

# VOICES FROM HEAVEN AND HELL

by

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### "I Was Awakened By An Earthquake"

**by the Philippian Jailer**

"I have a most remarkable experience to relate to you. I was awakened by an earthquake. This may not seem unusual unless you realize that it was not that of ordinary sleep from which I was awakened but a sleep of death. This earthquake caused me to enter into a world which I never knew existed. But let me tell you my story in order.

"I was a Roman living in the colony city of Philippi in Macedonia. My occupation was that of jailor. I was proud of my position which was a very important one. The malefactors were many. Our prison was large. Not only was my position important but it was a very responsible one. It was our Roman law that if the jailor allowed any criminal to escape that he himself had to bear whatever punishment was due this criminal. If I allowed one to escape who was to receive the death penalty then I myself would have to die in his place. So you can see what a responsible position this was. It was my pride, however, that not one prisoner had escaped. I saw to it that every one was chained or fastened in stocks. I thoroughly checked each of the doors and the locks which fastened the door. I made certain that no prisoner escaped. Indeed, my life depended upon it.

"The City of Philippi in which I lived was one of which we were proud. We sought in all its activities to make it like Rome the capital city of the Empire. Roman law and Roman customs held sway over our city. We came into prominence when Anthony defeated Brutus and Cassius near our city. Brutus committed suicide and Cassius ordered his freedman to slay him. In this they proved themselves honorable and true Romans. It was our belief that in the time of defeat it was both honorable and brave to take one's life.

"The citizens of Philippi had great respect for Apollo, the GOD of prophecy. Many journeyed to Delphi, the oracle of Apollo. It was there that Apollo killed Python the serpent which guarded the oracle. It was for this that Apollo was sometimes called Pythius, and the Delphi was formerly called Pythia. The priestesses of the oracle were possessed of the spirit of Python and were enabled to disclose secrets and forecast future events. Within our city were many fortune tellers

and soothsayers. Many of our citizens would consult a soothsayer about every venture in which they were to partake.

"Our city had a very famous diviner in the person of a young slave girl. She was truly possessed of the spirit of Python and was equal to any priestess of the Delphi. While I had not consulted her personally because of the pressure of my work, many of my friends had. One friend told me how she had prophesied that a ship in which he was interested would be wrecked but that his uncle who was aboard ship would be saved. And this actually happened. Another friend told how she had told him that within ten days he would receive a large fortune. And this actually occurred. I could tell you of one event after another that she truly prophesied would occur.

"She was owned by a group of men who were becoming immensely rich through her divination. The citizens flocked to consult her. As a matter of fact she became so busy that one had to make an appointment weeks ahead of time. She brought her owners much gain.

"Then something happened. It seems that several Jews had entered into our city. There were not many Jews living in Philippi. There were a few. They worshipped on what they called their Sabbath by the river side. But these Jews were strangers. And the remarkable thing was that this young girl who had the spirit of Python within her began to follow these strangers. She did not follow them silently but cried out: **'These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation: People told me that she followed these Jews wherever they went. From early morning till they retired at night she followed them. And constantly she cried out: 'These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.'**

"The men who owned her were at their wits end. She refused to prophesy. They could do nothing with her. They tried to persuade her to prophesy as formerly. But she refused. It seemed as though she were in a trance and that the spirit of Python compelled her to follow these men and to cry out: **'These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.'** The whole city was stirred up about this and it was all that my friends talked about.

"Then another unusual thing happened. The leader of these Jews suddenly pronounced these words to the spirit of Python within her: **'I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.'** And the spirit left her. The owners of this girl were dumfounded. They tried to have her prophesy. But she no longer had the ability. She was just like any normal girl. This meant they would no longer be able to profit from her. They filled the air with their curses.

"They caught up with two of these Jews whose names were Paul and Silas. They dragged them into the market place before the magistrates. A large crowd followed them to see the excitement. The owners of the girl said to the magistrates: **'These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.'**

"Both the multitude and the magistrates were indignant when they heard the nationality of these men. These Jews had just stirred up trouble in Rome so that Emperor Claudius expelled them. And now they were stirring up trouble in our city. And it was a Roman law that a foreign religion could not be introduced. It was told that these Jews spoke about another GOD of whom

we knew nothing. Were not our gods sufficient without introducing a strange deity? As a colony of Rome we must be faithful to the laws of Rome. So reasoned the magistrates.

"The magistrates tore the clothing off this Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods. This was no pleasant thing, let me tell you. I have seen prisoners more dead than alive after such a beating. Many would have their bones broken and flesh lacerated. After these two Jews were thoroughly beaten they were brought to me. The magistrates gave me strict instructions to keep them safely or else I would receive what they received and more.

"You may be well assured that I would be obedient to the order of the magistrates. I took them into the innermost dungeon. This we kept for the most vicious prisoners. I hated to enter into this dungeon myself for it was cold and damp. It was always annoying to have the chains rust on the bodies of the prisoners. We kept several stocks there into which we fastened the feet of the criminals. This prohibited them from lying down and if torture were ordered, we could stretch their limbs. Besides being cold and damp it was overrun with vermin.

"The bodies of the two Jews were raw and bleeding. Those who used the rods had done a good job. The two men were strangely meek and silent. I was accustomed to have men struggle and curse. But I had no difficulty with them at all. I was curious about them for I knew of their power to cast the spirit of Python out of the slave girl. And I knew what she said about them that they were servants of the most high GOD who do shew the way of salvation.

"When I had them safely fastened in the stocks I could not help mocking them. I said: 'So you are the fellows that are the servants of the most high GOD. Well, your GOD could not have been so powerful or else you would not have been beaten and imprisoned. And you are going to proclaim the way of salvation! You better try and save yourselves. No one has been able to loose himself from these stocks and chains. And look at those powerful doors. Who could burst them open? You Jews and your most high GOD! Go ahead and proclaim your way of salvation!' They said nothing but their lips moved as though they were making some petition of their GOD. So I left them.

"After making certain that all the doors were properly fastened I retired for the night and slept. Suddenly at midnight I was flung out of my bed by a mighty upheaval. It was an earthquake. My first thought was my prisoners. I ran out and behold the doors that I had fastened so thoroughly were all wide open and all the prisoners must have fled. What could I do? I would have to answer with my life. I could not stand the disgrace. So as a Roman and like Brutus I drew out my sword from its sheath. I was just about to plunge it into my heart when the sound of a voice came from the innermost dungeon: **'Do thyself no harm; for we are all here.'**

"Could that be true? I called for a light. I sprang into the inner dungeon and behold there were the two Jews free from the stocks and chains. They must be superhuman. I fell trembling before them and then I led them out of the prison.

"It is somewhat hard for me to relate all the thoughts that entered into my mind. But I never was more frightened in all my life. I suddenly realized that the GOD of these strangers was the living GOD. The earthquake, the opening of the prison doors, the safety of all the prisoners made me realize the GOD of these two Jews was both almighty and living. Almost I had plunged myself

into the presence of the living GOD by an act of suicide. And I had insulted GOD. I mocked Him and His messengers. All my life I had lived indifferent to GOD and even cursed His name. I denied His existence. My conscience smote me and I trembled as a leaf.

"As soon as I led the two men out of prison I fell down before them and cried out: '**Sirs what must I do to be saved?**' I knew that they had the way of salvation. I knew that they could direct me as to what I must do so that the wrath of GOD would not fall upon me. Whatever they said I would do. It mattered not if I had to give up all my silver and gold. It mattered not how many sacrifices I would have to offer to their GOD. It mattered not what penance they might prescribe. I was ready to do anything so that the wrath of almighty GOD would not come upon me. Trembling I waited for their directions.

"Then they told me what is surely the most wonderful news that this world has ever heard. They said, '**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.**' I did not know who this JESUS CHRIST was nor what it was to believe on him. So they explained what they meant not only to me but to my household also who had gathered around us.

"They said that JESUS CHRIST was the Son of the GOD whom I had offended and whose wrath I feared. They told me that the Son of GOD entered into our flesh by being born of a virgin in a little town of Bethlehem in Palestine. He lived in the country of the Jews and at the age of thirty began to teach the message of the kingdom of GOD. They told me of the many miracles which He accomplished and how He forgave men their sins. And then they told me how this Son of GOD was crucified upon a cross like a common criminal.

"'But', said Paul, 'our message does not stop with a crucified JESUS. He rose from the tomb on the third day and was seen of the disciples. He appeared to me and told me to proclaim the way of salvation to the Gentiles even as the slave girl intimated. That is why Silas and I are here in the city of Philippi. You ask us what you must do in order to be saved. In one respect it is not necessary to do anything for by the works of the law no one is justified. The reason why it is not necessary for you to do anything is because CHRIST has done it for you. When He died upon the cross He took our sins upon Him. You are still trembling because you realize that all your life you have ignored the true and living GOD. You cannot atone for such a sin. But JESUS, the Son of GOD, has taken your sin upon Himself. He died for you. The thing which you have to do is to believe in our Lord JESUS. You must believe that He died for your sins upon the cross. **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.**'

"Did I believe? Of course I believed. It was the most wonderful news I had ever heard. It was wonderful to know that GOD loved me so much as to give His only begotten Son and that by simply believing on Him my sins were forgiven. My wife and my children also believed. I washed the wounds of Silas and Paul. And even before the day dawned we were all baptized.

"It took an earthquake to awaken me from my sleep of death. I tremble to think what would have happened if GOD had not sent an earthquake. I would have remained a lost and condemned sinner. And to think that there are thousands who live as I lived, utterly indifferent to the fact that there is a living GOD in Heaven. They mock Him and curse Him. But the living GOD cannot be mocked. He will punish. Many scoff at the message of salvation which He sends by His messengers. They are scoffing the living and mighty GOD. Oh, that they might awake before

it is too late! Oh, that their conscience might become alive to the danger of falling into the hands of an angry GOD! But I am afraid that it will take an earthquake to awaken many to their danger.

"It is my hope and prayer that my testimony may be used of GOD to awaken those who are sleeping the sleep of death. If your conscience is awakened I bring to you the message of the Gospel: **'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.'**

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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