

ACTS 14

In Acts 14 we come to the conclusion of Paul's first missionary journey. Paul engaged in four missionary journeys throughout his ministry. Paul's first three missionary journeys are recorded in Acts, and the fourth is mentioned throughout Paul's letters to various churches.

Vs. 1 – The phrase *“they went together to the synagogue of the Jews”* – the leaders of the synagogue in Antioch had just expelled Paul and Barnabas from that city. Yet when they came to Iconium, they again began their evangelistic efforts by preaching in the synagogue. It was still a good way to start. The phrase *“So spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed”* - Paul and Barnabas had success among the Jews and the Greeks, presenting the same gospel to both. The fact that Jews and Greeks believed shows that Paul preached the same thing to both groups: salvation is in Jesus, and we appropriate it by our belief (trust in, reliance on) Jesus. Their success is refreshing, because they had just been kicked out of Pisidian Antioch, after much success there (**Acts 13:50**).

Vs. 2-4 – We fail to recognize what successful ministry often leads to. In our text, successful ministry creates opposition forcing Paul and Barnabas out of Iconium. The gospel is *“offensive”* to unbelievers. Look at the phrase *“Unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the*

brethren” - Luke made it clear that it was not all the Jews of Iconium who did this, because many believed (**Acts 14:1**). Yet some not only rejected the message, but stirred up others to reject the message and the messengers (against the brethren). They had the *“Sanballat syndrome”* from **Nehemiah 4:7-9**. In that text only 1 person – Sanballat was angry and opposed the work the Lord had Nehemiah leading. BUT, Sanballat’s toxic comments influenced other people to become toxic like him...and they were people who did not even have a problem with Nehemiah and the church project, but now they too are angry with Nehemiah and the work of the Lord. Saints of God be careful listening to and joining in with people who are mad at someone “you” don’t have an issue with. Look at that phrase in **vs. 3** *“therefore they stayed a long time”* - they stayed as long as they could, despite the opposition, they departed only when it was absolutely necessary. They did this because they knew that these Christians in Iconium needed all the grounding they could get to stand strong in a city with much opposition. Regarding the phrase *“Speaking boldly in the Lord”* - despite the opposition, Paul and Barnabas continued to preach boldly, bearing witness to the word of His grace and touching others with the power of Jesus. Regarding the phrase *“Granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands”* - no apostle could work a miracle by himself; nor was any sign or wonder brought about by any apostle, but by a special grant or

dispensation of God. And this power was not resident in them at all times; they did not have power of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit empowered them.”

Vs. 5-7 - When forced to, Paul and Barnabas left Iconium for Lystra (some twenty miles away) and Derbe. Their perseverance under the difficulty in Iconium didn't mean that it was time for them to become martyrs. Many of us wish we could perform a miracle that would cause everyone to believe Jesus is the way the truth and the life but as we see in our text, miracles no matter how great they are will not convince “everyone” to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. So plant seed and water where seed has been planted praying and trusting God will save all those whom He foreknew would be saved. In this region of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe – the southern part of the Galatian region is where scholars believe Paul wrote an epistle to the Galatians. Note **vs. 7** - The apostles did not go into these cities to do miracles, and then to preach. Rather, it was the other way around: They went to preach; then sometimes there were healings. Be careful when you say you are going to a “**healing service**” – proclamation of the Word always precedes any miracle and man does not control when a miracle can occur; it is totally in the hands of God.

Vs. 8-10 – In regard to the phrase “*This man heard Paul speaking*” - the crippled man heard Paul preach about Jesus. It's most likely Paul was

teaching or simply conversing in the marketplace about Jesus and the lame man overheard what was said. When he heard about Jesus, his face and manner showed that he believed Jesus could touch his life; he had faith to be healed. **Romans 10:17** says, “*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” Regarding the phrase “*Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed*” - there was something about this man’s faith that was evident, and it is likely that God gave Paul the gift of discernment, so much so that Paul knew God intended to heal the man at that moment. The fact this lame man had faith was made plain by his ready obedience to Paul’s command to stand up. Notice this certain man without strength in his feet made the important transition from *hearing* about the work of Jesus to *believing* that it was for him. Not everyone makes this same transition, but they should. And the fact that the text says he was lame from birth and not from a disease or an accident reflects if something changes, it would have to be a miracle from God; there was no known cure for that man’s condition. The fact he leaped and walked reflects his joy and gratitude. When God does something for you that only can be attributed to God doing it; you need to praise and thank Him privately and publicly.

Vs. 11-13 – Regarding the phrase “*The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*” These people saw a awesome miracle happen before their

very eyes; therefore, it seemed logical to them to consider Paul and Barnabas “little g gods.” The miracle merely attracted attention, and in a way, it was unwanted attention. The miracle although significantly beneficial to the former lame man, but the miracle in and of itself saved no one. Regarding **vs. 12** - in *Greek* mythology it was common for the “little g gods” to come to earth in human form, though they did not always do so for the good of man. Paul (was the more talkative one) was *Hermes*, because he was the chief speaker. Barnabas apparently had an air of authority about him, so they regarded him as *Zeus* (who is also called *Jupiter*, the chief of the “little g gods”). The real point here is “*miracles*” by themselves do not produce either conviction or faith. They must be accompanied by the Word of God (**Acts 14:3**); the same goes for the church worship service. Praise dancing or even singing without the proclamation of the Gospel rarely leads to salvation. It is the Holy Spirit ministering to us through the Word of God that saves; praise and worship calms the fears and storms in life; they comfort us; they prepare us for the Word to transform us and convict us to lead a holy life. Proof – read **1 Corinthians 1:21**.

Vs. 14-18 - How easy it would have been for Paul and Barnabas to get the “big head” here and try to use the honor as a basis for teaching the people the truth, or manipulating the truth. Regarding the phrase, “*They tore their*

clothes” – Paul and Barnabas did this to show that they were completely human, just as the Lystrians. They also did it out of an instinctively Jewish reaction to blasphemy. For Paul and Barnabas, it wasn’t just inconvenient that they were called gods; it was blasphemy. God will share anything with His prized creation man except His glory (**Isaiah 42:8**). Regarding the phrase “*That you should turn from these useless things*” - these were strong words from Paul to people who took their pagan worship seriously, but Paul wasn’t afraid to confront this mob with the truth, and the truth was that their idolatry was wrong. They had to turn from it. As Paul told them more about Jesus and what He has done, he especially wanted them to turn from these useless things to the living God. Jesus could not merely be added to their pagan ways. Regarding the phrase “*To the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them*” - Paul called the Lystrian crowd to consider the **real God**, the One who stands behind all creation, not one of the lesser (and imaginary) Greek “*little g gods.*” The things Paul mentions in **Acts 14:17** (He did good... gave us rain from heaven... and fruitful seasons...filling our hearts with food and gladness) were just the kind of things these people would think that *Zeus* gave them. Paul told them these blessings come from the true God who lives in heaven, not from *Zeus*. God’s kindness to all men (in giving rain and fruitful crops) should be seen as a

witness of His love and power, something theologians sometimes call common grace. Pay careful attention to the fact Paul did not preach to these pagan worshippers the same way he preached to Jews or those acquainted with Judaism. He did not quote the Old Testament to them, but instead appealed to natural revelation, to the things that even a pagan could understand by looking at the world around them. Paul the expert evangelist knew you have to meet people where they are to effectively witness to them. **Vs. 18** - *“And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them”* - even with all this, Paul and Barnabas had an extremely difficult time challenging the wrong conceptions of God held by the Lystrians.

Vs. 19-20 – One minute Paul was a *little g god* to be worshiped; the next minute he was a criminal to be stoned. People can turn on you that fast; so don't get too high on the highs of life or too low on the lows of life. It is dangerous for any spiritual leader to cultivate or allow a kind of hero-worship – Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:10** - *“I am what I am by the grace and mercy of God”* – To God be the Glory. The same people who give this honor will feel terribly betrayed when the leader is shown to be human. Live by the phrase “To God be the Glory” and stay humble. These opponents were not content to kick Paul out of their own region (**Acts 14:5-6**); they followed him and brought their persecution with them. They were dedicated adversaries of

Paul. Regarding the phrase *“having persuaded the multitudes”* - they incited the people of Lystra against Paul and Barnabas, and instigated the stoning of Paul. This was obviously an attempt to execute Paul and Barnabas – with the rocks being thrown by the same people who wanted to worship them shortly before (*what event and who does this sound like?*) Regarding the phrase *“they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city”* Paul was miraculously preserved here. Some think that he was even actually killed and raised (resuscitated) to life again, because stoning was usually a reliable form of execution. When Paul later wrote in **Galatians 6:17**, I bear in my body the marks of Jesus, he may have had in mind the scars from this incident. He certainly later referred to this stoning in **2 Corinthians 11:25**. Some theologians have suggested that the heavenly vision described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 took place at this attack. This is possible, but only conjecture. Now it’s reasonable to think that Paul remembered Stephen when he was being stoned, and how he had been a part of Stephen’s execution (**Acts 7:58-8:1**). The phrase *“He rose up and went into the city”* When Paul was revived, he did not flee the city that stoned him. Instead he immediately went back into it. He had been driven out of Antioch and Iconium by this traveling mob, and he was determined to leave Lystra on his own terms. In **vs. 20** – *“When they*

had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples” - Despite the persecution in Lystra, the work of God continued – just in a different place, Derbe. Yet Paul and Barnabas continued their work: preaching the gospel and making disciples.

Vs. 21-22 – Regarding the phrase in **vs. 22** “*strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith*” - as Paul and Barnabas decided to head back home to Antioch, they passed through the cities they had visited before to strengthen and encourage the Christians in those cities. Paul and Barnabas wanted to do far more than gain conversions; they had a passion to make disciples. Many Christians need strengthening in their souls. Many need exhorting to continue on in the faith. Too many churches fail to share that the Christian journey includes going through a narrow gate and it’s a difficult way (but it leads to eternal life). It is no small thing to walk with the Lord, year after year, trial after trial. It takes a strong soul and an encouraged faith. Many start a journey, and many fall down and never try to get back up. It takes being the church and being apart of the church (fellowship of the believers and worship) to have sustaining power. The phrase “*we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” - this was the message that helped strengthen and exhort these disciples. This was a simple message, proved in Paul’s personal experience. Paul could preach that

message because he had lived that message. This is for many a forgotten message today. They consider any kind of tribulation completely counter-productive to Christian living, failing to note the significant place suffering has in God's plan (read **John 16:33; Philippians 1:29; Philippians 3:10**). No matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable the task may seem, we must always support new believers who need our help and encouragement.

Vs. 23 – What made Paul and Barnabas risk it all was they were attempting to help organize the church and help them appoint capable spiritual leaders who could help the church grow. Regarding the phrase “*So when they had appointed elders in every church*” - Paul and Barnabas were committed to not just making new Christians, ***but in establishing new churches***, places where these new Christians could grow and be established in the Lord. The phrase “*And prayed with fasting*” - Paul and Barnabas knew if they wanted the best from God for these fledgling new churches; they knew how to connect with God and they demonstrated their great concern for the health of these churches by their prayer and fasting. The phrase “*They commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed*”- in the end, they can only trust in God's ability to keep these churches healthy, having commended them to the Lord. It was in the Lord they had believed, not in Paul or Barnabas or the elders.

The church belongs to Jesus.

Vs. 24-28 – these verses provide the itinerary of Paul and Barnabas on the way home. Regarding the phrase *“For the work which they had completed”* well these beautiful words were only partially true. Although the immediate mission was accomplished, the work of planting new churches and strengthening existing ones has never ended. This would be merely the first of several missionary journeys. I love that phrase *“but sailed to Antioch”* – because *they were returning to their home congregation.* This is what a *church anniversary service* is all about, getting the people to come back to the “old landmark” from where their Christian journey either began or continued. Note the phrase in **vs. 27** *“They reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* - their success with evangelism among the Gentiles, and the blessing of God that it demonstrated, showed that what God did in Antioch was not unique. God wanted to replicate this work all over the world. And finally note the phrase *“He had opened the door of faith”* - The trip was a great success, though not without great obstacles: The difficulty of travel itself, the confrontation with Elymas on Cyprus, the quitting of John Mark, being driven out of the cities of Antioch and Iconium, the temptation to receive adoration, and being stoned in Lystra. Yet Paul and Barnabas would not be deterred from the work God had them to do. And because of their dependence on the Holy Spirit to do and go where

God wanted them to go; God opened the door of opportunity. The door of opportunity often times open in the midst of adversity.