



## True freedom

### Acts 16 – Leader's version

#### For an hour study, just do the starred \* questions

**Check in** – ask everyone how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

This study looks long, but it's mostly quick comprehension questions – don't be put off by the number of questions! I led it in under 90 minutes.

You'll need to give a summary of the background to the passage in your own words as you begin the study, using the following points:

- In Acts 6, within 2 years of Jesus' death, the early church was starting to grow
- The Jewish leaders were speaking and acting against the church
- Stephen, who had been appointed to a pastoral care role within the church, was also a powerful teacher. The Holy Spirit was with him as he taught (v10)
- The Jewish leaders made false charges against Stephen and arrested him

#### 1. Read Acts 6 v 11. Why was Stephen arrested?

*Allegedly for speaking against God, but the verse tells us that the authorities had persuaded some men to falsely accuse him.*

#### 2. What was the real reason for Stephen's arrest?

*This was the first act of persecution against the church. The Jewish authorities were trying to crush the church before it became more influential.*

- Stephen gives a long talk to the Jewish leaders about the history of the Jewish people. They have no problem with this until the end, when he told them that they

were resisting God and had betrayed and murdered the Messiah. Read 7 v 51-53.

- Read 7 v 54-60
- Stephen was the first person to die for his faith in Jesus.

3. What was Saul doing when Stephen was stoned?

*He was looking after the coats of the people who were stoning Stephen. This implies he knew them.*

4. Read Acts 9 v 1. What does this verse tell us about Saul's involvement with the persecution and murder of Christians, including Stephen?

*Saul was 'still breathing out murderous threats' – he had been doing this for some time. Saul was actively involved in the persecution and murder of Christians. Whether he had killed anyone himself or not, he was either an accessory to murder or had arranged murder. He was a guilty man.*

Read Acts 9 v 1-20

(The early church at that time was called 'the Way')

5. What happened to Saul?

*Saul was on his way to Damascus with a warrant to arrest Christians, simply because they were Christians. On the journey, he was suddenly blinded by a light from heaven and Jesus spoke to him. Jesus told Paul who He was and told him to go into Damascus. Saul was blind for three days, until Ananias was sent by the Lord to restore his sight. Ananias was afraid because he knew Saul's reputation as a murderer of Christians in Jerusalem, but Ananias went, prayed for Saul and Saul's sight was restored. Saul was baptised as a believer in Jesus, and began to preach to the Jews about Jesus being the Son of God.*

In Acts 13 v 9, Saul has changed his name to Paul. We know him as 'St Paul'.

Now for the Bible study!

In Acts 16, Paul is in a Roman city called Philippi, in modern-day Greece. He was with Timothy and Silas. He has already met Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, and she has become a Christian. Lydia has a house in Philippi.

Read Acts 16 v 16-24.

6. Read v 16-18 again. Why does Paul have a problem with the girl saying 'These men are servants of Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved'?

*Because the information is not coming from her, it is coming from the evil spirit possessing her. Jesus also told evil spirits to shut-up, when they revealed who He was (Mark 1 v 21-28). Jesus reveals His own identity to us. The devil does not have authority to tell us about the Lord.*

7. What does Paul do for the girl?

*He exorcises the spirit from her – he frees her from spiritual captivity.*

8. What is the consequence of this for her owners?

*They have lost their source of income.*

8. Why is Paul arrested, v20-21?

*For 'throwing the city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise'.*

9. What is the real reason Paul is arrested?

*The financial consequences on the slave-girl's owners.*

10. Are the charges in v20 true?

*Technically, yes! Paul and his team were teaching that there is only one God, and that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who died and was risen to life. The Romans believed there were multiple gods – they had a major problem with the Bible's teaching that there is only one God.*

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Did you know that there are places in the world today, where the church is persecuted, and Christians are in prison simply because of their faith?

*Be careful how you handle this – keep it general, so you don't give political or religious offence. You don't need to name specific countries.*

*Explain that there are places today where people are imprisoned, disappear, or are killed, for their faith. Think about what conditions people might be held in.*

*You might like to pray for persecuted Christians at this point, or to encourage your group to include their brothers and sisters in the persecuted church in their prayers.*

11. Read v22-24. How are Paul and Silas treated?

*The crowd back up the false accusation. Paul and Silas are stripped and beaten, they are flogged and imprisoned.*

12. Why do you think we are told that they were put into an 'inner cell'?

*So we know that they had no chance of escape or rescue. They were in the most secure area of the prison. They were also in 'stocks' – their feet secured in a wooden frame.*

13. How do you think Paul and Silas responded to this imprisonment?

*Think about their situation – it's dark, they are tied to the floor, there may be rats, they have been beaten up and it seems they are still naked.*

14. Read v25-28. What were Paul and Silas doing at midnight?

*Paul and Silas were singing worship songs to Christ! Other prisoners were listening.*

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Pause for a minute and think about Paul and Silas' response to imprisonment and to the bad treatment they had received.

What is your natural response to unfair treatment?

What do you do in your personal time in prison? Do you spend any of your personal time consciously with the Lord?

15. What happened next?

*A violent earthquake shakes the prison, the doors open and everyone's chains come undone! (It's not just Paul and Silas whose chains come undone). Everyone has a chance to escape!*

16. Why do you think Paul and Silas stay where they are?

*Just brainstorm, don't try to come to a conclusion, we'll find out later...*

17. What is the jailer's response to the earthquake? Why? What does Paul say to him?

*The jailer is about to commit suicide. It's dark, so Paul probably hears him draw his sword, and concludes that he will kill himself.*

18. Why do you think Paul cares about the life of the jailer?

*Because, as is a follower of Christ, Paul loves other people as Christ does. The jailer is not saved, and Paul wants to share the gospel with him. Paul values human life. Paul has forgiven the jailer for holding him captive. Etc etc.*

19. Read v29-31. What is the jailer's response to Paul's statement?

*He falls on his knees and asks what he must do to be saved? Maybe he is asking which god Paul and Silas worship (he's heard them singing all night!) and wants to commit to their God because he has seen the power of God in the earthquake, and seen God's faithfulness to Paul and Silas.*

20. Read v31-34. How do Paul and Silas reply, and what do you think they say to the jailer and his household?

*Paul says 'Believe in the Lord Jesus' – Paul is specific about who to believe in. Remember, it's a Roman city, where many gods are worshipped by each person. Paul makes clear that Christianity is not just another god to worship alongside all the others – Jesus is the only way for the jailer to be saved.*

*A chance for the group to recap the gospel, and for you to see how much they know!*

20. The jailer and his whole household (family and servants) repent, believe and are baptised. What do they then do for Paul and Silas?

*They tend to their physical needs – their wounds and their hunger.*

21. Read v35-40. Why do you think Paul says no to the magistrate's command to release him?

*The magistrate obviously expects the jailer to have kept Paul and Silas (and the other prisoners) under guard after the earthquake.*

*If Paul and Silas had just walked out at this point, there has been no apology from the magistrate, and the charges do not seem to have been retracted. The charge against them – troublemakers disturbing the city and teaching illegal practices – would have become attached to the young Philippian church.*

*Paul states that he and Silas are Roman citizens – this was a big deal. Roman citizens were not to be beaten or imprisoned without trial. The magistrate was in the wrong, and Paul wants a public acquittal and apology: Paul wants justice to be done.*

22. Where do Paul and Silas go when they leave the prison? Why do you think they do this?

*They go to their Christian family, at Lydia's house. Maybe they took the jailer and his household, to introduce them? They went to the people who had been praying for them, and who cared for them and would send them on their way with what they needed because they loved each other in Christ.*

23. Who have we met in this account, that has been freed from something? What have they been freed from and to?

*Lydia – freed from sin and death, to new life in Christ*

*Slave girl – freed from the evil spirit, and from sin and death to new life in Christ*

*Jailer / household – freed from sin and death, to new life in Christ*

*Other prisoners – presumably freed from prison. They heard the gospel that night, but did they respond?*

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What is true (biblical) freedom?

Do you have it?

How do you get it?

?

The people we have met in the study today were the founders of the Philippian church.

*Encourage the group to read Paul's letter to the Philippian church, and think about why he says what he says in that letter.*

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Have you considered attending a church on release from prison?

Why do you think this would be a good thing to do? In what ways do you think a church could support you on release?

*If appropriate, you could consider linking people in prison to churches outside, following appropriate security guidelines.*

**Check out** – and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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