

Is this Really God's Plan?

Acts 16:16-40

Introduction:

Have you ever prayed that the Lord would guide you, and as things unfolded wondered if you got the message right? Paul and Silas are convinced that God has led them to Macedonia via a vision. There they encounter a business woman named Lydia who becomes their first convert in Europe. What a great start. Surely they were in the will of the Lord! Then things seem to slip off the rails. Did they somehow miss the will of God? Wouldn't God bring blessing and peace if they were doing the right thing? It is not easy to know when we are in the will of God at times. It is truly a faith journey, where pain and struggle can be as much a part of God's will as safety and easy circumstances. As you read through the passage, as yourself, "Was Paul still on track with God's will? How would he know if he was?" The answers may help us in our struggles to know God's will today.

Arrested for the Gospel – Acts 16:16-24

1. Accord to verse 16 where were the disciples heading? Who do they encounter on the way? What are we told about this person?

The word used to describe this spirit refers to the mythical snake Python of Delphi. This god was under Apollo, who defeated Python, and the priestess would consult Python for spiritual insights and answers to questions posed by worshippers of Apollo. Many believed the gods spoke through human instruments, and it was this belief that opened the doors for the slave's owners to use her for their own person gain.¹

2. What do you think drew the slave girl to Paul and Silas? Was she a help to Paul and Silas' ministry (cf. v. 17)?

¹ Richard p. Thompson, New Beacon Bible Commentary: Acts (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2015), p. 280.

3. How does the slave girl identify Paul and Silas? (v. 17) How does she describe their message? (Note: the original Greek texts do not have the definite article “the” in front of the words “way to be saved”. Therefore it should be translated “a way to be saved.”) Does it make a difference if the message is “the” way to be saved or “a” way to be saved? Explain.
4. How persistent was the slave girl in tagging along with the Apostles (v. 17)? Finally Paul could take it no more and “annoyed” or “grieved in his spirit” he did something about the constant companion. What did he do according to verse 18? Who did Paul address? Why?
5. Notice that Paul gives the command in the name of Jesus. This is a recurring theme in Acts (3:6, 16; 4:10, 12, 17, 18, 30). Why is this important? What was the result of calling on the name of Jesus (cf. v. 18)?
6. What was it that caused the owners of the slave girl to become angry (v. 19)? What does this tell us about their view of her as a person?
7. The marketplace was also the place for legal affairs. The owners of the slave girl lay out their charges against Paul and Silas in verses 20-21. First they note that they are Jews. Why might they do that? Second, they charge them with putting the city in an uproar. What is the irony in that charge? They go on to say that Paul and Silas were “advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” What customs were they referring to? Was this the true source of their anger?
8. Which side did the crowd side with – the Apostles or the merchants? Why? (v. 22)
9. No time is given for a defence. The Apostles are stripped and beaten with rods (v. 23). Verse 24 describes the flogging they received. What are we told?

10. We are now introduced to the jailer. What task is he given (v. 23)? How does he respond (v. 24)? Once again, humanly speaking, was there any way to get out of that place?
11. Can you see why it would be easy to question, “Are we in the will of God?” It would be easy to doubt their coming to Philippi, to preaching on the streets, to casting out the demon. No doubt Satan would try and raise doubts. Has that ever happened to you – you felt that you were following God’s leading but it seemed everything was going wrong? Share if you can.

Midnight Service – Acts 16:25-34

12. It is midnight. All the prisoners should be sleeping, but what are the battered and bruised Apostles doing (v. 25)? What impact might this be having on the other prisoners?
13. What happens that night that was so out of the ordinary (v. 26)? What might this suggest is the cause of this event? Do you think there is a symbolic message here as well as a practical issue?
14. What do you think woke the jailer up (v. 27)? What does he see, and what is his response (v. 27)? Why this response?
15. What does Paul shout out (v. 28)? Paul is addressing the person who represents those who beat him. What does Paul’s actions indicate?
16. In verses 29-30 we have the response of the jailer to what Paul has said. What three things did the jailer do? What one question did he ask?
17. There is a common theme throughout the book of Acts, and that is the way to salvation. What is the answer Paul gives the jailer (v. 31)? Is salvation only for one or two, or does God want to embrace our whole families?

18. Paul goes on to teach those present about the word of the Lord – in the middle of the night! The jailer is truly changed by the message, so what two things does he do (v. 33)?
19. Now the jailer sets before the prisoners a feast. They had accepted him, and he was showing he also accepted them. Tell about the disposition of the jailer after he put his faith in Jesus (v. 34). What made him this way?

Here is another important person in the Gospel story. Lidia was the first baptised convert in Europe! This unnamed jailer is the first convert recorded that was not connected to the Jewish faith. Until now all were Jewish in background or “God fearers,” which meant they were interested in the Jewish faith. This man has no background – only a miracle and the Gospel preached in the middle of the night!

Release with Honour! Acts 16:35-40

20. The next morning the magistrates send an order to the jailer. What was the order (v. 35)? It seems they felt the “criminals” had enough punishment – a beating and a night in jail. So the jailer comes to Paul and Silas and gives them what message (v. 36)?
21. Paul is not ready to leave quietly. What three facts does Paul point out as reasons why he will not go quietly? What does he want the magistrates to do? (v. 37)
22. What concerned the magistrates according to verse 38? Why?
23. So what do the magistrates do according to verse 39? Why might this be important to Paul and Silas and the Gospel?
24. Where do Paul and Silas go? What do they do there (v. 40)? After this they left town...

Conclusion

“It takes little imagination to see that this Roman jailer was a typical calloused official with no sympathy for man and no interest in Christ. Even though Paul and Silas had been humiliated and beaten, the jailer added to their sufferings by thrusting them into the inner prison and putting their feet in the stocks. Then he went about his business and finally went to sleep for the night.

But “At night His song is with me” (Ps. 42:8; cf. 77:6, NIV), and Paul and Silas praised God instead of complaining! What a testimony this meeting was! At midnight, God went to work and shook the prison so that all the prisoners were released. If a Roman jailer lost a prisoner, it meant his own life would be taken; so it is no wonder that the jailer, on awakening, tried to commit suicide. This is Satan the murderer at work again; for had Paul not called out and stopped him, that jailer would have died and gone to hell. As it was, Paul’s love and God’s grace reached the man’s heart, and he was converted.”²

“The nucleus of that church was made up of a wealthy woman, a slave girl, and a Roman jailer! But such is the grace of God: Christ takes the weak things of the world and confounds the mighty.”³

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). [*Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament*](#) (p. 321). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). [*Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament*](#) (p. 322). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.