

ACTS

Chapter 14

Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.[a] 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. 5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

14:1 *great number.* At first there was good success, then bitter opposition from the Jews (v. 2). But these evidently failed in their initial attempt, for Paul and Barnabas remained there a considerable time (v. 3). A second wave of persecution was planned, involving violence (v. 5). (CSB)

Jewish synagogue. Usually “synagogue” would not require the modifier “Jewish.” Perhaps whole synagogues were converting to Christianity, making this distinction necessary. (TLSB)

spoke in such a way. Preaching God’s Word, though it involves persuasion and clarity, is finally the work of the Holy Spirit, who produced a believing response by Jews and Gentiles. Cf 1Co 1:18–31; 2:14–16. (TLSB)

Could include several hundred people. This was not the result of a single visit to the synagogue. The work in Iconium continued for a considerable time. The Gentiles included people who were not proselytes. What made the preaching of Paul and Barnabas so effective was the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit, who works through the gospel. (PBC)

14:2 *poisoned.* Lit, “made them evil” in opposition. (TLSB)

brothers. The believers at the synagogue. (TLSB)

14:3 *Speaking boldly* – The reference to bold speaking supported by the witness of signs and wonders can be understood as indication that the Lord continues to act as previously when the Jerusalem church prayed in response to the first opposition. They prayed that the Lord might “give to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing and signs and wonders to continue happening” (4:29-30). (Tannehill)

Other events testified to the authenticity and power of the Word. (TLSB)

bore witness...signs and wonders. A major purpose of miracles was to confirm the truth of the words and the approval of God. (CSB)

As in Jesus’ ministry, miraculous events accompanied the spoken Word. (TLSB)

14:4 apostles. Both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles. The term is used here not of the Twelve but in the broader sense to refer to persons sent on a mission, i.e., missionaries (see 13:2–3). (CSB)

At times, the term is used in a broad sense (1Th 2:6 refers to Paul and probably his colleagues), but usually it refers to the office of apostle (Ac 1:21–26; 1Co 9:1; Gal 1:19). Here and in v 14, Barnabas seems to be numbered among this select group. (TLSB)

14:5 stone them. A Jewish mode of execution for blasphemy. Probably mob action was planned here. (CSB)

The prescribed penalty among Jews for blasphemy (Lv 24:16). (TLSB)

The reference to stoning (planned in 14:5, performed in 14:19) also recalls the stoning of Stephen. Thus the apostles and Stephen’s bold witness and the accompanying power of the Lord reappear in the mission of Paul and Barnabas as they encounter opposition. (Tannehill)

14:6–7 Rather than simply running away to save their own lives, Paul and Barnabas were also running toward new mission opportunities after planting a Christian community in Iconium. (TLSB)

14:6 fled – Jesus had instructed his disciples, “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another” (Matthew 10:23). The work of evangelizing Iconium was done and the apostles fled. They turned a desperate emergency into an opportunity. (PBC) – They had this powerful consolation: the second church in Asia Minor had been founded, and it would thrive. (LL)

Lycaonian cities. Lycaonia was a district east of Pisidia, north of the Taurus Mountains. It was part of the Roman province of Galatia. (CSB)

Lystra. A Roman colony and probable home of Timothy (though he was known in Iconium as well), it was about 20 miles from Iconium and 130 miles from Antioch. (CSB)

Derbe. About 60 miles from Lystra; home of Gaius. (CSB)

14:1–7 Paul’s visit to Iconium follows the pattern set in Pisidian Antioch. The message of grace again encounters violent opposition. The word of grace from God is sufficient for us (2Co 12:9), but the Lord may accompany His message with miraculous signs that testify to its power. • Heavenly Father, thank You for Your powerful Word. May it bear abundant fruit as You have promised, even in the midst of opposition. Amen. (TLSB)

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments

and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” 18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

14:8–10 The healing of this man “crippled from birth” parallels a miracle of Jesus (Lk 5:17–26) and a miracle of Peter and John (Ac 3:1–10). (TLSB)

14:8 *never walked* – The description of the man resembles that of the man healed by Peter in Acts 3:1-10. The resemblance is probably less accidental than a deliberate literary signal. (The usefulness of the story in securing Paul’s identity as an authentic prophet in the tradition of Jesus, who healed a lame man – compare Luke 5:17-26 and Peter is obvious.) The description itself is certainly redundant: a) he was sitting; b) he was powerless in his feet; c) he was lame from birth; d) he had never walked. Like the man in 3:10, he also was sitting “at the gates” of a temple. (Sacra)

14:9 *faith* – The man’s faith did not accomplish this healing or contribute to it. Faith accepted what God was doing. (PBC)

Either the man’s intense listening to the message was a sign, or the Spirit gave Paul insight into his heart.

made well. Lit, “be saved”; able to walk. (TLSB)

14:11 *Lycaonian*. Language spoken in the district of Lycaonia, east of Pisidia. The population may have originally emigrated from Crete. (TLSB)

gods. According to their logic, the healing showed Paul and Barnabas to be divine beings. (TLSB)

14:12 *Zeus ... Hermes*. Zeus was the patron god of the city, and his temple was there. People who came to bring sacrifices to Zeus apparently decided to make an offering to Paul and Barnabas instead. The identification of Zeus with Barnabas may indicate that his appearance was more imposing, and Paul was identified as the god Hermes (the Roman Mercury) because he was the spokesman (see 28:6). This incident may have been occasioned by an ancient legend that told of a supposed visit to the same general area by Zeus and Hermes. They were, however, not recognized by anyone except an old couple. So the people of Lystra were determined not to allow such an oversight to happen again. (CSB)

Zeus. Chief god in the Gk pantheon; patron of Lystra. A temple nearby was dedicated to him. *Hermes*. A god who served as spokesman for the other gods. The more important god (Zeus) was thought to work through a spokesman (Hermes). (TLSB)

14:13 *entrance to the city*. The Greek for this expression can refer to the temple gates, the city gates or house gates. (CSB)

priest of Zeus. Served at the temple of Zeus, just outside the city. (TLSB)

offer sacrifice – These people are not like Cornelius, “devout and fearing God” (10:2), that is, the one God of the Bible, nor like the God-fearers who come to the synagogues. Here the mission takes a new step and Paul faces a new challenge. In this scene the problem of mission among such people appears in sharp focus. Far from suggesting that the further the mission moves from Judaism the more receptive people will be, the narrator sees a special obstacle where people do not believe in the one God who has created all. The mission must begin with a call to “turn to a living God” from idols. This is a call to repentance from past ignorance of God. (Tannehill)

Typical offerings to these Gk gods. (TLSB)

14:14 *tore their garments*. A Jewish way of expressing great anguish. (CSB)

A sign of revulsion and horror (cf Mt 26:65). (TLSB)

14:15 *men...nature*. Merely fellow human beings, not gods. (TLSB)

good news. Paul wants to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus but does not get that far. (TLSB)

vain things. Used in the OT to denote false gods (see 1Sa 12:21). (CSB)

Pagan rites. (TLSB)

living God. The true God is not a statue or sculpture made by humans; instead, He is the Maker of heaven and earth. (TLSB)

14:16–17 The blessings of creation (providence) provide a powerful witness to a Creator God who graciously gives good things (cf Ps 19:1–6; 145:15–16; Mt 5:45; Rm 1:19–20). (TLSB)

14:16 *in the past* – The living God had not immediately punished the idolatry of those nations which worshiped false gods. Ultimately he will destroy every idolatrous people and punish every unbeliever. He bides his time, letting a nation’s corruption run its course. (PBC) – Paul in Lystra recognized that various peoples have had various religions and does not harshly condemn their religious histories. But Paul assumes that he stands at a turning point in world religion. The time of ethnic permissiveness in religion, a time of ignorance and trust in “vain things,” is drawing to a close. When Gentiles do repent of their idolatry, they will find the God who always has been the basis of their life and the source of the good gifts that they constantly receive. God is the creator also, and the gifts of nature have always been a witness to God’s goodness. Although they have not been part of Israel’s history, the sustaining fruitfulness of nature can be understood by all as witness to the goodness of the universal creator whom Paul preaches. (Tannehill)

2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understood slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance

14:18 The words of Paul and Barnabas barely kept the crowds from sacrificing to them as gods, and they were unable to proceed to speak of Jesus. (TLSB)

14:8–18 Lystra has no synagogue, so when God miraculously heals someone, Paul testifies to the people that God graciously blesses all creation. People by nature tend to worship gods of their own making and in their own ways (Rm 1:22–25). Yet, God’s bounty in creation, and especially His Word, come to turn us away from idolatry and toward Him. • Praise to You, O Lord, the King

of creation. “The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Ps 145:15–16). Amen. (TLSB)

Paul Stoned at Lystra

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

14:19 *They stoned Paul.* Within the city rather than at the usual place of execution outside the walls (cf. 2Co 12:2). (CSB)

14:20 *disciples gathered about him.* Young Timothy may have been present (see 2Ti 3:10–11). (CSB)

rose up – It is remarkable that Paul survived a stoning and more remarkable that he was able to travel the next day. It is most remarkable that his brutal treatment and brush with death did not deter him from continuing to preach the gospel. The Lord gave a generous harvest of disciples in Derbe. (PBC)

Paul was certainly severely wounded, apparently to the point of death (v 19). Yet, miraculously, he gets up and walks back into the city where he had just been stoned. (TLSB)

Derbe. A border town in the southeastern part of the Lycaonian region of Galatia. An inscription naming the city has been discovered about 30 miles east of what was previously thought to be the city site. (CSB)

14:21 *returned* – From Derbe it would have been easiest for Paul and Barnabas to continue eastward through the Taurus mountain pass and home to Antioch in Syria. But what was easiest was not always best for the Gospel. Since it was important to gauge the progress of the new missions they had founded, the two apostles went three times as far homeward in the opposite direction, bracing up the new believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and appointing elders (pastors) to guide them. This prudent gesture led to permanent Christian churches in all these cities, some lasting until the time of the Turkish conquest. (LL)

14:22 *strengthening the souls.* Encouragement affects their whole being. (TLSB)

through many tribulations – It is interesting that Paul did not say we must surmount and triumph over many hardships. The life of a Christian is not one grand victory procession. It will look that way at the end, but the cross comes before the crown. (PBC)

Evident here from Paul’s suffering (cf 2Co 11:23–29). Pressure, hardship, and opposition are to be expected by God’s people on their earthly journey toward their full experience of His heavenly kingdom. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “None the less ought we to sympathize with our friends whom we see placed in care and grief” (SLSB, p 47). “They will bring every possible misfortune

and grief upon us. For where God's Word is preached, accepted, or believed and produces fruit, there the holy cross cannot be missing" (LC III 65). Luther: "Curses will not be lacking. But go forth to face them more boldly, be strong, and cling steadfastly to the blessing, no matter how much everything seems to be full of a curse. For this is what we should conclude: It is sure that I have been baptized. I have heard the Word from the mouth of the minister. I have made use of the Sacrament of the Altar. This is the divine and unchangeable truth. Even though I am weak, it is sure and unalterable.... You are children of the kingdom, your sins are forgiven, the devil has been overcome and laid low under your feet, sin and death will do you no harm; but you are blameless. Therefore bear the hostile curses with equanimity" (AE 5:145–46). (TLSB)

14:23 *appointed*.† The Greek for this word (used also in 2Co 8:19) can mean (1) to stretch out the hand, (2) to appoint by show of hands or (3) to appoint or elect without regard to the method. In 6:6 (where a different Greek verb is used) the appointment of the Seven included selection by the church and presentation to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Because these were new churches, at least partly pagan in background, Paul and Barnabas may have both selected and appointed the elders. (CSB)

Formed from Gk for "hand," indicating either the stretching out or laying on of hands, or perhaps election by a show of hands. "Formerly, the people elected pastors and bishops [Acts 14:23]. Then came a bishop, either of that church or a neighboring one, who confirmed the one elected by the laying on of hands [1 Timothy 4:14]. Ordination was nothing else than such a ratification" (Tr 70). (TLSB)

elders. Pastors. Cf 20:17, 28; Ti 1:5–9. (TLSB)

fasting – They were no longer under any OT regulations, and Jesus had not commanded fasting. However, these Jewish believers knew from experience that fasting helped them concentrate when they prayed. (PBC)

Lit, "praying with fasting," as practiced in Antioch. (TLSB)

committed them to the Lord. Placed them before God in prayer and entrusted the new believers to His care. (TLSB)

14:19–23 The conclusion of Paul's work in Lystra illustrates both suffering for the Gospel and the power of the Gospel. God's people should expect opposition from a sinful world. Yet, the Gospel is crowned with success! It grants us entrance into God's kingdom, while strengthening and encouraging us along the way. • Lord, strengthen my soul so that in faith I may say, "Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer; Never will He leave me." Amen. (LSB 756:1) (TLSB)

Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch in Syria

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

14:24–26 Paul and Barnabas journey south to the coast and take a ship back to Syria. (TLSB)

14:24 *Pisidia*. A district about 120 miles long and 50 miles wide, north of Pamphylia (13:13–14). Bandits frequented the region (see perhaps 2Co 11:26). (CSB)

Pamphylia. A district 80 miles long and 20 miles at the widest part, on the southern coast of Asia Minor. After A.D. 74 Pisidia was included in the Roman province of Pamphylia (see 13:13). (CSB)

14:25 *Attalia*. The best harbor on the coast of Pamphylia (see 13:13). (CSB)

14:26 *Antioch*. Paul and Barnabas return to the congregation that had sent them out to face many trials, but had also given them over to God’s grace, which enabled them to fulfill such great work. (TLSB)

commended. The congregation literally “handed them over” to God. (TLSB)

14:27 *declared all*. They announced what God accomplished through them. (TLSB)

opened the door of faith. God had brought Gentiles to faith—had, as it were, opened the door for them to believe (cf. 11:18). (CSB)

People can only believe when God opens the door of faith to them; Paul’s first journey showed God was opening this door to Gentiles as well as Jews. (TLSB)

14:28 *no little time*. Probably more than a year. (CSB)

14:24–28 Paul and Barnabas end their journey by reporting to those who sent them everything God has done. Neither our faith nor our missionary achievements are ultimately our doing. It is God who opens the door of faith—for us and for those to whom we witness. • Heavenly Father, may Your Spirit move Your Church to spread Your Word. Bring many more people into Your kingdom, and strengthen all believers to endure the trials they face on their way to heaven. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)