

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: January 7, 2018
Lesson Title: "A Changed Family"
Lesson Passage: Acts 16:22-34

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson focuses on one of the most striking breakthroughs in the early expansion of Christianity, the conversion of a pagan jailer who posed the crucial question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain why Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi. (2) Describe the response of these missionaries to their imprisonment. (3) Tell the story of the jailer's conversion.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Use a map to trace the movement of the missionaries from Troas to Neapolis, by way of Samothrace, then to Philippi (Acts 16:11-12). Share this brief description of Philippi, the leading city in that part of Macedonia (Acts 16:12): As a Roman colony, Philippi had a large population of retired military veterans who took pride in Roman citizenship. They wore Roman dress, spoke the Roman language, and adhered to Roman laws. Being a distinctly Gentile city, Philippi had no synagogue. This called for a revision in Paul's usual missionary strategy, since he had typically used synagogues where Greek was spoken as a point of contact for preaching the gospel. In this lesson, we will find Paul proclaiming the gospel in a most unlikely setting.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Review the events leading to the imprisonment of Paul and Silas by the magistrates in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24):* (1) The missionaries were on their way to a place where Jewish people met for prayer, when they came across a slave girl inhabited by an "evil spirit" (v. 16). NOTE: William Barclay observes that the girl "was mad, and the ancient world had a strange respect for mad people because, they said, the gods had taken away their wits in order to put the mind of the gods into them," enabling them to foretell the future. And her owners were profiting from her supposed fortune-telling ability (v. 16). (2) For several days, the girl would follow the missionaries, and shout after them. (*Note what she cried out in v. 17.*) EXPLANATION: Among the polytheistic Gentiles, "The Most High God" probably meant, "the god who is greater than all the others." (3) Paul cast out the girl's evil spirit (16:18), thus depriving her owners of their lucrative source of income (v. 19). (A similar situation arose later in Ephesus, where Paul's teaching threatened the busi-

ness of silversmiths who made and sold images of the pagan goddess Diana (*see Acts 19:24-28*). APPLICATION: Human beings tend to get upset at whatever hits them in the pocketbook. (4) Using an age-old tactic, these unscrupulous men pretended that they were concerned about the public good, and, at the same time, appealed to the Gentile population's prejudice against Jews (*let someone read v. 20*). (5) Paul and Silas barely escaped being lynched by the mob (v. 22). The Roman officials tore their clothes off, had them beaten in public, then threw them into prison (v. 23). The jailer put them into a maximum security cell and fastened their feet in wooden stocks (v. 24). NOTE: Roman stocks were instruments of torture, designed so that the legs of prisoners would be spread apart, thus inflicting severe pain.

2. *As class members examine Acts 16:25-34, use these questions to stimulate discussion of the jailer's conversion:* (1) How did Paul and Silas react to their imprisonment and physical suffering? (2) What happened as they sang and prayed? (3) What effect did this have on the jailer? Why did he try to kill himself? EXPLANATION: In ancient times, a jailer who allowed prisoners to escape would receive their punishment. (*Call attention to the clue in Acts 12:19.*) (4) How would you describe the scene in which the jailer was converted (vv. 29-33)? (5) Who was baptized (v. 33)? NOTE: The word *panoikei*, translated "household" in some versions and "family" in others means literally "whole household." It usually referred to servants as well as to family members. Thus, v. 33 does not necessarily imply infant baptism, as some claim; it is entirely possible, perhaps probable, that there were no infants in the jailer's household.

3. *Share these additional comments:* (1) Though "Believe on the Lord Jesus" (v. 31) is the essence of the Christian's evangelistic appeal, verse 32 implies that further explanation of the meaning of this was needed. (This pagan Gentile probably had never even heard the name of Jesus.) APPLICATION: Evangelism and teaching "the word of the Lord" must always go hand in hand. (2) Paul and Silas had endured public humiliation and a great deal of pain (*see "washed their wounds" v. 33*). But God uses the sufferings of His people to further His purpose in the world. Had these missionaries been left alone to go their way in peace, this "hard core" pagan Gentile might never have been converted.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Remind your class members that we are surrounded daily by people who are asking, in one way or another, "What must I do to be saved?" They don't always use these words, but they have a spiritual hunger. Suggest that Christians ought to be as prepared to give an answer as those first-century missionaries were. Share this example: In a university journalism lab a student was reading wire copy containing a news story about a church, and she asked a Christian student sitting next to her, "What do you think about all this 'God' business?" (*Ask class members to indicate how they might respond in a similar situation.*)