

# Bible Study September 8, 2021

## ACTS 14 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

### Paul and Barnabas in Iconium

***<sup>1</sup> The same thing happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue and preached with such power that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers. <sup>2</sup> Some of the Jews, however, spurned God's message and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. <sup>3</sup> But the apostles stayed there a long time, preaching boldly about the grace of the Lord. And the Lord proved their message was true by giving them power to do miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>4</sup> But the people of the town were divided in their opinion about them. Some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.***

We may wish we could perform a miraculous act that would convince everyone once and for all that Jesus is Lord. But we see here that even if we could perform a miracle, it wouldn't convince everyone. God gave these men power to do great wonders as confirmation of their message, but people were still divided. Don't spend your time and energy wishing for miracles. Sow the seeds of the Good News in any way you can and trust the Holy Spirit to do the convicting and the convincing.

***<sup>5</sup> Then a mob of Gentiles and Jews, along with their leaders, decided to attack and stone them. <sup>6</sup> When the apostles learned of it, they fled to the region of Lycaonia—to the towns of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding area. <sup>7</sup> And there they preached the Good News.***

Iconium (14:1), Lystra, and Derbe were three cities Paul visited in the southern part of the region of Galatia. Paul probably wrote his letter to these churches—the letter to the Galatians—because many Jewish Christians were claiming that non-Jewish Christians couldn't be saved unless they followed Jewish laws and customs. Paul's letter refuted this and brought the believers back to a right understanding of faith in Jesus (see Galatians 3:3, 5). He may have written this letter soon after leaving the region (see the note on Acts 14:28).

### Paul and Barnabas in Lystra and Derbe

***<sup>8</sup> While they were at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas came upon a man with crippled feet. He had been that way from birth, so he had never walked. He was sitting <sup>9</sup> and listening as Paul preached. Looking straight at him, Paul realized he had faith to be healed. <sup>10</sup> So Paul called to him in a loud voice, "Stand up!" And the man jumped to his feet and started walking.***

***<sup>11</sup> When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their local dialect, "These men are gods in human form!" <sup>12</sup> They decided that Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus and that Paul was Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> Now the temple of Zeus was located just outside the town. So the priest of the temple and the crowd brought bulls and wreaths of flowers to the town gates, and they prepared to offer sacrifices to the apostles.***

Zeus and Hermes (also known as Jupiter and Mercury) were two popular gods in the Roman world. People from Lystra claimed that these gods had once visited their city. According to legend, no one had offered them hospitality except an old couple, so Zeus and Hermes had killed the rest of the people and rewarded the old couple. When the citizens of Lystra saw the miracles of Paul and Barnabas, they assumed that the gods were visiting them again. Remembering the story of the previous citizens, they immediately honored Paul and Barnabas and showered them with gifts.

***<sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard what was happening, they tore their clothing in dismay and ran out among the people, shouting, <sup>15</sup> “Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings—just like you! We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things and turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. <sup>16</sup> In the past he permitted all the nations to go their own ways, <sup>17</sup> but he never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness. For instance, he sends you rain and good crops and gives you food and joyful hearts.” <sup>18</sup> But even with these words, Paul and Barnabas could scarcely restrain the people from sacrificing to them.***

Paul and Barnabas were horrified and distressed, and they quickly tried to correct the people’s misunderstanding. They reminded them that God never leaves people “without evidence of himself and his goodness.” Rain and good crops, for example, are evidence of his goodness. Later, Paul wrote that this evidence in nature leaves people without an excuse for unbelief (Romans 1:20). When in doubt about God, look around, and you will see abundant evidence that he is at work in the world.

***<sup>19</sup> Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowds to their side. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of town, thinking he was dead. <sup>20</sup> But as the believers gathered around him, he got up and went back into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.***

Paul and Barnabas were persistent in their preaching of the Good News, considering the cost to themselves to be nothing in comparison with obedience to Christ. They had just narrowly escaped being stoned in Iconium (14:1-7), but Jews from Antioch and Iconium tracked Paul down, stoned him, and left him for dead. But Paul got up and went back into the city to preach the Good News. These hardships only strengthened Paul’s resolve and commitment. Being a disciple of Jesus calls for total commitment. As Christians, we no longer belong to ourselves but to our Lord, for whom we are called to suffer.

Only days after the people in Lystra had thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods and wanted to offer sacrifices to them, they stoned Paul and left him for dead. That’s human nature. Jesus understood how fickle crowds can be (John 2:24-25). When many people approve of us, we feel good, but that should never cloud our thinking or affect our decisions. We should not live to please the crowd—especially in our spiritual lives. Be like Jesus. Know the nature of crowds and don’t put your trust in them. Put your trust in God alone.

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

***<sup>21</sup> After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, <sup>22</sup> where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.***

Paul and Barnabas returned to visit the believers in all the cities where they had recently been threatened and physically attacked. These men knew the dangers they faced, yet they believed that they had a responsibility to encourage the new believers. No matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable the task may seem, we must always support new believers who need our help and encouragement. It was not convenient or comfortable for Jesus to die on the cross for us! Paul and Barnabas also visibly demonstrated that life in Christ does not mean freedom from pain, suffering, or persecution. Our freedom comes internally—freedom from sin, from addictions, from the slavery of our own dangerous beliefs. Sometimes God blesses us with physical relief and a reprieve from travails, but Paul and Barnabas remind us to persevere in all times of hardship.

***<sup>23</sup> Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With prayer and fasting, they turned the elders over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. <sup>24</sup> Then they traveled back through Pisidia to Pamphylia. <sup>25</sup> They preached the word in Perga, then went down to Attalia.***

Part of the reason that Paul and Barnabas risked their lives to return to these cities was to organize the churches' leadership. They were not just following up on a loosely knit group; they were helping the believers get organized with spiritual leaders who could help them grow. Churches grow under Spirit-led leaders, both laypersons and pastors. Pray for your church leaders and support them; and if God puts his finger on you, humbly accept the responsibility of a leadership role in your church.

***<sup>26</sup> Finally, they returned by ship to Antioch of Syria, where their journey had begun. The believers there had entrusted them to the grace of God to do the work they had now completed. <sup>27</sup> Upon arriving in Antioch, they called the church together and reported everything God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, too. <sup>28</sup> And they stayed there with the believers for a long time.***

Paul probably wrote his letter to the Galatians while he was staying in Antioch after completing his first missionary journey (around AD 48 or 49). There are several theories about what part of Galatia Paul was addressing, but most agree that Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were part of the region for whom the letter was intended. Galatians was probably written before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), because in the letter the question of whether Gentile believers should be required to follow Jewish law was not yet resolved. The council met to solve that problem.