

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 16 — The Gospel Reaches Macedonia

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 16 is a chapter about:

Guidance.

Conversion.

Spiritual warfare.

Suffering.

Worship.

Salvation.

Justice.

It begins with Paul meeting a young disciple named Timothy.

It continues with the Holy Spirit closing doors.

Paul wants to preach in one region.

The Spirit says no.

He tries another direction.

Again:

No.

Then God opens a completely different door through the Macedonian vision:

“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Paul and his companions conclude:

God has called us there.

The gospel therefore crosses into Macedonia.

In Philippi, Paul does not begin in a synagogue.

He finds a group of women gathered for prayer by the river.

There he meets:

Lydia.

The Lord opens her heart.

She believes.

She is baptized.

Her home becomes a place of hospitality.

Then Paul encounters a slave girl oppressed by a spirit of divination.

Paul commands the spirit:

“In the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her!”

The spirit leaves.

But her owners become furious because their income disappears.

Paul and Silas are:

Seized.

Dragged before authorities.

Stripped.

Beaten.

Flogged.

Imprisoned.

Placed in stocks.

Then comes one of the most memorable scenes in Acts.

At midnight:

Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns to God.

The other prisoners listen.

Then:

The prison shakes.

The doors open.

The chains fall.

The jailer believes everyone has escaped and prepares to kill himself.

Paul cries out:

“Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The terrified jailer asks one of the greatest questions in Scripture:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

The answer is direct:

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

Paul and Silas then explain the Word of the Lord to the jailer and his household.

They believe.

They are baptized.

The jailer washes the wounds of the men he had guarded.

Then he feeds them.

The gospel transforms an enemy into a brother.

The chapter closes with another important lesson.

Paul does not quietly accept an unlawful beating.

He reveals that he and Silas are Roman citizens.

The authorities become alarmed.

Paul insists upon public acknowledgment of the wrong.

This demonstrates that Christians may:

Forgive.

Show grace.

Preach Christ.

And still lawfully insist upon justice.

Acts 16 therefore teaches:

God directs His servants by both open and closed doors.

The Lord opens hearts.

Jesus has authority over evil spirits.

The gospel can disturb corrupt economic systems.

Worship can continue in suffering.

Salvation comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

True conversion produces visible change.

And:

Christians can pursue justice without abandoning grace.

The central truth of Acts 16 is:

God sovereignly directs the mission of His servants, opens hearts to the gospel, sets captives free through Jesus Christ, sustains believers in suffering, and brings salvation to people from every social background through faith in the Lord Jesus.

I. TIMOTHY JOINS THE MISSION

Acts 16:1

“Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where he met a disciple named Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek.”

Timothy enters the story.

He will become one of Paul’s most trusted coworkers.

Cross References

Acts 14:6

Paul and Barnabas had previously ministered in Lystra and Derbe during their first missionary journey.

2 Timothy 1:5

Paul later reminded Timothy of the sincere faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

2 Timothy 3:15

Timothy had known the sacred Scriptures from childhood, which were able to make him wise concerning salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

God often prepares future servants long before their public ministry becomes visible.

Timothy had:

Scripture.

A godly mother.

A believing grandmother.

A good reputation.

Now:

A missionary opportunity.

II. TIMOTHY HAS A GOOD REPUTATION

Acts 16:2

“The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.”

Timothy’s character was already known.

Cross References

Acts 6:3

The early church was told to choose people of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

1 Timothy 3:7

Church leaders should have a good reputation with people outside the church.

3 John 1:12

Demetrius was spoken well of by everyone and by the truth itself.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Character should be visible before greater responsibility is given.

A ministry position should not create character.

It should recognize proven character.

III. TIMOTHY IS CIRCUMCISED

Acts 16:3

“Paul wanted Timothy to join them on their journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews in the area, since they all knew his father was a Greek.”

At first this seems surprising.

Acts 15 just declared circumcision was not necessary for salvation.

So why circumcise Timothy?

The answer is motive.

Titus Was Not Circumcised

Because false teachers were demanding circumcision as necessary for justification.

Timothy Was Circumcised

To remove an unnecessary cultural obstacle to Jewish evangelism.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:20

Paul said that when ministering among Jews, he adapted to Jewish customs when doing so did not compromise the gospel.

Galatians 2:3

Titus, a Gentile believer, was not forced to be circumcised because the truth of the gospel was at stake.

Acts 21:20

Many Jewish believers continued to value Jewish customs even after coming to Christ.

Important Truth

Paul did not circumcise Timothy:

To save him.

He did it:

To remove a barrier to ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never compromise the gospel, but be willing to surrender personal freedom when doing so helps someone hear the gospel.

IV. THE JERUSALEM DECISION IS DELIVERED

Acts 16:4

“As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the churches to obey.”

The churches needed clarity.

Cross References

Acts 15:28

The Jerusalem Council had declared that Gentile believers should not be burdened with unnecessary legal requirements.

Acts 15:22

The apostles, elders, and church had united around the decision and sent trusted representatives to communicate it.

1 Corinthians 11:2

Paul later commended believers for holding faithfully to apostolic teaching.

Spiritual Principle

Doctrinal clarity strengthens churches.

V. THE CHURCHES GROW

Acts 16:5

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”

Notice both kinds of growth.

Spiritual Growth

Strengthened in faith.

Numerical Growth

Grew daily in numbers.

Cross References

Acts 9:31

The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was strengthened, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, and continued growing.

Acts 2:47

The Lord added to the church day by day those who were being saved.

Colossians 2:7

Believers are to be rooted and built up in Christ and strengthened in faith.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Healthy church growth should be both deeper and wider.

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT CLOSES A DOOR

Acts 16:6

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout Phrygia and Galatia, but the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching in Asia.”

This is remarkable.

Preaching the gospel is good.

Yet the Spirit says:

Not there.

Not now.

Cross References

Acts 18:23

Paul later returned through these regions strengthening disciples.

Galatians 4:13

Paul later reminded the Galatians that he had preached the gospel to them during an earlier period of weakness.

Acts 19:1

Paul eventually did minister powerfully in the province of Asia.

Spiritual Principle

A closed door does not always mean the desire was wrong; sometimes the timing or location is wrong.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God’s “no” may be guidance rather than rejection.

VII. ANOTHER DOOR CLOSES

Acts 16:7

“When they came to Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.”

Again:

They try.

God redirects.

Cross References

Romans 8:9

The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ, showing the unity of Christ's work and the Spirit's work.

1 Peter 1:1

Bithynia later contained believers, showing the gospel eventually reached that region.

Acts 16:6

The Holy Spirit had already redirected Paul away from another area.

Spiritual Principle

God may close more than one door before revealing the right one.

VIII. THEY GO TO TROAS

Acts 16:8

“So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.”

They keep moving.

They do not become paralyzed by closed doors.

Cross References

Acts 20:6

Paul later returned to Troas during another missionary journey.

2 Corinthians 2:12

Paul later described an open door for ministry in Troas.

2 Timothy 4:13

Paul later referred to personal belongings he had left in Troas.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God closes one direction, keep obeying what you already know until He makes the next direction clear.

IX. THE MACEDONIAN CALL

Acts 16:9

“That night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”

Now the direction becomes clear.

Cross References

Acts 10:9

Peter had received a vision that redirected his ministry toward Gentiles.

Acts 9:10

Ananias received a vision instructing him to go to Saul.

Acts 18:9

The Lord later spoke to Paul in another vision, encouraging him to continue preaching.

Spiritual Principle

God knows where prepared hearts are and can redirect His servants toward them.

X. THEY RESPOND IMMEDIATELY

Acts 16:10

“After Paul had seen the vision, we immediately prepared to leave for Macedonia, convinced that God had called us to preach the gospel there.”

Notice:

“Immediately.”

They discern.

Then obey.

Also notice the change from:

“They”

to:

“We.”

Luke appears to join the missionary company at this point.

Cross References

Acts 16:9

Paul had just received the Macedonian vision.

2 Corinthians 2:13

Paul later spoke of traveling into Macedonia during his ministry.

Philippians 1:5

The Philippian believers later became valued partners with Paul in advancing the gospel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Once God's direction becomes clear, delayed obedience can become disobedience.

XI. THE JOURNEY TO MACEDONIA

Acts 16:11

“From Troas we sailed straight to Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis.”

The gospel is moving geographically.

Cross References

Acts 16:8

Troas had been the place where Paul received the Macedonian call.

Acts 20:6

Paul later traveled again between Macedonia and Troas.

Acts 16:12

From Neapolis the missionary team continued to Philippi.

Spiritual Principle

God's mission often advances through ordinary travel, planning, and obedience after extraordinary guidance.

XII. THEY ARRIVE IN PHILIPPI

Acts 16:12

“From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city of Macedonia, where we stayed for several days.”

Philippi becomes one of the most important churches in Paul's ministry.

Cross References

Philippians 1:1

Paul later wrote to the saints in Philippi along with their overseers and deacons.

Philippians 4:15

Paul remembered the Philippian church for its unusual generosity and partnership in gospel ministry.

Acts 16:21

Philippi's Roman identity became important when Paul and Silas were accused before the authorities.

Spiritual Principle

God may send us into places whose future significance we do not yet understand.

XIII. A PRAYER MEETING BY THE RIVER

Acts 16:13

“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there.”

There may not have been a synagogue.

But there were people praying.

Paul finds them.

Cross References

Acts 16:16

Paul later again encountered people while traveling to the place of prayer.

Luke 4:16

Jesus regularly sought opportunities to teach on the Sabbath.

Acts 17:2

Paul's normal practice was to seek spiritually interested people and reason from Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When the usual ministry door is unavailable, look for the people God has already gathered.

XIV. THE LORD OPENS LYDIA'S HEART

Acts 16:14

“One of them was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. She worshiped God, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”

This verse beautifully combines:

Human preaching.

Divine grace.

Paul speaks.

God opens.

Cross References

Luke 24:45

Jesus opened the disciples’ minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

2 Corinthians 3:16

When a person turns to the Lord, the spiritual veil is removed.

Acts 13:48

Gentile hearers in Pisidian Antioch believed as God’s saving purpose unfolded among them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The preacher can present the truth, but only God can open the heart.

XV. LYDIA IS BAPTIZED AND OPENS HER HOME

Acts 16:15

“She and her household were baptized, and she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.”

Faith produces action.

Baptism

Lydia openly identifies with Christ.

Hospitality

Her home becomes available for ministry.

Cross References

Acts 16:33

The Philippian jailer and his household were also baptized after hearing and believing the gospel.

Acts 10:48

Cornelius and other Gentile believers were baptized after receiving the gospel.

Acts 18:8

Crispus and many Corinthians believed and were baptized.

Spiritual Principle

A heart opened by God often produces an open life, open hands, and an open home.

XVI. A SLAVE GIRL WITH A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION

Acts 16:16

“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination. She earned a lot of money for her owners by fortune-telling.”

This girl is enslaved in two ways.

Economically

She is owned by people profiting from her.

Spiritually

She is oppressed by an evil spirit.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 18:10

God forbade divination, sorcery, and occult practices among His people.

Leviticus 19:31

God warned His people not to turn to mediums or spiritists.

1 Samuel 28:7

Saul disastrously sought guidance through a medium rather than trusting God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The occult promises hidden knowledge but produces spiritual bondage.

XVII. THE SPIRIT SPEAKS TRUE WORDS

Acts 16:17

“She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’”

The words sound true.

But the source is evil.

Cross References

Mark 1:24

An unclean spirit correctly recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God.

Luke 4:34

Demons knew who Jesus was even while opposing Him.

Mark 5:7

A demonized man cried out and identified Jesus as Son of the Most High God.

Spiritual Principle

Truthful words do not automatically make the source trustworthy.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical discernment examines both the message and the spiritual source behind it.

XVIII. PAUL COMMANDS THE SPIRIT TO LEAVE

Acts 16:18

“She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!’ At that moment, the spirit left her.”

Paul does not use:

Magic.

Incantation.

Personal spiritual prestige.

He commands:

“In the name of Jesus Christ.”

Cross References

Mark 16:17

Jesus said authority over demons would accompany the mission carried out in His name.

Acts 19:12

God later performed extraordinary works through Paul’s ministry in Ephesus.

Luke 10:17

The disciples rejoiced that demons submitted to them through Jesus’ name.

Spiritual Principle

Authority over evil belongs to Jesus Christ.

XIX. PROFITS DISAPPEAR

Acts 16:19

“When her owners realized their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.”

The owners are not upset because the girl was harmed.

They are upset because:

Their income disappeared.

Cross References

Acts 19:24

In Ephesus, opposition later arose because the gospel threatened an industry connected to idolatry.

Matthew 6:24

Jesus taught that no one can serve both God and money.

1 Timothy 6:10

The love of money produces many kinds of evil and spiritual ruin.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People may tolerate the gospel until the gospel threatens what they profit from.

XX. FALSE ACCUSATIONS BEFORE THE MAGISTRATES

Acts 16:20

“They brought them before the magistrates and said, ‘These men are Jews, and they are throwing our city into chaos.’”

Notice:

The real issue was money.

But the accusation becomes:

Social disruption.

Ethnic prejudice.

Public fear.

Cross References

Acts 17:6

Paul’s opponents later accused Christians of turning the world upside down.

Acts 24:5

Paul was later falsely described as a troublemaker creating disturbances.

Luke 23:2

Jesus Himself was falsely accused before political authorities.

Spiritual Principle

When dishonest motives cannot survive public scrutiny, opponents may hide them behind more respectable accusations.

XXI. THEY ARE ACCUSED OF UNROMAN CUSTOMS

Acts 16:21

“By advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

Philippi was proud of its Roman identity.

The accusation exploits that pride.

Cross References

Acts 17:7

Opponents later accused Christians of acting contrary to Caesar’s decrees.

Acts 18:13

Paul was later accused of persuading people to worship God contrary to law.

Acts 21:28

Paul faced accusations that he taught against Jewish people, law, and temple.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel is often misrepresented as a political or social threat by those who refuse to engage its actual message.

XXII. THE CROWD JOINS THE ATTACK

Acts 16:22

“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.”

There is no careful investigation.

Crowd pressure drives the action.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:25

Paul later said he had been beaten with rods three times.

2 Corinthians 6:5

Paul described beatings and imprisonments among the hardships he endured for Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he and Silas had suffered and been mistreated in Philippi.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Public opinion is not a reliable substitute for truth or justice.

XXIII. PAUL AND SILAS ARE FLOGGED AND IMPRISONED

Acts 16:23

“After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.”

They had done nothing deserving this treatment.

Cross References

Acts 16:37

Paul later revealed that they had been beaten unlawfully despite being Roman citizens.

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul later described repeated imprisonments and severe beatings.

Acts 5:18

The apostles had previously been imprisoned for preaching Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Suffering does not always mean we did something wrong; sometimes suffering comes because we did something right.

XXIV. THEIR FEET ARE FASTENED IN STOCKS

Acts 16:24

“He put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

Their situation is physically painful and restrictive.

Cross References

Job 13:27

Job used the picture of feet being placed in stocks to describe severe restriction.

Jeremiah 20:2

The prophet Jeremiah was beaten and placed in stocks because of his message.

Psalms 105:18

Joseph's feet were hurt with shackles while he suffered unjust imprisonment.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants have often remained faithful while physically restrained.

XXV. MIDNIGHT WORSHIP

Acts 16:25

“Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.”

This is one of the most powerful verses in Acts.

They are not:

Complaining.

Cursing.

Planning revenge.

They are:

Praying.

Singing.

Cross References

Psalms 119:62

The psalmist said he would rise at midnight to give thanks to God.

Ephesians 5:19

Believers are told to speak and sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord.

James 5:13

Those suffering should pray, and those who are cheerful should sing praise.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“You Do Not Have to Wait Until the Prison Opens Before You Worship.”

Their chains were still on when they sang.

XXVI. THE PRISON SHAKES

Acts 16:26

“Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose.”

God acts.

Cross References

Acts 12:7

Peter’s chains had previously fallen away when God delivered him from prison.

Acts 4:31

The place where believers prayed had once been shaken by God’s power.

Psalms 107:14

God brings prisoners out of darkness and breaks their chains.

Important Truth

The text does not say every time believers sing:

An earthquake will come.

The point is:

God was sovereignly intervening at this moment.

Spiritual Principle

God can shake structures that appear completely secure.

XXVII. THE JAILER PREPARES TO KILL HIMSELF

Acts 16:27

“The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword to kill himself, thinking the prisoners had escaped.”

He assumes the worst.

Roman guards could face severe punishment for escaped prisoners.

Cross References

Acts 27:42

Soldiers later considered killing prisoners rather than risk responsibility for their escape.

Acts 12:19

Herod had guards executed after Peter escaped.

1 Samuel 31:4

Saul took his own life after suffering defeat in battle.

Spiritual Principle

A person can stand seconds away from irreversible action while not knowing God has a completely different future available.

XXVIII. “DON’T HARM YOURSELF!”

Acts 16:28

“But Paul shouted, ‘Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!’”

Paul protects the life of the man who had imprisoned him.

That is grace.

Cross References

Ezekiel 33:11

God declares that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that people turn and live.

Acts 27:22

Paul later urged people in danger not to lose hope because God would preserve their lives.

Acts 27:24

God assured Paul that lives around him would be spared.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel teaches us to care about the life of the person who hurt us.

XXIX. THE JAILER TREMBLES

Acts 16:29

“The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.”

The physical earthquake has exposed a spiritual crisis.

Cross References

Acts 9:6

Saul trembled when confronted by the risen Christ and asked what he should do.

Acts 24:25

Felix became afraid when Paul spoke about righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment.

Philippians 2:12

Believers are called to work out the implications of salvation with serious reverence before God.

Spiritual Principle

God can use a crisis to awaken a person to deeper spiritual need.

XXX. THE GREAT QUESTION

Acts 16:30

“He brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”

Few questions are more important.

Cross References

Luke 3:10

People who heard John’s preaching asked, “What should we do?”

Acts 2:37

Peter's hearers at Pentecost were cut to the heart and asked what they should do.

Acts 9:6

Saul asked the Lord what he should do after encountering Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The most important question in life is not merely, “How can my circumstances improve?” but, “How can I be saved?”

XXXI. “BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS”

Acts 16:31

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’”

The answer is simple and profound.

Believe

Trust.

Rely.

Place faith in.

In the Lord Jesus

The object of faith matters.

You Will Be Saved

Salvation is promised to the believer.

And Your Household

This does not mean the jailer's personal faith automatically saved unbelieving family members.

Verse 32 says the Word was then preached to everyone in the house.

Verse 34 describes the household rejoicing in faith.

Cross References

John 3:16

God loved the world and gave His Son so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 10:9

If you confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Acts 11:14

Cornelius was told that Peter would bring a message through which he and his household could be saved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Salvation Is Found in Trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.”

XXXII. THE WORD IS PREACHED TO THE HOUSEHOLD

Acts 16:32

“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.”

This verse explains verse 31.

Everyone hears.

Cross References

Acts 16:15

Lydia’s household had also become connected with the gospel and baptism.

Acts 10:44

Cornelius’ household heard the gospel before the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Acts 18:8

Crispus and his household believed in the Lord, and others who heard also believed.

Spiritual Principle

Saving faith is personal; each person needs to hear and respond to the Word of the Lord.

XXXIII. THE JAILER WASHES THEIR WOUNDS

Acts 16:33

“At that hour of the night the jailer washed their wounds; then immediately he and his entire household were baptized.”

Notice the transformation.

Earlier:

He secured them in prison.

Now:

He washes their wounds.

Cross References

Acts 16:15

Lydia and her household were baptized after receiving the gospel.

Acts 2:41

Those who received Peter's message were baptized.

Acts 22:16

Saul was urged to be baptized and publicly identify with Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

True conversion changes not only what a person believes, but how that person treats others.

XXXIV. THE JAILER REJOICES

Acts 16:34

“He brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.”

The jailer moves from:

Despair.

To joy.

From:

Sword.

To supper.

From:

Guarding prisoners.

To serving brothers.

Cross References

Acts 16:15

Lydia also expressed faith through hospitality.

Luke 19:6

Zacchaeus received Jesus joyfully when salvation entered his life.

Acts 8:39

The Ethiopian official went on his way rejoicing after believing and being baptized.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel can transform a house of fear into a house of joy.

XXXV. THE MAGISTRATES ORDER RELEASE

Acts 16:35

“When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: ‘Release those men.’”

The authorities now want the situation finished.

Cross References

Acts 5:19

God had previously delivered apostles from prison.

Acts 12:6

Peter had also been imprisoned under heavy guard.

Acts 12:7

God had miraculously opened Peter’s chains.

Spiritual Principle

God can change circumstances overnight.

XXXVI. “GO IN PEACE”

Acts 16:36

“The jailer told Paul, ‘The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.’”

The jailer expects Paul simply to leave.

Cross References

Mark 5:34

Jesus told a healed woman to go in peace.

Luke 7:50

Jesus told a forgiven woman that her faith had saved her and she could go in peace.

Acts 15:33

Christian messengers had earlier been sent away in peace.

Spiritual Principle

Peace does not require pretending injustice never occurred.

XXXVII. PAUL INVOKES HIS ROMAN CITIZENSHIP

Acts 16:37

“But Paul said to the officers, ‘They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. Now do they want to send us away quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.’”

Paul insists upon justice.

Cross References

Acts 22:25

Paul later asked whether it was lawful to flog a Roman citizen who had not been condemned.

Acts 22:29

Authorities became afraid when they learned Paul was a Roman citizen.

Acts 25:11

Paul later used his legal rights and appealed to Caesar.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian humility does not require surrendering every lawful right.

Paul is not seeking revenge.

He is seeking public acknowledgment of unlawful treatment.

This may also protect the young Philippian church from future mistreatment.

XXXVIII. THE MAGISTRATES BECOME AFRAID

Acts 16:38

“The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.”

Now the authorities understand the seriousness of what they did.

Cross References

Acts 22:29

Roman officials later became alarmed when they realized they had improperly restrained Paul.

Acts 16:37

Paul had made clear that he and Silas had been beaten without proper legal process.

John 19:8

Political authorities can become afraid when they realize a situation is more serious than they first understood.

Spiritual Principle

Those who exercise authority are accountable for how they use it.

XXXIX. THE MAGISTRATES APOLOGIZE AND ESCORT THEM OUT

Acts 16:39

“They came to appease them and escorted them out of prison, requesting them to leave the city.”

The public injustice receives a public response.

Cross References

Acts 16:35

The magistrates had initially hoped to release them quietly.

Matthew 8:34

People in another setting asked Jesus to leave their region after witnessing His power.

Acts 13:50

Paul and Barnabas had previously been driven out of another region after persecution.

Spiritual Principle

God can turn a moment of humiliation into public vindication.

XL. THEY ENCOURAGE THE BELIEVERS BEFORE LEAVING

Acts 16:40

“After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the believers and encouraged them. Then they left.”

Their first concern is not themselves.

They encourage:

The church.

Cross References

Acts 16:14

Lydia had been one of the first believers in Philippi.

Acts 20:1

Paul repeatedly encouraged believers before continuing missionary travel.

Philippians 1:5

The Philippian church later became a faithful partner in Paul’s gospel ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A true shepherd can suffer personally and still think about strengthening others.

XLI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 16

1. God Guides Through Closed Doors

Principle:

A closed door can be as much a part of God’s guidance as an open door.

2. God Opens Hearts

Lydia heard.

The Lord opened her heart.

Principle:

Evangelism depends upon faithful proclamation and divine grace.

3. Jesus Has Authority Over Evil Spirits

Principle:

Spiritual bondage must bow before the name of Jesus Christ.

4. The Gospel May Threaten Profitable Sin

Principle:

People often resist truth when truth threatens their money, power, or control.

5. Believers Can Worship While Suffering

Principle:

Praise does not require comfortable circumstances.

6. Salvation Comes Through Faith in Jesus

Principle:

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

7. Christians Can Pursue Justice

Principle:

Grace and lawful justice are not enemies.

XLII. WHAT ACTS 16 TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S GUIDANCE

Paul experiences:

A closed door.

Another closed door.

Then:

A vision.

Then:

Conviction about the next step.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Closed Doors Are Not Wasted Doors.”

Paul wanted Asia.

God wanted Macedonia.

Paul could not yet see:

Lydia.

The slave girl.

The jailer.

The future church at Philippi.

God could.

Principle

God may redirect you because He sees the people waiting beyond the door you have not considered.

XLIII. WHAT ACTS 16 TEACHES ABOUT LYDIA

Lydia was:

A businesswoman.

A worshiper of God.

Spiritually interested.

But still needed the gospel.

Then:

The Lord opened her heart.

Spiritual Principle

Religious interest is not the same as saving faith, but God can use spiritual hunger to prepare a heart for the gospel.

XLIV. THE GOSPEL REACHES DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Acts 16 presents remarkably different people.

Timothy

A young disciple.

Lydia

A successful businesswoman.

The Slave Girl

Economically and spiritually oppressed.

The Philippian Jailer

A Roman working man connected with the prison system.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is not designed for one social class, personality, ethnicity, or economic condition.

Jesus is for all.

XLV. WHAT ACTS 16 TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The slave girl's words sounded religiously accurate.

But Paul discerned that an evil spirit was involved.

Principle

Spiritual warfare is not merely about spectacular manifestations; it is also about discerning sources and preserving the purity of gospel witness.

XLVI. WHEN THE GOSPEL HURTS BUSINESS

The owners profited from the girl's bondage.

When she was set free:

Their profits disappeared.

Then:

Their anger appeared.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

People who profit from bondage will often oppose the message that brings freedom.

This can apply to:

Idolatry.

Occultism.

Sexual exploitation.

Addiction industries.

Corruption.

Any system whose profit depends upon human bondage.

XLVII. MIDNIGHT FAITH

Paul and Silas had every earthly reason to complain.

They had been:

Falsely accused.

Publicly humiliated.

Beaten.

Wounded.

Imprisoned.

Restrained.

Yet at midnight:

They worshiped.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Strength of Your Worship Is Revealed When the Circumstances Stop Giving You Reasons to Sing.”

They were not singing because the prison was pleasant.

They were singing because God was worthy.

XLVIII. THE OTHER PRISONERS WERE LISTENING

Acts 16:25 quietly says:

“The other prisoners were listening.”

This matters.

People watch how Christians suffer.

Spiritual Principle

Your response in pain may preach to people who would never listen to you in comfort.

XLIX. THE EARTHQUAKE WAS NOT THE GREATEST MIRACLE

The prison shook.

Doors opened.

Chains loosened.

But the greatest change in the chapter was not geological.

It was spiritual.

A jailer went from:

Near suicide.

To:

Faith.

Baptism.

Joy.

Hospitality.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The greatest miracle is not merely a prison door opening; it is a human heart opening to Jesus Christ.

L. “DON’T HARM YOURSELF”

Paul’s cry deserves special attention.

The jailer had participated in Paul’s imprisonment.

Yet Paul’s concern is:

His life.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not teach us to rejoice in the destruction of our enemies; it teaches us to desire their salvation.

LI. “WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

The jailer finally asks the essential question.

Not:

How did you cause this earthquake?

Not:

How did the doors open?

Not:

How can I save my career?

But:

“What must I do to be saved?”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can use temporary crisis to awaken eternal questions.

LII. BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS

The gospel answer is not complicated.

Not:

Become Jewish.

Keep the Mosaic law.

Perform religious works.

Earn forgiveness.

Paul says:

Believe in the Lord Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Saving faith rests upon a Person—Jesus Christ.

LIII. WHAT “YOU AND YOUR HOUSEHOLD” MEANS

This phrase should not be misunderstood.

The jailer’s faith did not automatically save everyone in his home.

Verse 32 states:

The Word was preached to all of them.

Verse 34 says:

His household rejoiced in belief.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Salvation can spread through a household, but every person must personally hear and believe the gospel.

LIV. CONVERSION PRODUCES CHANGE

Before conversion:

The jailer guards wounded prisoners.

After conversion:

He washes their wounds.

Before

Prison.

After

Hospitality.

Before

Fear.

After

Joy.

Spiritual Principle

Saving faith produces a changed direction of life.

LV. CAN CHRISTIANS DEFEND THEIR RIGHTS?

Acts 16 answers:

Yes.

Paul invokes:

Roman citizenship.

Legal protections.

Due process.

He does not do this to escape preaching.

He does it after suffering.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian meekness is strength under control, not passive surrender to every injustice.

Believers may:

Forgive personally.

And still:

Seek lawful accountability.

LVI. PAUL'S CONCERN MAY HAVE INCLUDED THE CHURCH

Why insist upon public acknowledgment?

The text does not explicitly explain all Paul's motives.

But a public vindication could help demonstrate that Christianity was not merely a criminal movement.

That could benefit the believers remaining in Philippi.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes defending a lawful right is not merely about protecting yourself; it may protect others who come after you.

LVII. THE BIRTH OF THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH

Look at the beginnings of this church.

A woman by a river.

A household.

A freed slave girl.

A jailer.

His family.

Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned.

Not glamorous.

Yet later Paul writes one of the warmest letters in the New Testament:

Philippians.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never despise a small or difficult beginning when God is building something eternal.

LVIII. JOY IN PHILIPPI

Joy appears repeatedly.

The jailer rejoices.

Later Philippians becomes a letter deeply associated with:

Joy.

Yet the church was born in suffering.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical joy can grow in soil watered with tears.

LIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who was Timothy?

Timothy was a young disciple from Lystra whose mother was a Jewish believer and whose father was Greek. He had a strong reputation among believers and became one of Paul's most trusted ministry coworkers.

Question 2

Why did Paul circumcise Timothy after Acts 15 said circumcision was not necessary for salvation?

Timothy was not circumcised to obtain salvation.

Paul did it to remove a cultural barrier among Jewish audiences.

Titus had not been circumcised when circumcision was demanded as a condition of justification.

The difference was motive.

Question 3

How did God guide Paul toward Macedonia?

The Holy Spirit first prevented Paul from ministering in certain areas.

Then Paul received a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to come and help.

The missionary team concluded that God was calling them there.

Question 4

Who was Lydia?

Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira who sold purple cloth.

She worshiped God, listened to Paul's preaching, and the Lord opened her heart to respond.

She was baptized and opened her home to the missionaries.

Question 5

What was wrong with the slave girl's fortune-telling?

She was under the influence of a spirit of divination.

Although the spirit spoke words that sounded true about Paul and Silas, its source was evil.

Paul commanded the spirit to leave in the name of Jesus Christ.

Question 6

Why were Paul and Silas arrested?

The owners of the slave girl lost their source of income after she was delivered.

They therefore stirred up accusations against Paul and Silas and brought them before the city authorities.

Question 7

What did Paul and Silas do in prison?

Around midnight they prayed and sang hymns to God.

The other prisoners listened.

Question 8

What happened during the earthquake?

The prison foundations shook.

The doors opened.

The prisoners' chains came loose.

Yet Paul and the other prisoners remained.

Question 9

What did Paul say when the jailer prepared to kill himself?

Paul shouted:

“Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

Paul protected the life of the man who had been responsible for guarding him.

Question 10

What must a person do to be saved according to Acts 16:31?

Paul and Silas said:

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

Saving faith is placed in Jesus Christ.

Question 11

How did the jailer demonstrate changed faith?

He washed Paul and Silas’ wounds.

He and his household were baptized.

He brought them into his house.

He fed them.

He rejoiced in his new faith.

Question 12

Why did Paul insist that the magistrates personally escort them out?

Paul and Silas were Roman citizens who had been publicly beaten without proper legal process.

Paul lawfully insisted that the authorities acknowledge what they had done rather than quietly hide the injustice.

LX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 16 asks several important questions.

Can I Trust God When He Closes a Door?

Paul had to.

Am I Willing to Change Direction When God Redirects Me?

The missionary team did.

Do I Believe God Must Open Hearts?

Lydia's story teaches this.

Am I Discerning About Spiritual Claims?

Not everything supernatural comes from God.

What Happens When the Gospel Challenges My Finances?

The slave girl's owners chose money over freedom.

Can I Worship Before My Circumstances Change?

Paul and Silas did.

Do People Hear Christ in the Way I Suffer?

The prisoners listened.

Do I Care About People Who Have Hurt Me?

Paul cared about the jailer.

Am I Trusting Jesus Christ alone for salvation?

That was the jailer's answer.

Does My Faith Produce Changed Behavior?

The jailer's did.

Can I pursue justice without bitterness?

Paul did.

LXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Closed Door May Be God's Way of Leading You to the Right Door”

Paul wanted one region.

Then another.

Both closed.

Macedonia opened.

Behind that door were:

Lydia.

The slave girl.

The jailer.

The Philippian church.

Principle

Do not judge God's guidance too early when He closes the path you expected to take.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Opens Hearts Before Churches Open”

There was no great public campaign at first.

Paul found:

Women by a river.

One listened.

God opened her heart.

A church began.

Principle

Never underestimate what God can begin through one receptive heart.

LXIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Worship Before the Earthquake”

Paul and Silas did not wait until:

The chains came off.

The doors opened.

The pain stopped.

They worshiped first.

Principle

Faith says God is worthy before the answer arrives.

LXIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Person Guarding You Today May Worship Beside You Tomorrow”

The jailer began as part of the prison system restraining Paul and Silas.

By the end of the night:

He is washing their wounds.

Feeding them.

Rejoicing with them.

Principle

Never decide too quickly who is beyond the reach of the gospel.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Grace Does Not Cancel Justice”

Paul forgave.

Paul preached.

Paul cared about the jailer.

But Paul also said:

“What they did was unlawful.”

Principle

Christian grace and lawful accountability can exist together.

LXVI. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 16 begins with movement.

Paul has plans.

Then God interrupts the plans.

Asia:

Closed.

Bithynia:

Closed.

Macedonia:

Opened.

This reminds us that God's guidance is not always:

Go.

Sometimes it is:

No.

Sometimes:

Wait.

Sometimes:

Turn.

Paul obeys.

And on the other side of the closed doors are people he could not yet see.

A businesswoman.

A slave girl.

A jailer.

A household.

A future church.

Acts 16 also reminds us that gospel ministry can move very quickly from blessing to suffering.

Lydia believes.

Then spiritual opposition appears.

A girl is delivered.

Then money is lost.

Then anger rises.

Then Paul and Silas are beaten.

Then imprisoned.

Yet the prison does not silence them.

At midnight:

They sing.

They pray.

The prisoners listen.

Then God shakes the prison.

But the greatest shaking happens inside the jailer.

He asks:

“What must I do to be saved?”

The answer remains one of the clearest gospel statements in Scripture:

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

That same message remains true.

Salvation is not:

Earned.

Purchased.

Inherited.

Achieved through religious performance.

It is received through faith in:

Jesus Christ.

And when that faith is real:

Lives begin to change.

The jailer goes from guarding wounds to washing wounds.

He goes from despair to joy.

He goes from jailer to brother.

Acts 16 therefore calls us to:

Trust closed doors.

Walk through open doors.

Preach Christ.

Discern spiritual deception.

Refuse to profit from bondage.

Worship in suffering.

Care about enemies.

Offer salvation clearly.

Expect transformed lives.

Stand for justice.

And keep strengthening the church.

The gospel reached Macedonia because Paul was willing to be redirected.

And the gospel reached a jailer because Paul was willing to worship while wounded.

We never know who may be listening when we sing in the night.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 16.

Thank You that You guide Your servants.

Teach us to trust You when doors close.

Keep us from forcing open what You have closed.

Give us discernment to recognize the doors You are opening.

And when Your direction becomes clear, help us obey quickly.

Thank You for Timothy.

Raise up young believers of strong character and good reputation.

Thank You for Lydia.

Open hearts today just as You opened hers.

Help us faithfully proclaim the truth while depending upon You to produce the response.

Protect us from spiritual deception.

Give us discernment concerning false spiritual power.

Thank You that Jesus Christ has authority over darkness.

Deliver people who are spiritually oppressed.

Expose systems that profit from human bondage.

Give us courage when obedience becomes costly.

When we are wounded:

Help us pray.

When we are confined:

Help us worship.

When circumstances are dark:

Give us a midnight song.

And let others hear our faith.

Thank You for the Philippian jailer.

Thank You that the gospel reached him at the edge of despair.

Help us remember that no one is beyond Your reach.

Give us courage to say clearly:

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

Let our faith produce transformed lives.

Turn harsh hearts into compassionate hearts.

Turn fear into joy.

Turn enemies into brothers and sisters.

And give us wisdom concerning justice.

Help us forgive without pretending wrong is right.

Help us stand for truth without becoming bitter.

Use our lives.

Open doors.

Open hearts.

Shake what needs to be shaken.

And build churches that remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’” — Acts 16:31

Central Truth

God directs His servants through both closed and open doors, opens hearts to receive the gospel, demonstrates the authority of Jesus Christ over spiritual darkness, sustains believers in suffering, and brings salvation and transformed lives to everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus.

Acts 16 in One Sentence

The Holy Spirit redirects Paul and his companions into Macedonia, where the Lord opens Lydia’s heart, delivers a slave girl from spiritual bondage, sustains Paul and Silas through unjust imprisonment and midnight worship, saves the Philippian jailer and his household through faith in Jesus Christ, and demonstrates that believers can proclaim grace while lawfully standing for justice.