

# In Iconium / In Lystra & Derbe / The Return to Antioch in Syria



In your youthful idealism, for what social, political or religious causes were you willing to "go to the mat," if need be? Did you ever have to?



Acts 14:1-28

**14** At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.<sup>2</sup> But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.<sup>3</sup> So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.<sup>4</sup> The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.<sup>5</sup> There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.<sup>6</sup> But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country,<sup>7</sup> where they continued to preach the good news.

<sup>8</sup> In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.<sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed<sup>10</sup> and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

<sup>11</sup> When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"<sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.<sup>13</sup> The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

<sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:<sup>15</sup> "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.<sup>16</sup> In the past, he let all nations go their own way.<sup>17</sup> Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."<sup>18</sup> Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

<sup>19</sup> Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.<sup>20</sup> But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

<sup>21</sup> They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,<sup>22</sup> strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.<sup>23</sup> Paul and Barnabas appointed elders<sup>a</sup> for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.<sup>24</sup> After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia,<sup>25</sup> and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

<sup>26</sup> From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.<sup>27</sup> On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> And they stayed there a long

time with the disciples.

a [23] Or Barnabas ordained elders; or Barnabas had elders elected



## Bible Study

1. How does Paul and Barnabas' experience in Iconium differ from their experience in Antioch? How is it similar?
2. What is the purpose of signs and wonders here (see also 6:8)? Why are the people divided (v. 4)?
3. What was religious life like in Lystra?
4. Compare 14:8-13 with 3:1-11. How are the two stories alike and different? What results from each healing?
5. What does Paul emphasize about God in his speech? How is his speech to this crowd (vv. 15-17) different from his previous sermon in the synagogue (see 13:17-41)? Why the difference?
6. Since Antioch was 100 miles away, what does that tell you about the nature of Paul's opposition?
7. How would you feel if you were one of these new believers (vv. 21-25) and you heard about the treatment Paul and Barnabas had received?
8. Reviewing this journey of about 1100 miles (13:1-14:26), what do you learn about Paul? About the Gospel?



## Reference Notes

**14:1-7** The disciples faced a situation in Iconium similar to that of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13). While many Jews and Gentiles believed, opposition intensified to the point that Paul and Barnabas had to flee for their lives.

**14:5 a plot to mistreat them and stone them.** While the opposition in Antioch proceeded through official and legal channels, the fact that a stoning was planned here indicates that this plot was led by Jewish leaders who intended to bypass the Roman court system to get rid of Paul and Barnabas.

**14:6 the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe.** Iconium had originally been a Phrygian settlement. Although it was in the province of Lycaonia, its residents still considered themselves distinct from others in the province. Lystra was about 20 miles to the southwest of Iconium, and Derbe lay 60 miles further to the southeast.

**14:8** The small Jewish community in Lystra (Acts 16:1-3) apparently did not have a synagogue. Adopting a new strategy which brought the Gospel directly to the Gentiles, Paul probably preached in the Greek forum, the site of the local marketplace and gathering place for public discussion.

**14:11** Williams notes how an ancient legend said that the gods Jupiter and Mercury (the Latin counterparts to Zeus and Hermes) appeared to an old couple in a nearby area. As a result, the local people made pilgrimages to this site and the worship of these gods flourished in the region through the third century A.D.

**14:12 *Hermes ... the chief speaker.*** Zeus was the chief god among the Greek deities, while Hermes was the herald of the gods. The fact that Paul was identified with Hermes shows that he was the leading figure in this missionary enterprise.

**14:14 *they tore their clothes.*** In the ancient world, this was a universally recognized sign of horror and grief. By so doing, the missionaries demonstrate the intensity of their opposition to what the people were supposedly doing in their honor.

**14:15-17** Paul declares he and Barnabas are in no way divine, but only human messengers bringing a message from the one true, living God. He goes on to describe God as the Creator, the Sovereign over history, and the One who demonstrates his goodness by providing people with food and joy in life. It is this God alone who is to be worshiped and honored.

**14:17** William notes that Zeus was spoken of in precisely these terms. It may be that Paul is using a hymn to Zeus as a point of contact with his audience while transferring its message to the true God.

**14:19-20** Although there was not a sufficient Jewish community in Lystra to cause any opposition, some Jews from Antioch (over 150 miles away) and Iconium reflected Paul's former zeal in opposing the Gospel by traveling to Lystra to stir up the people against him. The confusion of the people about the nature of Paul's message, coupled with their disappointed expectations that the gods had come, accounts for how they could be persuaded to move from their former adulation to severe opposition.

**14:20 *he got up.*** While some consider this a miracle of resurrection, Luke gives no indication that this was so. Paul was badly beaten and bruised, but able to travel on to Derbe. Paul refers to this incident in 2 Corinthians 11:5 with no mention of any miraculous resurrection or recovery.

**14:21-28** Luke concludes this long journey with a brief summary of the missionaries work in Derbe and their return trip through the cities in Asia Minor where they had established churches until they sailed back to Antioch in Syria.

**14:21** Since no further opposition from the Jews is mentioned in any of these cities, it may be that Paul and Barnabas simply visited each of the newly formed Christian communities for a brief time as they headed back to Antioch. Their mission was not to evangelize, but to encourage those already converted and to provide leadership for them.

**14:22** As the life of Paul and Barnabas showed, to follow Jesus meant being willing to suffer for his sake. Jesus had made this reality plain in his teaching as well (Matthew 5:10-11; 16:24-25; John 15:18-21).

**14:23 *elders.*** This is the first mention of elders outside of Palestine. The early churches simply adopted the synagogue form of leadership in electing leaders who were responsible for the spiritual oversight of the members.

**14:24-28** Returning to the coast, the missionaries continued to preach for a time until they set sail for Antioch in Syria. There is no way of knowing the length of time that Paul and Barnabas had been away or how long they stayed in Antioch before the events of chapter 15 occurred. In Antioch, they told the church of what had happened in their journey.

**14:27 *reported.*** The tense of the Greek implies they "kept on reporting" what had happened. This was probably because the church was actually a combination of small house groups that met throughout the city as at this point Christians had no common meeting places. ***opened the door of***

***faith to the Gentiles.*** It is precisely the nature of this report that led to the conflict in chapter 15 and the important council that resulted from it.

## **Caring Time**

1. Seeing Paul and Barnabas' courage, faith and endurance, how are you challenged to serve the Lord more completely?
2. What does the difference between Paul's sermon (13:17-41) and his speech in verses 15-17 teach you about sharing your faith with various groups of people?
3. The people Paul and Barnabas encountered along the way interpreted the Gospel through their own lenses, even calling them Hermes and Zeus. How do people you know interpret the Gospel by their own prejudices and beliefs?
4. What was one of the biggest misunderstandings about Christianity you had to overcome before you could believe?
5. How would you share the Gospel differently with a Jewish person than you would a non-Jewish person?