

“Divine guidance” – Discussion Questions on Acts 15v36-16v10

*Feel free to choose the questions that you feel are most interesting or relevant for your group – there is no need to go through them all! This is a transition passage between the council of Jerusalem in 15v1-35 and Paul’s second missionary journey which begins in 16v11. The first two sections (15v36-41 and 16v1-5) are really dealing with the aftermath of the council of Jerusalem, and then 16v6-10 deals with how God guides Paul and his companions to go and preach the gospel in Macedonia. Although these topics may seem unrelated, I think we can see the progress of God’s gospel purposes worked out through them and some principles of guidance for ourselves. It is important to note that this is not a complete answer to the question of guidance but rather three examples of some of the ways that God can guide.*

Read Acts 15v36-16v10

1. Why do we often find guidance difficult? Are there times when guidance is not difficult?
2. Looking at 15v36-41, would you be on team Paul or team Barnabas? What different aspects of God’s work do you think each was trying to protect?
3. If we look at the whole section from 15v36-16v5, how does God work through the conflict between Paul and Barnabas? How might this help to shape our response to some of the conflicts between Bible-believing Christians that we see or experience in church?
4. In 16v1-5 we see that Paul has Timothy circumcised in spite of the fact that Paul has previously argued that circumcision is not necessary for salvation. Why do you think Paul does this? Looking at 1 Corinthians 9v19-22, how does this help us to understand the principle that lies behind Paul’s actions? What limits are there to how this principle applies?
5. The ultimate example of embracing pain for the sake of unbelievers is the Lord Jesus. How can his example encourage us to embrace pain for the sake of the gospel without it leading to guilt or robbing us of joy?
6. Thinking about the way that God closed the doors to Paul in both Asia and Bithynia (16v6-10), can you think of examples of this in your own life? How far do you think it is wise to depend on feelings of unease or a lack of peace when it comes to guidance?
7. If it is true that God closes some doors and opens others, how do you think this applies to us? Do you think that this might lead us to too passive a view of guidance?
8. In this passage we see that Paul has his plans (preaching the gospel in Asia/ Bithynia), but yet God has much greater plans for him (the spread of the gospel into Europe). How might this encourage you in your Christian life this week?