

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XL. God's Pattern For His Circumstantial Leading

(Acts 16:6-10)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 16:6-10 records how God guided Paul's ministry team by way of circumstantial leading, what proves to be an invaluable example for us in our era when God uses Scripture and circumstances coupled with Scripture to guide us. We thus view this passage for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. God's Pattern For His Circumstantial Leading, Acts 16:6-10.

- A. The Lord intended for Paul's ministry team to extend their ministry beyond Asia Minor into Europe, a step that in retrospect has enormous ramifications in Church History.
- B. To lead Paul's team to Europe, instead of giving them an immediate vision with God's angel, what occurred on several other occasions (cf. Acts 9:12; 18:9; 22:17-21; 27:22-24), the Lord led them circumstantially:
 1. The Lord began to close doors of opportunity circumstantially for Paul's ministry team, Acts 16:6-8:
 - a. Having visited the churches that were established on Paul's first missionary journey in Phrygia (Antioch) and Galatia (Iconium, Lystra and Derbe; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, Map 13: "The Missionary Journeys of Paul"), the Holy Spirit prohibited them from ministering the Word in the province of Asia to the north of Phrygia, Acts 16:6; Ibid. We do not know if this prohibition was audible or if it was merely a series of obstructing hurdles that made ministry in Asia impossible, but it applies to circumstantial leading.
 - b. Paul's team then arrived at the border of Mysia, the area west by northwest of Asia (Ibid.), trying to go north into Bithynia that lay on the southern coast of the Black Sea (Ibid.), but again the Holy Spirit somehow did not allow them to go there, Acts 16:7 NIV.
 - c. This repeat restriction of the Holy Spirit is remarkable, given the fact that later the Apostle Peter wrote his first epistle to believers in both Asia and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1), for God planned for people in these regions to be evangelized as part of the worldwide thrust of the Matthew 28:18-20 Great Commission!
 2. Since the Holy Spirit had restricted them from ministering anywhere in that part of Asia Minor, Paul's ministry team went west, stopping at the seaport town of Troas on the Aegean Sea, Acts 16:8; Ibid.
 3. Later, upon Paul's revisit to this seaport town, he was arrested, taken to Rome, imprisoned in his second Roman imprisonment and beheaded. (Ibid., p. 1723: "Introduction to the Letter of Paul to Titus: Historical Background") Yet, at **this** time on his second missionary journey, Paul was *free* to come or go at Troas!
 4. Accordingly, at Troas during his second missionary journey, Paul received a night vision of a man from Macedonia across the Aegean Sea asking Paul to come over into Macedonia and help them, Acts 16:9.
 5. Though this was not an angel of the Lord as in other visions that Paul received in the Book of Acts, Paul's ministry team immediately endeavored to sail from Troas northwest to the region of Macedonia (Ibid., Map 13), concluding that the Lord had used this vision to call them to preach the Gospel to people in Macedonia, and they began to minister in the town of Philippi in Macedonia, Acts 16:10-12 ESV.
 6. Circumstantially, this directive to cross the Aegean Sea from Troas to Macedonia, a west by northwesterly direction, lines up closely with the direction the Lord had been directing Paul ever since he began his missionary ministry from Antioch in Syria at the Holy Spirit's Acts 13:1-3 call for missionary work: the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea align fairly closely to a nearly west by northwesterly direction from Antioch of Syria (Ibid.), additional circumstantial evidence of the Lord's guidance by way of His past precedents!

Lesson: *God circumstantially led Paul's ministry team to go to Europe by (1) closing doors to minister in Asia Minor, (2) by opening doors to minister in Macedonia, (3) by timing these open doors to fit an era when Paul was free to leave Troas for Macedonia, and (4) by having the journey to Macedonia align with God's past precedents.*

Application: *(1) May we discern God's circumstantial guidance through (a) the doors that he closes, (b) through the doors that He opens, (c) through the timing of His circumstantial signals, and (d) by seeing His circumstantial signals align with past precedents of His guidance. (2) If we have only seen God close doors for us, may we wait at our "Troas" location for the Lord to show us what to do next!*