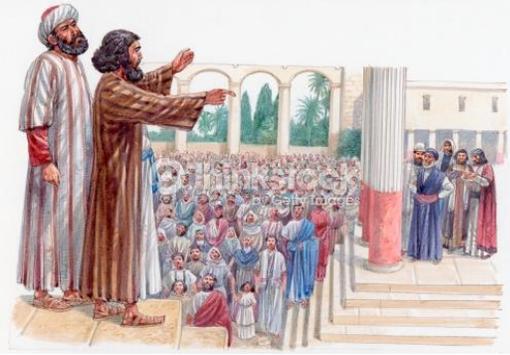


# Session #13: Acts, Chapter 14

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As we move into our study today keep in mind that we continue to study the first mission trip of Paul and Barnabas. We begin today in Iconium.

## **Paul and Barnabas in Iconium 14:1-7**

While each city and region was a unique experience, scholars say St. Luke offers this passage as an example

of what the typical mission experience was like

**14:1 Iconium** A city of southern Galatia, more than 80 miles southeast of Pisidian, Antioch

**14:3 signs and wonders** What we are speaking of here are miracles. Paul and Barnabas, through the power of God, were able to perform miracles. Even today we still understand that miracles are God's way of confirming the divine mission of one of His true disciples (2 Corinthians 12:12, Hebrews 2:4). Miracles are what we look for as the Church seeks to verify someone as a saint.

**14:4 the apostles** We are speaking of here Barnabas and Paul. This is the first-time Luke applies the apostolic title to men other than the original Twelve chosen by Jesus. He will repeat this title again in verse 14 of this chapter. It is most likely that St. Luke gives them this title not to acknowledge special status or authority but simply to recognize these two men as sharing in the missionary work of the early Church. So the original 12 chosen by Jesus are Apostles (with a capital A) and here we have Paul and Barnabas who are apostles (with a small a) who share in the apostolic ministry but not in its authority.

**14:5 to molest and to stone them** Mob violence! The crowd that was against them was wanting for their death. We can sometimes get into this mindset that the Apostles and disciples lived in peace and harmony. Remember persecution against Christianity continues to this day.

**14:6 fled to Lystra** We will find out later (16:1-2) that Timothy (of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy) is from Lystra. He will later join St. Paul in his second missionary trip (16:1-3).

## **Paul and Barnabas at Lystra 14:8-20**

In this next section we will see Paul go from being hailed as a god to being stoned almost to death. We can see some of the cultural difficulties that the early Christians had to deal with in their missionary work of proclaiming the Gospel.

### **14:8-13**

**14:8 Lystra:** Lystra was predominantly Roman. Historians show that a Roman colony of retired army veterans settled this town in southern Galatia. It is more than 100 miles

from Pisidian Antioch. These Romans were Gentiles and there was no synagogue in the community nor in Philippi (16:12-13)

**14:10 began to walk**

As spoken of in the first days of this study, scholars believe that St. Luke choose the incidents that he wrote about to show a parallel between first Jesus and Peter and now Paul and Peter. Not to say that they are the same man but for the readers to make the connection that what was begun in Jesus Christ continues in His Apostles and disciples. This miracle of the lame walking has a parallel in Acts 3. All healings come through the power of God as a testimony of faith. Peter healed a Jewish man and Paul a Gentile.

**14:11-18**

The episode we are about to study bears great similarity to a local legend preserved by the Roman poet Ovid. In the poem we are told that the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes came down to earth, to this region but were in disguise as humans. The locals had refused them hospitality and turned them away. There was in this town couple who had taken them in and in thanksgiving the gods had turned the home of the couple into a beautiful temple. In anger, they had destroyed the dwellings of the rest. What we see here is the crowd, knowing the story, don't want to make the same mistake twice. Seeing the miracle they respond as they

think their ancestors should having hoping to avoid tragedy and win favor.



**14:11 in Lycaonian**

Why is it important

that we know this community spoke in a foreign language? It helps to explain how Sts Paul and Barnabas did not realize the crowd to whom they were



speaking.

**14:12 called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes"**

If you have not studied

ancient Greek religions (as I haven't) Zeus was the topmost god of the gods of Mount Olympia, the father of all gods and humanity. Hermes was one of Zeus' sons and the herald or messenger of the gods.

**14:14-18**

This is the first recorded speech of St. Paul before a gentile group. Notice the difference between what he offers here and the overview of salvation history St. Paul offers to the Jews (13:16-41). St. Paul goes into none of the history but turns to signs from nature in hopes the crowd would recognize God's existence and presence.

**14:14 tore their garments:**

This action is a sign of extreme distress. We see it happen in both Matthew (26:63-65) and Mark (14:61-63) when Jesus is before the Sanhedrin during his trial. Paul and Barnabas tear their garment because are so distressed that the crowd has come to worship them rather than God. Sharp contrast to Herod's acceptance of worship (12:21-24)

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### **14:15 we are also men**

Unlike Herod, Paul and Barnabas are trying to stop the madness. If we look back at chapter ten (26) we will see that Peter also refused divine honor. One of the great wars that many men and women of faith must wage is the challenge of their egos. It is very easy to fall into the trap of believing one is as great as everyone's praise tells them they are. We must always keep in mind that any gifts of talents we have been bestowed with come from God. And any success we have in using those gifts and talents is through the power of the Holy Spirit. If we want to be glad, then celebrate that our hearts and minds were open to seeing and using those gifts as God has called us to.

### **These vain things**

The "vain" things are the beliefs and practices in worshipping false idols and god. These words come from a traditional Jewish critique of idolatry (1 Samuel 12:21). Their (and ours) understanding is that prior to Jesus God permitted the pagans to stumble in the darkness of mythology and false worship. With Jesus and with the "Good News" (Gospel) of salvation that time is at an end. As in the first century, now is the time to enlighten all nations to turn away from lifeless idols and believe and serve the living and true God.

### **14:17 he did not leave himself without witness**

From the beginning of time, because God created all, He made his goodness known through the beauty and blessings of the natural order (Romans 1:20).

### **14:19 Jew... arrived**

There are two possibilities that these Jews from Iconium should arrive on the scene. First, and very likely the Synagogue in Iconium sent a delegation to follow Paul and Barnabas in attempts to keep them silent. It is also very probable that this Jewish group had no knowledge that Paul and Barnabas was preceding them. They had simply come to Lystra, which was a great corn-growing region, to buy corn for their community and were surprised to find Paul and Barnabas there.

### **they stoned Paul**

What begins as salutations of love raising Paul up as a god ends with the seeking of his death. Note that the Gentile community has no problems



with stoning Paul within the city. Unlike the Jews who first force the person outside the city walls before stoning (7:58). This is probably so that they don't have to touch the dead body (making them ritually impure) in disposing of it. By the way, St. Paul mentions this stoning in 2 Corinthians (11:24): *Five times I have received at the hands of the Jew the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned.*

### **14:20 he went into the city**

How likely are you to go back into a community who just tried to kill you? *The outstanding feature of this story is the sheer courage of Paul.*

When he came to his senses, his first act was to go straight back into the city where he had been stoned. It was the great Methodist John Wesley's advice: "Always look a mob in the face". There could be no braver thing than Paul's going back immediately among those who had tried to murder him. An action like that would have more effect than 100 sermons. William Barclay The New Daily Study Bible.

**went on... to Derbe**

More than 60 miles from Lystra in southeastern Galatia

### **End of the First Mission 19:-28**

**14:22 persevere in faith**

This is a phrase that has become for many believers over the centuries a battle cry in hopes of hanging on through the hardships.

**many tribulations**

In our efforts to bring people to Christ there can sometimes be the idea communicated that belief in God through Jesus Christ will bring an end to all our troubles. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul urges this new community and you and I to realize that suffering and persecution are not a sign that God is unhappy with us. On the contrary. Living as believer often brings hatred and grief because of the sinfulness of the world, but these earthly trials open the way to heavenly glory. (Matthew 5:10, Romans 8:17)



**Let's Just take a moment to look at suffering as a part of our faith experience:**

As we have talked about in the past, we do ourselves and those we support and lead in faith, a disservice if we paint the picture that once we join our will to God's life here on earth is perfect. We may have suffered ourselves from the misconception of belief that we would know nothing but rainbows and unicorns dancing until the end of time. But because we live in a fallen world there can be nothing further from the truth. Sin is very where. Our contemporary culture here in the US and throughout the world is counter to the Christian message. So, the more we embrace our faith, the more our lives fall in line with the life and message of Jesus Christ, the more we become counter cultural the more we must endure suffering and at times persecution. Let's take a moment to discuss suffering as a part of the Christian's life

1. **Suffering is going to happen, accept it.** Whether we must struggle through a terminal illness or our neighbor's harassment because of our faith, pain and suffering are a simple matter of the reality of life. This world we live in is a fallen world. Evil exists and abounds all around us. The sooner we come to expect that in all life "some rain must fall" the easier our journey becomes.
2. **All suffering is temporary.** Most suffering is passing. A toothache is temporary. Heartache is temporary. And even if the suffering we must endure is lifetime, if we

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believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ we know that this world we live in presently is only short-term. We are a pilgrim people who march through this world in faith knowing that there is a far, far better life waiting for us in the eternal kingdom.

3. **Suffering does NOT come from God.** The Catholic Church teaches that God is all-loving and merciful. The cancer we deal... the job lost... the death of a loved one does not come from the heart of God. There is evil in the world which perpetuates more evil which is part and parcel with living in a fallen world. Suffering was not a part of God's plan but since we must endure it God shows us that through all suffering can come life. Life after death. Love in the face of hatred. If we enter into our suffering we will eventually pass through it to the life God intends.
4. **Suffering unites us with God.** Entering into suffering, embracing our suffering is no easy task but we go knowing that our Lord walked there first. Our suffering unites us in the suffering of Christ on the cross.
5. **We need community support.** The Church community that gathers is meant to be a great many things. One is a support for us as we do battle in the world. Pope Francis offered: *"The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle.* We are not alone in our suffering, our tribulations. But we must reach out if we are to find that support that helps us endure the battle.

### **14:23 They appointed**

In translating this phrase from Greek we would have a more accurate description of what actually occurred. In Greek we would read that Barnabas and Paul "stretched forth hands" towards the elders. In other words we have once again the idea of the rite of priestly ordination. Knowing that Paul and Barnabas would not be remaining there was the understood need to provide a foundation for this new community they have established, to provide guidance and leadership. In this calling forth the communities own

leadership there is the hope that the local church would be able to continue and maybe even thrive. Notice the beginnings of the Church's hierarchical structure. We do not hear of the group deciding, voting or even ordaining. The work of leadership comes through Paul and Barnabas.

### **14:26 sailed to Antioch**

Paul and Barnabas return home. This is where the first missionary journey began, in the city of Antioch (13:1-3).



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### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Sometimes the teaching or preaching within a parish given by a clergy or professional lay minister can divide the Church. Has this ever happened to you? What did the Church community do? If you are on one side or the other would you know how to evaluate, to find out whether your opinions/ideas align with the teachings of the Church?
2. In your opinion, why do you think it can sometimes be necessary for individuals to undergo “many tribulations” for the faith.

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

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