# Study 21: Acts chapter 14

## Introduction

The first missionary journey continues in the region of Galatia – sometimes referred to as the missionary journey to Galatia. Paul & Barnabas have had some deal of success so far, and they are now continuing with mixed successes.

Timing: When did these events occur?

Content: What are the major events?

Cast: Who are the major players?

# Body of the Study

What was the reception like in Iconium?

How did the Jews react to their teaching?

Where did they go to next?

What happened at Lystra?

What was the reaction of the crowd to the miracle?

How did Paul & Barnabas react?

How is it that Barnabas is called an apostle as well as Paul?

How does Paul use this as an opportunity to teach the gospel?

How do the Jews respond?

Where do Paul & Barnabas go to next?

What sort of struggles do we face?

The journey back

**Quotation from "Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen"** 

#### Homework:

Read the notes as a review of the study.

- How long had the churches been established before they formally appointed the leaders (elders) in the congregation?
- How did Paul and Barnabas go about being effective in sharing the gospel when there was no synagogue?

Read chapter 15 in preparation for next week

# Notes for study 21: Acts chapter 14

# Introduction

The first missionary journey continues in the region of Galatia – sometimes referred to as the missionary journey to Galatia. Paul & Barnabas have had some deal of success so far, and as they now continue they find mixed successes.

There are many great lessons that we can observe as we "look through the windows" that Luke presents for us during the first missionary journey into the Gentile world, and the methods that Paul and Barnabas use to make the opportunities to teach the gospel, and importantly to revisit and strengthen the christians in their faith and struggles.

*Timing:* When did these events occur?

The first missionary journey is placed between as early as AD 45 – soon after the death of Herod, concluding as late as AD 47 or 48.

**Content:** What are the major events?

Preaching at Iconium, Persecution of Paul & Barnabas – flee to Lystra – cripple healed. Paul & Barnabas worshipped. Paul stoned. To Derbe – return to Lystra – Iconium & Antioch. Elders ordained – to Pisidia & Pamphylia, Perga & Attalia – back to Syrian Antioch. Report of the journey.

*Cast:* Who are the major players?

Paul, Barnabas.

# Body of the Study

# What was the reception like in Iconium?

Luke describes the reception in Iconium as "...a great multitude of both the Jews and Greeks believed..." (14:1). This was more than just a few, and more than many, but a great multitude.

Paul and Barnabas "... so spoke that a great multitude ... believed..." They did not believe because of some direct action of the Holy Spirit on their heart, nor because of gifts that they had received. They believed because they heard what Paul and Barnabas had said – for "... faith comes by hearing the word of God..." (Rom 10:17).

Paul's pattern of evangelism has become set – they would go into a city, and go firstly to the synagogue. As Jews, they had the credentials – certainly Paul was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews", who had studied under Gamaliel. He would have found many opportunities to speak in the synagogues. Luke has given us a picture of what Paul has said on one of these occasions (13:16-41), which is probably a similar pattern to those he used on others.

Barnabas was the " $son\ of\ encouragement$ " (4:36) – the great reconciler. His natural personality must have been like a magnet – you could describe him as charismatic.

The combination of Paul and Barnabas must have been immensely powerful. Paul with the "credentials" to get openings to speak in the right places, and then his great insight (by inspiration) to the things of God. His understanding of the Old Testament and his divinely inspired understanding of its fulfilment in Christ. On top of all of this were the miraculous powers that were demonstrated from time to time. Combine this with Barnabas' ability to draw people around himself, and bring them together with Paul, and to encourage those who were obedient to the faith, and the stage is set for the explosion of the gospel.

After establishing a smallish group of believers from the Jews and Proselytes, then the gospel was spread to the rest of the community, building on the core group. Sometimes their stay was (as in this case) "a long time", and sometimes it was only a very short time (as we will see in the case of Thessalonica).

### How did the Jews react to their teaching?

"...a great multitude of the Jews and Greeks believed..." (14:1 NKJV). The Greeks must have been Proselytes of the gate, as if they had become Jews, then they would be described as Proselytes, and if they were just infidels then they would have had no interest in the synagogue, and would not have been welcomed there by the Jews. They would also have been described as Gentiles.

The Jews who did not believe stirred up those who did, and also the believing Gentiles. They embittered the Gentiles "...poisoned their minds against the brethren..." (14:2NKJV) so that they would not listen to Paul and Barnabas.

The whole city became divided between Paul and Barnabas, and the Jews. There is an implication here that the whole city was aware of Paul and Barnabas' work, and that the church had begun with a "great multitude". This was not something that happened in a corner.

As a result of the positive and strong growth of the church, and the external attack from the Jews, Paul and Barnabas <u>therefore</u> stayed "a long time there". This was not just the short few weeks ("3 sabbath days") that they spent in some other places. It was not "the space of 3 years" that Paul spent in Ephesus. It must have been several months, as Paul and Barnabas arrived, began preaching, established a church with "great multitudes", then the Jews divided the city against them. This suggests that the "long time" must have been several months—maybe 3 or 4 months, or even longer.

The city was divided, and the hostility and resentment from the Jews continued. Many of the unbelieving Gentiles sided with the Jews. The initial dispute was probably over the issues of the (Jewish) Law – whether or not you still needed to keep it after becoming a christian – and whether or not it really passed away. It is hard to understand how the Gentiles might have become caught up in such a dispute, but needless to say that many other "side issues" had become swept up with the core issues of dispute.

As time passed, the core issues must have become the side issues, and the lines were drawn regardless of the issues. So much so, that the Jewish rulers (the Elders and rulers of the synagogue) rounded up many of the Gentiles in the city into a "lynch party" to bring physical violence against the christians. The selected punishment of stoning was a Jewish method of execution, so the "rulers" were the Jewish rulers rather than the civic leaders of the city.

Paul and Barnabas heard of the plot, and decided that the best course of action was to leave the city. The word translated "became aware of" *sunideo* (G4894) is also translated in 12:12 "when Peter had *considered* ( *the matter*), he came to the house of Mary". This suggests that not only was there *knowledge* of what was happening, but those who had the knowledge had to *reason* with that knowledge to draw a conclusion. Here we see another example of how the Holy Spirit revealed, guided, and sent the apostles on their journeys.

#### Where did they go to next?

Lystra and Derbe are described by Luke as "cities of Lycaonia", and here Luke has been accused of making a mistake, implying that the city of Iconium was not part of Lycaonia. However the noted historian Sir William Ramsay has shown that Luke was exactly right in his description, because Iconium was a Phrygian city when Paul visited it<sup>1</sup>. It was located near the border between Phrygia and Lycaonia, and is the site of the modern city Konya. Paul and Barnabas fled from one region (Phrygia) into another (Lycaonia). A quotation from Ramsay appears at the end of this study, and makes interesting reading.

Lystra was about 30 km to the south of Iconium, and was the home city of Timothy, his mother, and grandmother (16:1). Whilst there were some Jews there (Timothy's mother and grandmother for example), there is no mention of a synagogue, so apparently there must have been less than 10 Jewish families in the city.

Derbe was about 70 km to the east of Lystra, at the extreme end of the Lycaonian plain, and bordered on the region of Cilicia. It was the first city at which a traveller would arrive after

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Ramsay, p.110, 111 Study of Acts (Revised 2007) by Graeme Offer

passing through the narrow mountain pass known as "The Cilician Gates", and consequently would have had an important trading role.

Luke says that Paul & Barnabas went to the cities, as well as to the surrounding regions. Again we see another example of the "pictures" that Luke presents of some of the places, along with a more general description of the spread of the gospel.

### What happened at Lystra?

Paul & Barnabas evidently found no synagogue in which to preach, and were consequently preaching in the open air – most likely at the gates to the city – a place where people would often congregate. This is supported by the description in 14:13.

The situation of the lame man sitting at the gate was similar to the one in Jerusalem in chapter 3, and evidently produced similar results to the observers. Notice the description of the man:

- Without strength in his feet
- Cripple from his mother's womb
- Had never walked

Like the man in Jerusalem, his condition was evident to all who saw and knew him. It is most likely that he was a beggar, and relied on the gifts from others to survive. In this passage, Dr Luke uses a medical term *adunatos* (*without strength*) to describe the condition of the man's physical problem – he did not have sufficient strength in his feet to enable him to walk.

Paul sees the man and uses him as an example to get the attention of the crowd, that they might listen to what he had to say. The man was listening to what Paul had to say. The tense of the Greek text suggests "had been continually listening to what Paul had to say". It suggests that Paul had been there on several occasions preaching, and on each occasion the crippled man was there and giving attention to Paul.

Paul looked intently at the man, and raised his voice so that the attention of all the listeners would be given to what he was saying, and commanded him to "...stand upright on your feet..." (14:10) The man responded not by just standing up, but by leaping and walking.

In 14:9, Luke has observed a description of "...having faith to be healed..." The question is whether the faith was on the part of the man, or on the part of Paul. We have observed in chapter 13 (Elymas), as well as several examples from Jesus' ministry (casting out demons), and the case of the lame man in the Temple (chapter 3) that the faith was required on the part of those working the miracles, not on the part of those receiving the miracle.

Therefore to conclude that this man could only be healed because he had sufficient faith, or that this man could not have been healed if he had insufficient faith is contrary to the cases noted above. Luke is telling us that Paul had observed this man (probably for several days), that he had been listening to what was being taught (probably including the healing ministry of Jesus: that "...He was shown to be approved of God by the miracles which He did..." (2:22)), and this man believed in the power of God to deliver physical miraculous healing.

#### What was the reaction of the crowd to the miracle?

The crowd immediately recognised the miraculous nature of this event. A temple of Zeus was just outside the gate of the city and there was probably a statue of Zeus within the temple. The crowd had most likely not come into close contact with the true and living God. There was no synagogue here, and it would be unlikely that many of the people had visited places where God was worshipped.

After they had healed the lame man, the people thought that Paul & Barnabas were the gods from the temple who had come down looking like men. An interesting discussion is given in Reese<sup>2</sup> from mythology, where on a previous visit, the gods had not been welcomed, and as a result they came and destroyed the city. On the current occasion, the whole city came out to worship Paul & Barnabas. Even the priest of Zeus brought oxen and garlands intending to make a sacrifice to Paul & Barnabas. They named Barnabas Zeus (Greek) = Jupiter (Roman), and Paul Hermes (Greek) = Mercury (Roman). Paul was called this because he was the chief

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Reese, p 504-505.

speaker. Barnabas was called Zeus, and is referred to in 14:14 as Barnabas & Paul rather than the other way around. This suggests that Barnabas must have been held in the pre-eminent position (as the god Zeus), with Paul as his chief spokesman.

Luke records that the crowd spoke in the Lycaonian language. Paul would have spoken in Greek, and the people of Lystra would have understood what was spoken. The context suggests that Paul & Barnabas did not understand how the crowd was reacting, until they saw what they were doing. This helps us to understand the nature of the gift of tongues – whilst Paul could speak in languages that he had not learned, he could not understand everything that was spoken in any language (the gift of interpretation of tongues). Therefore the gifts must have become apparent only on the occasions when they were required.

#### How did Paul & Barnabas react?

"... Paul & Barnabas heard about this..." (14:14). Things were well underway before Paul & Barnabas heard about them and then reacted to them — which supports the idea that they did not understand the things that had been spoken in the Lycaonian language. "... they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude..." (14:14 NKJV). This was a demonstration of abhorrence at what was about to happen, and has its roots in Jewish customs as far back as Jacob (Gen 37:29-34). As they ran in they cried out to the crowd that they out not to do these things, because they are just ordinary men like the listeners. The tearing of their clothes would have emphasised their humanity.

## How is it that Barnabas is called an apostle as well as Paul?

The use of the word "apostle" describes "one sent forth", and may in the special sense refer to those who were sent forth by Christ (the 12, Matthias, and Paul). Paul continually argued that he was equal amongst the apostles (1 Cor 9:1-2; 1 Cor 15:8; Gal 1:1). Luke has also made a similar reference to Barnabas in 14:4, and the question is whether he was included with the other 12? (James had been killed by this time, and had been replaced by Paul).

Both Paul & Barnabas had been "sent forth" on their missionary journey by the church at Antioch, and so in the generic sense of the term, they were apostles from that church, rather than the specific sense, as apostles of Christ - those who had been chosen by God for this role.

The qualifications of the apostles shows that they were eye witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, and in each and every occasion they were chosen by God and not appointed by men. Whilst Paul met these qualifications, and the New Testament details explicitly how he became an apostle, nothing is said about anyone else. Paul writes (Gal 1:19) that when he went to Jerusalem he saw none of the apostles except James the Lord's brother, and consequently he is often said to be an apostle. However this is the only reference which comes close to suggesting that this James is an apostle (in any sense), and it can be argued that Paul says "When I went to Jerusalem I had no contact with the apostles except Peter, and the only other person of note that I saw was James the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:18-19).

Whilst Barnabas was most certainly "one sent forth" by the church at Antioch, we cannot say the same thing concerning his holding the authoritative office of an apostle that goes with the special place of being "one sent forth" by the Lord, as with the other twelve who were alive and active at that time.

## How does Paul use this as an opportunity to teach the gospel?

• Paul points out that they were men just like the Lycaonians, and not the gods that the people were making them out to be. In fact, it was these very idols of Zeus and Hermes that Paul was preaching against! The very reason that they had come was to get the people to *stop* worshipping the dumb idols, and to turn to the true and living God.

The God that Paul presents is not like the ones who sit in the temple outside the city gates, but is the one who made the heavens and the earth. Not only that – He also made the sea, and all of the creatures that inhabit both the earth and the sea.

Paul contrasts the true and living God with the dumb idols, and says that they "...should turn from these vain things to the living God..." (14:15 NKJV). There was (and is) no

halfway house with God. If we are to be His children, then we need to <u>turn</u> from our sinful practices and serve Him fully.

• In the times past, God allowed people to walk in their own ways. The Gentiles did not have the formality of the Law that God had given to the Jews through Moses, but they were not free to do whatever they liked – since they had a conscience to ensure that they did what was right. (This point is strongly elucidated in Paul's letter to the church at Rome).

The time in history for God to bring in the Saviour had arrived. It had taken much time for man to realise his need for a Saviour, for the Jewish Nation to be prepared for His arrival, for the Greek language to enable the gospel to be taught, and the Roman government to prepare for the gospel to be spread. It was only at the convergence of all of these factors that the time for the arrival of the Saviour was set.

• The witnesses to the true and living God are the rain, the fruitful seasons, and the food that he brings on us all, and gladness that these things bring to our hearts.

Despite of what Paul & Barnabas were saying, the mob was still intent on worshipping them.

#### How do the Jews respond?

Those from (Pisidian) Antioch and Iconium must have heard about the events in Lystra – not surprising since the picture that Luke paints is the majority of the city recognising them as gods. Whilst in Iconium the city had been divided, and now the Jews from there and Antioch have come down to Lystra.

It is likely that Paul & Barnabas have been portrayed as imposters, and given their denial of their position as gods, the people could have easily accepted this position. The Jews sought permission to finally put an end to their troublesome actions. They must have received a positive response, as Paul was stoned, and taken out of the city and left for dead.

Stoning was the penalty for blasphemy, and the Jews would feel justified in their action against Paul, who was teaching that men are saved by grace rather than keeping the Law of Moses. Paul later reflected on this event as one of the greater persecutions that he suffered (2 Cor 11:25; 2 Tim 3:10-12).

Following the stoning, "...the disciples gathered around him..." (14:20) which tells us something of the evangelistic success that they had had at Lystra. It seems likely that Timothy was one of those present, since Paul writes to him "...that you have fully known...the afflictions which came upon me at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra..." (2 Tim 3:10-11). The disciples must have assumed that Paul was dead, since they were "standing around" rather than seeing to his wounds.

His rapid recovery, and to the point where he was ready to leave town and move on the next day are evidence that Paul's recovery was miraculous, although it is not stated as such.

## Where do Paul & Barnabas go to next?

Paul & Barnabas leave town and go to Derbe, around 70 km to the east. Luke gives only scant detail of what happens, but it is likely that the response was not as strong as that in Lystra, or perhaps they did not receive the negative response that was found in Lystra. Some writers suggest that the first missionary journey took place over a two-year period. Since it began and ended with a sea journey, then (if this is the case), Paul & Barnabas must have spent two winters during their journeys. The first one is assumed to have been at Iconium and the second at Derbe. This would mean that the duration of their stay in Derbe was for 4 to 6 months.

It might seem logical to have continued on through the Cilician Gates to Paul's home city of Tarsus and then to have made their way back to Syrian Antioch. However they now "double back" and go and revisit the cities where the churches have been established.

This might not be so abnormal except that they are now returning to the places where they were persecuted and Paul was stoned. The work of the missionaries was not only to convert the lost, but also to preserve their faith, and "...teach them to observe all the things that I have Study of Acts (Revised 2007) by Graeme Offer ©2003

commanded you..." (Mt 28:20). We can see this by the very words that Luke uses to describe what Paul & Barnabas were doing "...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith..." (14:22 NKJV)

### What sort of struggles do we face?

Luke describes Paul's exhortation "... We must through many struggles enter into the kingdom of God..." (14:22). This is certainly true of Paul & Barnabas' physical afflictions, but it describes every christian's walk with God. The Greek word Paul uses is dei - "it is necessary that" (we must). This is not optional. We must face and struggle with the issues.

- The struggle to come to faith to really grapple with and come to the firm belief that Jesus really is the Son of God and the promised Messiah. If we have not struggled with this and really grappled with the implications, then we have not really come to a true faith in God and Jesus.
- The struggle to deal with sin in our lives. All of us have had to deal with, and continually deal with, "the sin that so easily besets us". If we have not properly dealt with the first struggle, we are hardly in a position to deal with the second.
- The struggle to live a righteous and moral life. Sure this one goes with the second, but when we become christians we don't automatically shake off our sinful practices, and sometimes they can take years of struggling to get under control.
- The struggle to come to maturity of the faith. Even when we are convinced of who Jesus is, and are trying (successfully) to live the christian life, we need to grow in the faith and come to a mature understanding of God's revelation.
- The struggle to come to leadership in the church. God requires committed, understanding, and competent men to shepherd his family. Whilst many men are qualified to lead, they are often reluctant to accept the responsibility. The church <u>NEEDS</u> men to lead, and the church must accept the responsibility of <u>submitting</u> to their leaders. These things do not come without a struggle often on the part of both the leaders and the congregation.

Following this, Luke adds that they appointed elders in every church. We could spend many lessons on this verse alone, but alas that must be saved for another time and place. However it is appropriate to point out that the appointing of the elders on this occasion (and on every other occasion where it is recorded in the New Testament – Tit 1:5) was done by the evangelist. Like the appointment of deacons in Acts 6 (see notes from that study), the congregation was (most likely in this case) active in the selection, but did not actually do the appointing.

#### The journey back

Paul & Barnabas continued to retrace their steps and came back to Syrian Antioch. Here they recounted the whole journey, and how God had worked with them. The whole church had come together to listen to what they had to say. This was a strong lifelong relationship that Paul & Barnabas had with the church.

Their stay back in Antioch was not a brief one, but is described by Luke as "...a long time..." (14:28), probably several years, since the next event Luke is to record is the Jerusalem conference in 50 or 51 AD.

#### Quotation from "Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen"

The following quotation from the noted historian Sir William Ramsay sheds much light on the intricate detail that Luke provides in his narrative, and adds much to our certainty of the accuracy of Luke's writing.

The expression used in XIV 6 is remarkable (p. 90): "they fled into Lycaonia, especially to the part of it which is summed up as the cities, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding Region". To understand this we must bear in mind that the growth of cities in Central and Eastern Asia Minor was connected with the spread of Greek civilisation; and in the primitive pre-Greek condition of the country there were no cities organised according to the Greek system, and hardly any large settlements, except the governing centres, which were, however, Oriental towns, not Greek cities. Now, in v. 6 a Region comprising part of Lycaonia is distinguished from the rest as consisting of two cities and a stretch of cityless territory (i.e., territory organised on the native pre-Greek village system).

Here, as in XIII 14, we have one of those definite statements, involving both historical and geographical facts, which the student of ancient literature pounces upon as evidence to test accuracy and date. Is the description accurate? If so, was it accurate at all periods of history, or was it accurate only at a particular period? To these questions we must answer that it was accurate at the period when Paul visited Lycaonia; that it was accurate at no other time except between 37 and 72 A.D.; and that its only meaning is to distinguish between the Roman part of Lycaonia and the non-Roman part ruled by Antiochus. It is instructive as to Luke's conception of Paul's method, and about Luke's own ideas on the development of the Christian Church, that he should here so pointedly define the Roman part of Lycaonia as the region to which Paul went and where he continued preaching.

In modern expression we might call this district Roman Lycaonia; but that would not be true to ancient usage. Territory subject to Rome was not termed ager Romanus (p. 347), but was designated after the province to which it was attached; and this district was Galatica Lycaona, because it was in the province Galatia. It was distinguished from "Lycaonia Antiochiana," which was ruled by King Antiochus.

Such was official usage; but we know the capriciousness of popular nomenclature, which often prefers some other name to the official designation. The inhabitants of the Roman part spoke of the other as "the Antiochian Region" (Antiociznh; cwvra), and the people of the latter spoke of the Roman part as the Galatic Region (Galatikh; cwvra) It was unnecessary for persons who were living in the country to be more precise. Now this Region of Roman or Galatic Lycaoniais three times mentioned in Acts.

- (1) In XIV 7 it is defined by enumerating its parts; and as Paul goes to it out of Phyrgia, it is necessary to express that he went into Lycaonia: the advice which the Iconians gave him would be to go into Lycaonia.
- (2) In XVI 1-3 the writer does not sum up the district as a whole, for his narrative requires a distinction between the brief visit to Derbe and the long visit to Lystra.
- (3) In XVIII 23, as he enters the Roman Region from the "Antiochian Part," the writer uses the name which Paul would use as he was entering it, and calls it "the Galatic Region". This is characteristic of Acts: it moves amid the people, and the author has caught his term in many a case from the mouth of the people. But this is done with no subservience to vulgar usage; the writer is on a higher level of thought, and he knows how to select those popular terms which are vital and powerful, and to reject those which are vulgar and inaccurate: he moves among the people, and yet stands apart from them.

The subsequent narrative makes it clear that Paul visited only Lystra and Derbe. Why, then, should the author mention that Paul proceeded "to Lystra and Derbe and the Region in which they lie"? The reason lies in his habit of defining each new sphere of work according to the existing political divisions of the Roman Empire.

It is characteristic of Luke's method never formally to enunciate Paul's principle of procedure, but simply to state the facts and leave the principle to shine through them; and here it shines clearly through them, for he made the limit of Roman territory the limit of his work, and turned back when he came to Lystra. He did not go on to Laranda, which was probably a greater city than Derbe at the time, owing to its situation and the policy followed by King Antiochus. Nor did he go to the uncivilised, uneducated native villages or towns of Roman Galatia, such as Barata.

Accordingly, the historian in the few words (XIV 6, 7) assumes and embodies the principle which can be recognised as guiding Paul's action, viz., to go to the Roman world, and especially to its great cities. There is no more emphatic proof of the marvellous delicacy in expression that characterises the selection of words in Acts ,-a delicacy that can spring only from perfect knowledge of the characters and actions described.

But the passage, not unnaturally, caused great difficulties to readers of the second century, when the bounds of Galatia had changed, and the remarkable definition of XIV 6 had become unintelligible. It was then gathered from these words that some preaching took place in "the region round about," and the explanation was found in the later historical fact (which we may assume unhesitatingly as true), that converts of Paul carried the new religion over the whole region. This fact, got from independent knowledge, was added to the text, and thus arose the "Western" Text, which appears with slight variations in different authorities. In Codex Bez' the result is as follows (alterations being in italics):-

"(4) AND THE POPULACE remained divided, SOME TAKING PART WITH THE JEWS, AND SOME WITH THE APOSTLES, cleaving to them through the ward of God. (5) And again the Jews, along with the Gentiles, roused perucution far the second time, and having stoned them they cast them out of the city; (6) and fleeing tiny came into Lycaonia, to a certain city called LYSTRA, AND DERBE, AND THE whole SURROUNDING REGION; (7) AND THEY WERE THERE ENGAGED IN PREACHING, and the entire population was moved at the teaching; but Paul and Barnabas continued in Lystra."

To go to next study, click here Acts Study 22 - Chapter 15.doc