



The Conclusion of the First Missionary Journey Acts 14:1-28 (Lesson #21)



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Thirteen-point outline of Chapter 14:

- 1) Luke picks up his account of the first missionary journey in Iconium where Paul and Barnabas initially preach in a Jewish synagogue (14:1a).
- 2) We are also told that in Iconium a great number of Jews and Greeks believed (14:1b).
- 3) But the unbelieving Jews poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against the brothers (14:2).
- 4) We are then told that Paul and Barnabas ministered for a long time in Iconium and the Lord granted signs and wonders to be performed by their hands (14:3).
- 5) Then we are told that the people were divided and persecution broke out with some Jews and Gentiles planning to stone Paul and Barnabas at which point they fled to Lystra and Derbe (14:4-7).
- 6) In Lystra Paul healed a man who had been crippled from his birth which resulted in the people of Lystra thinking that Barnabas was the false god Zeus and Paul was the false god Hermes (14:8-12).
- 7) The priest of the temple of Zeus brought out oxen and garland and intended to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. (14:13-14).
- 8) Paul then called the men of Lystra to repent of this vanity and highlighted four points about God and they were able to prevent the people from offering sacrifices (14:15-18).
- 9) Following that, Luke tells us that Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the crowds to stone Paul and supposing he was dead they drug him outside the city and left him for dead (14:19).
- 10) As the disciples gathered around Paul's body, we are told that he rose up and reentered the city for the evening (14:20a).
- 11) The next day Paul and Barnabas departed for Debre where they preached and made many disciples (14:20b-21a).
- 12) Next, they returned through the cities that have initially come through, strengthening and encouraging the believers and appointing elders in every city (14:21b-23).
- 13) Then Luke records their return to Antioch in Syria and how they shared with the church how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (14:24-28).

14:1 Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

So having left Antioch in Pisidia, after having been run out of town, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Iconium around 100 miles to the south east. Paul and Barnabas pushed deeper into Galatia (**modern day Turkey**) and arrived at the city of Iconium.

In 25 BC Iconium became part of the Roman empire. Racially the people were Phrygian, but administratively they were Galatians and part of the Roman empire.

Notice just in passing as Luke writes about what happened in Iconium he records that **“they” entered into a Jewish synagogue.**

Two points:

- 1) Luke is still writing details and events that he was not a part of, he is still using the pronoun “they.”
- 2) Here we see again Paul's custom (to the Jew first) as Paul and Barnabas entered into the Jewish synagogue and taught about Jesus.

Guess what they did, exactly what they did in Antioch of Pisidia.

They went into the synagogue, and they began to teach. We would imagine that what they taught was similar to what they taught in Antioch. They likely reviewed the history of Israel, culminating in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and proving from the Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah.

We get a **small progress report** from Luke, namely: **“a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.”**

What started in the synagogue, appears to have gone beyond that, and we are told a **great number of both Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) believed**. Now notice, just in passing there is **no mention of anyone speaking in tongues**.

Vs 2 - But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

What had happened in **Antioch in Pisidia, happened in Iconium**, namely the **Jews who did not believe** stirred up unbelieving Gentiles, and **“poisoned”**, literally in the **Greek they made their minds evil** against the brothers. Here we see the **unbelieving group, persecuting the believing group**.

I hope you sense how quickly this church was birthed and how quickly they began to suffer persecution!

It is interesting that **many Jews are rejecting the message** of the person and work of Jesus, but they are also **working overtime to ensure that the Gentiles do not believe either**.

If you remember Paul would outline what happened in Antioch and in Iconium in (II Tim 3:10-12).

Vs 3 - So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Then Luke tells us something that is a **little surprising**. With the **opposition on the rise**, Luke tells us so **“they remained for a long time.”**

Paul and Barnabas **did not allow the persecution to intimidate them into silence**. Instead, they were **bold in their declarations** about Jesus.

Four things:

- 1) We do not know exactly how long, but we should expect it to be weeks or even months.
- 2) Again, in passing notice Luke records that “they” (Paul and Barnabas) remained there a long time. Again, it continues to appear that Luke is writing about something he was not yet a part of.
- 3) Not only did they stay there a “long time” but notice Luke says that they spoke boldly for the Lord.
- 4) Keep in mind, Paul and Barnabas likely understood that because the persecution involved more than just them, they needed to stay as long as possible and pour into these believers, as long as they could.

Then Luke tells us that the Lord, *bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands*.

Paul and Barnabas were carrying the message that men and women could **be saved by grace through faith**, not of any works they might do, but a gift of God provided the very moment they placed faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

God bore witness to the veracity of their message with miracles! God was putting His **stamp of approval** on the message of the early church. Clearly miracles were being performed, it would seem by the hands of Paul and Barnabas.

Vs 4 - But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.

Luke tells us that the city, the city of Iconium (Jews and Greeks) were divided.

Some sided with many of the Jews who were rejecting the message from Paul and Barnabas, rejecting that Jesus was the promised Messiah, while others sided with the apostles.

Again, I hope you see the irony and the sadness of more Jews rejecting the Savior they have been waiting for!

Notice in passing, Luke refers to Paul and Barnabas as **apostles**.

We have talked about this before, but it is worth repeating. The Greek word is **ἀπόστολος (apostolos)**. The word literally means a messenger and it is used many times in the New Testament in this broader sense. In the narrower sense it applies to the 12, who had this unique and special office of an apostle.

Vs 5 - When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country,

Then the unbelieving Jews in a **cabal**, in a **conspiracy**, with some of the unbelieving Greeks, along with rulers in Iconium made an attempt to **mistreat**, to use **spitefully**, **to abuse** and to injure Paul and Barnabas, **namely to stone them**.

The NKJV: “*And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them,*” (Ac 14:5 NKJV)

This is probably closer to what Luke is getting at, the Greek word translated “attempt” is **ὁρμή (horme)**. It means to **rush upon**, it means to **assault**.

An **assault** was made that involved Gentiles, Jews, and their rulers. We are assuming these are the rulers of the synagogue, but it could be political rulers as well. So, this assault involved **mistreating them, with the ultimate plan to stone them**.

Paul and Barnabas stayed as long as they could, but not a minute longer, as their lives started to hang in the balance.

They learned of the plan to take their lives and then and only then they **fled from Iconium** and went to regions of Lycaonia in particular the cities of **Lystra** and to **Derbe**, (both in Galatia).

Vs 7 - and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Lystra and Derbe were smaller cities that were off the beaten path, and it does not appear that there was a synagogue in either city. If this is true it would mean a very small Jewish population in these two cities.

But as we will see later there are Jews there, and one of them a half Jew will become important to Paul. We will meet him officially in chapter 16, but I will just mention him in passing now, his name is Timothy.

As Paul and Barnabas fled, they continued to preach the gospel.

Vs 8 - ¶ Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

In Lystra, Luke tells us that there was a **man**, sitting, liking in a **prominent place, likely in the market or at the gate of the city**. It is important to note that there is no mention of a synagogue.

This man, although we are not told his age, had been crippled from birth, and to make sure we get it, Luke tells us that he had **never walked a day in his life**.

Luke uses a medical term to indicate that the man was **“impotent or without strength in his feet.”**

Vs 9 - He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.

This man was listening to Paul speak, he was listening to the message of the gospel, he was listening to salvation in the name of Jesus. The imperfect verb tense is used and it seems what Luke is saying is that he was **listening intently**, and he **kept listening**.

The Paul looked **intently at him**, Paul fixed his gaze upon him, and it seems the Spirit conveyed to Paul that this man had placed faith in Jesus and the same faith that had saved his soul could also heal his body.

Then Paul said in a **loud voice**, no doubt to be **heard by those present**: **"Stand upright on your feet."**

The verb stand is in the **imperative mood**, that means that Paul is **commanding him to stand up!**

Ok, this man has **never stood a day in his life**, his **muscles are completely atrophied**, this is an **impossible command that Paul has just made**. How can Paul command a man, who has never stood in his entire life to stand?

Then Luke records the man **“stood up” and began walking**. This man who has never stood, has been an invalid since birth not only stood but is walking around. I hope you get how impossible the situation and how amazing the miracle! God simultaneously gave him the ability to walk... **Instantly!**

Now this miracle should have a familiar ring to it (Acts 3:1-8).

Here God works through Paul in a miracle very similar to the one He worked through Peter.

Vs 11 - And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

Then when the crowds saw this amazing miracle, when they saw what **God had done through Paul** to this man, **they lifted up their voices in Lycaonian**, notice not in Hebrew or Greek, but they raised their voice in their native tongue and they began to say to one another: ***"The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"***

Keep in mind, Paul and Barnabas have no idea what they are saying!

This response is shocking and a little strange. Of course it highlights the darkness and spiritual blindness of the people during this time. **But there may be a little more to the story.**

Both Dr. MacArthur and Dr. Fruchtenbaum record in their commentaries there was a legend, a tradition, folklore if you like. I will quote Dr. MacArthur: “There was a tradition in Lystra (recorded by the Roman poet Ovid, who died in A.D. 17) that the gods Zeus and Hermes once came to earth incognito. When they arrived at Lystra and asked for food and lodging, everyone refused them. Finally, an old peasant named Philemon and his wife, Baucis, took them in. Their inhospitable neighbors were drowned in a flood sent by the vengeful gods. Philemon and Baucis, however, saw their humble cottage turned into a magnificent temple, where they served as priest and priestess...”

This might explain their great interest in taking care of these two, they possibly believed they were gods come down to earth, once again!

Let's be honest, these people have never seen anything like this. The only answer from their **pagan upbringing** and their **pagan superstition** was that two of the gods (false gods they worshipped) had once again, taken on human form and had come down and done this amazing miracle.

That is how they are **synthesizing** this **undeniable** and **amazing** miracle.

Vs 12 - Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

They then began to refer Barnabas and Paul as two of the false gods. Barnabas they began to refer to as Zeus (or some translations may say Jupiter), and Paul as Hermes (or some translations may say Mercury)

We are told that they believed Paul was Hermes or Mercury, since Hermes was the **herald of the gods** and Paul was the chief speaker. Barnabas they believed was Zeus, the most powerful of the Greek gods.

PAUSE: I want us to understand that Paul and Barnabas are taking the **gospel into some of the darkest places**, the miracles are amazing to these pagan Greeks, and their only frame of reference are these false gods.

Thus, the **people conclude**, the only way all this is possible is if **Zeus** has taken on human form in the person of Barnabas and **Hermes** has taken on human form in the person of Paul.

ARCHAEOLOGY: So you know, evidence from archeology has surfaced that indicates that in this area the two main gods of the Greek Olympian that were worshipped were in fact, **Zeus and Hermes**.

In 1910, in the vicinity of Lystra, Sir William Calder discovered an inscription dating to AD 250, recording the **dedication to Zeus of a statue of Hermes** along with a **sundial** that contained Lycaonian men's names on it. In 1926, the same scholar, along with Professor W. H. Buckler, **discovered a stone altar near Lystra** dedicated to the **'Hearer of Prayer' (presumably Zeus) and Hermes.'**

Now all of a sudden, this strange story makes a great deal of sense.

Vs 13 - And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

The priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance of the city, brought oxen (for sacrifice) and garlands to the entrance of the city and then he intended to offer the oxen as animal sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul.

So imagine the crowds, imagine the confusion, and imagine the priest and people coming from the temple of Zeus who fully intend to offer sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul.

Vs 14-15 - But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, 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.

Notice, just in passing, once again Luke refers to both Paul and Barnabas as apostles.

The moment Paul and Barnabas heard and understood what the priest and the people with him were planning to do, they tore their garments, and they rushed out into the crowd and they began shouting:

So now let's work our way through what Paul and Barnabas began to shout at the crowd:

- 1) **What are you doing?** Why are you doing this? You can almost hear the shock in their voices.
- 2) **We too are men**, just like you, with a nature just like you. We are men, do not sacrifice to us.
- 3) **We have come with a message of good news.** We have come proclaiming a message of good tidings. Literally in the Greek we came here to gospelize.
- 4) We came with a message that you should turn from these vain and empty things.

APPLICATION: The worship of idols (false gods) is vain (useless). But let's be honest, **all religion apart from the worship of the one True God, through His Son Jesus Christ is VAIN!**

At that point, this call to turn from the vain and empty things, Paul outlines **four key truths about this God:**

- 1) He is the living God. This is juxtaposed to the false gods that they believed in. The true God is the only actual "living God."
- 2) He is the God who made heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them. As you look at the creative order around you, the living God is the one who made the creation.

Now I want to interrupt my points to quote Dr. John MacArthur, in his commentary where he states this: *"It is important to realize at this point that nothing has ravaged gospel preaching to the untaught world more than the theory of evolution. Because it poses an explanation of the existence of everything without a creator or moral lawgiver, people who accept it fail to see any need for God or a first cause."*

I agree with MacArthur, nothing has done as much damage to the Christian faith as the false teaching of evolution. You and I need to be armed with the truth related to evolutionary theory and the various ways it is presented!

Vs 16 - In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

- 3) In times past, the one true God has allowed the nations to walk in their own ways. He allowed them to walk in darkness and confusion. **Here Paul is highlighting the longsuffering of God.**

But those times of ignorance have ended with the coming of Christ (Acts 17:30-31).

Vs 17 - Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

- 4) Yet even during these times the One True God did not leave Himself without witness. For He did good, He gave rains from heaven, He gave bountiful harvests, He satisfied people's hearts with food and with gladness!
 - a. Theologians call this general revelation and common grace.
 - b. Meaning God has shown some of His attributes in His creation, and He shows common grace to all people.

Vs 18 - Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

And with all these words, with all this explanation, Paul and Barnabas, only with great difficulty, prevented the people from offering sacrifices to them!

The author of confusion, the father of lies, is doing everything he can, everything God will allow him to do, to blind the minds of men and women from hearing and responding to the gospel!

This incident does reveal the humility of Paul and Barnabas. To be acclaimed as a god was the highest honor imaginable in the Greco-Roman world and was highly sought after by many in authority (Remember Herod in Acts 12:21-23). Yet here Paul and Barnabas immediately disavowed any such thing!

APPLICATION: The greatest ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ are those who can, in spite accolades of fellow believers, remember who they are before God (I Pet 5:5b-6).

Vs 19 - But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

Then it seems, while all this is going on. Jews who had rejected the message of Paul and Barnabas come from Antioch and Iconium, and they begin to persuade the crowds that Paul and Barnabas are actually villains.

We are not sure what brought these Jews from Antioch and Iconium to Lystra. Maybe it was business, maybe they were hounding Paul and Barnabas. We do not know.

Equally, we are not told what argument they used to persuade the crowds, but here they are, and their arguments were obviously persuasive on the crowds there in Lystra.

If you can imagine this; the crowds that just moments ago, were persuaded that **Barnabas and Paul were gods**, now many in the crowd **become convinced that Paul and Barnabas are villains**.

Then we read that they **stoned Paul**, the leading spokesman, assuming him dead they drug him out of the city and left him for dead (II Cor 11:23-25; II Tim 3:10-12).

WOW, how public opinion can change.

Now I do want you to catch what Luke says, in the ESV it reads that they were: ***supposing that he was dead***.

The word translated "supposing" is the Greek word **νομίζω (nomizo)**, it means to think or to suppose something that is not true (Act 7:24-25).

Luke is telling us the crowd, incorrectly though Paul was dead, but he was likely only unconscious.

Do you see the **vile opposition** and who it is coming from? It is coming from **Jews and likely Jewish proselytes** who for various reasons have rejected the gospel, and who hate Paul for being the leading proclaimer of the message!

APPLICATION: If you are sharing your faith, do not be surprised if you experience opposition. **In fact, you should expect it!**

Vs 20 - But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

The mob, having drug Paul out of the city, the true disciples, the true learners, the true pupils gather around Paul, the Greek word brings with it the **idea of encircling** what they believe is his dead body. **They encompass the man who taught them about Jesus Christ.**

You can imagine the **horror**, you can picture the **tears**, you can **feel the pain**, you can **imagine the shock!**

As they are gathered around him, Luke tell us that Paul, **rose up**. You can imagine to **their shock, their surprise, their joy**, when Paul stood up! Then Luke tells us they **entered the city**.

We would presume it was the city of Lystra, we would assume they reentered the city of Lystra where Paul and Barnabas likely spent the night in the home of one of the believers, one who had placed faith in Jesus Christ.

Then we are told, on the next day they **went on to Derbe**. The trip from Lystra to Derbe is about 40 miles.

Then Paul and Barnabas went on to Derbe. **What do you think Paul looked like when he showed up at Derbe?** He would have been bruised and battered, he would have looked like a man who had been stoned, but amazingly had survived the event! The trip from Lystra to Derbe would have been difficult, he was likely very sore.

Vs 21 - When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

So they went to Derbe, and when they had preached the gospel in Derbe, when they had made **many disciples** in Derbe, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch.

But notice carefully, as part of the salvation experience, **there is not any mention of anyone speaking in tongues**.

OK, what will cause men who are being opening persecuted, to not only continue on, but to even go back through the cities where they were persecuted?

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.

So, they made the return trip, and this time it appears their focus changed as they go back through the cities where they had evangelized.

As they went back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, we are told what they were doing:

- 1) **Strengthening the souls of the disciples**. The Greek word means to **strengthen or confirm**. They strengthened and confirmed the disciples.
 - a. This **expression means they disciplined** these new believers.

- 2) They **encouraged** them to **continue in the faith**. They reminded them that a walk with God through the finished work of Jesus is a matter of faith, trusting in Jesus and following Him. Paul and Barnabas reminded them that to persevere in the faith is a mark that you are saved.
- 3) **Paul and Barnabas reminded them that they would face persecution. *In fact they told them: that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*** They taught them that persecution by people who reject God and reject His Son will overflow onto His followers. Expect persecution.

Notice Luke refers to the believers here as disciples. That Greek word, **μαθητής (mathetes)** means a learner or a pupil. It is the **most common word for believers** in the book of Acts.

Vs 23 - And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

FIRST, notice they **appointed elders** in every church. They appointed (The **Greek word is ordained**), elders in every church. The apostles appointed elders in every church.

We are observing, here in the book of Acts, as the mantle of **leadership of the churches** is **being transitioned** from the **apostles** to **elders** in all of the cities.

Here again, we see these early churches had **a multitude of elders**. A multitude of pastors.

SECOND, notice they did this with **prayer and fasting**, seeking to **hear from the Lord** that these were the men that God had chosen to lead this local churches.

Then they committed those elders to the Lord whom they had believed in.

The Holy Spirit is the one who raises up leaders, it is the job of the **church to recognize those leaders**, and this should be done **through prayer and fasting!** Although not stated we can imagine they laid hands on them and prayed.

Vs 24 - Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

So they passed through Pisidia, and then they came to Pamphylia.

Vs 25-26 - And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.

Then they stopped and **spoke the word in Perga**. Notice just in passing Luke is still referring to Paul and Barnabas' movements as what **"they"** did.

If you remember, when they started the missionary journey for reasons we are not told, they did not preach the gospel in Perga. Here we are told that they (Paul and Barnabas) spoke the word, shorthand for **preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the grave in Perga**.

Now to remind you. The trip from Antioch to Perga is through the Targus mountains and it is brutal, it would have been another treacherous journey coming back to the coast!

Then they went west to Attalia and from Attalia they caught a ship and **sailed back to Antioch in Syria** where it had all begun.

Scholars estimate that the first missionary journey took anywhere from **12 -24 months**. During that missionary journey Paul and Barnabas covered over **1,200 miles, likely most if not all on foot**.

They preached the gospel in a number of **different cities** and **established churches** and **ordained elders** in a **number of different cities**.

Then they sailed back to Antioch in Syria, the Gentile missioning launching church where it all started.

It was in Antioch Luke reminds us that it was there: ***they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled***. Notice Luke is still using the pronoun **they**.

It was there that they had been called to the work, it was in Antioch in Syria that the Holy Spirit called them, and it was to there they had returned, for the **work had been fulfilled!**

Vs 27 - And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Upon their arrival back in Antioch, again **as much as two years after they had left**, they arrived back in Antioch in Syria, and they gathered the whole church together.

On their return they spread the word and gathered the disciples in Antioch. There, they declared to the **church all that God had done**. Can you **imagine the stories?**

And they declared to them how **God opened the door of faith** to the Gentiles.

As you consider what Luke likely wants us to understand. These Gentiles who are coming into the church are not doing it based on observing the Mosaic law, they are not doing it based on circumcising their male children, they are not doing it based on bringing the correct sacrifices at the correct appointed times.

They are flooding into the church **by grace through faith!** They shared with them the amazing stories of many Gentiles coming to faith in the Messiah!

By the way it is the same today, we are calling men and women to turn from their futile ways and place faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ!

Vs 28 - And they remained no little time with the disciples."

Then we are told that Paul and Barnabas remained "no little time" with the disciples in Antioch of Syria.

This is code for, they spent a great deal of time, continuing to serve and worship together in this amazing, predominantly Gentile church in Antioch.

Now it is during this time, this time when a large number of Gentiles are coming into the church that something else is happening. Gentile salvation, and the expectations of Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus Christ is being discussed in earnest in Jerusalem. Questions are being raised, and this will be the focus for next week!

In closing: Today's lesson marks the halfway mark in the book of Acts. Please begin to pray about which book the Lord would have us look at next.