

Intro

Today you will hear a Tale of Two Women – one a gracious, Jewish woman, the other was a Gentile slave-girl possessed with the spirit of the demon-god Python. You could not have a greater difference between the two and yet God used both to open the doors of Europe for the Gospel of Christ. Listen today and find out how he did it.

02 Phil – A Tale of Two Women

Paul, Silas, and Timothy landed on the shores of Europe. Great eagerness was in their hearts. For days they had been confused by the leading of the Holy Spirit. He was leading in a new, strange way. He had been telling these men, “No, do not preach the Gospel in these areas.”

Why would he say “no”? We may not understand all the reasons, but they obeyed and waited until God’s “no” turned into that greater “yes.” Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia reaching out, pleading for help, and to Macedonia they went.

They found a ship in Troas on the western coast of modern day Turkey and boarded for the two day, 156-mile trip to Neapolis. It would take two days – the first day sailing 70 miles to the island of Samothrace, a small mountainous island in the northeastern Aegean Sea. Here the people worshipped the Cabeiri, a group of fertility deities. One wonders if Paul longed to disembark and proclaim the Gospel there. But he and his companions did not. Their destination was the province of Macedonia. Samothrace would have to wait.¹

On day two they finished their journey, arriving at the harbor city of Neapolis. They disembarked and began the 9-mile walk, uphill to the Roman colony of Philippi. It was in this city, about 90 years before that the fate of Rome was decided. Here, the armies of Octavian and Antony defeated the armies of Brutus and Cassius. The Roman republic was dead. Rome would become an empire with an emperor ruling all and maintaining its sovereignty with brutal force that Paul and Silas would discover in a few days.

When they arrived, Paul searched for a synagogue. Paul always went to the synagogue first because his mission was first to the Jews to tell them the good news that their Messiah had come. But as Paul and his friends explored the city they could find no synagogue. So, Paul and his companions, on the Sabbath, did what Jewish custom and common sense directed. They went to a riverside, a pleasant area where worship would be conducted. If a city did not have ten Jewish men, a synagogue could not be formed.

So Paul and his companions went to the Krenides River on the Sabbath, and there he met a group of Jewish women who had assembled. Paul shared his message with them and one of them, a woman by the name of Lydia responded to his message and was baptized along with her whole household. Lydia

¹ www.amadorbiblestudies.org/Notes/Acts/Acts%2016/Acts%2016_11.doc

was the first convert in Europe and as wonderful as this fact is, I have discovered something even more amazing. Lydia was from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor – the area where God told Paul he could not go! Paul wanted to preach the Gospel in this area but God had better plans. He sent him to Europe and the first person that is saved is an inhabitant from Asia Minor but who is living in Philippi in the province of Macedonia on the continent of Europe. It seems that God was doing two things at one time – opening a new continent for the Gospel and reaching Asia Minor – in an indirect way. God always knows best!

This makes me think of Romans 11:33 which states:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Let me share a story with you that happened to my wife and me when we were in Philippi several years back. We had gone to Greece to speak to a conference of pastors and missionaries. Before the conference Kathy and I went to Philippi and were in the museum enjoying the ancient artifacts. Three other men were there looking at them with us. I had this impression they might be Christians – I don't know why – but I just did and one of the men said something to me about visiting museums in Greece. I brushed it off politely and kept looking at the museum pieces.

A couple of hours later we ran into them again at the place that is memorialized as Lydia's baptismal site. I had this strong impression, "go up and talk to them," and, I'm sorry to say, "I didn't do it." Finally, we were in our car ready to leave, and they were in their van, and they backed their van to talk to us and invited us to dinner that night during which we discovered that they are missionaries to Albania right next door to Greece.

These missionaries were connected to a radio station, and eventually we connected with two Albanian radio stations. They translated many of our messages and stories into Albanian and broadcast them throughout their country and in neighboring Kosovo. God was at work – I was just a little slow on the uptake. We went to this area to minister to missionaries and pastors in their work and took a day to see the sights in Philippi, but God was at work setting something up for the Gospel to spread it into new areas!

In the same way, God was at work with Paul and his team. He directed them to this part of the world, saved a woman from another part of the world, and opened a new continent for the Gospel – all in one.

And so Paul preached the Gospel to these women, and at least one of them was saved with her family – Lydia – and they provided accommodations for Paul and his friends. Everything was going so well! But then, things took a strange and nasty turn. Paul would meet another woman in Philippi but she would not be like Lydia at all.

She was a slave-girl and was possessed with a python spirit associated with the oracle in Delphi. The python was the serpent killed by Apollo in Greek mythology and the prophetesses in Delphi took their name from this serpent. The spirit of this creature would enter the bodies of women and the women would then tell the future and bring great profit to their owners.

The spirit inside her knew who Paul and his companions were. Every day, the girl followed them when they would walk through the town. She would cry out for all to hear, “These men are servants of the Most High God. They are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” Day after day this occurred, and it caused a great commotion in the city which is not what Paul wanted. Yes, he wanted everyone to know that he was bringing the way of salvation to them, but not through the mouth of a demon!

Jesus had faced the same problem. Demons would cry out in his presence, “You, you are the Holy One of God” and Jesus would silence them. The demons were trying to create a riot in Jesus’ time and Paul was facing the same danger. Day after day, as these men were on their way to the place of prayer by the river, the slave-girl with the spirit of fortune telling would cry out these words. But this is not how Paul wanted them to hear the Gospel.

Finally, one day, Paul had had enough. He turned to the girl and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out at that very moment.

The girl was relieved. Her life had been completely dominated by this evil spirit and now she was released. This should have been a moment of joy for all. The bystanders were stunned. They had never seen a display of power like this before. They looked upon Paul with wonder as he tried to explain that the power was not his, but it was the power and authority of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord of all.

But her masters were displeased because now their hope for profit was gone. They had been making a sizable income from her supernatural abilities and those abilities vanished in one moment at the name of Jesus Christ.

And so her owners decided to take revenge and revenge could only come through the Roman authorities. They took Paul and Silas, dragged them before the magistrates and said, ““These men are creating an uproar in our city, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which are not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Roman citizens. They are proclaiming another lord higher than Caesar!”

Remember what I said earlier about Philippi. It was a Roman colony. Many Roman soldiers retired here. It had the eye of the Roman emperor. Order must be maintained at all costs. It was this sense of Roman justice and order that the owners of the girl appealed to, to get back at Paul, for freeing the girl from the spirit. What a lie they told! It was the evil spirit inside the slave-girl that was causing the problems! Paul and Silas were quietly walking to a place of prayer and this girl was the one causing the commotion every day! Paul brought the commotion to an end by casting the spirit out of the girl!

But such is the way of the world. Truth is often suppressed by the lies of men.

These evil men were also tapping into the customs of that day. In those times, all people were expected to follow their ancestral customs and it was forbidden to introduce new religions into areas. These men were saying, “Paul and Silas have interrupted our ancient practices of worship.”

But they did something else, they tapped into the prejudice against Jewish people. Did you notice what the text said, “These men, being Jews have thrown our city into a riot.” The Jews were looked upon as a strange breed because they would not worship their gods and engage in their immoral practices. It was

easy to become upset with Jewish people so these owners of the slave-girl wanted to make sure the authorities knew they were dealing with Jews.

Truth does not always prevail in court systems. A mob formed, the owners of the slave girl stirred up the crowds and Roman magistrates and before any order or any appeal or any trial could take place, they stripped Paul and Silas of their garments, beat them with rods, and threw them into prison where the jailer put their feet in stocks which would cause them to have to lie on their bruised and bloodied backs.

This is a Tale of Two Women – one a gracious, Jewish woman named Lydia who responded to the Gospel, the other, a Gentile slave-girl possessed with the spirit of the demon-god Python. You could not have a greater difference between the two. God used one to open the doors of Europe to the Gospel. And, as we will see in our next message, God would use the other to open more doors for the Gospel in unexpected ways. I hope you will join us then as we continue providing the background to this great epistle we know as the book of Philippians, Ancient Faith for Modern Times.