

## Acts: Expand (Acts 15:36 – 16:40)

For the week of May 15, 2016

### Background

Because of a disagreement over John Mark, Paul and Barnabas decided to separate. Paul chose Silas and, with Timothy, began another missionary journey. Responding to a plea in a vision, they initially took the gospel to Macedonia. Paul's second missionary journey centered on the cities of the Greek provinces of Macedonia and Achaia, which included Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth. The second journey probably began in A.D. 48 or 49 and ended in A.D. 51.

Read Acts 15:36-41. Paul and Barnabas were a great team. But great teams have disagreements. Let's look at some aspects of this split-up and the aftermath.

1. After reading verses 36-41, was there anything Paul and Barnabas should have done to try to rectify their disagreement? Do you feel they sought the Holy Spirit's leading? Was prayer mentioned? Direction from the leaders of the church?
2. One obvious lesson is that even the best Christians do not always agree. When disagreements arise with other Christians, how should you proceed in a way that honors the Lord?
3. Often through our difficulties and failures God leads us to increased productivity and creativity. How was that realized in this story? Can you think of an example in your life where God took a bad situation and made it something good? Share with your group.

Read Acts 16:1-5. What's this? Paul, the champion of spiritual freedom who argued successfully for liberation of the Gentiles from the necessity of circumcision (Acts 15), now does a 180 by circumcising Timothy.

4. Why would Paul take this action? And why would Timothy agree to this?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-21. Does this help explain Paul's action with Timothy?

Read Acts 16:6-15. This passage starts with God saying "no" and "no" again and then moves to the conversion of a businesswoman named Lydia.

6. Can God guide us by sending us only "no's?" How? I'm sure at some point during our life we've all felt God has abandoned us in the midst of "closed doors," but when we look at the big picture, we can see that a "no" is as much an act of guidance as a yes. Share an example from your life where God's no was really God's guidance.

7. What are we told about Lydia? How did she come to faith? What signs are we given that Lydia was truly converted? Verse 14 is a classic statement on how people become Christians!

Read Acts 16:16-24. This story is of a girl filled with a demon or demons. She was a clairvoyant owned by spiritual pimps who sold her metaphysical powers. Satan's strategy was obviously to derail the gospel by infiltrating it, by forming an apparent alliance with Christ's work – for his own ends, of course. He loves to distort the gospel just enough to twist it into a deadly heresy.

8. Why do you think it took Paul a few days before he finally addressed the problem with the slave girl?

9. True or false: Whenever the preaching of the gospel touches the economic structure of the powers that be, opposition is bound to come. Explain your answer.

Read Acts 16:25-40. As a group discuss this wonderful passage.

10. Describe Paul's and Silas's response to being flogged and thrown into prison. How would you respond if you were beaten and thrown in jail (assume no Wi-Fi, social media, etc.)?

11. Why do you think the jailer asked the question "What must I do to be saved?"

12. How does the response of the jailer (vv. 31-34) compare to Lydia's response to the gospel (vv. 14-15, 40)?

### Pray

*"O Lord, help us to unfurl the flag of your Son wherever you desire to use us as your witnesses today and days to come. Help us to know with whom you want us to share the gospel of life, and to do so wisely and skillfully. Help us not to be mute because of fear, but to praise you always, even in the most difficult circumstances. May your presence in us draw others, even our enemies, to your salvation, found only in your Son. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

### Final Thought

So there was Lydia the merchant princess, a possessed slave girl, the Philippian jailer and probably a few ex-inmates that made up the first European church. The rich and poor, the slave and the free, male and female were all one in Christ. The gospel was introduced on a continent that needed it desperately. What a church!