



Conclusion of the First Missionary Journey Acts 14

Introduction

Paul and Barnabas, with John Mark as their assistant, had been sent out by the church at Antioch (in Syria) and by the Holy Spirit to carry out the work to which God had called them (Acts 13:2). It was to be a work that was fresh and unprecedented — an adventure in the Holy Spirit. Their first stop as they sailed from home ground was the island of Cyprus which was familiar territory for Barnabas (Acts 4:36). Perhaps he was well acquainted with some of the synagogues where they preached as they traveled across the island. However, as they left Paphos and sailed for Perga, the unknown territory of Asia Minor lay ahead. John Mark turned back and went home from Perga, abandoning the adventure. Even though they did not know where the Holy Spirit would lead, Paul and Barnabas pressed on, determined to fulfill God's perfect will for them.

As they traveled inland and preached at Pisidian Antioch, they experienced the joy of seeing the Gentiles eagerly turn to the Lord, but they also had their first taste of persecution from the Jews. Undaunted, they moved on to spread the gospel message through three towns of southern Galatia. Chapter 14 records the tribulations and triumphs they experienced during the remainder of this first missionary journey, and their gratification upon returning to their home church at Antioch in Syria.

Outline of Acts 14

- I. Tribulations - Acts 14:1-20a
- II. Triumphs - Acts 14:20b-28

I. Tribulations - Acts 14:1-20a

Upon shaking the dust of Pisidian Antioch from their feet, Paul and Barnabas journeyed to Iconium.

- A. In Iconium - Acts 14:1-7

Iconium is situated about 90 miles southeast of Pisidian Antioch.

- 1. Powerful preaching - 14:1

Even though the Jews in Pisidian Antioch had harassed them and forced them to leave the city, Paul and Barnabas sought out the synagogue in Iconium. There they spoke with such power that *a great multitude both*

of the Jews and of the Greeks (god-fearing Gentiles) believed.

- 2. Opposition - 14:2

However, as had happened at Pisidian Antioch, the unbelieving Jews caused trouble. They used their influence to turn the pagan Gentiles against the missionaries and their message.

- 3. Perseverance in preaching - 14:3

The opposition didn't deter Paul and Barnabas. In fact, it even encouraged them to be more persistent! Instead of dwelling upon the persecution at Pisidian Antioch, becoming discouraged, and leaving Iconium, they spoke out more boldly than ever. What a lesson for us! Do not become discouraged when difficulties arise in your ministry. God will strengthen you and give you the toughness you need to continue on as you rely upon Him.

- a. *In the Lord* - 14:3

The phrase *in the Lord* literally means *upon the Lord* — in reliance upon Him. The secret of Paul and Barnabas' boldness in preaching was their reliance upon the Lord and not on themselves.

- b. *The word of His grace* - 14:3

The message they preached was the gospel of God's grace. He has lavished His grace upon us (Ephesians 1:7-8, NASB). All that God has done for undeserving sinners, He has done by His grace.

- c. *Signs and wonders* - 14:3

God confirmed their preaching with visible signs and wonders which attested to the truth of their message.

- 4. Plot against the apostles - 14:4-5

Luke refers to Paul and Barnabas both as apostles. The word is probably used here in a more general sense than in Acts 1:21-26 where it applies to the 12 apostles chosen by Jesus. The broader meaning of the word *apostle* is a *sent one*, one sent with authority as the representative of another. Paul and Barnabas had been sent out by the authority of the church at Antioch in Syria.

a. Division - 14:4

The city was divided. Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. Wherever the gospel is preached, there is always division between those who accept Jesus and those who reject Him.

b. Consolidation - 14-5

The unbelieving Jews and Gentiles and their leaders joined forces in a plan to mistreat and stone the apostles. Apparently the Jews planned to charge them with blasphemy, as stoning was the punishment for that crime.

5. Departure - 14:6-7

When Paul and Barnabas heard of the evil plan, they left Iconium and went to preach the gospel in Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, a subdistrict of Galatia.

B. In Lystra - Acts 14:8-20a

They arrived first in Lystra, about 20 miles south of Iconium. There is no mention of a synagogue in Lystra, but God provided another channel for His word to be spread.

1. Crippled man healed - 14:8-10

There was a crippled man in the vicinity where Paul was preaching. Luke tells us five things about this man: he had no strength in his feet, he had been lame from birth (*from his mother's womb*), he had never walked, he was listening to what Paul had to say, and *he had faith to be healed*. Paul was watching him, *observing him intently*, and could see that his message was sparking a light of faith in the crippled man's heart. Perhaps Paul had been speaking about Jesus and the healing miracles He had performed. Paul spoke loudly to the crippled man, commanding him to *stand up straight on your feet!* Immediately the man obeyed. He leaped up and began to walk.

2. Paul and Barnabas deified - 14:11-13

When the people of Lystra saw the miracle, they were so excited that they began to speak in their native dialect, *the Lycaonian language*. Most people in the Mediterranean world at this time were bilingual, speaking both Greek and their local dialect. Paul and Barnabas had been conversing with the people in Greek, but when the people saw the miracle done to the crippled man, they reverted to a language which Paul and Barnabas did not understand. The two missionaries had no way of knowing that the people were calling them gods, saying that Barnabas was Zeus and Paul, Hermes.

a. Superstition of the people - 14:11-12

The people of Lystra were pagan and very superstitious. Zeus was the chief of their gods and Hermes was his eloquent spokesman. The people believed that these gods could visit the earth in human form. In fact, there was a legend that Zeus and Hermes had visited that very area on an earlier occasion, seeking hospitality among the people. No one had recognized them, and the only ones who had welcomed them were an elderly couple. In return for their cordial treatment, the gods had transformed the old couple's cottage into a temple. They then destroyed the homes of those who had not accepted them. No one wanted to make that mistake again.

b. Sacrifice planned by the priest - 14:13

The temple of Zeus stood right outside the city and the priest, eager to honor Zeus and Hermes, brought oxen and garlands to the city gates in preparation for offering a sacrifice with all the people.

3. Paul and Barnabas' reaction - 14:14

When the two missionaries realized what was happening, they were horrified. Such a sacrifice would be blasphemous and repugnant to God. They tore their clothes as a sign of utter abhorrence and protest. They ran into the midst of the crowd, trying to attract the attention of those who were about to commit such an abomination. They were not pagan gods come down to earth, but human messengers of the one true God.

4. The sermon - 14: 15-17

The aim of this short sermon is very different than those delivered to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who already believed in and worshiped God. These people were purely pagan. They knew nothing of God and had to be introduced to Him. The message of the sermon is based on the general revelation of the one true God as seen in the natural world.

a. Question - 14:15

The apostles expressed their protest against the people's perceptions and intentions by asking, *Men, why are you doing these things?*

b. Disallowing their deity - 14:15

We are also men with the same nature as you. They were not gods, but simply men with the same kinds of feelings and failings as any man. This was an important point because the pagans believed that the gods lacked feelings and thus did not have the same nature as men.

c. Call to turn from idols - 14:15

The *vain things* they called the pagans to turn away from were their gods. They were nothing but lifeless idols, standing in stark contrast to the one *living God*.

d. Call to turn to God - 14:15-17

The sermon presents the *living God* as being the Creator who is supreme over all, and benevolent to all.

(1.) The Creator - 14:15-16

The *living God* made everything, *the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them*. As creator of all things, God has power and authority over all things, including the nations of the world. In past ages, He had allowed the nations to go their own ways, following *their own reason and passions, and their own system of religion*. *He gave them no written law and sent them no messengers.* (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes).

(2.) The One who *did good* - 14:17

God allowed the nations to remain in ignorance for a time, but even then they should have realized that He existed because He has always revealed Himself in the natural world. He has been good to all people by sending rain from heaven and fruitful harvests and satisfying our hearts with food and gladness. Even before the gospel message went out to the world, God was not hiding but revealing Himself by His goodness. In the remotest areas of the world where the gospel message has still never been preached, God reveals Himself through the goodness and greatness of His creation. *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse* (Romans 1:20).

5. The reaction of the people - 14:18

The words of the sermon stopped the crowds from offering the sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, but only barely. The people of Lystra were firmly rooted in their pagan superstition.

6. Paul stoned - 14:19-20a

The Jews who had forced Paul and Barnabas out of Pisidian Antioch and Iconium now showed up in Lystra to cause trouble again. The fickle crowd which had just called Paul and Barnabas gods and tried to sacrifice to them was now easily influenced by the Jews. They allowed the Jews to stone Paul, drag him out of the city, and leave him for dead. Luke doesn't comment on

whether Paul was actually dead or not, but he was probably only unconscious. In 2 Corinthians 11:25, where Paul listed tribulations of his life as a missionary, he wrote, *once I was stoned*, referring to this occasion.

The reference in 14:20 to *the disciples* who gathered around Paul shows that there must have been some converts in Lystra in addition to the crippled man. Miraculously, after the stoning, Paul was able to get up and go back into the city. The next morning he and Barnabas departed for Derbe.

II. Triumphs - Acts 14:20b-28

Troubles in the Galatian cities did not deter Paul from continuing to preach the gospel. In spite of the evil persecutions, this missionary journey ended in triumph.

A. In Derbe - 14:20b-21a

Derbe was also a Lycaonian city (14:6), located about 30 miles south of Lystra on the southern border of the province of Galatia. Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel there without any recorded incident. God blessed their efforts with *many disciples*.

B. On return to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch - 14: 21b-23

After staying for a time in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps through Galatia to strengthen and exhort the disciples and to help organize the churches they had established. They even had the courage to return to Lystra. They never left new believers to fend for themselves. Paul always took the responsibility to strengthen and encourage the new Christians in the cities he had visited, either by return visit or by letter. His love for Christ and Christ's love at work in him compelled him to encourage and establish his converts. Loving and caring follow-up is necessary, not only in missionary outreach, but also in evangelistic work within the church.

1. Strengthening the souls of the disciples - 14:22

As they returned to each city, Paul and Barnabas worked to reinforce the faith of the disciples. Having seen the missionaries abused and chased out of town, and perhaps facing some persecution themselves, the hearts and minds of the believers needed to be encouraged. They were told that troubles and opposition were to be expected, but they would get through it, *We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*. Jesus had said, *And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it —*

lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him (Luke 14:27-29). When we calculated the cost of following Christ, we should have counted on tribulations. The encouragement is that we will make it through the tribulations into the kingdom of God. Of course, there is a very real sense in which we are already in the kingdom of God, but when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again in His glory, all tribulations will be done away with and we will experience the fullness of the kingdom. *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him* (2 Timothy 2:12).

2. Organizing the church - 14:23

Where a new church was established, Paul and Barnabas also made sure that leaders were installed. Elders were appointed as overseers of the church to insure an organized ministry.

3. Praying and fasting - 14:23

Before they left each new church, they prayed and fasted with the new leaders and committed them to the Lord.

C. In Perga - Acts 14:24-25

The missionaries visited Lystra, Iconium and Psidian Antioch and then traveled to Perga in Pamphylia. After preaching the gospel there, they went to the nearby seaport of Attalia and sailed back to Antioch in Syria,

D. Back at Antioch - Acts 14:26-28

When Paul and Barnabas had left Antioch, the church there had committed them to the grace of God, trusting that He would complete in them the work to which they had been called.

1. The missionary meeting - 14:26-27

The work Paul and Barnabas had been sent out to do was now completed. The church gathered together to hear all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

a. What God had done - 14:27

Paul and Barnabas did not report what they had done but what God had done with them. They could have done nothing without God. What are you trying to do on your own, without God? Without Him you can do nothing, but *with God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26).

b. He opened the door of faith to the Gentiles - 14:27

Faith is the only door into the kingdom of God, and God is the One who opens it.

2. The long stay - 14:28

After this, Paul and Barnabas stayed with the disciples in Antioch *a long time*. The first missionary campaign had lasted between one and two years. The missionaries had traveled about 700 miles by land and 500 miles by sea. They had seen the wall broken down between the Jews and the Gentiles. Those who *once were far off* had been *made near by the blood of Christ* (Ephesians 2:13).

Applications

1. Having brought you to this Bible study, God has *opened the door of faith* to you. Have you entered in? If you have not or if you are not sure, will you speak with your discussion leader or teaching leader so that you may be certain you are a part of God's kingdom today?

2. What can you do to help reinforce the faith of someone who is a new believer, unsure of their faith, or struggling under opposition?