

## 57. The Lord Allowed Persecution in Philippi

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be led by the Holy Spirit. That will only happen as they see how we are led by the Holy Spirit. We need to provide them an example as we pray for the Lord to lead us and seek His peace about what He wants us to do. As our children learn to pray and seek the peace of the Lord, they will also learn to be led by the Lord. In this topic, we will see that the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to experience persecution in the city of Philippi.

In Acts 16:11-15 we read, “Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, 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. 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*. 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. 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.” Here, we see that Paul and the team sailed from Troas to Macedonia.

The boat made a stop at the island of Samothrace. Then, the boat sailed to the coastal city of Neapolis. From that city, they went inland ten miles until they came to the city of Philippi. Philippi was the most important city in the Roman province of Macedonia. It was also a Roman colony. The fact that it was a Roman colony meant that part of the people living in this city had come from Rome. Cities that were Roman colonies had certain rights, because they were free cities. This meant that they had the right of full ownership of their land, they were exempt from the Roman tax and they were self-governing so that they were not under the Roman ruler of the province. We also see that it was a city that had very few Jews, because there was no synagogue in the city. If there were ten or more Jewish men in a city they were required to build a synagogue.

As a result, when it was the Sabbath, Paul and the team could not go to the synagogue, because there was no synagogue in that city. In cities without a synagogue, the Jews would have a place of prayer where they could meet to pray, read from the Old Testament and discuss what they read. In Philippi, that place of prayer was outside of the city by the riverside. Paul and the team with him went to this place. When they arrived, they found that it was Jewish women who met there probably due to the lack of Jewish men in the city. As a result, Paul and the other team members were invited to speak to the women that were gathered there.

One of the women there named Lydia was a business woman from the city of Thyatira in Asia. That was the area where the Lord had not allowed the team to go before they arrived at Troas. The city of Thyatira produced a beautiful purple dye for dyeing cloth. Because purple dye was very expensive, purple clothing was usually only worn by the rich or those who were royalty. We also read that she worshiped God. This probably meant that she was a Gentile proselyte, instead of a Jew, and came to the place of prayer because she wanted to learn more about God. When she heard Paul and the team explain how God had sent Christ to die for sin and the Father showed that

He was satisfied with that payment for sin by raising Christ from the dead, the Lord opened her heart to the Gospel and she placed her faith in Christ. In addition, her whole household believed and they were then all baptized. She persuaded the team to stay at her house.

In Acts 16:16-18, Paul and the team began going to that place of prayer to spend time in prayer. One day as they went, they were met by a slave girl. This slave girl had a spirit of divination. This meant that she was possessed with demon spirits. Those demon spirits made it possible for the girl to make a large amount of money for her masters by fortune-telling. This type of activity was very common among the Gentiles, but was forbidden for the Jews. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 says, “There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you.” These things were forbidden for the Jews, because they involved demon influence and demon possession.

This girl followed Paul and the rest of the team and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” She did not just do it that day. Instead, she kept doing it for many days. Finally, Paul took action. The word translated “greatly annoyed” means *to be displeased or troubled*. The only other place in the New Testament where this word is used is in Acts 4:1-2 where we read, “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” In these verses, we see that the chief priests and Sadducees were greatly disturbed, because Peter and John were teaching the people about the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul and Silas were certainly the servants of the Most High God. They were telling the people how to have salvation and forgiveness of sins. However, Paul realized that this slave girl was actually in bondage to Satan and his demons. Paul understood the greatness of that bondage and wanted to set the girl free. As a result, one day Paul finally said to the demon in the girl, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour.” Although the girl was still a slave to her human masters, she had been set free from the bondage of Satan and his demons. Christ said in John 8:36, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” Christ had set this slave girl free from her bondage to Satan and his demons.

However, that did not make the masters of the girl happy. Acts 16:19-24 says, “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. 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.’ Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. 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.” Here, we see that her masters were controlled by the love of money.

In 1 Timothy 6:10, we read, “For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Here, we see that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. That was certainly true in the lives of the masters of this slave girl. They did not care that they were destroying her life to make money for them. As a result, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the magistrates (Luke was Gentile and Timothy was part Gentile so they were not included). Then the masters 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.” Here, we see that the first accusation that the masters made against Paul and Silas was that they were Jews. This statement was designed to stir up the prejudice of the people. Acts 18:2 says, “And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.” About that very time, the Roman emperor had expelled all Jews from Rome.

The masters accused Paul and Silas of teaching customs that were not lawful for the Romans to follow. Their goal was to stir up the people so that they would get immediate action from the magistrates. Every Roman colony had two magistrates who were to serve as judges. The masters did not want a trial and so they stirred up the people so that they could persuade the magistrates to punish them immediately without a trial. Here, we see an example of the consequences of the love of money. In this case, they were ready and willing to break the law and get the magistrates to break the law to get revenge.

The magistrates wanted to please the people instead of obey the law and have a trial. As a result, the magistrates immediately tore off their clothes and ordered an immediate beating with rods. The Jewish law said that prisoners could be beaten with no more than forty stripes. In contrast, the Roman law had no such limitation. We read that Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes. Then, the magistrates ordered them to be thrown into the prison and told the jailor to make certain that they did not escape.

In order to prevent any escape, the jailor put Paul and Silas in the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. Here, we see that the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to suffer a very severe beating and then have their feet placed in stocks so that it was impossible for them to get comfortable that night. We will see in the next topic that the Lord allowed this to happen in order to save an entire household. This is a reminder that the Lord promises to work all things for good to them that love God. This is an example of the fact that the Lord is able to accomplish His purpose in every situation that we face in life. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the Lord can even use the things that they suffer to draw others to Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand why God allows suffering in our lives.