

Acts 14:1

1 In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

I found a poem that made me think of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. Listen to the words.

I watched them tear a building down;
A band of men in a busy town.
With a `HO-HEAVE-HO' and a lusty yell;
They swung a beam and a sidewall fell.
I asked the foreman, `Are these men skilled?
And the men you'd hire if you had to build?'
He gave a laugh and said, `No indeed!
Common labor is all I need.
I can easily wreck in a day or two,
What builders have taken a year to do.'

And I thought to myself as I went on my way,
Which of these roles have I tried to play?
Am I a builder who works with care?
Measuring life by the rule and square?
Am I shaping my deeds to a well-made plan,
Patiently doing the best I can?
Or am I a wrecker who walks the town,
Content with the labor of tearing down?

Which of these two were Paul and Barnabas? Wreckers or Builders?

Our study this morning takes us to the city of Iconium. In our modern world it is currently the location of the 4th largest city in southern Turkey. And it is there that we find Paul and Barnabas building the church with many new believers. Look at verse 1.

1 In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

Skip to verse 3.

3 Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the Word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

Great things were happening for Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel. These verses tell us that many believed after hearing their message.

But contrast verses 1 and 3 with verses 2 and 4. Look at verse 2.

2 But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.

Verse 4:

4 But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

Although good things were happening, opposition was occurring simultaneously. The contrast is so acute that they must have gone from extreme highs to extreme lows from hour to hour.

Look at verse 5.

5 And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

All of us get discouraged from time to time. Or is it just me?

There are two types of people. There are optimists and pessimists.

Who in here is an optimist? How would you describe an optimist?

Verses 5 and 6 tell us that Paul and Barnabas knew they were in danger of being stoned, yet the verse says they continued to preach the gospel.

Why? Because they were optimistic that God would protect them. As believers, we too must be optimistic when we witness. I see boldness in Paul and Barnabas despite the circumstances they faced. It would have been easy for them to just keep quite and move on. But there were souls to win to Christ.

Their hope was in the Lord. They believed that the Holy Spirit would carry them through any situation.

In Lystra something interesting is going to happen. Look at verse 8.

8 At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, 10 said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

Lystra was different from Iconium. Lystra was famous for its advanced education and higher learning, however, there weren't enough Jews living in Lystra to have a synagogue. These people were pagans and worshipped the gods of the Romans.

There was a legend in Lystra that the city had been visited by two gods, Hermes and Zeus but they were not received well and so they supposedly sent a flood to destroy the city. The people of Lystra believed that one day the two gods would return and when they did, they would be worshiped.

So here come Paul and Barnabas into the city and the first thing that happens is that Paul performs a miracle. The man was healed and "leaped up and began to walk."

Suddenly, the people began to worship Paul and Barnabas thinking that they were Hermes and Zeus returning to the city for the second time.

Look at the reaction of the people in verse 11.

11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." 12 And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

The contrast again is significant. After preaching the gospel in Iconium, many believed but the unbelievers wanted to stone the missionaries, so they had to flee on a low note. Here in Lystra, they begin to preach the gospel and they are treated like gods.

I'm not sure why Barnabas got to be Zeus and Paul only got to be Hermes. According to my Greek mythology book, Hermes is called the Herdsman of the dead or guider of souls. Hermes is a god of commerce and music. He is the messenger or Herald of the gods and was known for his cunning and as a thief from the day of his birth.

Paul didn't take being called Hermes as a compliment for many reasons and he reacts strongly. Look at verse 14.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you 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.

Thus begins Paul's second recorded sermon. This time however, instead of speaking to religious Jews, he is addressing unchurched pagans.

How do you change your approach when you are witnessing to “churched” people as opposed to “unchurched” people?

In this message, Paul again breaks his presentation into 3 main points:

1. There is only 1 True God.
2. God has given man a choice to follow Him or not.
3. God has provided a way to salvation.

So he begins in verse 15 by saying, “you should turn from these vain things (that is the worship of false gods) to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”

After establishing that there is one true God, he turns to one of the clearest verses in the Bible about free will. Look at verse 16.

16 In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

What does that mean?

Why did God give man freewill?

Paul continues in verse 17. He says that although God gave man freewill, He has not judged them for their sins. Verse 17:

17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

Keep you finger in Acts 14 and turn in your Bibles to Romans 1:20. Paul told the people of Lystra that God did not leave Himself without witness, because the “Heavens declare the glory of God!”

Almost without exception, when I witness to an unbeliever, the question comes up, “What about all the people who have never heard of Jesus Christ. Are they condemned?” Do you get that question too?

Romans 1:20 says this:

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

What is Paul talking about when he speaks of God's invisible attributes?

We have a few doctors in this class. Dr. Joe Kelly has graciously agreed to give us a quick biology lesson on how complex one living cell is in our bodies.

<Presentation by Joe Kelly>

Thank you. Based on our bodies alone we must conclude the following:

1. The presence of design implies the presence of a designer
2. Our world manifests the presence of design
 - a. So is inorganic evolution plausible?
 - i. "The length of the average protein in the smallest known living thing is at least 400 amino acid links, containing more than 7000 atoms.
 - ii. Each cell requires millions of protein molecules arranged precisely into dozens of organelles
 - iii. A living organism must be capable of self-propagation, feeding, digestion, etc.
 - b. So what are the chances of a living organism coming into existence by chance?

That is why Paul concludes verse 20 by saying that people "are without excuse."

God's majesty and the obvious complexity of the world He created cry out for every human to believe in God.

Back to Acts 14. Even after Paul and Barnabas explain that they are NOT gods, look at the people's reaction in verse 18.

18 Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

Why do you think this happened?

Being treated like a god could have been a pretty heady experience, even if you are the apostle Paul. But look what happens next. Verse 19.

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Can you imagine what happened here? One minute Paul finds himself being treated like a god and the next moment he is being stoned. The extremes that he must have gone through are unimaginable.

Verse 20.

20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

Many commentaries believe that God performed a miracle here. The interesting thing to me is what he did after he got up. He went back into the city.

Why do you think he returned to the place where he had just been stoned?

From Lystra, they travel to Derbe.

Would someone read for us beginning in verse 21?

21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they

commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. 25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.

So when you look back on the first missionary journey, what would Paul and Barnabas say was accomplished?

So ends the first missionary journey. I will leave you with a few thoughts from our past 4 sessions in Acts 13 and 14.

1. Expect opposition
2. Success and elation must be tempered with realism
3. At the end of a difficult experience God sometimes reveals to you the benefits – sometimes not