



Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

"An Incredible Journey"

I've only watched one episode of *The Amazing Race* once so I'm no expert. I know that the teams must interpret certain clues along the way in order to arrive at the proper destination.

We've come to that time in the life of the apostle Paul that scholars call his Second Missionary Journey. You can read it straight through beginning in Acts 15:36 and ending three years later in Acts 18:22.

It's not an amazing race but it does read as if Paul had to discern certain clues along the way in order to go where God intended to send him.

As we highlight certain stops on this three year mission we'll be looking for some of the ways The Lord leads us on our own journey with Him.

The reason for the trip lays a foundation for how God leads us on a day-to-day basis.

Act 15:36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."

Paul wanted to see how the believers were doing. He wanted to go to them in order to strengthen them and encourage them.

If you want to be led by The Lord, and discern His leading, it's gonna require that you genuinely care about how others are progressing in Christ. It's gonna require you consider others over yourself.

The trip seemed to start on a bad note.

Act 15:37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.

Act 15:38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.

Act 15:39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus;

Act 15:40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.

Act 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

It's important we understand this was not the typical church division over the color of the carpet. It wasn't division at all. As it turns out it was multiplication because instead of one team being sent out there were two teams.

Godly men won't always agree on things like methods. It's OK; no one is at fault. As long as it multiplies rather than minimizes ministry, go with it.

Paul takes Silas with him to Tarsus. From there they travel to Derbe and Lystra. It is in Lystra that he meets Timothy who would become his frequent traveling companion, fellow laborer in spreading the gospel, and trusted pastor (Acts 16:1; First Timothy 1:2, 4:14).

Act 16:3 Paul wanted to have [Timothy] go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

Because Paul and Silas would be ministering to Jews in synagogues, and because Timothy was Jewish on his mother's side, he'd have to be circumcised in order to attend the services.

God will always lead you in ways to not offend others in order that you might be better able to minister to them.

With Timothy they continued northward through Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:6). They strengthened the churches by delivering the proclamation of the Jerusalem Council, telling them that Gentiles need not convert to Judaism in order to be saved.

It's at this point that Paul is prevented by God from going in certain directions.

Acts 16:6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.

Acts 16:7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.

Acts 16:8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

Acts 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Acts 16:10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

We're left to speculate as to how they were "forbidden" by the Holy Spirit. It may have been by a Word of prophecy; it may have been by outward circumstances, e.g., no way of passage.

The vision, however, was pretty plain. No need for much interpretation.

We must certainly say that God can lead this way - by a vision, which we would consider an exercise of the gift of prophecy.

Notice, though, that the vision was in a context of other occurrences - in this case, their being prevented from going to other towns and regions. It had to be taken together to be acted upon.

I'd add, too, that the prerequisite to all this supernatural leading was the fact Paul and the others were already on their way, actively involved in sacrificial ministry.

The whole picture, then, is this. Be busy serving The Lord. As you are He will order your circumstances to lead you - sometimes by permitting you but other times preventing you. All the while be open to receive a supernatural Word from Him. Follow it as long as you keep it within the context in which it was given.

The very next day the missionaries sailed across the Dardanelles, also called the Hellespont, which separated them from Europe. In Philippi a woman named Lydia heard Paul's preaching. On Pentecost in 50AD Lydia was baptized along with her entire household (Acts 16:12-15).

While in Philippi Paul cast a demon out of a female slave (Acts 16:16-18). Her masters, however, angry that they have lost the ability to make more money from the slave's demonic divination, stirred up the city against him and Silas. They were arrested, beaten and put in prison (Acts 16:19-24). Soon after arriving in jail a miraculous earthquake caused all the cell doors to open and the bonds of all prisoners to be loosed. This event led to the conversion of the prison guard.

God was still leading them despite the adversity. From deep within a prison cell, while locked in stocks, God was still using them.

If you want to be led by The Lord you're going to need to be willing to suffer for His sake. What I'm saying is that your prayer, "lead me, Lord," assumes that His leading could land you in stocks, in a dungeon.

Paul and Silas, along with Timothy and Luke, travelled through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia and arrive in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). In Thessalonica Paul visited a Jewish synagogue and for three consecutive Sabbaths (Saturdays) explained why Jesus is the Old Testament prophesied Savior of Mankind (Acts 17:2-4). Although many believed what was said certain Jews, envious of the Gospel's success, formed a mob and started a riot (Acts 17:4-5). The riotous crowd went to the house of Jason seeking him and Silas. When they were not found, the crowd dragged Jason and some brethren to the local civil magistrates and accused them of wrongdoing (Acts 17:5-8). In a short time, however, Jason and the brethren were let go.

Paul and Silas next preached in a synagogue in Berea. The Bereans were not only willing to listen to what they had to say they also verified what was preached against the Old Testament scriptures (Acts 17:11-12). Many Bereans came to believe the Gospel.

Unfortunately, Jews from Thessalonica arrived in the city seeking to cause more trouble (Acts 17:13). Paul immediately left for the coast and set sail for Athens while the rest of his party stayed in Berea (Acts 17:14).

Paul had an experience in Athens:

Act 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

Paul would go on to have a famous confrontation with Greek intellectuals and philosophers on Mars Hill. It was birthed by his being "provoked" in his spirit. God can lead you through a spiritual provocation as you are observant to things happening around you.

From Athens Paul crossed over to Corinth, the seat of the Roman government of Achaia. He remained there for a year and a half, spreading the Gospel to Jews and Greeks with much success. Paul had another vision in Corinth.

Acts 18:9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision,
"Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent;
Acts 18:10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."
Acts 18:11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Could the great apostle Paul really have been afraid? Of course he was afraid - otherwise God would not have said, "do not be afraid."

God can lead you to a place and you nevertheless feel afraid. Or discouraged. Or embarrassed. Or any of a number of other things.

I'm not saying those things are good, or that they are the places God leads you to. I'm saying He can and does lead you to places where, in your own strength, you will feel things like that.

When you find yourself feeling that way in a place where you know God has led you, you need a fresh vision of Jesus. It doesn't have to be a literal vision, an appearance of The Lord to you. You can get a fresh vision from the Word, through worship, by seeking Him.

Paul remained in Corinth until the Spring of 52AD when he then traveled to the port city of Cenchrea. In the city he has his head shaved due to a vow he took (Acts 18:18).

This vow of the apostle Paul's has caused quite a stir among Bible scholars and commentators. Some don't want to admit Paul was taking a full-fledged Nazirite vow. To them it seems a step backward into legalism. They suggest that it was some other kind of vow; or that it was a modified Nazirite vow.

The answer is simple, really. Without compromising the Gospel, Paul could be all things to all men.

Paul was willing to act himself as if he were under the law of God when he worked among nonbelieving Jews. Among Gentiles he did not observe Jewish rites and rituals. He ate whatever foods were offered to him and dressed the way they dressed. When asked to explain himself he'd say, "All things to all men in order to win some."

Most of us will probably not be called upon to take such radical steps. We are already among the people God wants us to reach and, for the most part, share their customs and habits. Still there are many sub-cultures in our society and in our church. Instead of thinking we should all be just like one another let's encourage diversity for the sake of reaching out to everyone who needs to hear about Jesus.

And let's pray – both individually and corporately – asking the Lord to show us if there are areas in our lives where we need to adapt in order to be relevant in order to reach out to nonbelievers.

If you are going to be led you will need this willingness to be all to all in order to win some.

Paul then began making his homeward journey because he wanted to observe Pentecost at Jerusalem. He was accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla as far as Ephesus. From there he made his way by sea, through Rhodes and Cyprus to Caesarea. From there he went up to Jerusalem. This was now his fourth visit to Jerusalem after becoming a Christian.

After keeping the Feast of Pentecost he returned to Antioch.

[Acts 18:22](#) And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.

One final observation. Paul had a base of operations, a home church that he was sent out from. He started in Antioch; he finished in Antioch. Even though he founded many churches, Antioch was his home church.

If you're serious about discerning God's leading in your life you need the love, protection, fellowship and blessing of a local church.