

New Testament Conversions – No. 8

The Conversion of a Jailer

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While in the Eastern European city of Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison (Acts 16:19–24). Instead of bemoaning their unjust treatment, they were praying and singing God’s praises, even at midnight when a great earthquake shook the prison, freeing all the prisoners (Acts 16:25–26). The Jailer, fearing the escape of his prisoners and knowing that Roman law required his execution if they escaped, was on the verge of suicide when Paul told him that none had escaped (Acts 16:27–28). The jailer was so overcome with gratitude and respect for these men of God that he inquired of them, “What must I do to be saved?” Never having heard of Christ before hearing the songs and prayers of Paul and Silas, as far as we know, the jailer was told to believe on the Lord, and he would be saved (Acts 16:31). After hearing the Gospel from Paul and Silas, the jailer took the two preachers, washed their stripes, and was baptized (with his household) immediately, after which there was a great rejoicing at their having believed in God (Acts 16:32–34).

As in the case of Cornelius, the jailer is told initially to believe on the Lord Jesus to be saved (v.31). However, also as in the case of Cornelius and every other case of New Testament conversion, the preachers did not say, neither did they mean, that by merely acknowledging the Sonship of Christ the Jailer would be saved. Here is another case where “believe” is used to express full compliance with the Lord’s conditions of pardon, which are all rooted in belief or faith. The context shows that after this man heard the Word of God, he expressed his penitent attitude by washing the wounds of the preachers which he had formerly consented to (vv. 32–33). Not only did “believing on the Lord” include repentance, but baptism as well, as is clearly shown (vv 33–34). Notice that their baptism was not postponed several days until a “baptismal service” was planned, but it took place “the same hour of the night,” “immediately,” even though it was about midnight (v. 25). This is consistent with all New Testament teaching that baptism is a condition of salvation or forgiveness of sins, otherwise they would surely have waited until a more convenient hour. It is also noteworthy that the rejoicing occurred **after** baptism rather than before (v. 34). Had they been saved when they merely believed, should not the rejoicing have taken place then?

The clearest evidence of all concerning what Paul included in telling the jailer to believe in the Lord and he would be saved is found in verse 34. **After** the jailer and his household were baptized, Luke writes that the jailer “rejoiced greatly, with all his house, **having believed in God.**” This is a plain statement that one has not truly believed in God until he has obeyed what God has told us to do to be saved, which includes being baptized for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Despite the plainness of Luke’s definition of saving faith, which includes baptism, in the case of the jailer and his household, men continue to ignore it and erroneously teach that this case exemplifies the “faith only salvation” fallacy. There is no teaching in the Bible that one can be saved by faith only, either implicitly or explicitly. But the Scriptures plainly teach that one **cannot** be saved by faith only (Jam 2:17, 24). This case perfectly harmonizes with all the others from the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel on Pentecost: God requires men to hear, believe and obey the Gospel, culminating in baptism, at which time they are saved by His grace (Mark 16:15–16).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in the “Bible Thoughts” Column for the *Hood County News*, Granbury, Texas, October 8, 1978.]

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