

## **HOW CAN THEY BELIEVE** **IF THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE?<sup>1</sup>**

### **Scripture Reading:**

*Acts 16:16-34*, “Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup>This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup>And this she did for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour.

<sup>19</sup>But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. <sup>20</sup>And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; <sup>21</sup>and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.”

<sup>22</sup>Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup>And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup>Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup>But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup>Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.

<sup>27</sup>And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

<sup>28</sup>But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

<sup>29</sup>Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup>And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

<sup>31</sup>So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

<sup>32</sup>Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

<sup>33</sup>And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. <sup>34</sup>Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

### **Introduction:**

1. I was sitting at a teacher’s desk at school #164 in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk-45. I had just finished teaching a Bible class during a regular school day. It was between class periods. I had been invited to return the next day to teach Bible in another teacher’s class.
2. I heard one teacher ask another in English, “Are your students believers?” The other teacher replied, “No, I think not. How can they believe if they don’t know what to believe?” They had no Bibles to read and no one had ever told them about Jesus.
3. That conversation made me think of a similar situation in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. When the Philippian jailer had asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” he was told, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31, NASV). This simple story is often sincerely misunderstood by many.

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4. To help us understand this passage, we seek answers to four simple questions.
  - a. What did the jailer mean when he asked, “What must I do to be saved?”
  - b. What did Paul and Silas say to the jailer?
  - c. Why should the jailer believe Paul and Silas?
  - d. Why do some people misunderstand this passage?

**I. What Did The Jailer Mean When He Asked, “What Must I Do To Be Saved?”** To answer, we ask two additional questions, viz. . . .

1. What would Paul have thought the jailer already knew? and
2. What would Paul have thought the jailer wanted to know?

**A. What Would Paul Have Thought The Jailer Already Knew?**

1. The jailer probably knew that Paul had cast a spirit of divination out of the slave girl who had repeatedly cried about Paul and those with him that “these man are bond servants of the most high God who are proclaiming the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17, NASV).
2. The jailer no doubt knew that Paul and Silas had been dragged before the chief magistrates, falsely accused, beaten, and put into jail without trial (See Acts 16:19-23).
3. He also knew that the earthquake, that had awakened him from sleep, was over, and that the prisoners had not escaped, although all the doors were opened and every one’s chains were unfastened (See Acts 16:26-29).
4. The jailer knew he did not need salvation from the earthquake, nor from the consequences of escaped prisoners.
5. The jailer knew Paul and Silas were not evil men, or they would have let him kill himself and tried to escape along with other prisoners.

**B. What Would Paul Have Thought The Jailer Wanted To Know?**

1. Paul would have realized that the jailer thought Paul had a message of salvation, on account of the slave girl having broadcast it (See Acts 16:17), but that the jailer did not know what that message was.
2. Paul would have known that the jailer wanted to know the content of the message of salvation from the most high God.

**II. What Did Paul and Silas Say To The Jailer?**

**A. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house.”** (Acts 16:30)

**B. “And they spoke to him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.”** (Acts 16:31)

1. What precisely did they say?
  - a. While we do not know precisely because the text does not say we know that what they had to say could be told within an hour (Acts 16:33).<sup>2</sup>
  - b. We can imagine what they said because we know what was said on similar occasions by apostles and others who spoke by the inspiration of God.

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<sup>2</sup>Acts 16:33, And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

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- 1) They talked about Jesus (Acts 2:22; 3:13; 4:2; 8:35)<sup>3</sup>
  - a) That he went about doing good (Acts 10:36-38)<sup>4</sup>
  - b) That he taught the people the word of God (John 12:49; 14:10; 17:8)<sup>5</sup>
  - c) That he performed many signs, wonders and miracles John 3:2; Acts 2:22; 10:38, in order to confirm that his message was from God (Hebrews 2:4)<sup>6</sup>
  - d) And that he was indeed the Son of God (Acts 3:13).<sup>7</sup>
- 2) They no doubt also declared that the Jewish authorities had killed Jesus (Acts 2:23; 13:27-28)<sup>8</sup>
  - a) because they were envious of him (Matthew 27:18)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>**Acts 2:22**, Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know;” **Acts 3:13-15**, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.” **Acts 4:1-2**, Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. **Acts 8:35**, Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

<sup>4</sup>**Acts 10:36-38**, “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ; He is Lord of all; that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

<sup>5</sup>**John 12:49**, “For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. **John 14:10**, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. **John 17:8**, “For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

<sup>6</sup>**John 3:2**, This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” **Acts 2:22**, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know; **See also Acts 10:38 above. Hebrews 2:4**, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

<sup>7</sup>**Acts 3:13**, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

<sup>8</sup>**Acts 2:23**, “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; **Acts 13:27-28**, “For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death”

<sup>9</sup>**Matthew 27:18**, For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

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- b) but that God had raised him from the dead (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 13:30, 33, 37; 17:31; 26:8).<sup>10</sup>
- 3) Paul and Silas no doubt also spoke of the day of judgment (Acts 17:31; 24:25),<sup>11</sup>
- 4) They probably said that Jesus would judge all men
  - a) according to their beliefs (John 3:16, 18; 5:24; 6:40; 20:31)<sup>12</sup> and
  - b) according to their deeds (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 17:31; 24:25).<sup>13</sup>
- 5) They surely told the jailer that those who believed and were immersed in water would be saved, and that those who did not believe would be condemned (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>**Acts 2:32**, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.” **Acts 3:15**, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. **Acts 13:30, 33, 37**, But God raised Him from the dead...<sup>33</sup>God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’...<sup>37</sup>but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. **Acts 17:31**, He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. **Acts 26:8**, Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

<sup>11</sup>**Acts 17:31**, He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. **Acts 24:25**, Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.”

<sup>12</sup>**John 3:16, 18**, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life...<sup>18</sup>He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **John 5:24**, Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. **John 6:40**, And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. **John 20:31**, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

<sup>13</sup>**Read Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29**, Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. **See also Acts 17:31; Acts 24:25 above.**

<sup>14</sup>**Matthew 28:18-20**, And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” **Mark 16:15-16**, And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” **Acts 2:38**, Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **Acts 22:16** ‘And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’

### III. Why Should The Jailer Believe Paul and Silas?

- A. While many individuals are motivated today to believe and obey because they can read the Bible and believe it to be the inspired word of God because of its proven worth, the jailer had no written word.
- B. However, we know the word was confirmed to him by the fact that Paul had already worked the miracle of discharging the spirit of divination from the slave girl.
- C. The jailer had every reason to believe the message told to him by Paul and Silas was from God, and no reason to doubt it.

### IV. Why Do Some People Misunderstand This Passage?

- A. When some people today declare that belief without immersion is all that is necessary for salvation, they generally do not consider two things.
  - 1. First, that when Paul told the jailer to believe, the jailer did not then know what to believe until Paul and Silas later taught him.
  - 2. Second, that belief prompts action.
    - a. **Illustration:** When I was a boy, living on a farm, if I had exclaimed, “Dad, there’s a snake in the chicken house,” and if my Dad didn’t make some immediate effort to kill the snake, then it would have been reasonable for me to have thought that Dad didn’t believe me.
    - b. **Application:** So also, Paul did not need to answer the jailer’s question in his initial reply by saying that he should “believe and be immersed” because . . .
      - 1) If the jailer knew what to believe, and if he then did believe he would be immersed!
      - 2) If the jailer had not been willing to be immersed, Paul and Silas would surely have questioned whether he had in fact believed, even if he had said he did!
- B. Whenever some people today declare that belief without immersion is all that is necessary for salvation...
  - 1. They may have been blinded by false teaching that does not want to recognize that the sinner must act as well as think.
  - 2. Just as Elymas desired to hinder Sergius Paulus from accepting the message of Saul and Barnabas (Acts 13:7-12), so also some today are hindered by false teaching regarding obedience<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>*Acts 13:6-12*, Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus,<sup>7</sup> who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup>But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup>Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup>and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? <sup>11</sup>“And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup>Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

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### Conclusion:

1. I'm convinced there are millions of people in this world (in Russia, in the United States, and also in other countries) who do not believe simply because they do not know God's message of salvation and therefore do not know what to believe.
2. But how can they believe unless we teach (Romans 10:14-15). We must first teach them what to believe, immerse them, and then further teach them the word of God (Matthew 28:18-20).<sup>16</sup>
3. Now, that you have heard what to believe, do you believe? And if so, have you acted on that belief by being immersed?

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<sup>16</sup>**Romans 10:14-15**, How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things! *See also Matthew 28:18-20 above.*