

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 14

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Just as Paul and Barnabas preached boldly (even in the face of opposition and persecution) so must we never back down from the message of the gospel. God's Word is alive, powerful, the only message that brings spiritual life and eliminates spiritual death. It brings light and dispels darkness in the hearts and minds of unregenerate men. As long as we are alive on earth, we are to fulfill the great commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

PREACHING IN ICONIUM (1-5)

Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue in Iconium and many believed. Then unbelieving Jews stir up the Gentiles against those who believe the gospel. Paul and Barnabas continue to speak boldly in the Lord and signs and wonders follow their preaching. The city splits; half side with the Jews and the other half with the apostles. Those against the message determine to stone Paul and Barnabas.

Iconium is located in an area of Galatia. It is a province consisting of four major cities: Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Derby, and Lystra. Paul and Barnabas have been removed from Antioch and are traveling further inland into Galatia, and the further they go, the more the persecution will intensify.

MANY BELIEVE

Act 14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

Paul is sitting a pattern. In most cities, when available, he goes into the synagogue. Paul knows the customs, manners, and beliefs of the Jews and finds this a quick platform and audience. He also knows in each city, the gospel was to the Jew first and then to the Greek (Romans 1:16). However, there were exceptions such as Athens and Philippi.

Paul and Barnabas draw large crowds and speak several times. Many more are added each time they speak.

Act 14:2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

Gentiles run the city of Iconium, and the Jews affect the attitude of the entire city. The city becomes bitter against Paul and Barnabas because of the Jews.

SIGNS AND WONDERS

Act 14:3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Long time therefore abode (diatribo: to remain under pressure) they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

It took some time for opposition to be stirred up against Paul and Barnabas, so they wasted no time in proclaiming the message of salvation. As they preach the Word, God confirms it with signs and wonders following. God always backs the message of grace with signs and wonders (Galatians 3:5).

Signs and wonders are God's way of making it difficult to say no to the gospel and teaching of the Word. Those in Iconium have to make an effort to ignore the miracles and healings and refuse salvation.

Act 14:4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

Even though there are miracles and healings, many are so hardened they will not believe, even with the display of the supernatural. The city is divided down the middle (Matthew 10:34).

The first four verses of this chapter reveal that the results of the word are always the same. Some accept the gospel, and others reject it. This was the case in Antioch of Pisidia and now is in Iconium. Verse 3 tells us God performed miracles in Iconium, but in Antioch none were performed (Acts 13). In some cities miracles are performed, and in some they are not. One city does not set a standard. One event does not establish a pattern. God works differently in each city, but the Word is always preached.

Manifestations will always differ. One method of witnessing does not set a precedent. One method for success in life does not set the norm for everyone. How you spend your time in study, prayer, praise, and worship is up to you. How you apply God's principles is up to you. Jesus did not witness or minister healing to any two people the same way. It is important to stay open to the Holy Spirit.

PERSECUTION

Act 14:5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,

Behind the scenes, there is a joint effort by the Jews and Gentiles to kill Paul and Barnabas and make a public example of them.

PREACHING IN LYSTRA (6-7)

Paul and Barnabas, learning of the plot against them, flee to Lystra and Derbe and preach there and in the surrounding area.

Act 14:6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

The word about the plot to stone them comes to Paul and Barnabas through either the Holy Spirit or through the converts they have made in the city. Paul and Barnabas flee to Lystra and Derbe, the other two cities of Galatia. They arrive in Lystra first.

Act 14:7 And there they preached the gospel.

Signs and wonders again accompany the preaching of the gospel. Paul is spared from persecution in Antioch and Iconium. He will be raised out of it in Lystra (2 Timothy 3:12).

Lyconia is a desert area with rugged mountains, and is one of the most desolate areas in the world.

HEALING OF THE CRIPPLE (8-10)

There is a man in Lystra who has never walked because he is crippled. Paul sees faith in this man and commands him to stand. The man responds and the people witness his healing.

Act 14:8 And there sat a certain man At Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:

And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent (totally helpless) in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked:

The man mentioned in this verse has been a liability on the city of Lystra since his birth. He is well known because for years others have carried him from place to place.

Act 14:9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

The man receives faith when he hears Paul speak (Romans 10:17). While Paul is ministering, the same Holy Spirit who gave the man faith, reveals it to Paul. The Holy Spirit works in both Paul and the crippled man to bring about his healing.

Act 14:10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

Lystra did not have a synagogue, so God used this miracle to draw a crowd. In Iconium, the miracles follow the teaching ministry (verse 3). Here the healing proceeds the Word, and a crowd gathers as a result of the healing.

PAUL AND BARNABAS DEEMED GODS (11-18)

Because of the miracle, the people cry out in their native tongue that god's have come to visit them in the form of men. A priest of Zeus even brings an ox and garlands with the intention of joining the multitudes and sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas. As soon as Paul and Barnabas realize what is happening, they run out among the people tearing their clothes, declaring they are men just like the people in the crowd. They also attempt to teach the people about the living God they serve.

Act 14:11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

The Lycaonian language is a mixture of Greek and Assyrian. Paul does not know what they are saying since it is in their native tongue. He only becomes aware when they begin to sacrifice to him and Barnabas (verse 13).

Maybe it is the Lystran's jealousy of nearby Phrygia that makes them so quick to label Paul and Barnabas as gods. Two trees stood in Phrygia as a monument to a supposed visit from Zeus and Hermes. According to legend, the trees had been lovers transformed after requesting from the gods a form that would allow them to be together forever. By worshiping Paul and Barnabas as gods, perhaps the Lystrians hope to have the requests granted as well.

Act 14:12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

SACRIFICES BROUGHT

Act 14:13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

Oxen were the highest form of sacrifice to the Greeks because they were so expensive. They belonged to the wealthy. Garlands were used in worship to entertain the gods. Paul and Barnabas now begin to understand why the people had made such an uproar. When the people witnessed the miracles, they mistakenly gave credit to Paul and Barnabas rather than the one true God.

PAUL AND BARNABAS CRY OUT

Act 14:14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

While the people prepare to make sacrifices, Paul and Barnabas are inside the house where they are staying. When they realize what is happening, they run outside and tear their clothes to prove they are human.

AN ATTEMPT TO TEACH THE PEOPLE

Act 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities (**useless**) unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

Although the people have cried out in the language of Lyconia, Paul speaks in Greek so everyone understands him. All Galatians worshiped the false gods of the air, land, and sea. Paul explains that there is one true God who made all of these elements as well as them.

14:15 useless, *mataios* (mat-ah-yoss); Fruitless, empty, futile, frivolous, hollow, unreal, unproductive, lacking substance, trifling, ineffectual, void of results, devoid of force, success, or utility, and worthless. The word here describes Greek and Roman mythological ritual. The unregenerate philosophy of that day made Paul and Barnabas urged the people to turn from these useless (*mataios*) things. The message was “turn from Zeus, who has never lived, to God who has always been alive. As Creator He is worthy to be praised, worshiped, and trusted.”

Act 14:16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

Paul explains to the people, “God has allowed you to walk in your foolishness even though He did not like it. That is why He has sent us to reveal Him to you.”

Act 14:17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

The universe and earth are a witness to God’s power and existence (Romans 1:20). Because the people Paul addresses are Gentiles (heathen), they have never known about the manifestations of Jesus revealed in the Old Testament like the angel of the Lord, Jehovah, and the rock. So Paul explains that God sends rain and provides food. Because they live in an agricultural economy, they can understand and appreciate Paul’s verbiage. He compares natural food to spiritual food, “filling our hearts with food.” God always supplies spiritual nutrition for the new birth.

THE CROWD DOES NOT LISTEN

Act 14:18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

The crowd is still in a frenzy and emotionally charged. They are not ready to listen to teaching, and they have not ceased in their attempts to offer sacrifices.

STONING OF PAUL (19-20)

The Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrive convincing the multitudes to stone Paul and drag him, dead, out of the city. However, the disciples gather around Paul and pray. He is raised from the dead. The very next day, he travels with Barnabas to Derbe.

PAUL'S MESSAGE REJECTED

Act 14:19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew (dragged) him out of the city, supposing (nomizo: concluding him to have died) he had been dead.

The Judaizers from Antioch and Iconium who reject Paul's message attempt to evangelize these Gentiles with the law. They were unable to stone Paul and Barnabas in Iconium because they had fled. They have now followed Paul and Barnabas to Lystra and this time, will see Paul stoned by the people. Believing they have been successful in putting a stop to the gospel, they will leave. These men never cared about Lystra until Paul arrived.

The people in Lystra are fickle and easily persuaded. One minute they are convinced Paul is a god, and the next, they plan to stone him. They are probably disappointed because Paul will not allow them to make sacrifices to him.

This instance of Paul's stoning and death is probably the time he was taken out of his body into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

PAUL RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Act 14:20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Paul's stoning takes place before a group of his own followers, disciples of the Lord. As they are praying for him, he suddenly comes back to life. Immediately he returns to the city of Lystra.

It must be a shock to the Jews who had just stoned him and a confirmation to the people of the city of the truth of the gospel. After they see Paul has been raised from the dead, they no longer want to offer him sacrifices. Now they are ready to receive the Lord. He only remains in Lystra one day before he continues his journey into Derbe. He will preach again in Lystra on his departure from the region and like in Antioch, no miracles are performed.

RETURN TO LYSTRA, ICONIUM, AND ANTIOCH (21-23)

After preaching in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen and exhort the disciples and encourage them to continue in the faith. They also appoint elders in every church and, after praying and fasting, commended them to the Lord.

Act 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

The word about Paul and the gospel has already spread throughout Galatia, and the people in the next city are ready to receive the gospel and hear the teaching of the Word.

Two words are mentioned in this verse that should be noted: **preached and taught**. **Preaching is for the unbelievers**. It is how they hear the gospel. **Teaching is for believers**, the disciples, and they heard the Word.

Not only have the next cities heard about Paul's resurrection, the word about what happened spreads back to the cities where Paul and Barnabas have received so much persecution. It was probably during this time when people regretted what had happened and would have "plucked out" their eyes and given them to Paul (Galatians 4:15). After having been stoned, Paul probably wasn't a pretty sight!

However, Paul isn't deterred by what has just happened; he continues to preach and teach despite his physical condition. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, Paul describes more about his sufferings during this time.

TEACHING THE WORD

Act 14:22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Through the teaching of the Word, the souls of the disciples are grounded and established. The soul is stabilized by the Word. **Confirmation is for the present**. **Exhortation is for the future**. Paul is unable to remain with them, and he wants them to be spiritually self-sustaining.

The "kingdom of God" is a reference to the spiritual walk of faith God wants all of us to obtain. It is comparable to the land of Canaan in the Old Testament. The life of faith is a goal every believer should attain to and it comes to us through knowledge of the Word of God. It also comes through much tribulation from the religious crowd. This crowd has always opposed the truth from the time of the prophets, to Jesus, and to the apostles of the New Testament. This is true for all believers. Satan will always oppose the deeper walk, but God gives us the strength and power to overcome.

14:21-22 Suffering, Tribulation, CONFLICT AND THE KINGDOM. Paul not only taught the joy and peace of the kingdom of God (Romans 14:17), it's power (1 Corinthians 4:20), and its present authority to cause the believer to triumph over evil (2 Timothy 4:18; Romans 16:20). He also taught that "kingdom people" experienced trial, suffering, and not always an "instant victory" (2 Thessalonians 1:5). Triumph and victory may characterize the attitude of each citizen of the kingdom of God, and Holy Spirit-empowered authority is given to be applied to realize results. Yet, God did not promise life without struggle. The "dominion" being recovered through the presence of the King within us and ministered by the Holy Spirit's power through us is never taught by the apostles as preempting all suffering.

This text reminds us that victory only comes through battle, and triumph only follows trial. Only a weak view of the truth of the kingdom of God pretends otherwise. Another weak view surrenders to negative circumstances on the proposition that we are predestined to problems and therefore should merely tolerate them. The Bible teaches that suffering, trial, and all order of human difficulty are unavoidable; but God's Word also teaches that they may all be overcome. The presence of the King and the power of His kingdom in our lives make us neither invulnerable nor immune to life's struggles. But they do bring the promise of victory: provision in need, strength for the day, and healing, comfort, and saving help.

ORDAINING ELDERS

Act 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

The Greek word for ordained is *cheirotoneo*. It means to "elect by stretching out the hand." In each of these cities, Paul and Barnabas establish churches as they retrace their steps back through the cities. The believers in each city continue in the Word and in grace, and groups are established. All of the groups need leadership, and Paul and Barnabas make the selections by the laying on of hands. Prayer and fasting accompany each selection to determine whether they have any "checks" in their spirits about any potential leaders. After praying and fasting, their consciences are clear, and they commend the selected leaders to the Lord. This demonstrates Paul and Barnabas have done their part, and what remains to be done is between the new elders and the Lord.

The Greek word for "commended" is *paratithemi* which means "to deposit." This is a banking term. A bank is generally considered a safe place to deposit money. The Lord is the bank, the safe place to deposit the new elders. These elders (presbuteros) become the pastors of the churches. The pastor is called an elder in many passages of scripture. A pastor can be called an elder, a bishop, or a deacon. Although not all elders, bishops, and deacons are the pastors, a pastor is each one of these offices as the head of the local church.

PREACHING CONTINUES (24-28)

Paul and Barnabas then traveled to Perga and Attalia and preach in those places. Finally, they returned to Antioch, testify about all God had accomplished during their missionary travels, and report how many Gentiles had received the gospel. They remain in the area to rest and be refreshed.

Act 14:24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

Paul and Barnabas now return to the place where Mark deserted them.

PERGA AND ATTALIA

Act 14:25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

Paul does not preach the Word in Perga when he first arrives, but reserves this opportunity for his return trip. Attalia is the seaport from which Paul will return home.

RETURNING TO ANTIOCH

Act 14:26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

They had been sent out from Antioch, and now they had returned. This was the place where they had been commended to God's grace. The Greek word is *paradidomi*, which means to be turned over for safekeeping.

TESTIMONY

Act 14:27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

They give God all the glory for what He has done. Not only should missionaries return to the church from which they are sent, they also need to testify of what God has done -- signs, wonders, churches established, and people saved.

A TIME OF REST

Act 14:28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

Paul and Barnabas spent almost eighteen months on the road in Galatia. They deserve a rest, and they take one. Vacation (time off) is a necessity in ministry. It helps ministers prepare for the next journey.