

Conclusion of the First Missionary Journey Acts 14

Introduction

The church at Antioch (in Syria) had sent Paul and Barnabas to carry out the work *to which (God had) called them* (Acts 13:2). It was to be a work that had never been done before — you could call it an adventure in the Holy Spirit! First, they sailed to the homeland of Barnabas, the island of Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Barnabas may have been familiar with some of the synagogues they preached at, while they traveled across the island. However, once they left Paphos to sail to Perga, they were headed into the unknown territory of Asia Minor. Even though they did not know where the Holy Spirit would lead them, Paul and Barnabas pressed on, determined to fulfill God's perfect will.

As they traveled inland and preached at Pisidian Antioch, they experienced the joy of seeing the Gentiles eagerly turn to the Lord. They also had their first taste of persecution from the Jews. **Undaunted**, they moved on to spread the gospel message through three towns of southern Galatia. Chapter 14 records the tribulations and triumphs they experienced during the rest of their first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas were excited to report to the church in Antioch what God had done through them.

Outline of Acts 14

- I. Tribulations - Acts 14:1-20a
- II. Triumphs - Acts 14:20b-28

I. Tribulations - Acts 14:1-20a

After shaking the dust of Pisidian Antioch from their feet, Paul and Barnabas journeyed to Iconium. It was a 90 mile trek through mountains. It could have taken four days on foot if the weather was good. They went to the synagogue first, even though the Jews in the last city had stirred up the trouble against them. They spoke with such power that *a great*

multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks (god-fearing Gentiles) *believed*. However, the Jews that did not believe caused trouble, just as they did in the last town. They used their **influence** to turn the pagan Gentiles against the missionaries and their message.

The doubting Jews did not stop Paul and Barnabas though. It encouraged them to be more persistent! Instead of becoming discouraged and leaving Iconium, they spoke out more boldly than ever. What a lesson this is for all believers! Do not get upset when you are scared to tell others about Jesus. God will strengthen you and give you the toughness you need. You need to trust Him.

In verse four, Luke calls both Paul and Barnabas "apostles." The word "apostle" actually means "sent one." So, even the pizza delivery man is an "apostle" because he is the "sent one" to deliver pizzas. Luke probably was using the word "apostles" to mean that Paul and Barnabas were the "sent ones" from the church at Antioch in Syria.

The people in the city were divided. Some took side with the Jews, and others took side with the apostles. Wherever the gospel is preached, there is always division between those who accept Jesus and those who reject Him. Make sure you are on His side!

The unbelieving Jews, Gentiles, and leaders joined together and made a plan to stone the apostles. Stoning was the punishment for blasphemy, so the Jews were probably planning to charge the apostles with this crime. Paul and Barnabas heard of the evil plan, and they left Iconium. They went to preach the gospel in Lystra and Derbe.

They arrived in Lystra first, about 20 miles south of Iconium, and could have arrived in

one day by foot. There is no mention of a synagogue there, but God provided another way for His word to be spread.

There was a crippled man in the area where Paul was preaching. Luke tells us five things about this man: 1) he had no strength in his feet, 2) he had been lame from birth (*from his mother's womb*), 3) he had never walked, 4) he was listening to what Paul had to say, and 5) *he had faith to be healed*. Paul was watching him, *observing him intently*, and could see that his message was sparking a light of faith in the crippled man's heart. Maybe Paul had been speaking about how Jesus had healed the needy. Paul spoke loudly to the crippled man, commanding him to *stand up straight on (his) feet!* Immediately, the man obeyed. He leaped up and began to walk!

When the people of Lystra saw the miracle, they were so excited that they began to talk in *the Lycaonian language*. Most people in the Roman Empire were bilingual, which means they spoke two languages. The common language was Greek, but the people also knew their own language (the one spoken in their area before the Roman Empire came to power). Paul and Barnabas had been speaking with the people in Greek, but when the people saw the miracle with the crippled man, they talked to each other in their own language, and Paul and Barnabas did not understand their words. The two missionaries had no way of knowing that the people were calling them gods, saying that Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes.

The people of Lystra were pagans (believed in false gods) and very **superstitious**. Zeus was the chief of their gods, and Hermes was Zeus' speaker. The people believed that these gods could visit the earth in human bodies. In fact, there was a legend that Zeus and Hermes had visited Lystra before. The legend said that nobody had recognized the gods. The only ones who had welcomed them were an old couple. In return, the gods had transformed the old couple's cottage into a temple. Then

they destroyed the homes of everyone who had not accepted them. The people of Lystra did not want repeat the legend.

The priest from Zeus' nearby temple brought oxen and garlands for an offering. When the two missionaries realized what was happening, they were horrified. Such a sacrifice would be blasphemous to God. They tore their clothes. This was an action that would show the people of Lystra they did not approve of what they were doing. The situation was beyond words! Only a clear and visible sign could stop the people from doing what they were doing. They ran into the middle of the crowd and tried to get the people's attention. The people needed to know that Paul and Barnabas were not pagan gods come down to earth. They were human messengers of the one true God.

The sermon given to the people of Lystra was very different from those given to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who already believed in the one true God. The Lystra people were pure pagans. They knew nothing about God and had to be introduced to Him. The apostles did this by explaining to the people that the true God made all things and could be seen in the *rain from heaven and fruitful seasons*.

The apostles explained, "*We are also men with the same nature as you.*" Paul and Barnabas were not gods, but simply men with feelings (natures) like any man. This was an important point because the pagans believed that the gods did not have feelings.

The words of the sermon stopped the crowds from offering the sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, but just barely. The people of Lystra did not want to let go of their pagan superstition.

The wicked Jews from the last two cities arrived in Lystra to cause trouble again. They hated the gospel message so much that they had followed Paul and Barnabas all the way to Lystra. They wanted to see the gospel

message silenced. Do not underestimate the wickedness of man's ways. We desperately need our Savior.

The people of Lystra were **fickle**. They had just called Paul and Barnabas gods and had wanted to make sacrifices to them. But now, they were easily influenced by the Jews. They allowed Paul (whom they had just called Hermes) to be stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. Luke doesn't say whether Paul was dead or unconscious. (Note: In 2 Corinthians 11:25, Paul wrote, *once I was stoned*, referring to this occasion.)

In verse 20, Luke mentions *the disciples* who gathered around Paul. This shows that the crippled man was not the only convert in Lystra. Miraculously, after the stoning, Paul was able to get up and go back into the city. The next morning he and Barnabas departed for Derbe.

II. Triumphs - Acts 14:20b-28

Derbe was located 30 miles south of Lystra on the southern border of Galatia. Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel there without any recorded incident. God blessed their efforts with *many disciples*.

After staying for a time in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas went back the way they had come through Galatia. They wanted to strengthen and exhort the disciples and help organize the churches that had been started after they left each city. They even had the courage to return to Lystra! They never left new believers without help. Paul always took responsibility to strengthen and encourage the new Christians in the cities he had visited, either by a return visit or by sending a letter.

Paul and Barnabas made sure that leaders were chosen for each of the new churches. Elders were appointed to oversee the church so that it would be organized. God is a god of order. There is no chaos with God, only peace and His established churches are to operate that way. Before they left each new church,

Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted with the new leaders and committed them to the Lord.

The work Paul and Barnabas had been sent out to do was completed. They returned to Antioch in Syria and reported what God had done with them. They could have done nothing without God. Faith is the only door into the kingdom of God, and God is the One who opens it.

After this, Paul and Barnabas stayed with the disciples in Antioch for *a long time*. Some believe it was during this time that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians.

The first missionary campaign lasted between one and two years. The missionaries traveled around 700 miles by land and 500 miles by sea. They saw the Jews and Gentiles come together. *Those who once were far off had been made near by the blood of Christ* (Ephesians 2:13). †

Prayer

Thank God for giving you faith and making you a part of the kingdom of God. Thank Him for this everyday this week!

Memory Verse

Acts 14:27 *"Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He*

Vocabulary

undaunted - not discouraged by disappointment, danger, or difficulty

multitude - a large number of people

influence - ability to sway the behavior of another person

superstitious - believing in magic or chance

fickle - changing loyalty frequently

Questions for Acts Lesson 12

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Review last weeks lesson and notes.

1. What do you think is the most interesting place Paul and Barnabas visited? Why?

DAY TWO: Read Acts 15:1-5.

2. a. What problem arose in the church?

- b. From the following Scripture passages, why might the Jewish believers think that a Gentile must be circumcised in order to be saved?

Genesis 17:10-14

Exodus 12:48-49

3. From Galatians 5:6:

- a. What did Paul believe about circumcising Gentile believers?

- b. What did Paul believe to be important? _____

4. The Christians decided to handle the problem by (circle the correct answer)

hanging the men from Judea sending Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem

circumcising all the Gentiles

5. a. Who were the men in Jerusalem who insisted upon circumcising the Gentiles?

- b. What else did they want the Gentiles to do? _____

c. ?(Thought Question) From what you know about the Pharisees, why would they insist upon these things?

DAY THREE: Read Acts 15:6-11.

6. a. Who met together to debate the question of circumcision?

b. Who stood up to speak?

7. According to Peter's speech (underline the correct the answer[s])

God had sent him to preach
the gospel to the Gentiles.

God wanted the Gentiles
to believe.

God gave the Holy Spirit
to the Gentiles.

God liked the Gentiles more than He
liked the Pharisees.

8. Whose hearts were purified by faith? _____

9. a. Those who believed that Gentiles must be circumcised and obey the law of Moses in order to be saved came to be known as Judaizers. How were the Judaizers acting toward God? Give verse.

vs. ____

b. What were the Judaizers doing to the Gentiles? Give verse.

vs. ____

c. What do you think it means to "test" God?

d. How do people today test God?

10. According to verse 11, how are people saved?

DAY FOUR: Read Acts 15:12-21.

11. What did Paul and Barnabas share with the council?

12. a. Who spoke next and what was his decision in verse 19?

b. What prophet did he quote from?_____

c. What had this prophet written about the Gentiles? (Circle the correct answer[s].)

They were all unclean and needed to
be circumcised.

God would never accept the Gentiles because
they were not from the family of David.

God restored the house of David so that those
who are called might seek Him.

13. James wanted the Gentiles to abstain from what four (4) things?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

DAY FIVE: Read Acts 15:22-35.

14. Who was sent to Antioch, and what did they take with them?

15. Write down the verse where you find:

- who the letter was sent to. vs._____
- an apology for the Judaizers. vs._____
- unity in the church. vs._____
- praise for Paul and Barnabas. vs._____
- reliance upon the Holy Spirit. vs._____
- a list of things the Gentiles
should keep free from. vs._____

16. How did the Gentiles respond to the letter?
