

A Spirit of Divination (Acts 16:16-24)^a

© 2018 Tony Garland^b

0:00

Context

1. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke on the 2nd Missionary Journey
2. Began evangelistic work in Philippi
3. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to believe
4. They continue their work of evangelism in Philippi

Passage (Acts 16:16-24)

[16] 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. **[17]** 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." **[18]** 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. **[19]** 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. **[20]** And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; **[21]** and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." **[22]** Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded [them] to be beaten with rods. **[23]** And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw [them] into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. **[24]** Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.¹

Questions concerning Paul's interaction with the slave girl

1. How did the slave girl "happen" across their path?
 - A. As we went to prayer . . . she met us (Acts 16:16)
 - B. They were on their way to the same place they had met Lydia that first Sabbath day—at the riverside (Acts 16:13)
 - C. It would seem that demonic influence led her purposefully to interfere with their meeting and subsequent evangelistic efforts.
2. How did the slave girl know who they were?
 - A. The demons recognize the spiritual power and purpose of Paul's group

- I. Consider the following statements by demons possessing various individuals
 - a. A man in the synagogue at Capernaum with an unclean spirit
 - i. *Let [us] alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!* (Mark 1:24 cf. Luke 4:33, 41)
 - b. A man in the country of the Gadarenes possessed by a legion of demons
 - i. *What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.* (Mark 5:7 cf. Luke 8:28)
 - ii. *Have You come here to torment us before the time?* (Mat. 8:29)
- II. An evil spirit who overpowered the seven sons of a Jewish high priest
 - a. *Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?* (Acts 19:15)
- III. *[Jesus healed] many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.* (Mark 1:34)
- IV. *And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, “You are the Son of God.”* (Mark 3:11)
- V. Demons have the ability to discern those who are empowered by God’s Spirit.

3. If the slave girl is telling the truth—why did that bother Paul?

- A. Motives can be quite different than appearances
- B. Acting as if a herald of the legitimate work of God

Though her statements were true, the gospel of Christ would be damaged by an association with a demon-possessed slave girl.²

To have accepted demons as witnesses to the gospel would have convinced the people that there was an alliance between them and the apostles; and thus all the good repute of the apostles would have been reflected on the demons, and all the evil repute of the demons would likewise have been reflected on the apostles.³

- C. Shouting, distracting

4. Why did Paul wait “many days” before casting the spirit out?

- A. The exorcism was at the hand of God, as was its *timing*.
- B. Perhaps Paul knew, now that the time had arrived to cast out the spirit, that their productive ministry would come to an end

We may venture to say that the Lord let it continue as long as he did because he wanted Paul to finish his work in Philippi; for after he drove out the spirit Paul had to leave the city (v. 39, 40).⁴

5. The resulting “reversal” in the situation of the girl and the evangelists

A. The one bound was set free

I. *The Spirit of the Lord GOD [is] upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to [those who are] bound; (Isa. 61:1 cf. Luke 4:18)*

B. The ones free (Paul and Silas) would soon become bound

Possession

1. possessed

A. *Demonized* (from δαιμονίζομαι [*daimonizomai*]) as in Mat. 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mark 1:32; Mark 5:15, 16, 18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21.

B. As here: ἔχουσιν πνεῦμα [*echousan pneuma*], *having a spirit*

C. For more on demonic possession, oppression, and how people open themselves to such influences, I recommend an excellent series of messages by Pastor Greg on the topic of [Spiritual Warfare^C](#) available on the church website from January of 2010.

2. a spirit of divination

A. πνεῦμα πύθωνα [*pneuma pythōna*] [*hapax legomenon*]

I. She had a spirit “(enthused) by python”⁵

B. She was possessed by what was thought to be the same demonic spirit which empowered the ecstatic utterances of priestesses who claimed to foretell the future at the city of Delphi in upper-central Greece.

The Python was a mythical serpent or dragon that guarded the temple and oracle of Apollo, located on the southern slope of Mount Parnassus to the north of the Gulf of Corinth. It was supposed to have lived at the foot of Mount Parnassus and to have eventually been killed by Apollo (cf. Strabo *Geography* 9.3.12).⁶

Various individuals and community representatives, Greeks and non-Greeks alike, consulted the oracle [at Delphi] for political, military, cultic, and social matters. By the fifth century bc, the oracle itself was located in the inner sanctum of the Apollo temple. The exact procedure for consulting the oracle is

unclear. But by looking at a number of sources from various periods, it does appear that the ancient Greeks believed that Apollo communicated directly to a priestess, called the Pythia, who then prophesied. Then, special religious interpreters, called prophētai, in some way shaped her message before delivering it to the inquirers.⁷

. . . the god Apollo was believed to be embodied in a python snake. The original priestess at Delphi was purported to be possessed by Apollo and thereby able to predict the future; therefore anyone possessed by the python spirit could foretell coming events.⁸

Fortune Telling - Divination

1. Divination - attempting to foresee or foretell the future by means other than what God has revealed (by His Word or His prophetic messengers)

A. *You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.* (Leviticus 19:26)

I. *soothsaying* = עֵינַן [‘nn], to cause to become visible, to interpret signs, as in a *seer*

II. *divination* = נִחֵס [nh̄s], “A spell to invoke supernatural knowledge or power (Nu 23:23; 24:1)”⁹

a. Same root word as the Hebrew word for *serpent* (נָחָשׁ [nāhās])

b. Why would the word for *divination* be so closely related to the word for *serpent*?

i. Notice the divine in divination - something reserved to God alone

ii. Now consider the promise of the serpent in the garden: *For God knows that in the day you eat of [the forbidden fruit] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.* (Gen. 3:5)

c. There is a connection between the *serpent* and *divination* : the promise to Eve of divine knowledge (hold that thought)!

B. Divination can include the attempt to influence the future by way of omens or curses

I. Balaam was hired to perform divination (Num. 22:7 cf. Num. 23:23)

2. Only God knows the future.

A. This is critically important to get right!

B. Curiosity, temptation, and deception await those who remain unclear on this!

- C. The unique ability of God to foretell the future is based on attributes that are uniquely His
- I. Omniscience
 - II. Eternality, timeless, not trapped within time itself. His unique name is “I AM WHO/THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:14)
 - III. All created beings lack these divine attributes (repeat after me, “All created beings lack these divine attributes”)
- D. In numerous passages, God emphasizes His unique ability to foretell the future—it is a capability which is His alone.
- E. Speaking to men and their demon-inspired idols, the God of Israel proclaims through Isaiah:
- I. *“Present your case,” says the LORD. “Bring forth your strong [reasons],” says the King of Jacob. “Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; Let them show the former things, what they [were], That we may consider them, And know the latter end of them; Or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, That we may know that you [are] gods; . . . Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know? And former times, that we may say, ‘[He is] righteous’? Surely [there is] no one who shows, Surely [there is] no one who declares, Surely [there is] no one who hears your words.” (Isa. 41:21-23, 26)*
 - II. *Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them. (Isa. 42:9)*
 - III. *And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared [it]? You [are] My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed [there is] no other Rock; I know not [one]. (Isa. 44:7-8)*
 - IV. *Tell and bring forth [your case]; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? [Who] has told it from that time? [Have] not I, the LORD? And [there is] no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; [There is] none besides Me. (Isa. 45:21)*
- F. In several of the passages, notice that God connects the ability to know and predict the future with His uniqueness: “[Who] has told it from that time? [Have not I, the LORD? And [there is] no other God besides Me”
1. The ability to know and determine the future is unique to a god
 2. I alone can do this
 3. THEREFORE: There is no other God besides Me . . . there is none besides Me!
- G. What evidence do we have that this girl could *not* reliably predict the future?

I. Lenski wryly observes, “The spirit in this girl accomplished no more by means of his divining than our fortunetellers do today. Why, this spirit could not and did not know what was awaiting him, namely that in a few days he would be driven out of the girl by the power of Jesus!”¹⁰

H. Sorcerer, false prophet, bar-Jesus

I. *Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 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?”* (Acts 13:9–10)

3. Profit - why would people pay?

A. Desire to know aspects of the future God has not revealed—the essence of divination

B. Having rejected the true gold (what God has revealed, the Bible), people chase after fool’s gold

I. The rapidly growing influence of the occult in our society

II. Revival of interest in mystics such as Nostradamus

III. Palm readers, openly on the streets of business, in malls

IV. Tarot cards, openly sold in most bookstores

V. Tea with Your Dragon — right here in little ol’ Stanwood!

a. Magickal effects attributed to oils

b. Appealing to inanimate materials, such as oils and rocks, to release guilt and shame

c. Attributing peace and guidance to rocks

d. Various “readings”

i. This is *divination* - attempting to peer into things that are only known to God!

e. Remember our earlier observation: there is a connection between the *serpent* and *divination* — the promise to have god-like abilities, to do something only God can do

i. Picture on their Facebook page: dragon facing a woman holding apple [(the “serpent of old” is also known as “the dragon” (Rev. 12:9; 20:2)]

ii. The promise of deeper knowledge, capabilities withheld from mankind

VI. Almost seventy-five years ago, H. A. Ironside wrote

After all, we have not progressed very far. Today we find the same characters. Even in our land, with all its enlightenment, there are literally thousands of people who scarcely make a move without consulting a clairvoyant or spirit-medium, someone who is supposed to have special illumination because of contact with the unseen world.¹¹

VII. Twenty years ago, J. Vernon McGee wrote

Don't think this was just foolish superstition. This girl was possessed by a demon. We are seeing a resurgence of demonism in our own day. I have before me now a letter from a Christian woman in El Paso, Texas. She got tied up in spiritism by just fooling around with it, not thinking that it was dangerous. She has quite a story. It was hearing the Word of God through our radio program that delivered her from it. She cried out to God, and He delivered her. Demonism is a reality.¹²

- a. One can only wonder what he might say if he saw our movies, television shows, and bookstores today!

C. Ignoring the Living God

- I. *And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? [Should they seek] the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light in them. (Isa. 8:19-20)*

- II. This is where our post-Christian culture has now arrived.

- a. Whispering and muttering, looking to oils, crystals, nature for healing, signs, readings
- b. Ignoring the law and the testimony: the Bible

- III. If the acceptance, promotion, and even celebration of occult practices continues unabated, we must prepare for a corresponding increase in the manifestation of demonic activity within our culture.

- IV. As we cast God out of our society, we naively make room for dark spiritual powers to fill the void.

- V. Our condition as a once-enlightened nation is akin to that of Israel in the days of Jesus.

- a. The words Jesus spoke concerning the spiritual condition of Israel may as well have been spoken to America in our day:

- i. *When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds [it] empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last [state] of that*

man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.
(Mat. 12:43-45)

- ii. Our nation found enlightenment through our Judaeo-Christian heritage—things were “swept and put in order.”
- iii. But, like the religious moralists of Jesus’ day, we failed to be truly converted: to be filled with God’s spirit.
- iv. Having rejected what we once knew—the light of God’s Word—our nation is increasing in spiritual darkness.

Persecution - to be expected wherever light shines on darkness

1. Darkness has no concern for its victims

A. Slave girl set free from possession - masters don’t care

I. She was now in her right mind

II. Undoubtedly came to faith

B. *The Spirit of the Lord GOD [is] upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to [those who are] bound; (Isa. 61:1)*

C. Contrast — universality of salvation

I. Lydia: a well-to-do influential business woman

II. This girl: a lowly slave

2. Darkness loves money

A. What motivated the seizure of Paul and Silas?

I. *when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone (Acts 16:19).*

B. Undeniable, objective evidence of the healing power of God — ignored

C. Sin and its victims are merely a means for financial gain

I. No different in our “enlightened society” of today

II. Gambling → addiction → financial hardship, poverty, bankruptcy

III. X-rated, so-called “adult entertainment,” pornography → addiction → violence, sexual abuse, objectification of women, caustic to true intimacy within the bonds of marriage

IV. Drugs → addiction → motivational problems, financial hardship, poverty, theft, medical problems, overdoses, death

D. “Touch the unconverted moneybag and hear what a devilish noise results.”¹³

3. Darkness misrepresents the true reasons behind persecution

A. One M-O of darkness: conceal the true motivation behind persecution of the light

B. “The complainants must have felt some difficulty in stating their grievance.—The law had no remedy for property depreciated by exorcism. The true state of the case was therefore concealed, etc. (*Conyb. and H.* p. 323.—Tr.)”¹⁴

4. Darkness often uses crowd dynamics to achieve its ends

A. Crowd dynamics has proven to be a convenient tool of the dark throughout history

I. Steps

1. A smaller group of people harbor a concealed motive
2. While concealing the motive, they work up an emotional crowd
3. Another small group of people with power in the situation bow to bullying tactics of the crowd
4. Legal process compromised or bypassed entirely

II. Power subverts truth

III. Crowd dynamics at the crucifixion of Jesus

a. *Pilate answered [the crowd], saying, “Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. . . . So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged [Him], to be crucified (Mark 15:9-11, 15).*

b. Steps

1. Chief priests motivated by envy (hidden motive)
2. Crowd stirred up
3. Pilate intimidated by the crowd
4. Legal process bypassed: illegal trial and crucifixion of Jesus

IV. Crowd dynamics at Philippi

a. Slave girl’s masters make unrelated accusations, appeal to racial hatreds: *These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city (Acts 16:20).*

i. Misrepresent motivation

But the whole charge was pure hypocrisy; for as these men would have let the missionaries preach what religion they pleased if they had not dried up the source of their gains, so they conceal the real cause of their rage under color of a zeal for religion, and law, and good order¹⁵

b. Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded [them] to be beaten with rods (Acts 16:22).

c. Steps

1. Masters motivated by money (hidden motive)
2. Crowd stirred up
3. Magistrates intimidated by the crowd
4. Legal process bypassed: Paul and Silas, as Roman citizens, illegally beaten without trial

Principles

1. **Discernment** - be able to separate inward spiritual motivation from outward appearance and actions
2. **Divination** - looking for truth and guidance in all the wrong places
3. **Possession** - a very real spiritual affliction which, in the continuing lapse of Christian influence, can only grow in influence and open manifestation
4. **Persecution** - when the light shines brightly in an increasingly dark place

Sat Feb 24 14:30:23 2018



[SpiritAndTruth.org](http://www.spiritandtruth.org) Scan Code^d

Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 16:16-24](#)
2. [Ref-0038, 2.399](#)
3. [Ref-1486, 97](#)
4. [Ref-1487, 666](#)
5. [Ref-0617, #4780](#)
6. [Ref-1488, 462](#)
7. [Ref-1489, Delphi](#)

8. [Ref-0038](#), 2.399
9. [Ref-0618](#), #5728
10. [Ref-1487](#), 663
11. [Ref-1131](#), 373-374
12. [Ref-0465](#), 584
13. [Ref-1487](#), 667
14. [Ref-1304](#), 306
15. [Ref-0187](#), 198

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0187** Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-0465** McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Ref-0617** James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-0618** James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-1131** Ironside, H. A., *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1943).
- Ref-1304** John Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008).
- Ref-1486** McGarvey, J.W., *Acts of the Apostles* (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, 1892).
- Ref-1487** Lenski, R.C.H., *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961).
- Ref-1488** Richard N. Longnecker, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981).
- Ref-1489** John D. Barry, et al *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/55_Acts_16_16-24/index.htm.
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.mabanachapel.org/teaching/index.html#20100103>.
- d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.