

Acts 16 Bible Study

1. How often do you see people “getting even” for something wrong done to them? What are some ways people use to get even?

Try to tease the idea of taking revenge. If no one has anything to say, just move on.

2. Read Acts 16:6-10. Those with maps in the back of their Bibles – trace where Paul and Silas travel here. List the factors that led to Paul and the others travelling to Macedonia (Europe)? What does this tell us about “guidance” in the book of Acts?

The Holy Spirit keeps them from going to Asia, The Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to enter Mysia (NB different ways to describe God’s Spirit – an incidental reference to the divinity of Jesus and the nature of God as Trinity), a vision, consensus of godly people and the general conviction to take the gospel forward – wherever they can. There is no one simple method of guidance in Acts – God works in many ways.

3. Read Acts 16:11-15. It took a minimum of ten Jewish men to establish a synagogue in a town. There must have been very few Jews in Philippi. How does this passage encourage us to continue sharing the good news of Jesus with others?

This was a place that had known very little of God’s word. And yet when the gospel comes, Lydia is converted. – and this happens because the Lord ‘opens her heart’ – conversion is God’s work, our part is to be faithful in pointing others to Jesus.

4. Read Acts 16:16-24. What the slave girl said was true. Why then doesn’t Paul allow her to continue like this?

Paul was “troubled” by her spiritual enslavement. But also, her calling out might have been an attempt by the spirit to show some kind of superiority over the apostles, or to discredit their message by associating it with the occult and somehow to water down the message by blurring the distinction between God and the devil, between holiness and evil.

5. Is there a principle in Paul’s refusal to allow for the testimony of this spirit to accompany his testimony?

Syncretism – blending Christian beliefs with other beliefs – will always render the gospel powerless. We must beware of ever using anything but the gospel to make an impact on unbelievers. So we renounce manipulative methods of telling others about Jesus (see 1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 4:2), nor do we rely on unbelievers or their money to help us in our work eg using ‘fundraisers’ to support gospel work.

6. What do you think the girl’s slave-owners thought of Paul’s message before Paul drove the spirit away? What was it that caused the offence? What might this teach us about sharing our faith?

It’s really conjecture, but they were probably happy enough with the gospel being preached as ‘background noise’ in Philippi. It was only when the power of the gospel impacted their lifestyle (money, profit etc) that they were forced to decide on it. People are often content to leave Christianity as a ‘private matter’ - - we must resist the temptation to keep to ourselves out of fear of confronting others.

7. Read Acts 16:25-40. What factors do you think contributed to the gaoler’s conversion? Does anything here particularly encourage you?

Some or all of the following: Earthquake (the gaoler realises he’s outgunned!), helplessness (had the prisoners escaped?), near death experience!, the mercy of Paul & Silas, hearing the gospel – in brief and at length. God allows people to be brought low that they might call out to him (see Rev 16:8-9) – responding with love and grace rather than indifference or even vengeance can help open hearts to the gospel.

8. NB Paul demanded his ‘rights’ (v37) not for his own sake but to vindicate/defend the gospel message – showing that it was not an unlawful message, and to protect the Christians who would remain in Philippi from the kind of abuse he and Silas suffered.

9. It is not stated, but possible that the slave girl was converted. If this is the case, consider the first converts who made up the church in Philippi. What can you say about it? How can we be encouraged by this? Read also Gal 3:28.

Lydia – wealthy foreigner, slave girl, Roman gaoler, possibly some of the prisoners too (v25). Who would have thought up such a diverse group? But such is God’s mind when forming his church! Praise him for this.