

Who was Silas in the Bible?

Silas was a leader in the early church, a fellow missionary with Paul, and a “faithful brother” (1 Peter 5:12). He was a Hellenistic Jew who, it seems, was also a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37). He is also referred to as “Silvanus” in Paul’s Epistles (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 1:1).

When we first meet Silas in Scripture, he is a leader and teacher in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22, 32). After the Jerusalem Council, Silas was chosen to help communicate the council’s decision to Antioch, along with the apostle Paul. Soon afterwards, Paul set out on his second missionary journey, and he chose Silas to accompany him (Acts 15:40-41).

On this journey, Paul and Silas traveled to Greece. In Philippi, the missionaries were arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. But “about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). God then miraculously released them, and the jailer, having witnessed their faith, asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (verses 30-31). The jailer was saved that night, and he and his family were all baptized. The next day, the city officials learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and they were immediately fearful; their mistreatment of Paul and Silas the day before had violated Roman law. The city leaders immediately released Paul and Silas from custody. The missionaries left town, but they left behind a body of believers—the first church in Europe.

The start of the Philippian church is a great reminder that, even in extremely difficult times, God can bring about great things. God will glorify His name, even through our

trials and tribulations. Paul and Silas had this perspective, and that's why they were able to sing at midnight.

The fact that the prisoners were "listening" to Paul and Silas singing hymns is not a detail to be skipped over lightly. As followers of Jesus Christ, we, too, have people watching how we react to life's circumstances. If Paul and Silas had been griping or protesting or whining about the injustice of their situation, the jailer would have never been drawn to believe in the Lord Jesus. But they responded to their situation gracefully and with joy—their actions were completely foreign to how others expected them to react. Because they were "salt" and "light" (Matthew 5:13-14), others had their hearts opened to the gospel.

Later, Silas and Timothy ministered in Berea (Acts 17:14), and Silas spent extra time in Corinth, ministering after Paul left that city. Silas served with Peter as well; in fact, he is thought to have delivered the epistle of 1 Peter to its recipients (1 Peter 5:12).

Silas is a great example of someone who used his gifts to serve the Lord and others with all his heart. The apostles called him "faithful," and he was known as one to "encourage and strengthen the brothers" (Acts 15:32). Multitudes in the early church were blessed by Silas, and Paul and Peter were heartened by his faithful companionship. Silas was "a brother . . . born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17).