

Paul and Silas Sing in Jail

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Scene Summary

Paul and Silas sing in jail presents the unusual story of two preachers who sing and praise God in the midst of trouble. Scenes include: men accuse Paul and Silas before rulers...Paul and Silas are taken to jail...they are placed in stocks...they sing at midnight...an earthquake loosens stocks and unlocks doors...the jailer fears for his life...Paul tells him no prisoners escaped...jailer becomes a believer...he calls his family to hear the Good news...a soldier brings permission for their release...Paul refuses to go...rulers come to release the men.

Scripture

(Acts 16:19-39 NIV) When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. {20} They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar {21} by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." {22} The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. {23} After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. {24} Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. {25} About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. {26} Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. {27} The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. {28} But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" {29} The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. {30} He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" {31} They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." {32} Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. {33} At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. {34} The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family. {35} When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the

order: "Release those men." {36} The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace." {37} But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." {38} The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. {39} They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.

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Players

- **Narrator** – The play's "catechist" or teacher should be a good reader with a clear voice.
- **Paul** – The central character in this story.
- **Silas** – Traveling companion with Paul.
- **Jailer** – A rough looking person, somewhat mean.
- **Ruler 1, 2** – Very pious, dressed in beautiful robes.
- **Person 1, 2** – Part of the crowd, angry at Paul and Silas.

Special Props

- Normal items from the prop box such as cloaks, veils, robes and headdresses.
- A large set of keys for the jailer.

Script – Paul and Silas Sing in Jail

Person 1: [loudly] Paul and Silas are causing trouble!

Narrator: A crowd was forming around Paul and Silas. The people lied about them.

Person 2: They are Jews and teaching people to break the laws of the Romans.

Person 1: [angry and loud] Beat them!

Person 2: [angry] Put them in prison.

Narrator: The rulers of the city grabbed Paul and Silas. They tore off their clothes and commanded that they be beaten. Soon Paul and Silas' backs were cut and bleeding from being hit again and again.

Ruler 1: [to the jailer] Now put these men in prison. Make sure they do not escape.

Jailer: [nodded, then to himself] I better put them in a basement room. [Leads the prisoners away.]

[Scene change to the prison, part of the jailor's house]

Narrator: The stone floor of the prison was cold. The men's backs ached and their legs were sore from being clamped in the stocks. Each still felt the sting where the whip had broken the skin. Later that night, Paul and Silas could not sleep so they began to pray.

Paul: [to Silas] Let's pray and thank God.

Narrator: Soon the men began to sing and praise God.

Silas: [to God] Praise you, Lord God almighty!

Paul: [singing] Praise the Lord!

Narrator: They knew that they were in prison because they obeyed God. They sang even louder. All of the prisoners could hear them sing, even the jailer.

Narrator: [excited] Suddenly, around midnight, there was a great earthquake. The whole prison shook. Doors rattled off their hinges. Locks were shaken apart. The jailer could hear the doors of the prison open and the chains rattling. He grabbed a lamp and quickly hurried to the prison.

Jailer [excited and worried]: The prisoners are going to escape. The ruler will kill me for letting them get away. I am going to die.

Narrator: The jailer drew his sword and was going to kill himself.

Paul: [calling out] Don't harm yourself. We are all here!

Narrator: The jailer hurried down the prison steps to Paul and Silas. He saw that the door was opened and Paul and Silas standing besides the broken stocks and chains.

Jailer: [holding up a lamp] Oh sirs, your God is great and awesome. Please tell me what I must do to be saved.

Paul: [with confidence] Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! He will forgive your sins.

Jailer: [excited] Come, follow me. Tell my family about the Lord Jesus.

[Scene change to the Jailer's home]

Silas: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and he will forgive your sins.

Narrator: The jailer's wife and children were glad to know about Jesus. They believe what Paul and Silas told them.

Jailer: Let me wash your backs. I will put some oil on the cuts to help them heal.

Narrator: Then Paul and Silas baptized the Jailer and his whole family because they believed in Jesus.

Jailer: [comforting]: You are weak and tired. Eat this food and you will feel better.

Narrator: Later that morning a soldier arrived at the prison.

Soldier: The ruler says that the men, Paul and Silas, may now go. Release these men and set them free.

Paul: But we did not have a trial and everyone saw them beat us. We are Roman citizens. We were beaten without a trial and that is against the Roman law. Tell the rulers of the city to come here and bring us out of prison.

Ruler 2: [worried] We didn't know that they were Roman citizens!

Ruler 1: [concerned] This is terrible. We are in trouble. If the emperor hears about this we could lose our jobs.

Ruler 2: We will do what Paul says.

Ruler 1: [going to the prison, speaking to Paul and Silas] This was all a mistake. We didn't know that you were Roman citizens.

Ruler 2: You are free to go. It might be best if you left the city.

Narrator: Paul and Silas went to tell their friends goodbye.

The End

Supplemental Information

Paul picked Silas to be his companion on his second missionary journey. Silas was a leading member of the church at Jerusalem. He was also a Roman citizen, as was Paul. When the two men reached Philippi they found that there were not enough Jewish men to have a synagogue. It normally took at least ten Jewish families to form a synagogue. Paul and Silas found a group of women that met outside the city, by a river, each day for worship and prayer.

Paul and Silas preached to those that assembled outside the city. A demon possessed slave girl that kept shouting followed them, “These men are servants of the most High God.” This went on for several days. Finally, Paul turned to the slave girl and cast out the demon. The girl became normal. Her masters had been charging the superstitious people to hear her predictions. Now, this easy income was gone and they blamed Paul and Silas.

They were outraged. In their anger, they took Paul and Silas to the city rulers. They did not have a case against the men, so they made one up. They said that Paul and Silas were causing chaos in the city. This, of course was not true. They also said that the men were teaching customs that Romans could not accept. This was somewhat true since the Roman law did not permit the introduction of foreign religions. The Romans did not enforce the law as far as the Jewish religion is concerned.

The girl’s master incited the crowd when they claimed that these strangers, Jews, were breaking Roman law. The magistrates ordered that the men be beaten and taken to prison. They admonished the jailer to not let them escape. The jailer put them into an inner prison. Probably this was a lower room with no windows or light. Such rooms were normally cold, dark and unsanitary. The jailer placed the men’s feet in stocks. These were made of two boards with holes for feet. When clamped together, the prisoner could not move their feet and legs. The holes were far apart, so that legs were painfully stretched. Some stocks also had holes for hands and head.

When the jailer was awakened by the earthquake and saw that the prison doors were opened, he was ready to commit suicide. He was responsible for the prisoners. If even one got away, he knew that he was in trouble. But Paul saved his life. It may seem strange that Paul refused to leave the prison when his release came. Paul knew that the magistrates had broken two Roman laws. Both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and that entitled them to a fair trial. There had been no trial; therefore any punishment was not lawful, yet they had been beaten in public. Paul now insisted that the magistrates publicly declare their innocence. This alarmed the magistrates. They knew if this information got back to the emperor in Rome, their positions would be in jeopardy.

Stocks

To make sure that a criminal did not get away, and also to punish them, Roman jailers used stocks. Stocks were two boards hinged together with holes for feet, hands and head.

Sometimes only the feet were placed in stocks as in the case of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail. The holes were placed far apart so that the legs were spread wide. This was very uncomfortable position. Paul and Silas probably sat on the damp, cold stone floor of the prison. The Romans scourged or beat their prisoners. Leather strips, with bits of bone or metal fastened to them, were attached to a handle. The bone or metal cut the person's flesh as they were beaten.