

21. Paul and Barnabas Complete the First Missionary Journey: Acts 14

In the first part of this journey, Paul and Barnabas had visited Cyprus, where the proconsul was converted to the Lord. Following this, they sailed to Perga, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. After this, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and Paul preached a powerful sermon, with many believing upon the Lord. The gospel spread through the whole region. The Jews incited the people against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from the region. Luke reported the outcome in Acts 13:51-52: "51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Chapter 14 opens with Paul and his company in Iconium. In the apostolic period, Iconium was one of the chief cities in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, and it probably belonged to the "Phrygian region" mentioned in Acts 16:6:

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

The border of Phrygia ran between Iconium and Lystra, 18 miles to the south. In the apostolic period, Iconium was still a Hellenic (Greek influence) city with a strong Roman influence.

Paul and Barnabas Preach Boldly at Iconium

Acts 14

1 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. 2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 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. 4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. 5 There was a plot



afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. 6 But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, 7 where they continued to preach the good news.

By now, it has become customary for Paul and Barnabas to go first to the Jewish synagogue. They spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. This is a testimony to the power of the gospel, the word of truth, for Paul later testified to his own weakness of speech. He said in 1 Cor 2:1, 3-5:

. . . I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . . 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

In 1 Cor 1:18, Paul declared that the power of God is the message of the cross: "18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Rom 1:16 gives this power to the gospel: "16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

Once again, the Jews that did not believe stirred up the people against the brothers. However, Paul and Barnabas stuck it out, spoke boldly the world of God, and confirmed the message with signs and wonders. When they found out about a plot to stone them, they fled to Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding countryside, continuing to preach the gospel.

Paul, First Thought of as a God, Is Then Stoned at Lystra

Acts 14:8-10

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

No matter the testimony, no matter the miracles, and no matter the adulation and praise, all of this goes out the window, as it were, when people harden their hearts against the Lord. This miracle is evident, of great magnitude, and of certain consequence: the man, crippled from birth, had never walked. Paul recognized the belief of the man. When Paul called out to him to stand up, he jumped up and began to walk.

Acts 14:11-13

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 13 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.

The Lystra people credited Paul and Barnabas as being the gods Hermes (Paul was the main speaker) and Zeus. So convinced they were that the priest of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths in order to sacrifice to them. Hermes was the Greek god who served as herald and messenger of the other gods. His Roman equivalent was Mercury. Zeus, whose temple was outside the city, was considered the king of the gods. The King James version uses the word *Jupiter* for Zeus.

The point to notice here is that the people were so enamored of Paul and Barnabas that they tried to make gods out of them.

Acts 14:14-15b

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you.

Barnabas and Paul, clearly alarmed by the men's actions, tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd. There are many examples of renting clothes in the Bible. Most often, it had to do with great grief or blasphemy. The chief priest tore his clothes before Christ, mistakenly accusing him of blasphemy in Matt 26:63-66:

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

Older translations used the word *rent* for the word *tore*. Joshua is an illustration of the distress felt by Paul and Barnabas in Josh 7:6 when the Amorites decimated the Israelites:

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads.

Paul and Barnabas responded first by asserting that they were only men. John received a similar rebuke when he tried to worship an angel of God in Rev 22:7-9:

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Despite this clear teaching, many today of the denominations' clergy consider that they are divine or reverent, and they let others to consider them so, even allowing people to bow and scrape before them. They take to themselves titles like reverend and father. Jesus taught in Matt 23:9-12:

9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Acts 14:15b-18

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. 16 In the past, he let all nations go their own way. 17 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." 18 Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Paul and Barnabas did not look the other way, but launched directly into an attack; nor should we today when we face erroneous ideas and false teaching. Their argument was straightforward and almost got them killed: Turn from these worthless things (idols) to the living God. The evidence of God was equally straightforward. He made everything in heaven and earth. *In the past, he let all nations go their own way* is a statement like the one Paul made to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:29-31:

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

God has left testimony of himself in the rain and crops, plenty of food to eat, and joy in our hearts. This argument also reappears in Rom 1:20: "20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Even with all this, the enamored crowds still wanted to sacrifice to them. However, the climate quickly changes.

Acts 14:19-20

19 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. 20 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.

All it took to turn this crowd was Jews coming from Antioch and Iconium. The result was that they stoned Paul and left him for dead. But Paul was not dead and the next day, he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

From Derbe, They Return and Appoint Elders in Each Church

Acts 14:21-25

21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 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. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. 24 After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, 25 and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

After establishing the church in Derbe, they returned to the cities where they had established other churches—Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Their goal was to strengthen and encourage the churches. The idea that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God was first presented by the Lord himself in Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it."

To secure the churches, they appointed elders in each church. Elders are called pastors (shepherds) and bishops (overseers), depending on the translation. Paul used the words interchangeably in Acts 20:17, 28-31.

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church.

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! [Emphasis added].

Peter also used the words in this very same way in 1 Peter 5:1-3

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [Emphasis added]

The point is that God's pattern was for elders (plural) to take the oversight in every church, to feed the flock and to protect the flock. Each of these congregations was all sufficient and autonomous. There is no record in the New Testament of a hierarchy beyond the local church. A unique feature of the Lord's church as presented in the New Testament is that there are no regional, national, or worldwide bodies. Any organization larger than the local church is unscriptural.

Returning and Reporting to Antioch

Acts 14-26-28

26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. 27 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. 28 And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

They sailed back to Antioch, the church from which they had been committed to this great work by the grace of God. The entire church heard the news of all God had done and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They stayed a long time in Antioch.