but let them come themselves and bring us out” (v. 37).

This strikes fear in the heart of the magistrates, because they do not have the authority to beat and jail Roman citizens without due process of law. The magistrates come to the jail to apologize, after which they ask Paul and Silas to leave town. Paul and Silas visit Lydia’s home to encourage the believers, after which they do leave town.