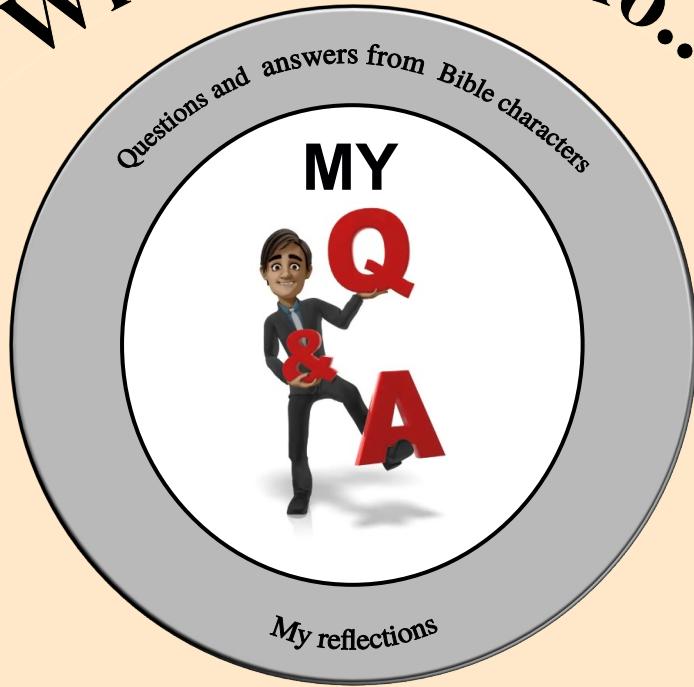


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What must I do...



...to be saved?

Introduction

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This MyQ&A paper concerns this unique question, directed to Paul and Silas:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

Philippi

Paul and Silas happened to be in Philippi, a city in one of the four districts of Macedonia, which was a Roman province in Greece, but Philippi was not the capital city (See map at right).

This was the first European city to have accepted Christianity, and it became a metropolis of Christianity. Its location on the Via Egnatia made it important to travellers and trade, and more especially, for the spread of the Good News. Virtually all land traffic from the Middle East to Europe went through

Philippi along this Roman road. A common route was the one that Paul took, landing at the port of Neopolis, and traveling 12 miles north to Philippi Via Egnatia. It is certain that Paul used it for his second and third missionary journeys.



Pax Romana (Roman peace) played a significant role in the spread of early Christianity through a common language (Greek from Alexander's conquests); a superior network of roads, shipping, communications and the most advanced level of trade ever known. Further, a code of Roman Law backed by the best professional army the world had known also acted as a channel for the Good News within the ranks of the Legionaries. The news of Salvation by belief on the Lord Jesus Christ travelled along the Via Egnatia, often known as the Roman Road to Salvation.

On the Sabbath, Paul and Silas went to the riverside (possibly the the Gangites (or Gangas) a small stream close to Philippi) to a place of prayer (Acts 16:13). Now ‘place of prayer’ is *proseuchē*, which is a synonym for “synagogue” a building where Jews gathered to hold their services. Paul and Silas spoke to the women who had gathered there, and a certain woman named Lydia, had her heart opened by the Lord to what was said. And she prevailed upon them to stay at her home (Acts 16:14-15).

Demonic opposition

Her conversion didn’t go down well in this Roman city, and Paul and Silas were targeted by a slave girl (*paidiske*) who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortunetelling. ‘Paidiske’, could refer to a girl or a working woman of very low standing, and implies employment for which the feminine gender was essential. Note that in Greek and Roman society, sexual services were among the common duties of slaves of both genders. Brothels in the Greco-Roman world were for customers who didn’t own slaves ([Abarim's Dictionary](#)).

Luke says that she had a spirit of divination (*Python*). Originally Python was the name of the serpent or dragon that guarded the Delphic oracle. According to Greek mythology, it lived at the foot of Mount Parnassus and was killed by Apollo. From this, the word came to designate a person who was thought to have a spirit of divination. Pagan generals, for example, might consult someone like this. So her presence here suggests a supernatural encounter involving Paul and her “spirit” ([Net Bible](#)).

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Further, the occupation of fortune-telling (*manteuomai*), meaning to act manically or like a maniac, was entertaining enough to make one's owners money (Acts 16:16 only). This verbal form of this word (*mantis*) was commonly used for a Greek prophet or seer, people who were known for their wide-eyed enthusiasm and entertaining antics, but evidently not for the accuracy of their insights.

The bizarre-looking, wide-eyed, cross-eyed praying mantis was named after the Greek prophet. This animal not only looks like it is continually confused, it also continuously preys on creatures that are slower but not necessarily smaller than it. A fight between a mantis and a rodent or amphibian is still considered stellar entertainment in our modern world. In antiquity, seeing a human version of such a beast in action must have been a hoot to certain people. Paul was not merely pestered by the girl, but rather challenged to a duel of madness.

While this girl followed Paul and his colleagues, she would cry out, "*These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.*" This went on for many days, until Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "*I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.*" And it came out that very hour.

So, Paul released this girl from prison, from the jail of an evil spirit, and for his good deed, he and Silas were thrown into prison. What an irony!

Paul and Silas in prison

Well, that was the end of profit making for the girl's owners, so they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the magistrate authorities (Acts 16:19). The marketplace (*agora*) was a place of trade, commerce, and discussion. It was the public square, a place of judgment where courts held session, a place for idle people and those seeking work, and a place for children to play ([Net Bible](#)).

The charges made against Paul and Silas were threefold. Firstly, the social cohesion claim that they were throwing the city into confusion. Secondly, the racial argument that they were Jews, and thirdly, the legal charge that they were advocating customs that are not lawful for Romans to adopt or observe.

Mayhem followed. The crowd attacked, the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. Then they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely, which he did by putting them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:20-24).

It was no crime under Roman law to exorcise a demon. Paul and Silas had done nothing of which they could justly be accused before the court. The real charge was that of preaching and making converts to an illegal religion. However, Judaism was not illegal, and Christianity was considered by Rome as the same thing as Judaism. We know immediately that this imprisonment is in violation of Rome's own law.

Roman prisons had three compartments. One was called "Communiora" which had light and fresh air. The second was called "Interiora". This was shut off by strong iron bars and locks. Paul and Silas were in the "Tullainium" which is a dungeon where people were placed to die. This was top security - likely because the jailer knew the circumstances of this illegal seizure. Their feet were placed in stocks which were a heavy piece of wood with holes similar to the mediaeval British stocks into which the prisoner's feet were placed and stretched in such a way as to cause constant agonising pain.

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Paul and Silas' supplications and singing to God was heard in heaven, and heaven's response was soon heard on earth in that prison. An earthquake toppled the prison's foundations changing the building's structure so that the cell doors fell from their hinges, and the prisoners' chains rattled free, and woke the jailer. Assuming that the prisoners had escaped, the jailer decided to kill himself knowing that the penalty for failing to guard the prisoners would have been death, so he contemplated saving the leaders the trouble (see Acts 12:19; 27:42).

Paul intervened to ensure that the man did not harm himself, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And, this was his question:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:28-30).

The Philippian jailer

Little is known about the identity of the jailer by the Scriptures. Many Bible scholars believe that the Jailer was a retired veteran Roman soldier. The city of Philippi was a major city that had been chartered as a "Roman Colonial City". Old soldiers sought retirement in these cities. The position of Jailer was most suitable for a veteran who had commanded in combat and proved his ability with men and a fit, hardened soldier would have been the likely choice of the Roman officials.

‘Saved’. What did it mean?

‘Saved’ (*sozo*) is part of a cluster of words that revolves around wholeness and soundness. As such, the word reminds us of the familiar Hebrew word *shalom*, peace, from the verb *shalem*, to be or make whole or complete ([Abarim's Dictionary](#)).

But what did it mean for the jailer? Given that his jail is now a wreck following a couple of Jews praying and singing to God, he could have meant, ‘How do I get rescued from the danger I’m in with my Roman masters, and return to my former state of safety and peace?’

But how likely is this view to be correct?

Or alternatively, the jailer would know the charges laid against Paul and Silas, and no doubt was familiar with the slave girl's summation of their message which was 'the way of salvation', which of course had landed them in jail. It's likely too that Paul and Silas' singing gave expression to God's 'way of salvation' and the jailer probably heard them. They were in the "Tullainium", the dungeon prison where people were placed to die. How could they then sing?

In this setting it's understandable that the jailer wanted to be saved and freed from his own prison, namely the burdens of life that had brought him to that point of self-destruction. He wanted to have what Paul and Silas had, an inner joy and peace that no Tullainium could disturb.

Hence his question: **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”**

Their answer was as brief as his question:

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:31).

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‘**Believe**’ (*pistis*) is possibly a signature word of the New Testament. Here it is an imperative action word, a command issued by Paul and Silas. There was no other option for the jailer. There is just one way to be saved.

In New Testament times people referred to *pistis* as the mental substance that results from intelligent and reasonable inquiry or instruction; the mind's response to valuable information. It described sureness in every way, from sureness about salvation to sureness about how to make a club sandwich. Someone's *pistis* did not denote one's religious or political leanings but comprised everything a person was certain of, on whatever level and whatever field, without distinction between scientific, artistic and religious certainties or even little practical certainties to help with daily chores ([Abarim's Dictionary](#)).

To follow a command is the act of the will, of the heart and Luke records that the jailer rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household (Acts 16:34).

Conclusion

The question considered in this paper was “**What must I do to be saved?**” to be made whole and sound.

“**Believe in the Lord Jesus**” was the answer to the jailer, a command to be totally certain of the power of Jesus Christ to make him, this broken and wounded soldier, whole and sound.

Reader, have you found this source of total completeness?

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