

Fact Sheet for “Be Gone!” Acts 16:16-40

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Worf – “With all due respect... Be gone!... sir.” (Compare with this exorcism)

ESV 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.

“spirit of divination” – lit. “a python spirit” “This concept goes back to the Greek city of Delphi where the god Apollo was believed to be embodied in a python snake. The original priestess at Delphi was purported to be possessed by Apollo and thereby able to predict the future; therefore anyone possessed by the python spirit could foretell coming events.”¹ Could this girl with the python spirit really tell the future??? Listen to what God says about idols in Is 41:21-24; 42:8-9. The answer is, “No!” She had abilities like any fortune teller, palm reader, tarot card reader, or astrologist today. Now she was also demon possessed and therefore had Satan’s perspective on events, but even a demon cannot tell the future accurately.

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.”

Here the truth was proclaimed by a demon-possessed slave girl. Similar events occurred with Jesus (Mk. 1:23-26; Lk. 4:33-35 / Lk. 4:41 / Mk. 3:11 / Mk. 5:7; Lk. 8:28).

18a And this she kept doing for many days. 18b 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.”

Each roman colony was governed by two of magistrates. Shortly before this the Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (See Acts 18:2). Philippi was a Roman colony and the magistrates would have been well informed of this. “These men are Jews” – The civil leaders could not distinguish between Judaism and Christianity (Compare 18:14-15). “Not lawful customs for Romans”... Rome permitted the peoples of its colonies to have their own religions but not to proselytize Roman citizens.

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.

This was one of the three beatings Paul referred to in 2 Cor. 11:25.

Timothy was a half-Gentile (16:1) and Luke was likely a Gentile. This could be why they weren't imprisoned also.

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

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 399.

the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

Compare Peter's experiences (5:18-20; 12:3-11)

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.

"The custody and care of imprisoned persons devolves upon the jailer, who must not think that some abject and vile dependent will be responsible, if a prisoner should, in any way escape, for We desire that he himself shall suffer the same penalty to which the prisoner who escaped is shown to have been liable. When, however, the jailer is necessarily absent from his post, We order that his assistant shall be bound to exercise the same vigilance, and shall be punished with the same severity."²

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?"

He had just been saved physically, now he was asking about spiritually. The jailer must have known about the slave girl. He must also been listening to Paul and Silas praying and singing.

³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

"Believe" + nothing

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."

"police" – lit. "rod holders"

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." ^{37a} 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?"

The magistrates were now in trouble! Born a Roman citizen (22:28) Paul had certain rights, including a public hearing. And no Roman citizen was supposed to be scourged. This likely saved the Philippian church from further harassment.

^{37b} 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.

When life gets tough how do you choose to react? Is your God too small? Was God ever out of control, or sleeping, or off doing something (See Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel)? What spiritual opportunities are you missing out on?

² Code of Justinian 9.4.4.