

# Bumps & Turns in the Road

Acts 15:36-41; 16:6-15



## Collision with Barnabas

Paul and Barnabas had already gone together on one missionary journey (*Acts 13:4-14:28*). They had returned to Antioch where they were teaching and preaching the word of the Lord (*15:35*). They were now planning their 2nd missionary journey. Read Acts 15:36-41.<sup>1</sup>

1. Why did Paul and Barnabas separate? What might this indicate about their personalities and priorities? Was it all bad? Explain.<sup>2</sup>

## No Left Turn, No Right Turn

Paul and Silas went to Derbe, then to Lystra, where Timothy joined them (*16:1-3*). They traveled from town to town strengthening the churches (*16:4-5*).

Read Acts 16:6-8. Apparently, Paul and his companions had planned to go westward into the province of Asia. But the Holy Spirit did not allow it (*16:6*). Then they wanted to continue north into Bithynia, but “the Spirit of Jesus” would not allow it (*16:7*).<sup>3</sup>



2. What do we see concerning planning, moving forward, and guidance in Paul's journey?<sup>4</sup> What does this teach us about the Christian's journey in general?
3. We are not sure *how* the Spirit prevented them from going where they had planned. Maybe he spoke through a prophet.<sup>5</sup> What other ways might God use to prevent Christians from going in a particular direction (both then and now)?

## Unexpected Sign

Read Acts 16:9-12.<sup>6</sup> After a series of divine prohibitions (*16:6-7*), Paul then received positive guidance. Sometimes clear direction comes only after road blocks and closed doors.

4. Paul received clear guidance through a vision, which was extraordinary. By what other ways may Christians sense God's guidance in their journeys? In general, what should Christians do to receive God's guidance?<sup>7</sup>



<sup>1</sup> This passage follows the ‘Council at Jerusalem’ (*Acts 15:1-29*), which was a very significant event in the life of the church. The council issued guidelines concerning the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

<sup>2</sup> Paul and Barnabas had a ‘sharp disagreement’ over John Mark who had earlier left their mission (*Acts 13:5, 13*). Disagreements do occur between Christians, but God can work through them. In this case, the result was two missionary teams and fields instead of one. It should be noted that Paul later valued John Mark (*2 Tim. 4:11*), who helped Paul while imprisoned in Rome (*Col. 4:10*), worked with Peter (*1 Pet. 5:13*) and wrote the gospel of Mark.

<sup>3</sup> Asia and Bithynia would be evangelized (*Acts 19; 1 Peter 1:1*) but God had other plans for Paul at this time.

<sup>4</sup> Paul was active in his obedience to God. He kept moving and adjusting as God guided him through various means.

<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit might have spoken directly to Paul or Silas, who was also a prophet (*15:32*). Other general ways might include inner compulsion, the words and actions of others (including the church), and circumstances.

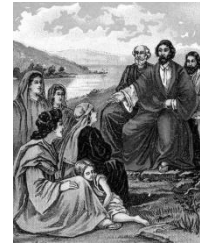
<sup>6</sup> The narrator begins to use ‘we’ in verse 10. At this point, Luke (the writer of Acts) became part of the group.

<sup>7</sup> Christians can get caught up in seeking signs. We should start by responding to the clear guidance we already have, primarily the Bible. The Holy Spirit will guide us when we prayerfully submit our hearts to God and his Word.

## Joyful Stop by the River

Read Acts 16:13-15.<sup>8</sup> Paul and Silas went to the river to find a place of prayer. They found some women and began to speak to them. “One of those listening was a woman...named Lydia ... The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (16:14, NIV).

Lydia’s conversion is the first one specifically mentioned in Paul’s second missionary journey. Since leaving Lystra, Paul and his companions had traveled all the way through Galatia and across the Aegean Sea to arrive at a riverside for this “divine appointment.”



5. As travelers in the Christian journey, we may have particular ideas of where we want to go and what we want to accomplish. But what is most important? What is “success” in the Christian journey?<sup>9</sup>
  
6. Everyone’s journey has relationship difficulties, unexpected changes in direction, and plans that don’t work out. Many people understand that a wise person adjusts to these “bumps and turns” and does his/her best to move forward in life. But how is the “Christian’s journey” different?<sup>10</sup> What difference does that make in *your* life?

## Big Pothole



As Paul and his companions continue their journey, they encounter a big pothole. As a result of their ministry, they are severely beaten and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16-24). Is this the end of their journey? No! What happens next? Stay tuned for Lesson 5.

## Reflection/Application

- The Christian’s journey has a guide. That guide is God. In what ways are you seeking God’s guidance? As you continue your journey, are you adjusting and trusting? Are you available and responsive to the “divine appointments” in your life? Review this lesson.
- Who is the guide of *your* life journey? Is your guide leading you through a life of true purpose, peace, fulfillment and everlasting joy? If not, seek the Good Guide and ask Him to open your heart to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Lydia was a ‘worshiper of God,’ which probably meant she was a Gentile who believed in God and followed the moral teachings of the Jewish Scripture, but was not a full convert. The Lord ‘opened her heart’ to respond to the gospel. This emphasizes that God enables faith, but human beings are still responsible for their response to the truth.

<sup>9</sup> In general, our ‘success’ is defined more by our faithfulness to God than what *we* accomplish. God is the one who gives true success. We may want to accomplish great things, and we may be disappointed that we’ve not achieved our own goals. But faithfulness includes being available for the ‘divine appointments’ in our lives, however small they may seem. We should make the most of the opportunities God gives us, which may come at unexpected times. Let us not miss the present by getting too distracted by our past journey or too focused on our dreams for the future.

<sup>10</sup> The Christian’s journey is lived for God. It is about His purpose and plan, and He is in control. God is all-knowing and all-powerful and He will accomplish His purpose. Nothing is ‘unexpected’ to God. If we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, we have no reason to worry about our lives (Matthew 6:33). Whenever we face difficulties, trials and unexpected changes, we can still trust that God is working out His plan (Romans 8:28). And He is faithful to enable us to finish our journey (8:29-39). This brings great peace and purpose to the Christian’s journey.