

Acts

Part 37 – “Through Many Dangers, Toils, and Snares”

Acts 14:21-28

This passage offers a window into the means Paul and Barnabas employed to build disciples and strengthen churches. Paul and Barnabas are doing more than seeking mere converts. They are busy making disciples of Jesus. The strength of this commitment is seen in the fact that Paul and Barnabas return to both Lystra and Iconium where murderous plots and actions were hatched against the evangelists. No wonder these new disciples were warned about the trials they will face as followers of Jesus living in a fallen world. Paul's own life serves as an object lesson for this reality.

The context for this disciple-making is the church. Disciples of Jesus are made by deliberate action within the church. So, Paul and Barnabas go about what will become a pattern: establishing elders in the churches. Churches are strengthened, at least in part, through the leadership of wise and godly men who serve as shepherds to God's flock. Paul and Barnabas return to their sending church in Antioch to report back on the great works of God. Thus concludes Paul's first missionary journey.



Main Idea: Paul and Barnabas risked their lives to establish healthy churches where disciples of the Lord Jesus would be made.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. The Mission to Derbe and Perge (14:21-28)
 - A. Missionary work in Derbe (14:21a-c)
 1. The proclamation of the gospel in Derbe (14:21a-b)
 2. Conversions in Derbe (14:21c)
 - B. Returning to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (14:21d-23)
 1. Visiting the churches (14:21d-f)
 2. Encouraging the believers and appointing elders (14:22-23)
 - C. The mission to Perge (14:24-25)
 1. Journey through Pisidia and Pamphylia (14:24)
 2. Proclaiming the gospel in Perge (14:25a)
 3. Journey from Perge to Attalia (14:25b)
 - D. Return to Antioch and Syria (14:26-28)
 1. Journey from Attalia to Antioch (14:26)
 2. The report to the church in Antioch (14:27)
 3. Paul and Barnabas remain in Antioch (14:28)

Paul and Barnabas were interested in far more than simply making converts. Their priority was to establish churches. It is to the church that Jesus has entrusted his command to make

disciples. So important was this responsibility that Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra and Iconium to strengthen those new disciples and establish healthy churches.

In Derbe Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel and after “making many disciples” chose to travel on. Paul and Barnabas are now being described by Luke not only as evangelists but as disciple-makers. Making disciples is never a passive exercise. Disciples are made by way of deliberate actions. In his “great commission” (Matthew 28:18-20) Jesus mentions two necessary components of disciple-making:

- “Baptizing them” – Disciples must be initiated into the church.
- “Teaching them to obey” – Disciples require comprehensive instruction from God’s Word.

Luke mentions at least two tools in the disciple-maker’s toolbox:

1.) The Ministry of the Word

Vs. 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.”

- Strengthening the souls of the disciples is a work of God’s grace. Because of this, it is something that is accomplished by the chief means by which God chooses to build us up – his word. God has always chosen to build up or strengthen his people through the means of his word.
- Having been brought to faith in Jesus, these new disciples are challenged to continue in the faith they professed. “The faith” had come to refer to the content of their belief.
- Likewise they are reminded that disciples of Jesus must pass through many tribulations. There are many reasons why Christians suffer tribulation in this world.
 - a. Satan has been granted great influence upon the earth.
 - b. God uses trials to wean us from sin and break the grip of the world upon our hearts.
 - c. A servant is not greater than his master.
 - d. We learn much from trials that we can learn no other way.

2. Healthy Churches

- Vs. 23 – The apostles provided for the ongoing health and stability of the church by appointing elders in each of the churches. Since the Exodus, elders had provided wise leadership in both the wilderness and later in cities (Ex 3:16; 18:13-26; Num 11:24-30; Deut 1:9-18). In the New Testament, the church in Jerusalem was led by elders from early on (Acts 11:30).
- Paul left instructions concerning the qualities which must characterize the lives of elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The health of the church depends upon wise and godly shepherds.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why did Paul and Barnabas return to the cities where they had nearly been killed?
2. What are some of the common risks that missionaries face in the world today?
3. What does Luke mean by “the faith” in verse 22?
4. Why did the Christians in Lystra and Iconium need to be encouraged to continue in the faith?
5. Why are the ministry of the word and healthy churches so necessary to making disciples?
6. Why did Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in the churches?
7. What are some of the reasons why we go through tribulations in this life?