

Many rich people considered the slave girl to be a milk cow. They did not care about the psychological suffering of the demon-possessed girl, for they were accumulating much money through the devil's lying and craftiness working in her. They flamed up with rage when their source of sordid gain was suddenly interrupted. They seized hold of Paul and Silas and violently dragged them before the authorities, where they accused them of causing mutiny in the city. They did not, of course, tell how the apostles had delivered the possessed girl from her nightmare. Instead, they brought false accusations against them, claiming they were rebellious Jews who had introduced undesirable customs not suitable for honest Romans. They awoke the zeal of the retired soldiers living in Philippi, for the owners of the fortuneteller were known and respected people. So the roaring multitudes began clamorously moving toward the magistrates' court. When the magistrates saw that public opinion was decidedly against the two Jews one of them made a sign to their lictors, whose job was to see that the offenders were punished. They attacked the apostles, tore their clothes, stripped them of their clothing, and beat them severely and violently. They made fun of them before the mocking multitudes.

To be able to later inquire more fully into the activities of these two beaten troublemakers, they were thrown into a narrow, dirty inner cell of the prison, with their backs bleeding and their bodies exhausted and suffering pain. Moreover, they fastened their feet in the stocks, heavy blocks of wood, and handcuffed them with heavy chains to keep them from fleeing. What entered the minds of these poor prisoners? Did they curse the Romans? Did they feel sorrow and regret for freeing the fortuneteller from her demon? Were they afraid of a consequent attack against the newly growing church? No, they had none of these thoughts, for the prisoners were speaking to their Lord in prayer. They blessed their persecutors and with thanksgiving recognized that they had participated in bearing the cross of Christ.

The ploughers had ploughed upon their backs, making long furrows. The apostles, however, did not rest in a hospital, where they would have been treated by gentle nuns. Instead they were fastened with stocks and chains to sit in the dirty cell, where they were surrounded by darkness. They neither cursed, nor wept, but began singing hymns together. They were not satisfied with praying in a low voice, for their hearts were filled with thankfulness and praise. They rejoiced over Christ's triumph in Macedonia following the prohibition by the Holy Spirit to continue in Asia Minor.

The morning of Christ's triumph had begun shining in Europe. Darkness had begun to lift; the name of Him who had been raised from the dead had been proclaimed. There is no obstacle too big to prevent the breaking through and spreading of the kingdom of God on earth. The two suffering apostles sang hymns loudly so that the other prisoners heard them. It was midnight when the songs of praise began reaching heaven. This event in the Acts of the Apostles has been a source of comfort to many who have been tortured and persecuted in the history of the church. With songs of praise ascending at midnight God suddenly answered - not through an angel, or with words of revelation, but through a violent earthquake. It may have seemed to them at first that the devil was wanting to add to their suffering. Stones and dust began falling down on them from the ceiling. Yet immediately all the prison doors were opened and their tormenting chains fell off. In spite of this event, Paul did not use it as an occasion to run away. Other prisoners had been deeply impressed and awed by the apostles' singing. Following God's response to it with the earthquake they dared not move. All may have begun fearing God's judgment upon their sins.