

# Acts

## Part 36 – “Witness and Perseverance”

### Acts 14:8-20

The mission to Lystra seems to mark a new phase in the ministry of Paul. Either there was no synagogue in Lystra (most likely) or Paul and Barnabas by-pass it. Whatever the case, Paul's normal practice of going first to Jews to proclaim the gospel changes in Lystra where he engages pagan Gentiles first. As Paul proclaims the gospel he perceives that a man born without the use of his legs has embraced the good news. As a way to confirm the authority of the gospel which he preached, Paul is divinely enabled to perform a miraculous healing. The gathered pagans, believing Paul and Barnabas to be physical manifestations of Zeus and Hermes begin to worship and make sacrifices to them. Grieved, Paul and Barnabas plead with the Lystrans to cease their false worship. Understanding their spiritual ignorance, Paul proclaims to them very basic truth concerning God as sovereign creator and upholder of all there is. Having been followed to Lystra by enemies from Antioch and Iconium, the mission is cut short by the attempted murder of Paul and the flight to Derbe.



### Exegetical Outline:

- I. The Mission to Iconium (14:1-7)
- II. **The Mission to Lystra (14:8-20)**
  - A. The Healing of the lame man (14:8-14)
    1. Description of the lame man (vs. 8)
    2. Paul's proclamation of the gospel (vs. 9a-b)
    3. The faith of the lame man and Paul's reaction (vs. 9c-e)
    4. The miraculous healing (vs. 10)
    5. The crowd's response to the healing (vv. 11-13)
    6. The refusal of Paul and Barnabas to accept worship (vs. 14)
  - B. Paul's speech and further response (14:15-18)
    1. The call to turn from worthless idols (vs. 15a-g)
    2. God is the sovereign creator (vs. 15h-k)
    3. God's forbearance (vs. 16)
    4. God's goodness (vs. 17)
    5. The people hardly restrained from false worship (vs. 18)
  - C. The persecution of Paul and Barnabas (14: 19-20)
    1. The arrival and activity of Jews from Antioch and Iconium (vs. 19a-c)
    2. The stoning of Paul (vs. 19d-f)
    3. The recovery of Paul (vs. 20a-c)
    4. The departure of Paul and Barnabas to Derbe (vs. 20d-f)

**Main Idea:** The church's mission requires wisdom and clarity in our witness and perseverance through opposition.

### 1. What happened in Lystra

#### a) A miraculous healing (vv. 8-10)

**b) An urgent sermon (vv. 15-17)**

- Paul's message at this point is not so much a presentation of the gospel as it is an emergency sermon to confront an urgent problem (vv 11-14). It may also be considered "pre-evangelism". That is, since Paul is not speaking to Jews who understood biblical categories, he must address a more fundamental question: Who is God?
- Paul's message consists basically of three main parts:
  1. We are mere men.
    - Vs. 15b – "We are also men, of like nature with you..." The first priority is to get the Lystrans to stop their false worship. But Paul is also making a deeper point that the Living God is not like men. He is profoundly different from his human creatures. This was a direct contradiction of the prevailing pagan ideas concerning the gods.
  2. Turn away from your worthless idols.
    - Vs. 15 – Idols are routinely identified as "vain things" that cannot benefit their misguided worshipers. But Paul and Barnabas have good news from the Living God.
  3. Worship the Living God (vv. 15-17).
    - a) He is the creator of all things.
    - b) He is patient.
    - c) He is kind.

**c) A violent response (vv. 19-20)****2. What we learn from Lystra****a) What we learn about witness**

- *Understand the people to whom you witness.* Paul understands he must begin at the beginning in his witness to the Lystran pagans.
- *Keep God central* (theology matters). We are not offering divine therapy or satisfaction of their felt needs. We are calling them to know and worship the right God.
- *Have confidence in the power of the gospel.* Whether he was speaking to Jews or pagans Paul and the apostles proclaimed the same gospel (Rom 1:16-17).

**b) What we learn about the human heart**

- *We are worshippers.* We will all worship someone or something.
- *Left to ourselves we will worship the wrong things* (Rom. 1:18ff). In offering blasphemous worship, the Lystrans were simply following their darkened hearts.

**c) What we learn about perseverance**

- *We have need of Perseverance.* We have need of perseverance precisely because God has called us into a world that will oppose us.
- *Perseverance is about the long-haul, not the short-run.*