

# Ministry of Grace Church

## The Acts of The Apostles Chapter 14

### Preface:

In chapter 13 we learned about the leaders of the church in Antioch, consisting of three prophets and two teachers, who commissioned Saul and Barnabas to go on the first missionary trip. Under Barnabas' leadership they first went to the island of Cyprus, which was his home territory. There, in the town of Paphos, a false prophet by the name of Bar-Jesus tried to hinder their work while they were witnessing to the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. As a result, Saul called down a curse on Bar-Jesus so that he went totally blind for a while. The proconsul then believed the message that Barnabas and Saul had been preaching.

After leaving Paphos, Saul appears to have become the leader and from this point on, Luke no longer refers to him as Saul, but Paul. They then went north across the Mediterranean to Perga and then on to Antioch of Psidia where Paul delivered such a powerful message in the Synagogue that many Jews and Gentiles believed, asking him and Barnabas to come back and teach them again on the following Sabbath. But the Jews became jealous of Paul and Barnabas because they were attracting great crowds of people, and chased them out of the district. As a result, Paul and Barnabas headed east into other parts of Galatia.

### Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

#### **Acts 14:1-7**

**<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. <sup>5</sup>When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, <sup>6</sup>they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup>and there they continued to preach the gospel.**

### Notes:

In Iconium, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas was powerful and was made effective by the way they spoke. Many Jews and Greeks believed the message delivered by these two. Notice what it says in verse three:

speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

The Lord blessed their ministry by allowing them (not just Paul, but both of them) to perform miraculous signs and wonders. The word translated "signs" is *sēmion*, which refers to a miracle with a spiritual purpose. The word "wonders," is from the Greek word *teras*, which also refers to a miracle. These two words refer to different aspects of the miracle. *Semion* refers to the miraculous nature of the

event which always points to God as the source of the miracle. *Teras*, on the other hand, refers to the character of the miracle as being extraordinary, startling, or amazing. In other words, it refers to something that appears so extraordinary that it sticks in the memory of the observer.

Unfortunately, in spite of the power of their preaching and the miraculous events that gave evidence of the source of their teaching, Jews who refused to believe that Jesus is their Messiah, stirred up the people (especially the Gentiles) against Paul and Barnabas. The first word in verse three, “So,” is a word that indicates a cause-and-effect relationship between what was just said and what is being said. In other words, the reason that Paul and Barnabas remained a long time speaking boldly for the Lord, is because they encountered opposition. To most of us, that is counter-intuitive. When we meet opposition to the Gospel, our tendency is to go elsewhere and speak to someone else who might be more receptive to our message. Not so, for Paul and Barnabas. The opposition they encountered just spurred them on to greater witnessing.

However, in spite of their determination to preach even in the face of opposition, those opposing them stirred-up so much trouble that the people were going to stone them. But, when Paul and Barnabas knew of the plot against them, they finally left town and headed east to Lystra and Derbe, where they continued to preach the gospel.

## **Paul and Barnabas at Lystra**

### **Acts 14:8-18**

**<sup>8</sup>Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup>He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, <sup>10</sup>said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. <sup>11</sup>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!” <sup>12</sup>Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, <sup>15</sup>“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. <sup>16</sup>In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup>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.” <sup>18</sup>Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.**

### **Notes:**

Paul’s healing of a man crippled since birth reminds us of Peter’s similar healing of a man crippled from birth (See [Acts 3:1-10](#)). Neither one of these men asked to be healed. In the case of Peter’s miracle, the man was asking for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. In this case, the man had not asked anything of Paul, he was simply listening to Paul preaching the Gospel message. In the current example, we are told that Paul perceived that the man had the faith to be made well. What exactly does this mean? Does it mean that Paul could perceive by the man’s outward expression and body language that he believed the Gospel message and, therefore, could be healed? Or, does it mean simply that when Paul looked intently at the man, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he should heal the man? We really don’t know for sure

what Luke meant by his description of the healing. The important thing is that the man was miraculously healed by God.

Either way, we see that Paul didn't hesitate and wasn't timid about this healing. He simply commanded, in a loud voice, that the man was to stand up on his feet. It's important to understand that the people of Lystra did not believe in the God of all creation. Instead, they believed in a pantheon of Gods, both Roman and Greek, of whom were the chief god Zeus and his messenger god Hermes. Since Paul had been the one speaking, they assumed that he was Hermes (also known as Mercury by the Romans). To put this in perspective, according to a Lycaonian legend, Zeus and Hermes had once before visited their land in human form and were displeased because the only people who had treated them with hospitality were an elderly couple. Because of their displeasure, according to the legend, Zeus and Hermes had destroyed all of the people of the land except the elderly couple.

Therefore, when the people saw Paul miraculously heal the crippled man, they assumed that Zeus and Hermes had come back to visit them again, and they began shouting, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" And, the priest of the temple of Zeus immediately brought animals to sacrifice as an offering of hospitality to the two who they had assumed were Zeus and Hermes. Originally, when the people proclaimed that the gods had come down to them, Paul and Barnabas had not known what they were proclaiming, because they were shouting in their native tongue, which neither Barnabas nor Paul were familiar with. But, as soon as the priest brought the oxen for a sacrifice, Paul and Barnabas recognized what was happening and they immediately put a stop to it.

Paul, then explained to the people that he and Barnabas were not gods, declaring themselves to be ordinary people just like the rest of the people there. He then proceeded to preach a sermon about the real God of Heaven. Notice the difference in this sermon. Paul did not start off with the Old Testament because the people were heathens and knew nothing about the Old Testament. Instead, he told them about the God who created heaven and earth, declaring that He is the one who provides rain from the heavens and produces food for them to eat.

## **Paul Stoned at Lystra**

### **Acts 14:19-23**

**<sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>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.**

### **Notes:**

Back in verses one through five, we were told that the people of Iconium had attempted to mistreat Paul and Barnabas and tried to stone them before they fled town. Now we see that some of these same people who were now opposing Paul and Barnabas in Lystra had travelled more than one hundred miles to carry out what they failed to do earlier.

This time, however, they succeeded in stoning Paul and dragged him out of the city. Dr. Luke tells us that the people who stoned Paul “supposed him to be dead.” We are never told, for sure, whether or not Paul was killed and subsequently raised from the dead. We are only told that his attackers assumed him to be dead. In other uses of the word translated “supposed,” it means that they believed something that was not true.

We do know, from Paul’s own witness that he had, in fact, been stoned. In his second letter to the Christians in Corinth, he said:

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. **Once I was stoned.** Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; (2 Corinthians 11:24-25)

He also told us in his letter to these very Galatians:

From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. (Galatians 6:17)

These marks that he refers to could very well be scars from his having been stoned in Lystra.

There is yet one more passage that Paul wrote which may be connected with this stoning. It is also found in his second letter to the Christians in Corinth:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

There are some who believe that this is a reference to when he was stoned. If that is the case, then it appears that Paul did, indeed, die and was taken to Paradise before being brought back from the dead. However, if we do some diligence in checking dates, we will discover that these events in Lystra were only about 8 to 10 years before Paul wrote the second letter to Corinth, not fourteen. So, this couldn’t be a reference to his stoning.

Finally, there is one more reason that some people believe Paul may have been killed and then rose from the dead. The verb translated “he rose” is verse 20 is *anistēmi*, which literally means “to stand again.” This is the same exact word that all four gospel writers used in reference to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. So, there is little evidence that Paul actually died when he was stoned and there is good reason to believe that he did not die.

After his stoning, Paul and Barnabas went back into the city and then travelled to Derbe where they again preached the Gospel and many people believed. Then, the two of them returned back through the towns where they had made disciples and established some structure in the churches that had been started. They appointed elders in every church. It is possible that these had been converts from Judaism, or believing Gentiles, who were familiar with the God of the Old Testament.

## **Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch in Syria**

### **Acts 14:24-28**

**<sup>24</sup>Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. <sup>25</sup>And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, <sup>26</sup>and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been**

commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>And they remained no little time with the disciples.

### Notes:

On their way back to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas had been visiting the churches they had helped to start, appointing elders in each one. However, when they arrived at Perga, on the Mediterranean coast, it does not say that they appointed elders. Instead, it says,

when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. (Acts 14:25)

Why does Luke tell us that they spoke the word in Perga while he says nothing about appointing elders? Back in Acts 13:13-14 we read that John Mark left them when they first arrived in Perga. But it also appears that they did not remain any length of time in Perga. As we said when we covered chapter 13, it appears that Paul got sick (perhaps Malaria) while they were in Perga, so they immediately headed on to Pisidian Antioch. If that was the case, then it would make sense for them to spend some time preaching in Perga when they came back through, since they missed the chance earlier.

Then, they headed back to their home church to give them an update on their missionary journey. And, Luke makes particular note of the fact that Paul and Barnabas informed the church in Antioch that during their travels, God “had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” This would have been especially significant to the Christians in Antioch, who were mostly Gentiles themselves. This is even more significant given the fact that in the next chapter of Acts (chapter 15) we will learn about the legalists who tried to make the new Christian believers adhere to all the Law of the Jews whether they had been Jews or Gentiles.

### So What?

As I have studied through this chapter there is one question that keeps coming to mind. Why do unbelievers get so stirred up by the Gospel message? Why don't they just ignore it instead of creating such opposition to it?

We read in the earlier part of this chapter that in Iconium, those who opposed the Gospel message mistreated Paul and Barnabas and even attempted to stone them because of their message. And, we have already noted that opposition didn't dissuade these two from witnessing, but there is a time when it is appropriate to move on to harvest in a different field.

However, when Paul and Barnabas left town, their persecutors followed, some travelling from Antioch, which is 100 miles away, in order to oppose God's gracious gift of life. And – this is not the only time the early church met with opposition. Here are just a few references of that opposition: Acts 13:50; Acts 16:19-22; Acts 17:5-8, Acts 17:13; and Acts 19:25-34. These are just in the book of Acts alone. There are others.

So, what is it in our message that causes such opposition? Perhaps we can learn from Jesus, in a discussion He had with his half-brothers, who at the time did not believe He was who He claimed to be. Jesus said the following:

The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.  
(John 7:7)

The unbelieving world hates Jesus because He exposes their evil works by His character and His ministry. And, the world hates us because we are His. They will persecute us because they do not know God. Also, as part of His discourse during the Last Supper, Jesus said:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ... But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (John 15:18-19, 21)

Then, at the end of the Last Supper, before going out to the Garden of Gethsemane, He told the eleven disciples:

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

We Christians who are living in the last days must be aware that our enemy will stir-up his followers to oppose us. Why do I call them his “followers?” Because of what Paul said to the Corinthian church:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Satan is the god of this world. He has blinded the minds of unbelievers. Therefore, they oppose the truth because they have:

... exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:25)

What did Paul just say? He said that because of the sin nature, mankind suppresses the truth and becomes foolish even as they claim to become wise. In fact, it is informative to read this entire portion of the first chapter of Romans.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:18-25)

Now, after studying this section, I think we have been reading it wrong for years. According to The Complete Word Study Dictionary, the Greek word translated “creature” actually refers to, “the sum total of all that has been created.” In other words, Paul said:

because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator

And what does the world system say about the creation? First of all, we have to understand that the religion of the world today is called “Science.” And adherents to this religion make fun of our “faith” which can’t be proven. They say that science can be proven.

Do you know that it takes less faith to believe in the Bible, than to believe that everything, all matter, started out as a densely packed singularity the size of a pencil point which – suddenly exploded almost 14 billion years ago? Something that can’t be proven scientifically, of course. In fact, scientific theories (which are all science really has) change from year to year. Even the foundational Big Bang “Theory” has undergone several major revisions during the past 50 years.

It also takes great faith to believe that from that “Big Bang,” all of the conditions for life came into being and that over the ensuing billions of years all the elements were forged in the stars and supernovas, then came together in just the right combination in the primordial soup which, when exposed to lightening, suddenly sparked into life. But, wait, that was simple life, a single celled organism, which over the billions of years evolved into complex life forms that spontaneously developed intelligence. All of which is not only not proven, but soundly contradicted by the well-known scientific law of entropy, also called the Second Law of Thermodynamics. This scientific law states that all things, when left alone, progress from a state of order to disorder, from complexity to simplicity. Listen, my friends, those who believe such things as the Big Bang and Evolution have a lot more faith than you and I do.

But I digress –

My original question was, “Why do unbelievers get so stirred up by the Gospel message? Why don’t they just ignore it instead of creating such opposition to it?”

The answer is, because they refuse to believe the truth, they are driven by their god to oppose the truth. And, to their god, Satan, this is war.

## **Now What?**

So, do we just quit witnessing because the Gospel message in and of itself causes people to get stirred up against us and against the message? No! As long as we are on this earth, we have been commanded to do two things: Declare the Gospel and Make Disciples. Let’s keep fulfilling our commission!

**Let’s pray.**

*Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*