



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Record of the Beginning of Jesus' Reign

Chapter Sixteen

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 15 of Acts left off as Paul was beginning his second missionary journey into Asia Minor. On his first journey Paul took Barnabas with him. Together they delivered to many of their Israelite brethren scattered throughout that part of the world the good news of Christ's Reign.

Later, after returning home to Antioch, they found that certain unfounded men from Jerusalem were trying to teach false doctrine to the brethren at Antioch. They were proclaiming that salvation had to be acquired by performing rituals like circumcision.

Paul knew that salvation had resulted from God's gracious intervention, through Christ ... and not due to religious works or rituals. So, Paul and Barnabas, and certain others, thought it best to go to Jerusalem and meet with the elders in the ecclesia to discuss this problem. When they had resolved the problem they determined that Paul and Barnabas should carry letters of instruction from them to the brethren both in Antioch and in the newly formed ecclesias in Asia Minor, to reconfirm the truths Paul had given them at first, and make sure the false teachings were laid to rest.

The problem that faced Israelites in Jerusalem, in Antioch, and elsewhere was NOT that they were neglecting rituals and ceremonies. Rather, the problem was that they had absorbed the culture of Babylon. Babylon had its own mixture of rituals and customs ... some of which mimicked and perverted certain rituals of ancient Israel. Thus, when the gospel was delivered first in Jerusalem, Israelites learned that they had adopted much error from the nations around them, and more error from their captivity in Persia, and even more error from Babylon's daughter, Jerusalem.

Now certain men from Jerusalem were trying to re-insinuate some of those old Judean perversions into the ecclesias in Antioch and in Asia Minor. Paul informed the apostles in the Jerusalem ecclesia and together they moved to defend Christ's work by denouncing these errors.

The false teachers from Jerusalem didn't give up easily. They argued against Paul and his colleagues who were declaring the good news of Christ's Kingship. It happened time and again during his journeys as evidenced by a subsequent event in Thessalonica. There a man named Jason had befriended Paul, and both were met by religious prejudice and political hostility fomented by Judeans:

5. But the Judeans became envious and took unto themselves some wicked men among the market-place idlers, and formed a mob, and were setting the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the mob.

6. But when they didn't find them they dragged Jason and certain brethren to the political

NOTE: This chapter brings us to some exciting events, controversial history, and some of the most important doctrine in the Bible – concerning the nature of salvation.

Bible students may be surprised to find themselves thinking about Paul and Silas as "convicts," and of Jesus helping them make a prison break.

rulers, crying, *These (Paul & Silas) that subvert our world are also among us;*

7. *Whom Jason has welcomed; and these all are opposing the policies of Caesar, saying there is a different king, Jesus.*

8. *And they agitated the mob and the city rulers who heard these things.*

Acts 17:5-8

The “market place” refers not to a food store, but to the town center for public discussion – generally occupied by “idlers” engaged in religious and political gossip and propaganda (like a church group). It was no doubt

arranged and monitored by politicians and preachers.

This passage exemplifies the essence of the book of Acts. The good news of Christ’s Kingship was typically opposed by the political and religious establishment.

So, Paul took Silas with him, and Barnabas took Mark, and the two teams left from Antioch, Syria on a second excursion into Asia Minor. This time they would venture beyond Asia Minor as far as some areas of Europe.

ACTS 16: 1,2 DEFINING “JUDEAN” AND “GREEK”

Then he (Paul) arrived in Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a faithful Judean woman, but his father was Greek:

About whom the brethren at Lystra and Iconium gave witness.

Incourage Bible students to do word studies. I am happy to recommend materials to help with word studies. It is necessary because the modern use of a word may be different from the ancient meaning, and can lead you to wrongly interpret a passage of Scripture.

By knowing what the words actually meant at the time and context in which they were penned we can understand the actual intent of the writers. We don’t have to depend on “versions” and translators that are often incorrect.

But people who are strictly dependent on the translators have a great handicap. People who must rely upon “versions” of the Bible (like the King James Version, or the New International Version) with the translators’ supplied words that replace the original true words, find that the verses just don’t make sense.

As an example, the KJV translates verse one to read “...*the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a*

Greek.” This wording is deceptive because it suggests that Timothy was the product of a mixed marriage; the KJV says his mother was a “Jewess” and his father a Greek. A person who doesn’t do word studies could come away with the assumption that Timothy was a racial half-breed: half Jew and half Greek, assuming that two separate races were involved.

But that would be incorrect. The New Testament Greek text actually describes the woman as a “Judean,” which refers to nationality, not her race. However, the churches and the translators maintain that the word “Jew” refers to a race of people.

The word “Jew” (Jewess) was not in the original text. The actual word was “Judean.”

In this case “Judean” refers to the culture, nationality and/or language of Timothy’s mother. It indicates that she was from Judea. But it does not imply race. “Judean” was a national or cultural term ... not a racial term. If it had said “Israelite” or “Hebrew” it would have indicated race.

Timothy’s father was identified as

a Greek. Likewise, the term “Greek” (“Hellen”) is like the term “Judean” in that it implies culture, nationality or language ... not race. And that simply means that his father was of Greek culture, or spoke the Greek language, or was a Greek citizen.

These terms refer to one’s place of birth, residence or culture ... not race.

The fact is, both his mother and his father were of the same race: they were both Hebrews. Many Greeks (Hellenists) were racial Hebrews (Israelites). They spoke Greek and lived in Greek lands and Greek culture. By the same token, some of the Judeans were racial Hebrews (Israelites) as well, albeit most were not. Some were Edomites, Canaanites, Persians, etc. Some Judeans were Hebrews, and some Greeks were Hebrews ... but many were not. It’s important to understand this issue of race since it has become so confused and divisive.

QUESTION: If the term “Judean” implies culture and language, then why did they change it to “Jew” and use it in reference to race in today’s society? How can we be sure?

ACTS 16:3 PAUL & TIMOTHY OVERCOME A RELIGIOUS PREJUDICE

Paul requested that he (Timothy) accompany him; and taking him he circumcised him on account of the Judeans who were in those areas: for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

AT first, this sounds like a contradiction to the points we learned in chapter 15. We found that the requirement for circumcision had been gone a long time. And yet the first thing Paul does, when he decides to take Timothy with him on this journey, is have him circumcised. He says he did it because of the Judeans.

Now this sounds a little strange at first. It requires background work to understand what happened. Why would Timothy need to be circumcised in order to go with Paul and help him preach the gospel in Asia Minor?

From our previous studies we know that circumcision had absolutely nothing to do with Timothy's acceptability with Christ. Christ had already accepted him. His faith was already known and confirmed by the disciples. He was accepted not only as a Christian, but as a leader among the disciples. So, this action had nothing to do with Timothy being accepted by Christ. Instead, it had to do with his image among the Judeans who were still confused by Babylonian ritual.

Paul was going to the Hebrews (Israelites) in the nations, and many of them were still keeping Babylonian/Judean customs. But Christ's message was urgent! Paul needed to inform and update the brethren scattered throughout the nations. They needed to know that Paul and Timothy both had once been in the Judean culture.

The Greeks did not practice circumcision. The Judeans did. If the Judeans knew that Timothy's father was a Greek they would suspect he wasn't circumcised, and therefore they would be prejudiced against his message. Paul and Timothy would be rejected before they had a chance to speak. Their message would not be

heard. Then their efforts would have been for nothing.

Therefore, Timothy was circumcised in order to overcome local prejudice against outsiders. Paul and Timothy had to overcome the customs barrier in the minds of these lost brethren so they would at least hear the message.

By the way, regarding the conundrum that has puzzled many Bible students regarding certain public aspects of circumcision – namely, in this case, how the Judeans in Asia Minor would know whether or not Timothy (or anyone for that matter) was circumcised – a quick comment is in order. Given the personal nature of the ritual and the mark, the problem of verification is obvious. It was not like a hair style or mode of dress which could be displayed openly. How, then, could this discrete mark be known publicly?

The answer is that circumcisions were recorded and kept on file in the synagogues – like records of births, deaths, and bar mitzvahs – for verification to branch synagogues outside Judea. The status was on file and could be carried like a certificate. Judeans were noted for keeping records on their people.

But going back to Paul ... did he do the right thing by arranging Timothy's circumcision? Logically, one might say that this was not the best strategy for Paul to use. We understand Paul's motive, but some have questioned his method.

This strategy, in principle, was not unlike the disciples attending a Judean synagogues – as at Pentecost, Judean Sabbaths, or feast days. Jesus and his disciples did this on occasion to make contact with lost sheep of Israel.

As you recall, in Paul's first missionary journey, every time he went into a new city or community

the first places he would search for lost Israelites was usually among the Judeans. He'd go into the synagogues, or he'd go into the communities where the Judeans congregated because he knew there were Israelites among them. He was calling them out of the synagogue/church system and into the light of Christ's Reign.

20. And to the Judean I became as a Judean that I might gain Judeans; to them that are under a law, as under a law, that I might gain them that are under a law;

21. To them that are with no law, as with no law, (not as lawless to God, but lawful in Christ,) that I might gain them that are with no law.

22. To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

1 Corinthians 9:20-22

There were Israelite Judeans, and non-Israelite Judeans. The same is true of the Greeks. Some of them were Israelite and some of them were not. The important point is that Israelites were among them ... and they needed to hear Paul's message. Paul's mission was to the lost and scattered Israelites in the nations ... in a Greek and Roman world.

QUESTION: Doesn't Paul's act of having Timothy circumcised show that Paul was trying to soft sell Jewish ritual?

Wasn't Paul practicing "Situation Ethics"?

ACTS 16:4-5 GOOD LEADERSHIP CONFIRMS FAITH

And as they went through the cities, they delivered to their care the doctrines that were decided by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

And so the ecclesias were confirmed in the faith, and were growing in number daily.

THE “doctrines” (in verse four) were those statements in the letters sent from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. You’ll remember in chapter 15 that the Jerusalem ecclesias had sent letters to admonish the ecclesias in Antioch and in Asia Minor, instructing them to uphold cleanliness, morality and common sense ... and to avoid Babylonian rituals and beliefs. Because of these letters delivered by the apostles, the new ecclesias were confirmed and strengthened in truth and in faith.

By looking at the KJV translation we can see that the problem of creeping confusion and perversion is still with us. The KJV renders the phrase, “... *they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained* ...”. “Decrees that were ordained”? That insinuates something very different from the actual wording: “... *doctrines that were decided.*”

A “doctrine” is only a teaching. A “decree” is an edict; a command from a ruler. The KJV translators have insinuated that the apostles and elders in Jerusalem were making edicts, issuing commands, and making laws. That was the way King James and the Church of England wanted their subjects to think of the apostles – as lawmakers and tyrants. Thus, the King James Version teaches its readers that issuing of edicts and legislating laws were God-ordained duties of the apostles, the church leaders and national rulers.

But Paul did not deliver edicts. He delivered letters containing opinions and admonition. The new ecclesias needed advice – not tyranny. They were new in the faith and still had a lot to learn. Acts 15 explained that well.

This is important to remember today. All too often new converts are expected to understand all and conform to a party line before they can be considered brethren. This is unrealistic and wrong. Everyone is in the process of learning – or should be. Learning results in growth, and growth causes change. None of us are above learning and change.

ACTS 16:6-15 JESUS DIRECTS HIS TROOPS

But they went through Phrygia and the Galatian country, being led by the holy spirit to not speak the word in Asia.

And having come down to Mysia, they would have gone

into Bithynia, but the spirit of Jesus did not permit them.

So, passing by Mysia they came down to Troas.

And during the night a vision

appeared to Paul. A Macedonian man was standing, entreating him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, assuming that God had called us to declare the gospel to them.

Therefore having put out from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day to Neapolis;

And from there to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony; and we spent some days in this city.

And on the day of the sabbaths we went outside the gate beside a river where seemed to be a place of prayer; and we sat down, and were speaking to the women who had assembled.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple (cloth), of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to heed the things being spoken by Paul.

And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay in my house. And she persuaded us.

LEARNING Bible idioms and manners of expression is essential. In verse six it says they were “*led by the holy spirit*” to not preach the word in Asia. Then in verse seven, when they tried to go into Bithynia, “*the spirit of Jesus did not permit them.*” These expressions could give the wrong impression to a churchgoer who doesn’t know what a “spirit” is. These “spirits” were not invisible beings who literally spoke to them and told them they couldn’t go there.

Rather, the expression meant that they were motivated based upon their understanding of Jesus’ wishes. They felt they should continue on and not stop or spend time there in Asia and Bithynia. They might have asked themselves, “What would Jesus want us to do?” So they judged it preferable to sow the seed of faith further west.

Or, it could have been that time was of the essence, and they had to move on to a more pressing need.

The apostles, therefore, passed on to Troas and then to Macedonia.

In verse 9 Paul saw, in a vision, a man saying, “*Come over into Macedonia and help us.*” Macedonia was just north of Greece. That area today is called Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

Sensing that this vision was instruction from Jesus, they felt they should hurry and get to Macedonia. Jesus sometimes leads by giving visions to people – but not always.

So, they left Troas, and sailed across the Aegean Sea to the island of Samothrace, and then to Macedonia and the

city of “Neapolis,” which, in Greek, means “new city.” When they eventually reached Philippi they learned why the Lord had urged them on.

After being there a few days, the disciples went outside the city to a riverside where a group of women gathered for prayer. There, the disciples began sharing the message with these women, and soon a woman named Lydia, who sold purple cloth, became interested in what they were saying. The Lord had led them to someone with ears to hear the Gospel of Christ’s Reign.

Lydia and all her household were baptized, and she offered hospitality to these messengers of God to have them stay at her home. Moreover, she allowed them to work out of her house for some time.

QUESTION: Apparently, Paul and his colleagues sought out fellow Israelites on their missionary journeys. Do you think they shared the gospel with non-Israelites as well like many of the mainline churches do today by sending missionaries to Africa and other third-world countries?

ACTS 16:16-19 PAUL EXPOSES A FORTUNE-TELLER SCAM

And as we went to the prayer it happened that a certain servant girl with the spirit of python, and who worked much profit for her masters, met us.

The girl followed Paul and us, and was crying out, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, who are announcing to you the way of salvation.

And she did this many days. But Paul, having tired, turned upon the spirit, saying, I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very hour.

But when her masters saw that the hope of their profit had come out, they caught Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the marketplace to the rulers,

THE King James Version translators inserted the term “*possessed*” although that word is not in the Greek text. The church world loves its superstition about “demon possession,” and the translators gladly accommodate them by inserting the term. However, the Greek text only says “*having*” (“*a servant girl having a spirit ...*”).

When you correctly understand that a “spirit” is not an invisible entity, but rather a disposition or motive, then you can understand that the author was describing this girl’s disposition or motive.

Her motive was described as “python” ... a strange term.

The word “python” in Greek mythology is the name of the Pythian serpent or dragon that dwelt in the region of Pytho and was said to have guarded the renowned Oracle at

Delphi: a diviner of great reputation among the superstitious Greeks and Romans. Divining, also called soothsaying or fortune telling, was popular and profitable. People would travel from miles to have their fortunes told by the Oracle who's powers were associated with the serpent "Python."

This servant girl had a "*spirit of python*," meaning that her motive (i.e., her spirit) was to promote superstitions that were associated with the land of Pytho and the Oracle at Delphi: i.e., fortune telling and divination.

Verse 16 further says that this girl was making profit for her masters through her activities as a diviner. She was selling her "talents" to local superstitious people who paid her to "see the future" or "divine" and cure problems in their lives. She was conning the locals, possibly putting on shows, seances or attractions of that sort for which gullible people will pay good money.

A modern-day version of this scenario can be seen on television, with programs like "Psychic Hot Line," where viewers are enticed to call in to a panel of so-called "psychics" (usually women) who claim to be diviners. People call them to get personal advice about their own lives. Superstitious callers imagine that some stranger at the end of a phone line can somehow supernaturally see into their minds and tell their futures. Of course, it costs to get your fortune told, and just as in Paul's day, soothsayers today continue to make good profits.

Now, unless you know how con artists operate, it may seem strange that this misguided fortuneteller girl would appear to be promoting Paul and his associates by stating "*these men are the servants of the most high God, who are announcing to you the way of salvation.*" Why would she

say something like that if her motives were only profit? The reason is because she was working a "confidence scheme" and her goal was not to argue theology, but to gain the confidence of her potential victims who were watching her.

Here is a breakdown of how her attempted scam may have unfolded. Paul and his friends were going through the land of Philippi, preaching the gospel, witnessing Christ's works, and making an impression on the people. Paul was accomplishing good things by teaching and propagating the Gospel of Christ's Kingship and establishing ecclesias. The fortuneteller sees the impact Paul's group was having on the public, and realizes the possible marketing potential available to her if

nothing to do with ... and try to insinuate publicly that they are associated with it. Preachers, especially, are noted for doing this. They see some event happening among the people, and they recognize an opportunity to make an impression and gain notoriety and power. So they strike a similar pose, claim to be in unison with it, and say, "Yes, this was my idea. God gave it to me and sent me here to be the leader of all this."

Actually, when you think about it, fortunetellers and preachers are very similar. They're both con artists who try to get the confidence of the people in order to take advantage of them. In this case the servant girl, a proficient con girl, was attempting to gain the people's confidence by

suggesting that she had some connection with Paul and his notable work.

This servant girl played her scam for many days as it says in verse 18. Paul wasn't fooled by what she was doing, and he didn't appreciate it although he tolerated it for a

LUKE: PAUL'S JOURNALIST

It is thought that Luke was traveling in Paul's entourage, recording the experiences as they occurred. One piece of evidence is the phrasing in verse 17. The writer is talking about "Paul and us," as he refers to Paul and those who followed with him. Now, to the best of our understanding, Luke was the one who penned the book of Acts. So, from this phrasing, we can deduce that Luke was chronicling the events of the travels of Paul on this trip.

she can make it appear that she had some secret insight into the works that Paul was doing. She thinks to herself, "This looks like a pretty good thing. Maybe I can get a piece of the action and make some profit for myself." So, she insinuates herself in Paul's company and declares the obvious ("*these men are the servants of God ...*"), hoping to impress some of the simple-minded people into thinking that she had something to do with it. She did this to co-opt the success of Paul and use it to her own advantage.

You've probably seen preachers, politicians, actors, and other opportunists take advantage of a situation in this same way. They'll try to get close to something successful ... something that they had

while.

Finally, Paul had about all he could take. He got tired of her scam. The KJV says he "*turned and said to the spirit*" ... as if the spirit was a person. This choice of wording reflects the idolatry of the churches, preachers and translators who want this to read the wrong way.

Understand that there are NO invisible spirit entities flying around; no invisible "demons." That kind of belief system is foreign; it has NO basis in truth! We dealt with this, and we defined "spirit," in Chapter One. Please keep that in mind while studying this chapter. No matter how much the KJV translators try to make it appear as if the spirit was a living entity that had somehow gone inside the girl's body and was controlling

her like a marionette, the only thing happening was that this fortuneteller girl had a deceptive motive/disposition that upset Paul. The girl's spirit (motive) was responsible for her actions; she was not the helpless victim of a "possessing" invisible entity that had invaded her.

And so, Paul, tiring of the girl's con game, confronted her directly and spoke to her attitude (her motive). He told her to stop trying to take advantage of the people and using him in her con game.

Please reread verse 18 at the beginning of this section and compare it to the KJV. Notice that the word connected with "spirit" is "IT," not "HE" (as in the KJV). That which came out was an "it," not a "he." The spirit was a thing, not an entity. Paul turned and addressed the motives of the servant girl, exposed them, and commanded her to stop. In other words, Paul rebuked and corrected the girl's evil motives, and she repented of her divining and conning.

When she repented of her evil ways her masters viewed it as a damage to their business. To them, these outsiders tampered with their property. The girl was their servant and they figured she was their property. Therefore they accused Paul of damaging them for having altered the girl ... their source of revenue. Paul had dissuaded her from being a fortuneteller, and turned her into a normal girl, maybe even a Christian.

There's no telling how much profit her masters were raking in because of this girl. They were

manipulators and con men operating a sideshow. The hired girl had been doing a good job bringing in money up to this point.

There are a lot of angles one can use to increase profits from fortune telling. They may have been selling idols. They may have been selling magic potions. They may have even been promoting pyramid marketing schemes to make money. But suddenly after Paul confronted her, she lost her evil spirit (she repented) and no longer wanted to do the work for her masters. In the eyes of her evil masters she had become defective merchandise.

Paul had ruined their business. Her masters assessed the damage and said, "Hey, this girl's no good to us now. She won't play our con game for us; she won't lie; she won't manipulate; she won't con the people any more. She's lost her value." From a purely legal point of view they had a point. Their property (the girl) had been changed in such a way that she was of no value to them.

We can easily relate this scenario in Acts to our present day. You can see this same attitude (or "evil spirit") at work today in advertising, in the courts, and in capitalistic marketing.

Advertising agencies pay actors and actresses big bucks to appear on television or radio and deceive their audiences. It happens all hours of the day. They try to convince you to go and buy things that are not what they claim, and that you don't really need.

Advertisers are con men. The measure of the success of an

advertiser is how well he can get the confidence of the viewers. And so, if he can get you to go into some store, or to some car lot, and spend your money because you believe his lies – as the masters of this girl did by using the her to sell divination – then they are successful.

This evil spirit (evil motive) not only exists in the advertising industry, but the same lying, stealing, manipulating and conning goes on in the churches and in the halls of Congress ... all the time! It's a spirit that's evil and hurtful, and it needs to be cast out of our lives!

QUESTION: Is it possible that your explanation of the word "python" may explain other "serpents" in Scripture as well? Since the serpent in the Garden of Eden represented evil motive, could this also explain what is intended by the term "serpent" and "dragon" in Revelation 12, 13 & 20, as well as Jesus' "tempter" in Mtt. 4?

ACTS 16:20-24 THE ILLEGAL GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Judeans, are troubling our city,

And they are publishing customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to accept or to observe.

And the crowd rose up together against them: and the magistrates ripped off their clothes, and commanded to beat them with rods.

And having laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them secure:

Who, having received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison, and secured their feet in the stocks.

NOTICE that in verse 20 the girl's masters apparently assumed that Paul & company were Judeans ... possibly because of their appearance, the fact that they obviously were not Romans, and the fact that they went to the synagogues to call out the lost sheep. But we know from our earlier studies that Paul and Silas were actually Galileans (not Judeans). Later on in this chapter we will discover that they were also Roman citizens. Furthermore, Timothy wasn't from either Judea or Galilee. He was from Lystra. Nonetheless, the magistrates accused them of stirring up trouble.

Paul and Silas were brought before the town rulers in the marketplace. Although the original complaint was for civil damages to their property (their business), they opted instead to charge them with heresy and sedition. The Macedonian culture was obviously religious ... reflected in their civil doctrines. The charges of heresy and sedition had several advantages, including local religious prejudice. Plus it would not draw unwanted attention to the con men's own liabilities. So they zeroed in on Paul and Silas' doctrine.

So the charge was that Paul and Silas were teaching "unlawful" things in Roman provinces. What do you suppose were the offensive doctrines they were teaching? Some folks may think Paul was teaching some religious church custom. Could church teachings have offended them, or been illegal? Could church teaching have been illegal for Romans to hear? Were they building churches, or speaking in tongues? Were they teaching about "the rapture," or "the Trinity," or about "Satan," or about "going to heaven"? Would that have been "unlawful"? Was it a revival type church service? Were these kinds of things condemned by Rome? Did these kinds of activities strike fear and hatred in the heart of central Roman government?

No, of course not. The confrontation could not have been over church teachings, because none of those things threaten government systems or financial establishments – neither then nor now. Macedonia had churches/synagogues that were established and thriving. The Jews (Judeans) were not persecuted under Roman domination. The Roman government worked together with the Judeans in Judea (a Roman province) and in other Roman lands as well.

So, if it wasn't religion and churches that were illegal, what things then do you suppose Paul and Silas were teaching that Rome considered "unlawful"?

Is it possible, in light of what we have already learned about ecclesias and the real Gospel of the Christ's Reign, that Paul and Silas were teaching men to look to Christ

instead of Caesar? Or that man-made government is wrong? Were they teaching Romans that man is not supposed to create his own laws? Would Rome and Caesar consider these teachings "heresy" and "sedition?"

Paul and Silas were teaching that bodies politic should not make law. They should only discover God's already-existing Laws, and honor them.

This is the only possible answer.

Certainly, Rome had no law against religious establishments. In fact, Romans loved religion. They had a multiplicity of gods and religions ... and government bureaucrats were part of it. But what Rome wouldn't stand for was the undermining of Caesar's central power and his sovereignty and control.

We can ask the same question today. Does the U.S. Government suppress or attack religion? Of course not. Certainly not churches. What reason would the government have to come against churches? What do churches teach that could be considered illegal? What would they have taught in Rome that would have been illegal? Obviously NOTHING! Churches teach and do NOTHING that puts them at odds with the ruling Beast System. In fact, churches are joined together with the Beast System.

But, Paul and Silas were teaching and doing SOMETHING that put them at odds with Rome and Jerusalem.

Government doesn't put down churches. It gives them preferred status and makes them tax exempt. The Beast doesn't fear religion. It never has! It has never been illegal or unlawful to be religious. Look at the diversified spectrum of legal religious organizations officially sanctioned by government in America.

However, government DOES put down dissent and exposure. They call it "sedition," and sometimes "heresy; pass laws against it, imprison people, and even execute people for these "crimes" of unpatriotism.

You see, modern America and ancient Rome are very much alike. Just as in Rome, it's illegal in America today to undermine the rule of this central government and to teach people that government is not supposed to be the people's supreme god (i.e., the sovereign Law Maker).

This got Paul and Silas in trouble with the Roman and Judean governments. This still gets men in trouble today. To teach that man's government has no authority to create laws and rule over men; to teach that Jesus is our true King, and that He is present ... this is what caused Paul, Silas and Timothy to be charged with heresy and sedition!

Paul and Silas were teaching forbidden doctrine to Roman citizens (who happened to be Israelites by birth). They taught that Jesus was the only true and rightful King, that other kings were not for them, and that God was their only Lawgiver or Law-Creator.

The Roman government (or Roman bureaucrats) wanted their slaves to remain ignorant. So they chose to stop Paul and Silas from teaching freedom and truth among Roman citizens.

The original charge for "damaging" of the servant girl

was replaced by the new charge of sedition and heresy. The magistrates were apparently so threatened by what Paul and Silas were teaching that they tore off Paul and Silas's clothes there in the marketplace and had them beaten!

These actions indicate that their motives were not merely religious. Government thugs would not have been called out to beat people who were merely expounding religious beliefs about "the trinity" or a "burning hell" or "going to heaven," or that people ought to pray and sing. Nor would other church doctrines, like a future return of Jesus Christ and His FUTURE kingdom, have caused the rulers to go to such extreme measures. They weren't concerned about religious myths that had nothing to do with reality or government power. Rather, they were concerned about the teaching of a reigning, immortal King Jesus ... a Reign that disqualified them as rulers.

They were so worried, they not only put Paul's group in prison – they put them into "the inner prison." And not only did they put them into the inner prison, they put special guard ("jailer") there to watch them day and night. Moreover, they put their feet in stocks. This was indeed a "maximum security" prison. Paul and Silas were apparently considered very dangerous! This kind of treatment is reserved for the most dangerous prisoners.

Here we see these men picked by Jesus to represent Him, filled with holy spirit, bringing the good news of Christ's Reign. In response, the government establishment, along with the citizenry, marked them as dangerous criminals and put them through a degrading arrest, imprisonment and branding as unfit for public society. Most Christians today can't begin to understand this aspect of true Christianity.

And so, Paul and Silas set an example here in the book of Acts. It's an example every one of us must take to heart. They were dangerous to the establishment system. It would be nice to be able to say that we are, at least to some extent, *dangerous* to the system – like Paul, Silas and Timothy were to the Jewish and Roman systems of their day.

QUESTION: Why is it that the dissenters today who are arrested and imprisoned by government and considered "dangerous" criminals seem to be unstable, not-so-smart crackpots and failures in life? Why aren't they righteous, noble Christians like Paul? Are there any people today who are like Paul and are getting imprisoned ... and who are doing the same types of things Paul, Silas and Timothy did?

QUESTION: Should Christians consider the Gospel of Christ's Reign to be "illegal" by the current establishment (Beast System), the same as it was in Paul's time? If this is the case, how can most Christians out there today be so blind and not understand this simple correlation?

ACTS 16:25-34 ANOTHER SUPERNATURAL PRISON BREAK

But at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and praised God with hymns: and the prisoners heard them.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and instantly all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

And the jailer, having awakened out of sleep, and having seen the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled.

But Paul spoke out with a loud voice, saying, Do yourself no harm: for we are all in here.

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and trembling he fell down before Paul and Silas,

And brought them out, and said, Lords, what should I be doing to be saved?

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved; you and your household.

And they spoke the word of God to him together with all that were in his house.

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes. And he was

baptized, he and all his (family), immediately.

And when he had brought them into his house, he set a table before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

PAUL, Silas and Timothy were sitting there in maximum security prison, praying and in good spirits. They were apparently trusting that Jesus either had a way for them to get out of there, or He had something for them to do in there. They weren't letting their situation get them down; they making the best of it.

Then the earthquake hit. Now it wasn't just your ordinary, everyday earthquake! An ordinary earthquake usually shakes the buildings, or perhaps even collapses them. But this earthquake not only shook the building, it caused the cell doors to fly open and broke open the prisoners' shackles. This was some kind of special earthquake. Jesus was facilitating a jail break.

The guard suddenly awoke, and thinking that the prisoners had escaped on his watch, and that he would be held responsible ... the consequences if this would be hideous shame and punishment! Being a Roman, he prepared to kill himself ... the subscribed Roman protocol for failure and shame. He was preparing to take his own life when Paul called out to him and urged him not to kill himself. Paul then showed him that they were still there. They hadn't left yet.

The guard began to realize that he was witnessing something unexplainable. He was moved to humility, and he asked what he could do to be saved. He was impressed, not only by the fact that the earthquake had miraculously released them, but also by the fact that the prisoners didn't abandon

him to his ignominious end.

So, the jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved.

Please give close attention to this. Here is the question of all questions; the crux of theology. Here the question is asked, and answered. It is the question every truth seeker wants to know. Understand this passage and you understand the most misunderstood principle of the gospel.

But, seeing (or reading) the answer does not necessarily mean you understand it. The answer has been seen and heard by millions, but only a few have understood and appreciated it. So be careful that you don't miss it. It is important!

The question: "WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING TO BE SAVED?" This question as stated presumed a kind of "salvation" that required him to do something to acquire it. Here was a man – typical of men today (churchgoers) – asking a pointed question about salvation: a subject of which he knew nearly nothing. How do you give the answer to a man who doesn't understand the question?

Thank God that we are not required to understand salvation in order to receive it. However, if we are to keep it we must learn about it. Otherwise, we'll fail to discern it. And if we fail to discern it we'll not know how to honor it, protect it, keep it and live it.

Paul gave the jailer the right answer: "BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS, AND YOU WILL BE SAVED." But did the jailer understand the answer? Not likely. It is evident that he didn't at first ... because of the way he asked the question. He clearly expected to be given a protocol to qualify for salvation by performing some kind of work or deed.

The scripture indicates that Paul probably helped him understand the question better, and thus the answer as well.

What must man do to be saved? NOTHING! There are a good many things we can do in response to having been saved ... but we do nothing initially to cause it.

In this case the jailer was sitting there asleep, doing nothing when salvation came to him. It came in the form of seeing God's hand at work rescuing his disciples.

Lost man is ... well, LOST. When you are "lost" you can do nothing to save yourself. Otherwise you wouldn't be truly lost.

Man who is spiritually "lost" from God doesn't even know he is lost. It is not until after he is saved that he begins to realize where he once was. Unregenerate man who doesn't believe he is lost has neither reason nor ability to seek to be saved. He can't even identify it! How can he seek something he can't identify? He can't! So he doesn't!

Anyone who has an interest in being saved must first think he is lost. But this is impossible ... for lost man doesn't know his is lost.

What then? Lost man must first be saved ... only then can he understand that he had been lost. Only then can he change the way he sees the world, and change the way he lives.

Saved men can seek knowledge, virtue, truth, freedom ... the things that please God and help mankind. Saved men are novices at first, and must grow up to become responsible and useful in the family of "the elect." They have nothing to offer others until after they, as saved men, make something of themselves. There is much for us – the community of the saved – to do. But we can't do anything until after our salvation dawns on us.

There is nothing that lost man can do to bring about his own salvation.

"No man can come to me (Jesus), unless the Father who has sent me draws him:"

—John 6:44

If the Father is drawing you, you are already being saved. You are not coming to Jesus to be saved. You are already being saved. And as a saved man you are in the process of recognizing your Savior. Looking to Jesus is the right thing to do once salvation dawns, just as gratitude and a new sense of responsibility is the

right attitude toward anyone who helps or rescues you.

Man does nothing to find salvation. You do not find salvation. It finds you. If this were not the case it would not be called “salvation” – it would be called “result,” or “achievement.”

There are many things, however, we can do once we realize that we are saved. The things we “do” (i.e., our “deeds”; our “works”) are our duties as saved men – not as men trying to get saved. Knowing the difference is critical.

A newborn does nothing to effect his own conception and birth. After having been born, however, he can do much to fulfill his part within his family.

Thus it was with the jailer. Paul told him that if he would believe on Jesus he would continue in a state of grace. Not that believing had saved him, but that believing would evidence the fact that he has been saved.

“By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not from yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

—Ephesians 2:8

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

—Romans 10:17

Salvation literally dawns on man by hearing the word. The saving work of Christ takes effect upon a man as he hears the word – and to hear the word God gives him faith and helps him do good deeds.

Thus, salvation is equated with the gift of being able to hear and believe in Christ ... which brings change to man, family, community, etc..

Salvation is the affect that truth and awareness has upon the heart and the mind. It affects the way you think, believe, and view your life. When we are saved, we begin thinking differently. We find that we have faith. In fact, faith is itself nearly tantamount to salvation. Often in Scripture, faith is equated with salvation. Being saved causes faith. That critical difference in thinking is the essence of salvation. That change in thinking is the means through which Jesus changes man. It is the means by which Paul and Silas became notorious for “... overthrowing the world ...” (Acts 17: 6).

Changing the way people think – changing their paradigms – was the “crime” for which Jesus was crucified. By this He saved Israel. Salvation is a state of mind! Change a people’s state of mind and it affects everything, and changes everything.

In America, where principles of government and society have followed the wrong course for over two centuries, Christ’s salvation has been ignored. If it had not been ignored, American minds would have been changed. And along with their minds, the ways of life – government and society – would be changed. But it isn’t.

Therefore, America needs salvation more than anything else. She needs to be saved so she can have a change of heart; so Americans can think differently, and then act differently.

Paul told the jailer that true salvation was to believe in Jesus. This was the answer. This is STILL the answer. It is astounding, and simple.

And so the jailer took Paul, Silas and Timothy to his home where Paul continued to explain to the rest of the people the good news of Christ’s Reign. This, then, made it possible for them to believe in Christ and realize that they had been “saved.”

Salvation causes faith, and comes by hearing the word of Christ. Giving out the word of Christ is the greatest thing a man can do. Salvation is carried on the word itself. Where the word goes, salvation goes. The apostles carried Christ’s word, and his salvation, to their lost brethren in the nations. They helped change the world.

Paul, Silas and Timothy had wounds on their backs from the public beatings they received for teaching truth. And so the jailer washed their stripes, and then he and his family were baptized that very night. Paul and Silas had brought the word (and thus salvation) to his house.

ACTS 16:35-40 PAUL STANDS UP TO MAGISTRATES

And when day came, the magistrates dispatched the deputies, saying, Release those men.

So the jailer reported their words to Paul, “The magistrates have sent to have you released: now therefore having come out, go in peace.”

But Paul said to them, Having flogged us openly, uncondemned, and being Romans, and having cast us into prison, now they secretly thrust us out? No! But let them come themselves and walk us out.

And the deputies reported these words to the magistrates: and they grew fearful when they heard that they were Romans.

And they came and pleaded with them, and walked them out, and requested them to depart out of the city.

And having come out of the prison, they entered the house of Lydia: and having seen the brethren, they encouraged them, and departed.

WHAT’S strangely different about this prison break is that Paul, Silas and Timothy – after escaping from the high security prison and going to the jailer’s house, having their wounds washed, and baptizing his family –

they then returned to the prison of their own free will to await the outcome of the magistrates' orders.

At dawn the magistrates, or judges, suddenly decided to release them. Paul, Silas and Timothy had been accused and flogged publicly. So the magistrates decided to let them go secretly, hoping they would leave quietly and not make an issue over their beatings, feeling fortunate to just be out of jail.

The situation is similar to modern-day prison releases, when someone gets arrested for a traffic violation or some other victimless "crime." Almost invariably, when the police turn that victim out of the jail, they release him between midnight and 2:00 AM. They just turn him out into the street without telling anyone and regardless of the weather.

Why would the deputies do that? Could it be just one more dirty trick they pull on people; a parting shot; just one last jab before they get away? The prisoners are released at midnight with no car, and no phone booth nearby to call someone to come pick them up. No one is notified that they are being released. We must give jailers credit for being dirty. And it is certainly not just coincidental because it happens that way over and over.

But it's also possible that part of the reason for this procedure is because the authorities would like for these guys to just slink off into the night and just be happy to be out of jail. In broad daylight it might be a little embarrassing to the officers for the public to see them treating

prisoners with such hateful prejudice.

Anyway, the judges in this passage sent the jailers (deputies) to release Paul and Silas and hoped they would just slip away and leave town. But Paul didn't do that.

"They have beaten us openly uncondemned," is another way of saying "They have punished us without a conviction"; or "They have publicly shamed and jailed us without a reason based on law." In other words, Paul protested, "they beat us and jailed us openly, and now they want to let us go in secret, without notice."

So Paul says, "let them come themselves and fetch us out." The magistrates had unknowingly put themselves at risk by not recognizing Paul's Roman citizenship. Paul and Silas were proving to be an embarrassment to them, and Paul wanted one last parting shot.

One thing that's different about today's circumstances is that the magistrates are backed by a bigger and more powerful system. It is nearly impossible to embarrass them or get justice these days.

Not being aware that Paul and Silas were Romans, the magistrates erred by putting them in jail without proper procedure. They probably broke some Roman law.

But at this point the magistrates just wanted to cover the whole thing up and get rid of Paul. So they took them out of jail and said, "You guys just go away and leave us alone."

It doesn't say what all transpired between Paul and the government officials but Paul probably raked

them over the coals before he and his entourage departed. This whole incident must have strengthened the disciples as they watched the hand of Christ at work against government bullies and thugs who, as it turned out, weren't quite as invincible as they thought they were.

QUESTION: Despite all the noble-sounding ideas of our Government and the Constitution, it seems the offices and positions in government are continually occupied by scoundrels. Why is that?

CONCLUSION

As you can see, chapter 16 contains some enlightening points.

Paul, indeed, had some interesting experiences. He took his work seriously and did it faithfully, meeting the challenges as they came. He was a blessed man, and he was committed to sharing those blessings.

As we read about Paul's experiences, and the effects they had on him and his colleagues, perhaps we can relate them to ourselves and share that same spirit.

The world could certainly use more men like Paul, Silas and Timothy.

END OF CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FOR ANSWERS AND NOTES, SEE ENCLOSED "ANSWER SECTION."

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POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. Chapter Sixteen of Acts is a lesson in the dynamics of salvation.

The first principle is this: salvation is by grace. Christ saves man by instilling faith to follow Him. Man, on his own, is incapable of following Christ ... just as a dead man is incapable of helping himself.

We, being dead in transgressions, were made alive together with Christ, (by grace you are saved;)

Eph. 2:5

For the grace of God has appeared that brings salvation to all men.

Titus 2:11

The second principle is proper stewardship of the gift. That is, after receiving the gracious gift of faith and salvation we are then expected to be good stewards of the gifts we've received.

Thus, faith and salvation come by grace – but they are kept by diligence and sincerity. Otherwise, we can “*fall from grace*” (Gal. 5:4).

As each man has received the gift, use it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

1Pet. 4:10

2. Paul and Barnabas were learning that ministering to Christ's sheep is a challenging process. They hadn't been back at Antioch long before they were sent again into Asia Minor to reconfirm and strengthen the brethren.

3. The most common problems that cropped up among the brethren were those caused by, **a**) personal character weakness, and **b**) bad teachers who taught error.

4. The most damaging errors usually came in through the brethren. Non-brethren (outsiders) usually aren't able to get our confidence, so they have less chance of convincing us of anything. But brethren can

spread error with seeming impunity. Therefore, constant vigilance is necessary to avoid error. Everyone must be on his guard against it. Error often starts small and insignificant, and then grows into a body of wrong thinking empowered by pride and inattention. Men are prone to promote and defend their own beliefs before truth. Truth takes a backseat. This is where caring brethren can come to the rescue to help a brother in error. We must always resist the arrogance that keeps us from learning truth. Otherwise we can fall from grace and lose our way through pride.

5. The term “Jew” never appears in scripture, in spite of the fact that most of the English Bible versions have it. The correct word in the Old Testament is “Judahite,” and in the New Testament it is “Judean.” The differences are important.

6. Labels such as “Judean” and “Greek” refer to a man's language, nationality or adopted customs. Seldom if ever does it imply race.

7. Racial separation was taken for granted in the times these scriptures were being written. No special attention was given to the question of racial separation because it was not an issue at the time. The concept of race mixing in marriage has always been unacceptable all around the world ... until recent decades.

8. The writing and compiling of the Book of Acts has been attributed to Luke, in spite of the fact that he is not mentioned.

9. In verse 18 we read that Paul commands a “spirit” to “come out” of a girl. Passages like this one are used often by churches to imply that “spirits” are sentient beings ... hearing, thinking, and acting with wills of their own.

However, it was customary in the dialect and habits of their day to refer to inanimate things as if they were human. It is still true today. The custom is called anthropomorphism (“anthropos” = man, and “morph” =

“form or shape” — thus, “*to ascribe human form or attributes to a thing that is not human*”).

For instance, luck (random chance) is commonly called “she,” or “a lady.” When a man is hoping for chance to favor him he may chant, “*Come on! Come on!*” as if chance (luck) could actually hear him and react.

Another example is disease being addressed as “mean” or “cruel” as if it had its own motive.

By the same token, the custom of anthropomorphizing spirits (motives or dispositions) in Paul's day was no different than it is today.

10. Paul and Silas were turned into “criminals” by the Beast System of their day. The same is happening to many of us today. It is inevitable when the establishment government is corrupt and ungodly that every man who follows Christ will be considered a threat and a criminal by that system.

ANSWERS:

pg. 2

The New Testament was first translated into English in the 14th century. Until that time it was unavailable to the common English-speaking citizen. It had to be read in its original Greek tongue – except in Catholic churches where priests read it in Latin (their “Holy Tongue”). The confusion of the terms “Jew,” “Judean” and “Judahite” carried over from Catholicism to Protestantism.

For reasons of its own, the church portrayed the term “Jew” to mean race as if it equalled “Israelite.” This was done as an attempt to associate the teachings of the Old Testament with the teachings of Judean culture universally recognized as anti-Christ. Through this, the churches have discredited the whole Old Testament including God's Law ... and claimed their own authority to create law.

To do this, they replaced the actual words used in Scripture. Thus,

“Judahite” (the Old Testament Hebrew word) and “Judean” (the New Testament Greek word) were both replaced with “Jew.” In doing this, the culture of Babylonian Judaism officially usurped the title of “Israel” in the church world. The “Jews” (Judeans) became, in the eyes of an illiterate world, Israelites ... and the Old Testament teachings were equated to the loathsome teachings of Judaism.

Jews (so-called) have always been a racial/cultural mixture of Persians, Edomites, Canaanites, Khazars, Moors, etc.. In Judea, in Paul's day, there were also some racial Israelites still among the “Judeans.” However, the racial Israelites were quickly migrating elsewhere, or were being driven out by religious persecution.

The terms can be understood accurately by learning their actual usage in the Hebrew and Greek texts, and by having a good background in Bible and history. (see: *Facts Are Facts*, by Benjamin Freedman <benwilliamslibrary.com>).

pg. 3

As explained in the lesson, Paul was not pushing Judean custom. But Paul was pragmatic, and he had been given the task of taking a controversial message to people accustomed to Judean ritual. He merely wanted to overcome a barrier of prejudice long enough for his deceived brethren to hear him before making up their mind about him.

pg. 5

The apostles were SENT to the “*lost sheep of the house of Israel*.” The message of the good news of Christ Kingship was taken to them expressly. Paul was sent into Asia Minor to convey this message to the lost sheep of Israel. It was a fulfillment of prophecy from their past. He searched for Israelites among the non-Israelites. He looked for them among the churches/synagogues, the cities along the way, and in every

culture and religion he encountered. Paul focused on the synagogues because Judaism had absorbed most of the lost and deluded Israelites who were disconnected from their history.

However, as his public addresses were directed to his Israelite brethren, people of any race or persuasion that happened to be present could hear and respond as they chose. Truth is good for any race!

God promised Abraham that his descendants (Israel) would become a blessing to all the families (races) of the earth. Truth came through Moses and then Jesus: both descendants of Abraham. This truth was carried by apostles who also were descendants of Abraham. Truth blesses anyone, and any race (family), that hears and believes it.

There is no scripture in the Bible that specifically commands Christians to seek out and proselytize non-Israelites. However, we must be willing to assist them when asked.

However, the law is clear that strangers must be treated fairly and honestly (Dt.24). At the same time, racial families should hold to their genetic integrity, and not mix through intermarriage which destroys their races.

pg. 7

“Snake,” or “serpent” (“ophis” in Greek), was commonly used as a term to allude to evil genius, and hypnotic programming or mind control. It often connotes a practice of deceptive salesmanship (con artists). In legend and superstition snakes are alleged to have hypnotic powers via their eyes as the Cobra stares at his victim and swings his head back and forth like a hypnotist's amulet.

Thus, snakes have been a symbol of secret knowledge and occult religion. The correlation to “divination” is obvious.

Regarding the episode in the Garden of Eden, the tempter was called a “serpent” because: **a)** he had persuasive, hypnotic ability to convince people of lies, and: **b)** he claimed to have secret knowledge to

share with his converts. This serpent was a flesh-and-blood con man who displayed the legendary and symbolic attributes of a “serpent.”

Other “serpents” and “dragons” in Scripture (like Rev. 12, 13, 20) portray men and/or systems of men with “serpent” (ophite) motives.

pg. 9

a) First, the assumption that “Right Wing Dissidents” are good guys is nonsense. More often they really are not-so-smart crackpots. Why? Because “Right Wingers” represent one wing of the bird of state, and any connection with that bird is a *foul* one.

Yes, there are still good folks out there, like Paul and Silas, who do good works and get in trouble with the system. However, we rarely hear about them from the controlled media. The crackpots are the only ones we hear about in the news because they sound and look silly. The establishment media carefully avoids letting the public know about the sensible and honorable ones.

b) Yes. By establishment standards, true Christianity has always been politically and socially unacceptable ... often illegal. Any work declaring that Christ is the true King will find itself at odds with the ruling establishment built on the concept of men being their own gods.

Churchgoers blind themselves to this truth because it is uncomfortable to live at odds with the ruling establishment. Also because they fear the establishment more than they fear God.

pg. 12

When men with good intentions go into government they soon learn they must change to survive. Good men soon find they have no stomach for it. They get weeded out and relaced by psychopaths who can kill and lie and still sleep at night. Those who stay are conscienceless politicians who enjoy doing the Beast's bidding.