

## ~ACTS~

## Lesson 42- The Gospel Preached in Iconium and Lystra

## Acts 13:50-14:17

We are continuing our study of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey as they travel further into the Galatian area and preach the Gospel in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. We have just spent three weeks learning about Paul's first recorded sermon in the Scriptures as he was preaching in a Jewish synagogue in Antioch Pisidia, and as a result of this great sermon, the Word of God did what it does best... it convicted the hearts of sinners and we saw the two reactions that we always see when the Gospel is preached. They will either humble or harden and we see these same two hearts here in Antioch as well.

We left off last week in Acts 13:49 as the Word of God was being carried throughout the region by both Jews and Gentiles who received the Truth and were saved. But there were many unbelieving Jews who began blaspheming and speaking against the Truth and began to persecute Paul and Barnabas. And in verse 50, we see these same hard hearted unbelieving Jews continue to stir up trouble for these two faithful men. Let's start our verse by verse study with Acts 13:50...

**50) But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women, and the chief men of the city raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.**

These chief men of the city, τοὺς πρώτους τῆς πόλεως, were probably the Roman Gentile leaders in charge of running the city. And just as in times past, the unbelieving Jews never had a problem using Gentile leaders to help them persecute the Truth. They did this with Jesus when they asked Pilate to put Him to death, Acts 13:28. In Damascus, the unbelieving Jews joined with king Aretas and his men to try and hunt Paul down to kill him, 2 Cor 11:32; Acts 9:23-25. Then the Jews conspired with king Herod Agrippa I to arrest and kill James and then arrest Peter, Acts 12:1-4. This was a common tactic by the Jews... to get Gentile leaders involved in their evil schemes. But notice the avenue in Antioch by which they get the rulers of the city to join with them. **The Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women.** Strabo, a Roman historian who lived in the early first century (63bc-24ad) speaks of the strong persuasion that women had in western Asia Minor to control the religious opinions of powerful men\*. These women were probably Gentile proselytes because Luke says they were τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας καὶ τὰς εὐσχήμονας, devout women of high reputation and they had a way of influencing the chief men of the city. Therefore, the Jews, out of envy, pride, and haughty arrogance, with the help of these chief men, **raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.** It is very possible that because of the power of the authorities behind this expulsion, Paul and Barnabas may have even been beaten with rods or whipped as punishment, 2 Cor 11:24-25; 2 Tim 3:11. So Paul and Barnabas leave the city, and notice how Luke describes their exit...

**51) But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.**

This is what Jesus said to do with those who reject the Words of Life, **Mark 6:11**; Matt 10:14; Luke 10:10-12. The Jews made their free will choice to reject Jesus. So Paul and Barnabas travel further into the Galatian region to a town called Iconium about 75 miles to the east of Antioch Pisidia. But even among the persecution, there were many converts who believed the Truth and stayed in this area of Antioch Pisidia. Remember Paul's words of encouragement to them in verse 43... *continue in the grace of God*. Abide upon and remain upon the grace of God and His Word. And I believe he told them this as an encouragement to endure this persecution. So now look at the result in verse 52...

**52) And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**

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\* Conybeare, W. J., & Howson, J. S. (1893). *The life and epistles of St. Paul* (Vol. 1, p. 219)

There is great joy when you are in Christ, even among intense persecution. And even though Paul and Barnabas had left the town, the disciples that stayed there were probably being ridiculed and blasphemed. But Luke says... **the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit, Matt 5:11-12.** Later in chapter 14 we will find that these disciples become the churches of Galatia, Acts 14:21-23; Gal 1:2. And in the letter to the Galatians, we find that there was huge pressure from the Jews to fall back under the Law Gal 3:1-3. This ends chapter 13 in which chapter 14 begins with Paul and Barnabas entering a Hellenistic synagogue in Iconium.

**14:1) Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.**

Paul and Barnabas, probably with sore backs, continue preaching the Gospel in this city of Iconium. And following the same pattern, to the Jew first then to the Gentile, so they enter another Jewish synagogue. Luke doesn't record Paul's sermon here, but we see the results, **that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.** The Truth is spreading to the multitudes of Jews and Gentiles and notice it is because the Word is being preached. Luke says that Paul and Barnabas **so spoke.** They spoke in such a way that a great multitude believed. This was because they were speaking the Words of Truth empowered by the Holy Spirit and many more are entering into the Kingdom. But just as Paul says, *all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution,* 2 Tim 3:12.

**2) But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.**

These are Jews who refuse to believe, they are ἀπειθέω, disobedient, unpersuaded, obstinate. And they are more than just unbelieving, they have become workers of Satan. Instigating and trying to poison and embitter the souls of the people to come against these new believers. In Antioch Pisidia they did the same thing by stirring up the minds of the woman and chief men. Now in Iconium they are stirring up the other Gentiles against the brethren. You would think that Paul and Barnabas would just shake off the dust from their feet and move on to the next town. But look at the next verse...

**3) Therefore, they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord...**

There were still many people receiving the Word and coming to Jesus, so Paul and Barnabas stay to shepherd these new believers. Even among this persecution, Luke says, **they stayed there a long time.** We don't know exactly how long this was, but he uses this word, *ἰκανός*, three other times in the book of Acts, 3 yrs in Arabia, Acts 9:23; 2 yrs in Joppa, Acts 9:43; and 1-1/2 yrs in Corinth, Acts 18:18. And according to the timeline of Acts, they could have stayed in Iconium for up to a year (45-46ad). And notice what they are doing the whole time, **speaking boldly in the Lord.** And look how God met them there. They make the bold stance to stand for Truth and God meets them in their faithfulness... look at the remainder of verse 3...

**3) Therefore, they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the Word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.**

Here in Iconium, the Holy Spirit begins working through Paul and Barnabas displaying miracles that bear witness to the Truth, bearing witness to the Word, Logos, of His grace. Proving and testifying that Jesus is alive and pointing people to His Salvation. Because that is what signs and wonders do, they point people to the Truth. They are not on demand miracles, but miracles performed by God through those who are faithful to preach the Word of Grace... and they are always "as He wills." Here these miracles were a testimony to the Word of His grace because the Word is the avenue by which His grace is given. God's Word will always accompany His signs and wonders. If somebody is doing signs and wonders, but not preaching the Truth of His Word, they are false. The antichrist will perform signs and wonders, but will

be blaspheming the Truth, 2 Thess 2:9-12. Because of the deception of the unbelieving Jews, persecution rose up again...

**4-6)** <sup>4</sup> But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. <sup>5</sup> And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, <sup>6</sup> they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe...

The Jews continue to stir up the people, creating a schism between the people. Some sided with the unbelieving Jews and others with Paul and Barnabas. But even among this persecution and division they continued preaching the Gospel in Iconium until Luke says, **a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them.** Paul and Barnabas have been in this city for close to a year, but now the Jews have created a schism by stirring up the Gentiles against them, and just like in Antioch Pisidia and other places, they plot to kill them. But God prevails and gives them divine knowledge of this attack...

**6)** they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.

So, was this a cowardice thing to flee from this persecution? No, it was smart. By the leading of the Spirit, they stayed in Iconium for a year, even among persecution, but when they became aware of this plot, the Holy Spirit told them to flee, and they went 18 miles south to Lystra and then to Derbe. And notice what Luke says they continue doing...

**7)** And they were preaching the gospel there.

Everywhere they go they continue bearing witness of Jesus Christ and preaching His Word. Notice how there is no preplanned agenda to their mission. When they left the church at Antioch in Syria, their plan was basic: head for Cyprus because that's Barnabas' hometown, and then head north to Galatia. As far as the durations and all the little details, they were just leaving that to the work of the Spirit. And notice what is driving the Spirit... humble hearts and expectant ears. And when the people no longer want to hear the Word, the Spirit leads them elsewhere.

After leaving Iconium, they arrive in a town called Lystra, which happens to be the hometown of brother Timothy. We will see that on Paul's second missionary journey, Paul returns to Lystra and takes Timothy to travel with him on the road, Acts 16:1. So it is here on his first visit that Timothy, his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice were born again, 2 Tim 1:5. But here in Acts 14 in Lystra, Luke focuses on one particular healing that created a strange reaction with the people...

**8)** And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

This is very similar to the lame beggar at the temple gate in Acts 3. This was a small town, so everyone would have known this man to have been crippled from birth.

**9-10)** <sup>9</sup> This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, <sup>10</sup> said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

Paul had been preaching the gospel, but there is no mention of him entering a synagogue in Lystra. It is very possible Paul was preaching to a crowd in an open square in the city. We know nothing of this man, if he was a Jew or Gentile. My guess he was probably an uncircumcised Gentile, but it matters not. All that matters is that he had faith. Luke says, **Paul, observing him intently...** This is the same word when Paul confronted Elymas the sorcerer in Cyprus and he "looked intently" at him, Acts 13:9. This "looking intently," was Paul being attentive to the voice of the Lord. Waiting for the leading of the Holy Spirit,

because in both instances, the Spirit follows with a mighty work. With Elymas, he was made blind for a time, and now this lame man is healed and made whole.

Something to point out here is that Luke says this lame man **had faith to be healed**. But it's more than that. This word healed is, σῶζω, the verb form of Salvation. Luke is literally saying, "he had faith to be saved," saving faith unto Everlasting Life. Yes, the Holy Spirit healed this man physically, but even more, this man was saved from eternal destruction by the grace of God and his faith connected him to that Salvation.

So this man who was lame from his mother's womb is healed not only physically but spiritually, all for the glory of God, and he begins leaping and walking around. Nothing more is said of this man. Paul and Barnabas had done many miracles on this journey, v. 3, but Luke focuses on this miracle because of the unique reaction from the people. Notice how they respond...

**11-12)** <sup>11</sup> Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" <sup>12</sup> And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

These pagan Gentiles saw this miracle and even though having just heard the Gospel preached to them, they resorted to their pagan roots. They were reminded about a story that was written in their Greek mythology, and this story was told by a Roman poet named Ovid, (43bc-17ad), he writes that Zeus and Hermes had come to earth in human form and visited the region of Phrygia, which is in this same area of Lystra in Galatia. But Ovid writes that when these gods came, the people didn't honor them, so they destroyed the city†. So being steeped in these pagan myths, and seeing this supernatural miracle, they thought that the gods had come back to them, and they didn't want to make the same mistake and be destroyed. So they called Paul Hermes, and Barnabas, Zeus because Hermes was the spokesman for Zeus and he was the inventor of speech. And since Paul was the one preaching, and because of the miracle, and their pagan beliefs, they jump to the conclusion that Paul and Barnabas are these gods. So, to honor these so-called gods, the priest of Zeus comes out to make a sacrifice to them...

**13)** Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

But look at Paul and Barnabas' response...

**14-15)** <sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out <sup>15</sup> and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you..."

The whole city had gathered together to make this sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas and when they heard of this, they immediately ran to stop them not taking any credit but giving all glory to God. And Luke says they start preaching the Gospel to them again...

**15)** We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach (εὐαγγελίζω preach the good news) to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them,

Paul begins preaching the Gospel again to them in desperation to stop these sacrifices. And he urges them to turn away from these useless gods and sacrifices, and to turn upon the One True Living God. This is repentance and faith... turn away from your old life and turn upon the Living God. But notice the style in which he preaches. These are pagan Gentiles that know nothing of the Scriptures, so Paul appeals to them

† Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII, 626

by proving God to be the One True God simply by observing the creation of the world. He does this because everybody in the world has an innate understanding in their conscience that God is the One True God. And they know this just by looking at the creation, **Romans 1:19-20**. Paul says, don't worship us... Worship the Living God. He says, this Living God who just healed this lame man. He is the same Living God who created the world and everything in it. Paul continues preaching the Gospel to them in verses 16 and 17...

**16) who in bygone generations** ...generations who had previously passed by, He... **allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.**

In times past, before the cross, God allowed the nations to walk in their own ways. It was only to Israel that He gave His Law and commandments. All the other nations were allowed to do what they wanted. He did this, not because He didn't care about the Gentiles, but because He loved the world, and He chose the Jewish nation to usher in the Savior for the purpose that all the nations could be saved through Jesus Christ. And he continues in verse 17...

**17) Nevertheless, He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.**

The plan of Redemption has always included the Gentiles, and Paul is showing them the goodness of God because it's His goodness that bears witness that He is God. It's the goodness of God that leads us to repentance Rom 2:4. So when Paul quotes verse 17, **that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.** I think Paul has in mind **Psalm 145:15-19**. But in order for Salvation to come to the whole world, He had to legally send the Kinsman Redeemer. And this had to come through the lineage of His Promised Seed. This is described in **Isaiah 54:1-10**. The plan of Redemption was to bring Salvation to the nations through the Promised Seed. God didn't abandon the nations, but rather he brought Salvation to them through the Seed.

This is what Paul said in Gal 3:29- *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* This was the plan of redemption for the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, but even in this time before the cross, even when the nations were left alone, God did not leave the nations without a witness that He is the One True God. Even in this time... He was working to bring them their Salvation.

Paul is preaching the goodness of God to these pagan Gentiles trying to get them to stop their useless sacrifices. So next week we'll continue chapter 14 and see the results...