

14:1 In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

Paul and Barnabas had been driven from Pisidian Antioch and traveled about 90 miles south-east to Iconium, the center of agriculture and commerce in the area. It "was called by the Syrians, 'Ik-ona', which signifies 'the bosom of sheep'; the country round about it being famous for feeding great numbers of sheep" (Gill). Today this is Konya, the seventh largest city in Turkey.

Paul and Barnabas followed their typical pattern of going to the synagogue, however, their mission was clearly not limited to the Jews; according to verse 1 they were reaching out to the Gentiles as well.

14:2 But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.

14:3 Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

14:4 But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

Verse 2 says that the Jews "disbelieved," but the word is really "disobeyed;" faith and obedience are so closely tied together in biblical thought. Their anger against the apostles came out in a bitter campaign against them as they attempted to stir the minds of the Gentiles against them.

"Therefore"(v.3; that is, because of all the false accusations that had been made), Paul and Barnabas stayed longer to correct the misconceptions that the Jews were propagating. As a testimony to the truthfulness of their teaching about the grace of God in the Gospel, God empowered them to do signs and wonders. As a result, the city was deeply divided. Some were convinced by the apostles' teaching, having seen the signs that they performed, and others sided with the Jews.

Note in verses 4 and 14 that Barnabas and Paul are both called apostles. Although they were not part of the twelve, the title can be applied to others as well. It is often difficult to determine if the word "apostle" is being used in a general sense or a technical one. Some would place all but the twelve and Paul outside of this select group of gifted men. Others do not. If there were more than 12 apostles in the technical sense of the term, then Barnabas may have been one of them. However, the term apostle also has a general meaning of anyone who was sent by the church. This may be all that is intended here.

14:5 And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,

14:6 they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;

14:7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

The opposition to the apostles escalated into a planned attempt by the Jews to mistreat and stone them. However, the plan became known and so the apostles fled to Lystra and Derbe where they continued to

preach the gospel. Neither city had a large population and most were uneducated. Perhaps the apostles went here because it was a quiet and relatively safe haven.

Five observations should be made about the apostles' preaching of the gospel:

1. Preaching the gospel always brings hostility and opposition (v.2, 5). This is the reality of living for Christ in a fallen world; proclaiming the gospel means opening oneself up to the hatred and murderous intents of men. Jesus said in Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." In John 15:18-19 He said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."
2. They spoke boldly in reliance upon the Lord. They said what God has spoken. They did not change the message to accommodate what they thought others wanted to hear. They were unashamed witnesses. He was their Lord and the only Savior of the world.
3. The preaching of the gospel divided people (v. 4). The same message that drew some repelled others. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be members of his household" (Matt. 10:34-36).
4. Paul and Barnabas were strategic. They fled when the situation demanded it. They didn't flee because they were afraid to die; they fled because that was the course of greater wisdom. They saw the greater need was that others hear the good news of Christ.
5. The message is described as "the word of His grace" (v. 3) and "the good news" (v.7).

The Christian message is a message of undeserved mercy to judgment-deserving sinners. God doesn't tolerate sinners, He welcomes them. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such *were* some of you; but *you were washed*, but *you were sanctified*, but *you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." But even more than this, God's grace seeks sinners (Lk. 15). In Luke 15:2 the Pharisees mocked Jesus and said, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." In Isaiah 65:2 God says, "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people." Jesus said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10).

14:8 At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

14:9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well,

14:10 said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

Lystra was 18 miles south-west of Iconium. It was a significant village. There a man who was lame from birth was healed.

14:11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us."

14:12 And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

14:13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

The crowd's superstitious and even fanatical behavior is hard to comprehend, but some local background throws light on it. About 50 years previously, the Latin poet Ovid had narrated in his *Metamorphosis* an ancient local legend. The supreme God Jupiter (Zeus to the Greeks) and his son Mercury (Hermes) once visited the country of Phrygia, disguised as mortal men. In their incognito they sought hospitality but were rebuffed 1000 times. At last, however, they were offered lodging in a tiny cottage, thatched with straw and reeds from the marsh. Here lived an elderly peasant couple called Philemon and Baucis, who entertained them out of their poverty. Later, the gods rewarded them, but destroyed by flood the homes which would not take them in. It is reasonable to suppose that the Lystran people knew this story about their neighborhood and that, if the gods were to revisit their district, they were anxious not to suffer the same fate as the inhospitable Phrygians. Apart from the literary evidence in Ovid, two inscriptions and a stone altar have been discovered near Lystra, which indicate that Zeus and Hermes were worshipped together as local patron deities.

Since it was in the Lycaonian language that the people shouted out their belief that the gods had visited them again, and named Barnabas, Zeus and Paul, Hermes, it is understandable that the missionaries did not at first understand what was happening (11-12). It dawned on them only when the priest of Zeus . . . *brought bulls and wreaths, intending to offer sacrifices to them* (13). At this the missionaries *tore their clothes*, to express their horror at the people's blasphemy, and *rushed out into the crowd*, protesting against their intention, and insisting that they were like them (14-15; Stott, 231; also Marshall, 251).

14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

14:15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you 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.

14:16 "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

14:17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."
14:18 Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

Although Luke is giving only part of Paul's sermon, it is noteworthy how Paul speaks to illiterate pagans in comparison to the message he gave to the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch. Although the substance of his message always included the gospel, he varied his approach and emphasis depending on the audience. When he spoke to the Jews he used the Scripture and related to them and their ancestry as members of the covenant people of Israel. When he spoke to the Gentiles he started with the revelation of God in the natural world around them.

God provided testimony of his kindness to all humanity by giving rain from heaven to water the crops in their seasons and provide food and subsequent joy for man.

Paul never altered the message of salvation, but he began where people were to find a point of contact with them (Marshall, 252; Stott).

Notice four points to Paul's message:

1. He declares that they were only men. The implication is that the true God is vastly different from His creatures. He is not like the Greek gods who were simply exaggerated men and women; God was eternal, immense, and transcendent.
2. Paul declared that he and Barnabas were messengers of good news (cf. 13:32; 14:7, 15, 21).

The heart of the message that the early church proclaimed concerned a person. It was not a philosophy or a moral code. Jesus Christ Himself is the good news (13:32; cf. Lk. 2:29-30; I Cor. 1:21). Christians are people who have put their trust in another to fit them to enter into the presence of God. The good news is addressed in a message. It is a communication addressed to our ears (Ro. 10:17). It comes to transform how we think about God, ourselves, and the world to come. Truth not rooted in the mind dissipates quickly. Thirdly, the good news is the message of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). It included repentance and faith; in the present context in Acts, the people needed to abandon their worthless delusions and turn from their vain things (Acts 14:15), and rely instead upon the person of Christ.

Paul declared that the religion of the Lystran people was empty (vain); it was without substance. Their idolatry in their false religion misrepresented God (What idol can convey the glory, the eternity, the majesty, the triunity, the love, kindness, or the simplicity of the ever-blessed God?) It also deceived the people, because they trusted in things to deliver them that had no power to do so.

3. He proclaims God's sovereignty in creation: "a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM." Paul recognized that the creation declares the glory of God (Psa. 19; Ro. 1:18ff.). When Paul spoke to men he knew he was not speaking to a blank canvas. All men everywhere are exposed to creation. Day by day and night by night, creation speaks of a Creator (Ps.

19:2) and men must purposefully suppress that truth to avoid its conclusions (Ro. 1:18). Men have a sense of the divine and it surfaces at unexpected moments. Paul was stirring this knowledge within them and framing a context from which he could speak of Christ.

4. Lastly, Paul declares God's providence and sovereignty. "He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

In the past God overlooked the nations (14:16). That is, He left them alone. "There was no special revelation for the nations as Paul is giving now, although there were general revelation and care, as Paul notes in verse 17" (Bock, 478).

He allowed the "nations to walk in their own ways; of ignorance, superstition, and idolatry; which they devised, and chose, and delighted in: not that he gave them any license to walk in these ways, without being chargeable with sin, or with impunity; but he left them to themselves, to the dim light and law of nature, and gave them no written law, nor any external revelation of his mind and will; nor did he send any prophets or ministers of his unto them, to show them the evil of their ways, and turn them from them, and direct them to the true God, and the right way of worshipping him; but left them to take their own methods, and pursue the imagination of their own hearts: but the apostle suggests, that the case was now altered, and God had sent them and other ministers of his, among all nations of the world, to protest against their superstition and idolatry; and to reclaim them from their evil ways, and to direct them to the true and living God, and his worship, and to preach salvation by his Son Jesus Christ" (Gill).

As Ellicott says, "The ignorance and the sins of the Gentile world had been allowed to run their course, as the Law had been allowed to do its partial and imperfect work among the Jews, as parts, if one may so speak, of a great divine drama, leading both to feel the need of redemption, and preparing both for its reception. All were included in unbelief that God might have mercy upon all (Ro. 11:32)."

He has also withheld from the nations His final, irrevocable judgement upon them. This will be developed in Chapter 17. There Paul says, "*having overlooked the times of ignorance*, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

Although God allowed them to pursue their vain pursuits, He had not left Himself without witness. He has shown kindness to them and filled their hearts with joy. The blessings that God pours out upon mankind should cause men to ask, "Why does God do this to someone as undeserving as me?" God's providence is a testimony that God is kind to sinners; He does not treat us as our sins deserve. It should cause us to turn from mental and material idols. Paul said in Romans 2:4, "the kindness of God leads to repentance."

14:19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

14:20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

The stoning that had been planned in Iconium was carried out in Lystra. This was mob violence, not the result of a judicial hearing. One wonders if Paul remembered the stoning of Stephen under similar circumstances. Although Paul was not killed, his enemies thought he was dead. The disciples followed those who dragged Paul's body out of the city and found that he was alive . . . but he was also courageous, immediately returning to the city where he was stoned (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24f.; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:11).

The next morning Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe. Derbe was about 60 miles away and one wonders how Paul made it with this battered body.

One also can't help but be amazed at the fickleness of the crowd. One day they worship Paul as a god; the next day they stone him.

- 14:21** *After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,*
- 14:22** *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."*
- 14:23** *When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*
- 14:24** *They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia.*
- 14:25** *When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.*
- 14:26** *From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.*
- 14:27** *When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*
- 14:28** *And they spent a long time with the disciples.*

In Derbe many came to Christ (14:20b-21). The believers were called disciples. A disciple is one who commits himself to the way of a master. It was assumed that the Master's belief shaped the conduct of his disciples. For example, in Mark 2:18, the question as to why Jesus' disciples do not fast is really directed toward Jesus, since it was believed that Jesus' disciples would be following their Master's example. Likewise, in Mark 2:23, it was expected that Jesus would correct His disciples' conduct. There is no reference to a disciple in the NT where the Master's teaching does not extend to the disciple's inner life. In the book of Luke, from 5:30 to 22:45, the 12 followers of Jesus are referred to as *disciples* about 33 times. However, from Luke 22:45 to the end of the book at the end of Jesus' life, Luke stops calling Jesus' followers "disciples" but substitutes other expressions for them instead; they are called "those around Him" or "with Him" (Lk. 22:49; cf. 22:56, 58, 59), "His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him" (Lk. 23:49), "the eleven and all the rest" (Lk. 24:9), "them" (Lk. 24:13), "the eleven and those who were with them" (Lk. 24:33). The only explanation for Luke's sudden change is that the disciples' betrayal during Jesus' suffering was seen as a breach in their relationship with Him. By leaving Jesus, they were no longer considered "disciples."

After going to Derbe, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps through the Galatian cities where they were persecuted and had suffered. At great risk to themselves they went back to make sure that the churches were established. They encouraged the converts to remain true in the faith and also appointed elders to continue to teach them in the faith.

They then traveled south over the Taurus Mountains and down into the coastal swamps of Pamphylia. This time they stopped in Perga to preach the word; after this, they went to Attalia, the seaport from which they sailed back to Seleucia, and then back to Syrian Antioch.

Once they returned to Antioch, they reported to the church all that had taken place and how the gospel had been received by the Gentiles. The work of spreading the gospel is the work of the church so Paul and Barnabas sensed their accountability to them.

The following are some of the conclusions (condensed) from John Stott.

He observes:

1. Nothing can alter or disguise the fact that on Paul's first missionary journey, Paul left complete churches behind him. Indeed, in little more than 10 years, Paul established the church in four provinces of the Empire - Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. Before AD 47, there were no churches in these provinces; in AD 57 Paul could speak as if his work there was done.
2. Paul exhorted the church members *to remain true to the faith* (v. 22), which they had received from him. A number of similar expressions are used in different parts of the New Testament to indicate that there was a recognizable body of doctrine, a cluster of central beliefs, which the apostles taught. Here it is called, 'the faith' (cf. Jude 1:3), elsewhere, 'the tradition' (2 Thess. 3:6), 'the deposit' (2 Tim. 1:14), 'teaching' (Tit. 2:10), or 'the truth' (2 Cor. 4:2; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:15). . . . "To some extent we can reconstruct it from the apostles' letters. It will have included the doctrines of the living God, the Creator of all things, of Jesus Christ his son, who died for our sins and was raised according to the Scriptures, who now reigns and will return, of the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer and animates the church, of the salvation of God, of the new community of Jesus and the high standards of holiness and love he expects from his people, of the sufferings which are the path to glory, and of the strong hope laid up for us in heaven" (Stott, 235-236).
3. We also notice that the appointed elders were local (in that they were chosen from the church, not imposed from without) and plural (in that there was more than one at each church). In other words, there was a pastoral team, which likely included full-time and part-time workers, as well as paid and voluntary leadership. (1 Cor. 16:15f.; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12f also demonstrate Paul's concern for church leadership; Marshall, 256).

Paul's quick turnover rested on the conviction that the church belongs to God and he can be trusted to look after his own people. So upon leaving the Galatian churches, Paul and Barnabas *committed them to the Lord in whom they put their trust* (23).

These are the reasons why Paul believed that the churches could confidently be left to manage their own affairs. They had apostles to teach them (through the faith and their letters), pastors to shepherd them, and the Holy Spirit to guide, protect and bless them.

4. "In conclusion, in reverting to the first missionary journey, its most notable feature was the missionaries' sense of divine direction. It was the Holy Spirit of God himself who told the church of Antioch to set Barnabas and Saul apart, who sent them out, who led them from place to place, and who gave power to their preaching, so that converts were made and churches planted. The sending church had committed them to the grace of God for their work, and on their return they reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. True, he had done the work 'with them' (literally), in co-operation or partnership with them, but he had done it, and they gave him the credit. The grace had come from him; the glory must go to him" (Stott, 239).

