

ACTS

Chapter 14

In Iconium

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.

14:1 *great number.* At first there was good success, then bitter opposition from the Jews (v. 2). But these evidently failed in their initial attempt, for Paul and Barnabas remained there a considerable time (v. 3). A second wave of persecution was planned, involving violence (v. 5). – Could include several hundred people. This was not the result of a single visit to the synagogue. The work in Iconium continued for a considerable time. The Gentiles included people who were not proselytes. What made the preaching of Paul and Barnabas so effective was the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit, who works through the gospel. (PBC)

14:3 **SPEAKING BOLDLY** – The reference to bold speaking supported by the witness of signs and wonders can be understood as indication that the Lord continues to act as previously when the Jerusalem church prayed in response to the first opposition. They prayed that the Lord might “give to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing and signs and wonders to continue happening” (4:29-30). (Tannehill)

confirmed ... by ... miraculous signs. A major purpose of miracles was to confirm the truth of the words and the approval of God.

14:4 *apostles.* Both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles (see v. 14; see also note on Mk 6:30). The term is used here not of the Twelve but in the broader sense to refer to persons sent on a mission, i.e., missionaries (see 13:2–3).

14:5 *stone them.* A Jewish mode of execution for blasphemy. Probably mob action was planned here. – The reference to stoning (planned in 14:5, performed in 14:19) also recalls the stoning of Stephen. Thus the apostles and Stephen’s bold witness and the accompanying power of the Lord reappear in the mission of Paul and Barnabas as they encounter opposition. (Tannehill)

14:6 FLED – Jesus had instructed his disciples, “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another” (Matthew 10:23). The work of evangelizing Iconium was done and the apostles fled. They turned a desperate emergency into an opportunity. (PBC) – They had this powerful consolation: the second church in Asia Minor had been founded, and it would thrive. (LL)

Lycaonian cities. Lycaonia was a district east of Pisidia, north of the Taurus Mountains. It was part of the Roman province of Galatia.

Lystra. A Roman colony (see note on 13:14) and probable home of Timothy (though he was known in Iconium as well), it was about 20 miles from Iconium and 130 miles from Antioch.

Derbe. About 60 miles from Lystra; home of Gaius (see 20:4 and note on 14:20).

In Lystra and Derbe

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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

14:8 NEVER WALKED – The description of the man resembles that of the man healed by Peter in Acts 3:1-10. The resemblance is probably less accidental than a deliberate literary signal. (The usefulness of the story in securing Paul’s identity as an authentic prophet in the tradition of Jesus, who healed a lame man – compare Luke 5:17-26 and Peter is obvious.) The description itself is certainly redundant: a) he was sitting; b) he was powerless in his feet; c) he was lame from birth; d) he had never walked. Like the man in 3:10, he also was sitting “at the gates” of a temple. (Sacra)

14:9 FAITH – The man’s faith did not accomplish this healing or contribute to it. Faith accepted what God was doing. (PBC)

14:12 *Zeus ... Hermes.* Zeus was the patron god of the city, and his temple was there. People who came to bring sacrifices to Zeus apparently decided to make an offering to Paul and Barnabas instead. The identification of Zeus with Barnabas may indicate that his appearance was more imposing, and Paul was identified as the god Hermes (the Roman Mercury) because he was the spokesman (see 28:6). This incident may have been occasioned by an ancient legend that told of a supposed visit to the same general area by Zeus and Hermes. They were, however, not recognized by anyone except an old couple. So the people of Lystra were determined not to allow such an oversight to happen again.

14:13 *city gates.* The Greek for this expression can refer to the temple gates, the city gates or house gates.

OFFER SACRAFICES TO THEM – These people are not like Cornelius, “devout and fearing God” (10:2), that is, the one God of the Bible, nor like the God-fearers who come to the synagogues. Here the mission takes a new step and Paul faces a new challenge. In this scene the problem of mission among such people appears in sharp focus. Far from suggesting that the further the mission moves from Judaism the more receptive people will be, the narrator sees a special obstacle where people do not believe in the one God who has created all. The mission must begin with a call to “turn to a living God” from idols. This is a call to repentance from past ignorance of God. (Tannehill)

14:14 *tore their clothes.* A Jewish way of expressing great anguish (see note on Ge 37:29).

14:15 *worthless things.* Used in the OT to denote false gods (see 1Sa 12:21).

14:16 IN THE PAST – The living God had not immediately punished the idolatry of those nations which worshiped false gods. Ultimately he will destroy every idolatrous people and punish every unbeliever. He bides his time, letting a nation’s corruption run its course. (PBC) – Paul in Lystra recognized that various peoples have had various religions and does not harshly condemn their religious histories. But Paul assumes that he stands at a turning point in world religion. The time of ethnic permissiveness in religion, a time of ignorance and trust in “vain things,” is drawing to a close. When Gentiles do repent of their idolatry, they will find the God who always has been the basis of their life and the source of the good gifts that they constantly receive. God is the creator also, and the gifts of nature have always been a witness to God’s goodness. Although they have not been part of Israel’s history, the sustaining fruitfulness of nature can be understood by all as witness to the goodness of the universal creator whom Paul preaches. (Tannehill)

2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understood slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance

14:19 *They stoned Paul.* Within the city rather than at the usual place of execution outside the walls (cf. 2Co 12:2).

14:20 *disciples had gathered around him.* Young Timothy may have been present (see 2Ti 3:10–11).

GOT UP – It is remarkable that Paul survived a stoning and more remarkable that he was able to travel the next day. It is most remarkable that his brutal treatment and brush with death did not deter him from continuing to preach the gospel. The Lord gave a generous harvest of disciples in Derbe. (PBC)

Derbe. A border town in the southeastern part of the Lycaonian region of Galatia (see note on v. 6). An inscription naming the city has been discovered about 30 miles east of what was previously thought to be the city site.

The Return to Antioch in Syria

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^a 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. **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.

14:21 RETURNED – From Derbe it would have been easiest for Paul and Barnabas to continue eastward through the Taurus mountain pass and home to Antioch in Syria. But what was easiest was not always best for the Gospel. Since it was important to gauge the progress of the new missions they had founded, the two apostles went three times as far homeward in the opposite direction, bracing up the new believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and appointing elders (pastors) to guide them. This prudent gesture led to permanent Christian churches in all these cities, some lasting until the time of the Turkish conquest. (LL)

14:22 THROUGH MANY HARDSHIPS – It is interesting that Paul did not say we must surmount and triumph over many hardships. The life of a Christian is not one grand victory procession. It will look that way at the end, but the cross comes before the crown. (PBC)

14:23 *appointed*. † The Greek for this word (used also in 2Co 8:19) can mean (1) to stretch out the hand, (2) to appoint by show of hands or (3) to appoint or elect without regard to the method. In 6:6 (where a different Greek verb is used) the appointment of the Seven included selection by the church and presentation to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Because these were new churches, at least partly pagan in background, Paul and Barnabas may have both selected and appointed the elders.

FASTING – They were no longer under any OT regulations, and Jesus had not commanded fasting. However, these Jewish believers knew from experience that fasting helped them concentrate when they prayed. (PBC)

14:24 *Pisidia*. A district about 120 miles long and 50 miles wide, north of Pamphylia (13:13–14). Bandits frequented the region (see perhaps 2Co 11:26).

Pamphylia. A district 80 miles long and 20 miles at the widest part, on the southern coast of Asia Minor. After A.D. 74 Pisidia was included in the Roman province of Pamphylia (see 13:13).

14:25 *Perga*. See note on 13:13.

Attalia. The best harbor on the coast of Pamphylia (see 13:13).

14:26 *Antioch*. See 11:20; see also note on 11:19.

14:27 *opened the door of faith*. God had brought Gentiles to faith—had, as it were, opened the door for them to believe (cf. 11:18).

14:28 *long time*. Probably more than a year.