

## EPWORTH LEAGUE TOPICS

### Great Stories of the Bible

#### XL. A Prison Experience Acts 16: 19-40.

TOPIC FOR WEEK OF MARCH 15.

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#### DATE.

Probably in A.D. 52, two years after the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), which had accepted the fact that the Gospel was for the Gentiles as well as for the Jewish race, and had also recognized that Paul had been specially commissioned as "The Apostle of the Gentiles." The story is part of the record of Paul's second missionary tour.

#### PLACE.

Philippi, a Macedonian city—the first European city of importance to which Paul had yet come. The story we are to study ought to have special interest because it marks what was probably the beginning of Christianity in Europe, or at least the first definite effort to found a European church, and because also it narrates the first purely Gentile persecution of Paul and his fellow-laborers. They have been persecuted before, but hitherto it has been by Jewish instigation. Here the opponents are Gentiles and the charge laid against the missionaries is a Gentile charge. Apart from this the city of Philippi has other points of interest. It was a Roman "colony." Find out exactly what this means. Any good commentary or Bible dictionary will tell you. Note particularly that it does not have the meaning of our modern word "colony." Find out also about the founding of the city, and its relation to the history of Brutus, Antony and Augustus.

#### THE APOSTOLIC MISSIONARY PARTY.

Paul, Silas (Acts 15: 36 to 40), Timothy (Acts 16: 1 to 3), and Luke, who was picked up at Troas, just before the party left Asia for Europe. (Note in proof of this the change in the narrative from third person plural, "they," to the first person plural, "we," at verse 10 of this chapter.) Did Luke leave Philippi with Paul? (Note change to "they" again at verse 40. See also resumption of "we" or "us" in chapter 20, verse 5.)

#### THE EVENTS LEADING TO THE ARREST.

Tell briefly the story of the women at the "proseucha," or "place where prayer was wont to be made." (What does this tell us about probable numerical strength of the Jews in Philippi?) Tell of the girl with the spirit of divination (Pythones), and her cure. Do not spend time discussing demonic possession. Better describe her with Dr. Lyman Abbott as "a mixture of fraud, clairvoyance, insanity and devil." Note, however, the apostle's attitude towards such testimony as hers. It is the same as that of Jesus Himself. (See Mark 1: vs. 24, 25 and 34.)

#### THE ARREST.

There is a great chance to bring out the fact that there are hypocrites about the church as well as in it, in verses 19 to 21. What was the real complaint of the "masters" against Paul and his

companion, Silas? What was their accusation before the proctors or magistrates? Can you recall other instances of hypocritical charges and disguised motives on the part of the opponents of Christianity in the New Testament? (See Acts 19: 23 to 28, and Mark 14: 57 to 64, in contrast with accusation of Jesus before Pilate in Luke 23: 1 and 2.) Is evil any less effective today in its attacks upon the Church and Christianity? Are the licensed vicars any more honest when they oppose the closing of the bar-room on the ground of its supposed interference with the personal liberty of our citizens?

Note also how old the trick is of raising the race cry to down an opponent. ("These men being Jews," etc.) This is a fine illustration of the anti-Semitism that is still with us and of which both Russia and France have of recent years furnished painful examples.

The charge against Paul and Silas (verse 19) brings out the fact that the early missionaries literally and for the legal view-point took their lives in their hands when they set out to make converts in the Roman Empire. (See the tribute given to Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15: 26.) Compare early missionary risks in Japan. Note the mob justice meted out to Paul and Silas. The magistrates evidently fell in with the anger of the crowd, and acted in an unmagisterial way. According to the usual procedure the magistrates gave condemnation thus: "Summovete, licetores, despoliate, verberate," i.e., Take them, licitors, remove their clothes and beat them." The reading of verse 22 indicates that the magistrates were so utterly beyond themselves in their anger that they usurped part of the functions of the licitors and themselves tore off the garments of Paul and Silas, so that the licitors might without delay lay their rods upon the backs of the condemned men. The intensity of the popular magisterial rage is reflected in the cruel severity of the jailer when he flung the missionaries with their bleeding backs into the inner prison (possibly a damp, filthy, underground cell), and callously made their feet fast in the stocks.

#### THE MIDNIGHT PRAISE AND THE JAILER'S CONVERSION.

What an enthusiastic conviction of the truth of their message; what unflinching loyalty to Christ; these men had to make them willing not only to bear such degradation and suffering for the name of Jesus, but also to fill the midnight hours with their songs of praise. Did Paul think, when he lay in the stocks with cramped limbs and aching back, of the many he had "haled to prison" in the old days? Was his Christian joy now in part due to the fact that he was in some sense atoning for his early persecution of the Church? Would you blame him if he had thought of these sufferings as in part blotting out the past?

We need not pause over the story of the miracle beyond noting the fine Christian spirit the suffering apostle displays in staying the suicidal hand of the brutal jailer by his timely cry. We expected the apostle to do this, but think of how the aroused, alarmed soul of the jailer was affected by that unexpected cry of his prisoner. Probably it as much as any-

thing was responsible for the sudden break-down of evil in him and for his urgent question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Pause over this question. Does a man always know what he means by salvation when he asks it? Did this Philippian jailer know? Look to the answer of Paul. Is it such an answer as you would give? How does it compare with the answer of Peter in Acts 2: 38? How does it compare with the answer of Jesus in Luke 18: 22 to 23? Why should Paul here make no reference to repentance? Note the immediate fruits of conversion in this jailer. Can you find these four: Restoration, or an endeavor to undo past wrong; kindness; consecration, joy? Was this man an made a finished Christian in a moment?

#### AFTERWARDS.

What reasons had the magistrates for ending the order of release? Was the order due to superstitious fear aroused by the earthquake, or were they disturbed because they had acted too hastily and in too great passion, or were they merely desirous of getting rid of Paul and Silas before the disturbance should repeat itself in the city?

What do you think of Paul's protest and demand? Were they in harmony with Christ's teaching? "Resist not the evil"? Could his demand have been more lenient? What would you do if you had been condemned by some judge without fair trial to some punishment beyond the terms of the law? Would you be content with a mere release, or would you demand an abject apology or damages? If the latter, why? When Paul was released, where did he go? What did he go for—to be comforted and cheered, or to comfort and cheer others? See in 2 Cor. 1: 3 to 6, how he looked to his sufferings, and how he related them to others.

### The Delinquent Boy

Citizenship Department for March  
Lesson—Prov. 23: 12-26.

TOPIC FOR CITIZENSHIP MEETING, FOURTH  
WEEK OF MARCH.

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"Juvenile delinquency" is a modern legal term.

**Definition.**—A juvenile delinquent is "any person under sixteen who commits any offence for which he is brought before the courts. It includes, legally, all under sixteen who, by reason of destitution or neglect, are in grave danger of committing such offence." Judge Lindsay says that "delinquency pertains to all children, for all children are delinquent at some time or other. Indeed, in present-day definitions, delinquency may be better described as a state, condition or environment into which the child enters, and which, if continued, may result in such acts or habits in the child as eventually to make of it a criminal.

#### CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY.

Thomas Travis says that "at least 90 per cent., and probably 98 per cent., of first court offences are normal children, not more than one or two per cent. being criminal by nature." The cause of delinquency must be found in the environment and influences surrounding the child's life. Let us note a few of the main causes. We cannot treat all, only the more important.

**Social Causes.**—As our civilization advances our laws become more complex and binding. On the other hand, every

child must have human development to the moral child will have laws that are complex and nurtured, must go to strict discipline, but for that sees the child, some time degree, of mature natural and allowed to of life, then it is found with the our great highest state boys living in liquid teen."

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