

Acts 16

## Aim of Lesson

To show how the good news of Jesus was preached to all kinds of people, and to show how Paul and Silas trusted in God despite their suffering.

## Background study

Acts 15:40-41; 2 Corinthians 11:25; Ephesians 2:13-18; Philippians 1:1-6 and 27-30; 2 Timothy 3:12. It is essential to select or prepare a simplified map that shows clearly the route of Paul's second missionary journey.

## Suggested outline of lesson

Engage the children in a discussion on the ways in which news is spread today. News media, which we now take so much for granted, and by which information can be conveyed instantaneously from one side of the world to the other, were not known in Paul's day. Messages and news were conveyed in person or by letters delivered by a messenger who travelled along the excellent Roman roads. Paul could and did communicate with his fellow Christians by means of letters, but in order to convert more people to the Christian faith, it was necessary to contact them in person. He was eager to take the gospel to as many people as possible and made this his life's work.

Having chosen Silas as his travelling companion, Paul set off, from Antioch in Syria, on his second journey. Show the position of Antioch on the map. The two travelled overland and first re-visited Derbe and Lystra, where the young Timothy joined them. Trace their progress as far as Troas, but avoid confusing the children with too many place names. Perhaps Paul wondered, upon reaching the west coast of Asia Minor, where he should go next, but God left him in no doubt; the vision gave clear direction. The three travelling companions shared the same conviction that this guidance was from God. Ask the children to read verses 8-10, and help them to recognize the change of pronoun from "they" to "we", indicating that Luke, the writer of Acts, had joined the party at Troas. Now there were four who set sail across the sea to Europe. They disembarked and made for the nearest big city - Philippi, a Roman colony. Apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi, so on the sabbath day they sought a quiet place for their own devotions. Here they were presented with an opportunity to preach to a group of serious-minded women. In describing the conversion of Lydia, show how the common bond of a shared faith removed normal human barriers. These men, who had approached her as foreigners, were welcomed as brothers into her house.

It seems that the riverside became the regular meeting place for people to hear Paul's daily preaching. Describe the embarrassment to Paul of being pursued by the demented slave girl, who shouted persistently after him and chanted trite religious phrases. In using the power to cure, which God had given him, Paul was to bring more trouble upon them than he could have foreseen. It is noteworthy that on the two chief occasions mentioned in Acts when Gentiles violently opposed the gospel, it was because of its threat to vested financial interests, the other occasion being at Ephesus.

The owners of the girl fabricated charges against Paul and Silas. Motivated by their own prejudice against all Jews, they appealed to similar feelings in the magistrates and the onlookers, who responded by prejudging the foreigners. Without any form of inquiry or court hearing, the apostles were summarily stripped, cruelly beaten with rods and thrown into prison. Try to convey the injustice and severity of the ordeal and contrast this with the calm acceptance and hopeful confidence of the inflicted men who, despite their pain and their grim situation, sang praises to God for all to hear.

Describe how their singing was cut short by a sudden rumbling. The whole building began to shake. In total darkness the prisoners were thrown about. Stocks cracked open and all was noise and confusion, as prisoners screamed and doors burst open. As the quake subsided, the stunned prisoners fell silent, and the jailor's first thought was of his own responsibility for the security of those in his charge. As he groped his way through the prison and found open doors and broken chains, he assumed that some must have escaped. He knew that if this were the case he would be severely punished and executed. Rather than face that ordeal he was prepared to take his own life. His eyes could not penetrate the darkness of the dungeon, but he was visible to Paul because of the torch he carried, and the apostle quickly intervened to prevent further tragedy, and reassured him that no one had fled.

The continued presence of the prisoners seems to have been attributable to Paul's personal hold over them. The jailor recognized that Paul and Silas were no ordinary prisoners and he appealed to them for help. Paul grasped the opportunity to offer him the joy of knowing Jesus. Imagine the thrill for Paul and Silas, knowing that God had used their suffering to bring about the salvation of this man and his family. Mark the sequence of events - the jailor's recognition of his need, the instruction in the word of God, conversion, the physical response of obedience in baptism, and the changed attitude that was seen in kind actions and hospitality. The result of all this was pure joy.

Describe briefly the events of the following morning, and Paul's insistence upon fair treatment, so that they were exonerated from all blame. No one in that city would have been in any doubt about the integrity of these men, and their powerful message. Although they felt it expedient to leave the city, they were happy in the knowledge that they had laid the foundation of the Philippian church. God had touched the hearts of a variety of people who, in spite of their marked differences in background, became united in Christian fellowship.

Show the children the letter to the Philippians, to show them that the letters are to real people. Chapter 1 verse 30 indicates that later the disciples in Philippi were being ill treated as Paul himself had been.

## Relevance to the children's lives

Isn't it remarkable that Paul and Silas did not feel sorry for themselves in prison, but felt inclined instead to sing praises to God, and so strengthen each other. It is easy to praise God when everything is going well for us, but how do we feel when we are in pain, cruelly and unfairly treated, or in a hopeless situation? When something makes us miserable, what sort of things can we do or say in order to stop feeling sorry for ourselves?

## **Worksheets**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord God, please help us to show that believing in you makes us happy people, even when things look black. Amen.

## **Memory verse**

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11).