



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V28 N32

August 9, 2026

UNHINDERED

“Praise that Shakes Prison Doors”

Acts 16:16-40

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Worship

I worship God for who he is and what he has done for me.

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods.”

Psalm 95:1-3



“Tribulations”
(Ac 14:22)—
what’s their
relationship to
worship?

Throughout history and today, Christian persecution has consistently served as a catalyst for deeper worship. Stripped of buildings, Bibles, and legal protections, believers often respond to hostility by elevating private praise, deepening their theology, and expanding secret fellowships as courageous acts of devotion.

Historically, Paul and Silas provide the consummate biblical example. After being seized by the owners of a slave girl who had “a spirit of divination,” that is, “a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means” (NET), Philippi’s magistrates ordered that Paul, the one responsible for her exorcism, and Silas, his companion, be stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison (Ac 16:19-24). One commentator remarks: “One would expect that after such brutal treatment, Paul and Silas would be bemoaning their plight. Certainly they were suffering pain and shock from the flogging they had received. But about midnight, as Paul and Silas were ‘praying and singing hymns to God,’ an earthquake suddenly shook the prison, opened its doors, and loosened the chains of all the prisoners” (Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *John-Acts*, vol. 9, EBC, 464). Contrary to expectations, Paul and Silas were not lamenting their illegal treatment, they were praying and singing hymns to God; they were worshipping! Persecution incentivizes worship, which is its own reward.

Today, many examples of persecution provoking worship can be cited. Global Christian Relief gives examples in an article entitled, “A Joyful Noise: Worship in the Persecuted Nigerian Church” (globalchristianrelief.org/stories/a-joyful-

[noise-worship-in-the-persecuted-nigerian-church](#)). The article by Chandler Peterson begins:

Followers of Jesus in Nigeria, the most dangerous country for Christians, know that their faith could cost them their homes, their safety and their lives.

When more than 6,000 Christians have been killed in northern Nigeria in the last 5 years and more than 2 million have lost their homes following terrorist attacks, it would be easy for persecuted Christians in Nigeria to lose hope.

Yet, many of the displaced Christians that Global Christian Relief met have made the remarkable decision to choose hope over despair and joy over sorrow. They shared that worship in the persecuted Nigerian church can bring hope and encouragement, even in the face of terror and death.

When Brian Orme, CEO of GCR, spoke with persecuted and displaced believers in Nigeria, he was moved by their boldness and resiliency.

“The songs I heard in Nigeria were more than melodies; they were anthems of defiance against the darkness,” he said. “In a place where faith can cost everything, their worship is a courageous reminder that their hope in Jesus remains unshaken and their spirit, unconquered.”

“I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands,” writes King David in Psalm 63:4. No stranger to persecution himself, David chose to lift his voice and sing words of praise to the Lord in the midst of his hardship, just as many Nigerian believers do today. Worship songs often provide a source of hope and encouragement to persecuted Christians, some of whom shared their stories and their songs with us.

Read Acts 16:16-40

16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." 18 And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go

in peace." 37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." 38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. 40 So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "we" in v. 16 and "us" in v. 17.
- Circle "place of prayer" in v. 16.
- Bracket "spirit of divination" in v. 16.
- Circle "fortune-telling" in v. 16.
- Highlight the quotation in v. 17.
- Circle "rulers" in v. 19 and "magistrates" in v. 20.
- Circle "customs" in v. 21.
- Bracket "praying and singing hymns to God" in v. 25.
- Circle "earthquake" in v. 26.
- Box "But" indicating *contrast* in vv. 28, 37.
- Highlight the question in v. 30.
- Circle "saved" in vv. 30, 31.
- Circle "Lord" in v. 31.
- Circle "Roman citizens" in vv. 37, 38.
- Circle "So" indicating *result* in vv. 39, 40.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Luke uses the pronouns “we” (v. 16) and “us” (v. 17). What does that indicate?
2. Why would Paul want to silence the slave girl’s testimony?
3. Identify what *motivated* the slave girl’s owners to drag Paul and Silas before the city’s magistrates, and describe the *charges* against them and the magistrates’ *verdict*.
4. How would you describe the *relationship* of verse 25 to verse 26?
5. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 28.
6. What does “saved” mean—to what does the word refer—in verses 30 and 31?
7. If the jailor believes, will his household be saved? Explain.
8. Paul and Silas refused to leave prison upon their release. Why?
9. The magistrates were afraid when they heard Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. Explain why.
10. **Discussion.** Talk about what Paul and Silas (i.e., God) accomplished by the time they left Philippi.

Commentary On The Text

The visit of Paul and Silas to Philippi is described by Luke in Acts 16:11-40. It unfolds in two episodes, the *first* involving the conversion of Lydia (vv. 11-15) and the *second* involving the conversion of the Philippian jailor (vv. 16-40), which is the focus of this study. The second episode unfolds in three scenes, the *first* involving the exorcism of a slave girl (vv. 16-24), the *second* involving the conversion of the jailor (vv. 25-34), and the *third* involving Paul's demand of the magistrates (vv. 35-40).

In literary terms (see Freytag's Pyramid), the *first* scene (vv. 16-24) contains the *exposition* (vv. 16-17), which introduces the characters and the setting, the *inciting incident* (v. 18), which triggers the narrative to follow, and the *rising action* (vv. 19-24), which contains events following the girl's exorcism, leading up to the *climax*. Regarding the *exposition*, Paul, Silas, and Luke ("we") were on their way to the place of prayer (cf. v. 13), when confronted by a slave girl with the ability to predict the future, whose owners exploited to enrich themselves. A self-appointed forerunner of sorts, she went about announcing the missionaries' coming by crying out "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation" (v. 17). Rightly understood, what she said was true; whether her pagan Roman hearers would rightly understand her was another matter entirely.

Regarding the *inciting incident*, when Paul had enough of her, he exorcised the clairvoyant spirit in her, which wiped out her value to her owners. According to one commentator: "Her presence and public advertising work implied that the missionaries were allies of the demon that people knew indwelt her (cf. Mark 1:24-25). Jesus, working through Paul, cast the demon 'out of her' (Mark 9:14-29; Luke 4:33-35; 6:18; 7:21; Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-12; 19:13-20)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Acts," 2026 ed., 314, soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf).

Regarding the *rising action*, in exorcising the slave girl's demon, Paul exorcised her owners' source of income. And when they realized "their hope of gain was gone" (v. 19), they hauled Paul and Silas before the town magistrates and brought charges against them. The first charge was prejudicial: "These men are Jews" (v. 20). The second was somewhat nebulous: "They are disturbing the city" (v. 20). The third was the only one with any substance: "They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice" (v. 21) — referring to either "advocating a *religio illicita* and thus disturbing the Pax Romana" (Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *John-Acts*, vol. 9, EBC, 463) or to "illegal proselytizing for Judaism" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 353). In either

case, the charges were not valid, but they had their desired effect. The magistrates had the missionaries beaten with rods and put in prison.

The *second* scene (vv. 25-34) contains the *climax* (vv. 25-31), which marks the turning point in the story. It's not the end of the story but anticipates how the story will end and the *falling action* (vv. 32-34), the immediate aftermath and consequences of the climax. Regarding the *climax*, around midnight as the missionaries were "praying and singing hymns to God" — all while the other inmates listened — a great earthquake shook the prison, resulting in its doors being opened and its prisoners' being freed from their shackles (v. 26); they, however, made no attempt to escape. It was all God's doing. The climax clearly indicates the story will in due course have a happy ending. Rather than be executed for dereliction of duty, the jailor was prepared to take his own life and would have had it not been for Paul, who out of the darkness cried, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here" (v. 28). In response, the jailor brought Paul and Silas out of jail and asked, "What must I do to be saved" (v. 30). Paul's answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v. 31) indicates that the jailor had salvation in its fullest sense, namely, its spiritual sense, in mind. Regarding the *falling action*, the message of salvation was then taken to the jailor's household (v. 32) where the word of the Lord was spoken to him and all who were in his house. They were all apparently saved, for the jailor and his whole household were baptized before daybreak (v. 33).

The third scene (vv. 35-40) contains the *resolution* (vv. 35-39), namely, the conclusion of the conflict created by the inciting incident, and the *denouement* (v. 40), which ties up loose ends and provides a sense of closure to the story. Regarding the *resolution*, the magistrates, for whatever reason, decided to release Paul and Silas, but the missionaries refused to go quietly. Paul told the police sent by the magistrates with their release orders, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens and have thrown us into prison, and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out" (v. 37). Paul wanted a public apology, but why? He wanted an apology for the sake of the church in Philippi. One commentator explains: "The refusal to settle without a public act of vindication shows a concern with the public standing of the mission. Acts of ignorance and injustice must not be allowed to masquerade as truth and justice in the public eye" (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 205).

Regarding the *denouement*, after Paul and Silas received a public apology and were sent off by the magistrates, Luke writes: "So they went out of the prison and visit Lydia and when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed" (v. 40). The end.

Word Studies/Notes

vv. 16, 17 *we, us* In the Book of Acts, the narrative shifts abruptly from the third person ("he" or "they") to the first-person plural ("we"). These specific passages are traditionally understood by scholars as segments where Luke joined the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys (cf. 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

v. 16 *place of prayer* "In Jewish law, a congregation was made up of ten men. Whenever there were ten male heads of household who could be in regular attendance a synagogue was to be formed (cf. M *Sanhedrin* 1.6; M *Pirke Aboth* 3.6). Failing this, a place of prayer (*prosuchē*) under the open sky and near a river or the sea was to be arranged for (cf. Philo *In Falccum* 14; Jos. *Antiq.* XIV, 258 [x.23], though rabbinic sources do not explicitly say it must be by water, cf. SBK, 2:742). But Philippi apparently did not have the quorum and so was without a synagogue" (Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *John-Acts*, vol. 9, EBC, 460).

v. 16 *spirit of divination* Gk. "a spirit of python." "The Greek speaks literally of a 'python spirit.' The python was the symbol of the famous Delphic oracle and represented the god Apollo, who was believed to render predictions of future events. The serpent had thus become a symbol of augury, and anyone who was seen to possess the gift of foretelling the future was described as led by the 'python' (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 351).

v. 16 *fortune-telling* "Greeks and Romans put great stock on augury and divination. No commander would set out on a major military campaign, nor would an emperor make an important decree without first consulting an oracle to see how things might turn out. A slave girl with a clairvoyant gift was thus a veritable gold mine for her owners" (Polhill, 351).

v. 17 *Most High, salvation* "None of this would have been very clear to Gentiles. The term 'God most high' was a common Old Testament term for God, but the same term was equally common in the Gentile world and was particularly applied to Zeus. Neither would 'way of salvation' be immediately clear to a Gentile. The Greco-Roman world was full of 'saviors.' Savior/deliverer, salvation/deliverance were favorite terms. The emperor dubbed himself 'savior' of the people. All of which is to show why Paul finally became irritated with the girl's constant acclamations" (Polhill, 351).

vv. 19, 20 *rulers, magistrates* Or "authorities" (NET), "Roman officials" (GNT). Luke refers to the "rulers" of Philippi as "magistrates." "There were two chief magistrates, called *duoviri* in most Roman colonies but in certain colonies referred to by the honorary title *praetores* (cf. Cicero *De Lege Agraria* 2.93), which translated

into Greek as *stratēgoi* (vv. 20, 22, 35-36, 38). At Philippi the magistrates were given this honorary title. (Longenecker, 463-64).

v. 21 *customs* "Rome permitted the peoples of its colonies to have their own religions but not to proselytize Roman citizens. The civil leaders could not distinguish between Judaism and Christianity (cf. 18:14-15), so they would see the preaching of Paul and Silas as a flagrant infraction of imperial law" (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 400).

v. 26 *earthquake* "Again God miraculously freed His servants, and all the other prisoners, from prison (cf. 5:18-20; 12:3-11) — this time by using 'a great earthquake.' Some ancient writers wrote that earthquakes were not uncommon throughout Macedonia and Greece" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Acts," 2026 ed., 318, soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf).

v. 30, 31 *saved* Assuming Paul understood the jailor's question, his answer indicates the man was not asking about salvation in a secular sense, that is, how his life might be spared. "His life had already been spared. No one had escaped. More likely he asked about his salvation in the full religious sense" (Polhill, 355).

v. 31 *Lord* Paul is not saying that a person must make Jesus the Lord of their life in order to become a Christian — put differently, that a person must submit entirely to Jesus' control of every aspect of their life in order to be saved. "Paul explains that faith in the Lord Jesus will save the jailer and his household. This brief confession expresses the core of what saving response is — to trust in Jesus's salvation authority and work. 'Lord' is the title chosen here to summarize that authority . . . The jailer would have the meaning of such a confession explained to him (v. 32 says as much)" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 542). "Paul went on to explain the gospel more fully to the jailer and his household. The only condition for salvation was trust in Jesus Christ. As elsewhere, references to household members trusting Christ presuppose the ability to do so. Those who were old enough and capable enough to believe did so" (Constable, 326).

v. 37, 38 *Roman citizens* "On the basis of extant evidence, 'it would seem that a Roman citizen was protected against arbitrary flogging without trial, and if accused could refuse to submit to trial by appealing to Caesar' (ibid., pp. 54-55) . . . To beat and imprison a Roman citizen without a trial was a serious offense. So when the magistrates heard that Paul and Silas were citizens, they came to apologize for their illegal actions and to escort them out of prison" (Longenecker, 466-67).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE

As a result of the ministry of Paul and Silas in Philippi, the jailor and his entire household received salvation and the community of believers received vindication in the eyes of the local Roman authorities.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does the author of this passage want me to *know*?
2. What does the author of this passage want me to *do*?
3. What does the author of this passage want me to *be*?



PARENT CONNECTION

Do you have family rules? One family I know has a rule to always lift one another up in word and deed. My best friend put in place a very important final rule after all the other rules — always have fun. Another family I know has a rule that I wish I had put in practice when my kids were little — don't be annoying. (Never fear, I added this one to the family rules as the kids got older. You can still add it to your rules, too!) Let's face it, when kids are annoying, parents get, well, annoyed and sometimes we make rash decisions. Case in point — Saul got annoyed and he went to prison. I guess we can't make that our lesson. It wouldn't look good for us to walk around Walmart screaming, "Quit being annoying or I'll go to prison!" But here's the lesson, the parenting rule, for us — keep a cool head. Your kids are going to be annoying at some point — maybe when you're trying to finish work before a deadline, make a meal, or just have a quiet moment after hours of family fun. They aren't trying to annoy you; they just want your attention. Stop what you're doing. Just put it down; it can wait. Look them in the eyes and give them your undivided attention for five full minutes, maybe even 10. Your time is as precious and valuable to them as it is to you. Before you know it, they'll be driving to school for their senior year, and you'll wish you have five minutes of their undivided attention. We're praying for you!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Acts 16:16-40.

1. Why did Paul and Silas go to prison?
2. What miracle happened while they were in prison?
3. What did Paul do to the jailer and his family once they believed in Christ?

What Do You Think?

If you are saved, does that mean your family is too? What must you do to be saved?

What Do You Do?

Have you believed in Jesus?
Have you been baptized? Have you told others about Jesus?
What is the next step for you in your faith journey?

CORE COMPETENCY: Worship

I celebrate God for who He is and what He has done for me. .

MEMORY VERSE: Isaiah 26:3

"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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OUR MISSION
Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.