

Context (see chapter 13). While not the first to reject the idea that the Lord God Yahweh was God for all people (see Jonah's story), many of the believers in Pisidian Antioch could not accept this premise. The redemption found through the Christ was an attractive narrative for many, but fertile ground for jealousy for others.

So, Paul & Barnabas called them out—"We spoke the word to you all first. You've rejected it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life. So what? We now turn to the Gentiles. And we do this with the Lord's blessing; to wit:"

*I have made you [singular] a light for the Gentiles, that you [singular] may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.*  
[Isaiah 49:6]

The Gentiles were ecstatic; traditional believers not so much. Stirring up women of high social status and leading men as well, their persecution squads went on an "get the illegals out" rampage. As instructed by the Lord Christ Himself (Matthew 10:14), they shook the dust from their feet and went on down the road to Iconium. The followers were filled with joy and Holy Spirit Himself.

Acts 14:1-7. *The truth is accepted, and the Truth is rejected*. So as per usual, they went to the synagogue at Iconium. Speaking so effectively, several people believed—Jews and Gentiles. But of those who refused to believe, some believers stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. Nonetheless, Paul & Barnabas not only spoke boldly for the Lord, He confirmed His message of grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders. Some believed, and some did not. There was plot to stone them, but they found out about it and got out of Dodge. All the way to Lystra & Derbe, and the surrounding countryside.

- Q What was so disturbing about the gospel message to traditional believers?
- Q Why do people accept the truth, but reject the Truth?
- Q How does one ignore the miraculous signs and wonders performed through Paul & Barnabas?
- Q Why didn't they stay in Iconium and trust in the Lord God to protect them?

### ACTS 14:1-7

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. <sup>2</sup>But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. <sup>5</sup>There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. <sup>6</sup>But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup>where they continued to preach the good news.

Acts 14:8-20. *Don't burn the bull for us*. While in Lystra, they encountered a man who had been lame from birth. Listening intently to Paul as he was speaking, Paul could not ignore him. Looking directly at him he discerned he had faith to be healed.

Paul called out "Stand up on your feet!" Wow. The dude jumped up and began to walk.

The crowd was impressed! "The gods have come down to us in human form!" They called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes—he was the chief speaker after all. And to top it all off, the priest of Zeus who had a temple right outside the city, had bulls and wreaths brought to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

When Barnabas and Paul<sup>3</sup> heard, they freaked. Tearing their clothes in demonstrative grief, they shouted to the crowd—

*Dudes! Why are you doing this? We're human too, just like you. We're bringing good news, telling you to turn away from such nonsense. Turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in heaven and earth and sea!*

*Sure in the past, the Lord God let people go their own way, but He has not left Himself alone without evidence of His presence. Consider the kindness of rain, crops in their seasons—plenty of food and hearts filled with joy.*

Even with this correction, Barnabas & Paul were unable completely to keep them sacrificing their bulls and wreaths in sacrificial worship.

Of course some of the jealous believers from Antioch and Iconium came and won the crowd over. They stoned Hermes (Paul) and dragged him

outside the city, assuming he was dead. He wasn't and the disciples gathered around Paul. He got up and went back into Lystra. They left for Derbe the next day.

- Q Why was the lame man in Lystra lame? Why was he healed? Could he have been healed without his faith?
- Q Why was it useful to assume Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes?
- Q What was the purpose of the bulls and wreaths?
- Q Why did their correction with the Truth change the truth they believed?
- Q Why was Paul stoned, and not Barnabas?

<sup>3</sup>Note the order of names has changed.

## ACTS 14:8-20

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

<sup>11</sup>When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"

<sup>12</sup>Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup>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.

<sup>14</sup>But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: <sup>15</sup>"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. <sup>16</sup>In the past, he let all nations go their own way. <sup>17</sup>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."

<sup>18</sup>Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

<sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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.

Acts 14:21-28. *Celebrating a period of God's success*. Derbe heard the good news as well, but then they returned back to the hotspots of Lystra, Iconium, and even Antioch. They focused on strengthening the disciples, and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. Their words were not sugar coated:

*We must endure many hardships  
to enter the kingdom of God.*

To assist each church, Paul and Barnabas<sup>4</sup> appointed elders in each church, and after prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord, in Whom they had put their trust.

After traveling and preaching through Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, Attalia, they came back to Antioch where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they'd now completed, as per Holy Spirit's guidance.

With the church gathered, they reported on all that God had done through them, and especially how He had opened the door of faith to Gentiles. Enjoying their company, they stayed a long time with the disciples there.

- Q Why would they caution about hardships believers must go through to "enter the kingdom of God?"
- Q What is the greatest hardship you've had to face?
- Q Why do you suppose most churches today do not follow the model of church leadership exemplified in 14:23?
- Q Why had the door of faith been opened to the Gentiles?

### ACTS 14:21-28

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, <sup>25</sup>and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. <sup>26</sup>From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

### ADVANCED BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR ACTS 14 OF HOLY SPIRIT<sup>5</sup>

**14:1** *great number*. At first there was good success, then bitter opposition from Jewish believers (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).

**14:4** *apostles*. Both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles (see v. 14; see also note on Mark 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 Biblical mode of execution for blasphemy.

<sup>4</sup>Note the order of their names has changed back to Paul & Barnabas.

<sup>5</sup>Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

**14:6** *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 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 14:20 below).

**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.

**14:14** *tore their clothes.* A Jewish way of expressing great anguish (see Genesis 37:34).

**14:15** *worthless things.* Used in Hebrew Scriptures to denote false gods (see 1Samuel 12:21).

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

**14:20** *disciples had gathered around him.* Young Timothy may have been present (see 2Ti 3:10-11). *Derbe.* A border town in the southeastern part of the Lycaonian region of Galatia (see note above on verse 6). An inscription naming the city has been discovered about 30 miles east of what was previously thought to be the city site.

**14:23** *appointed.* The Greek for this word (used also in 2Corinthians 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 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.

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

**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.