

~ACTS~

Lesson 43- The First Mission Completed

Acts 14:18-28

Today we will be wrapping up chapter 14 as we look at the final events of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. We left off last week in verse 17 as Paul and Barnabas were in the town of Lystra pleading with these pagan Gentiles to not worship them as gods. Because you remember that just before this, Paul had just finished preaching the Gospel here in Lystra and there was a man who was healed from being lame his entire life. And when he began leaping and walking around, these Gentiles knew this to be a miracle, but instead of giving glory to God, they resort to their pagan roots and start worshipping Paul and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus. So of course Paul and Barnabas didn't allow them to do this, so Paul starts pleading with them, and begs them out of desperation to stop their sacrifices. By way of review, let's read from this point at verse 13, down into verse 18 where we will start our lesson today, **Acts 14:13-18**.

The whole crowd was so determined to make these sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas thinking they were gods, that they did not want to let go of their pagan roots. Probably out of fear of the gods, which are just demons, but also simply because they didn't know any better and they were trapped in the darkness and only the Truth can set them free. Verse 18 says, that with great difficulty Paul and Barnabas are finally able to convince them to stop.

18) And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

So that tells us that they did stop the sacrifices, but with great difficulty. And now we see an interesting turn of events because now instead of worshipping Paul and Barnabas, the people of Lystra want to kill them.

19) Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Talk about a fickle crowd! There seems to be some time that goes by between verses 18 and 19 because Paul and Barnabas get them to stop the sacrifice and then at some later point, maybe just a few days... I don't think it was very long, the unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium hunt Paul down here in Lystra and they come to stir up the crowd just as they had done in the other cities. These are the same Jews from Antioch Pisidia and Iconium that wanted to kill them in those cities, and they have come to Lystra with one agenda... to kill Paul and Barnabas. Notice their tactic is the same in every city... they stir up the people to come against the Truth. In Antioch Pisidia they stirred up devout woman to persuade the chief men of the city to persecute Paul and Barnabas 13:50. Then in Iconium they stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their souls against the brethren, 14:2, and tried to made a violent attempt to kill Paul and Barnabas, 14:5. So Paul and Barnabas escape but everywhere these men go, they're making more disciples. And now these same unbelieving, antichrist Jews are becoming even more envious, so they track Paul down in Lystra to finish what they started in Iconium. And they do the same thing and stir up the minds of these pagan Gentiles. Luke says, **having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.**

These unbelieving Jews are using the offended emotions of this fickle Gentile crowd in Lystra, because these pagan Gentiles were probably deeply offended by Paul when he told them to stop worshipping their useless, good for nothing idols and turn upon the One True Living God. And so they probably got really mad at Paul for saying these things. But that is what the Truth does... it convicts, and it can be offensive to those who do not believe. Remember there are always two reactions to the Truth... Humble or Harden. So here in Lystra, many of these pagan Gentiles have hardened their hearts, and then these Jews come from the nearby towns and begin enticing that anger by persuading the multitudes that Paul and Barnabas should die. So the Gentile mob realizes that Paul and Barnabas are not their gods, so they turn and stone

Paul to death and drag him out of the city. There are some who don't think Paul actually died here, only that he was just knocked unconscious, and it looked like he was dead. I don't believe that. I think Paul literally died and the Holy Spirit brought him back to life. I say this because of something Paul writes in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, **2 Corinthians 11:22-12:6**. This stoning was so bad that even 20 years later, when Paul writes his final letter to Timothy, he mentions these same persecutions, **2 Timothy 3:10-12**. Timothy was probably there witnessing this stoning because Luke says the disciples of Lystra gather around Paul's dead body, verse 20...

20) However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

You can't keep this guy down! As we know, Paul had a lot more work to do for the kingdom, so God raised him from the dead and he keeps on going. Paul gets up and they go into the city. Then the next day, they make their way 60 miles east to Derbe. That's a miracle! Not only did Paul get up, but he walks 60 miles to another town to start preaching the Gospel. But someone who had just been stoned probably didn't look that good. You can imagine his face was probably bloody and bruised and his eyes swollen shut. And Paul refers to this in his letter to the Galatians reminding them of this persecution, **Galatians 4:12-15**. Some scholars say that Paul is referring to some eye problem that Paul had his whole life. Paul had an eye problem... his eyes were swollen shut because he was just stoned to death! This was a hard trip, but this is how Paul's entire life was. So when Paul gets to Derbe, you would think he would take a break and try to recover, but no, look at the next verse...

21) And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

This is why God picked this man to preach the Gospel to the world. Paul had such a driven character, and filled with the Spirit, he was unstoppable, **Acts 20:22**. So not only does he preach the Gospel in Derbe, he also decides to go back to where he just got stoned to death! They could have easily traveled on through Tarsus and around back home to Syrian Antioch, but if they did this, the churches of Galatia would have never been strong enough to survive the persecution. So Luke says **they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch**. And the purpose of this is to edify the body of Christ and establish these disciples as the churches of Galatia to strengthen them so that they could endure the intense persecution.

22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

This is very similar to what Paul said to them in Antioch Pisidia, **Acts 13:43**. ἐπιμένω, abide upon and remain upon the grace of God. Here Paul is exhorting them to continue in the faith. This word "**continue**" is ἐμμένω, abide in and remain in the faith. The Bible is constantly telling us to abide in Him. Many times, you hear me say the word ὑπομονή- under abide; 13:43 says ἐπιμένω- abide upon; and now 14:22 ἐμμένω- abide in... abide in Him... abide upon Him and abide under Him... this is how we endure persecution with joy.

Notice what Paul says next... "**We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.**" This is the life of a Christian. But it's not our sufferings that save us, but rather it is because we are saved and because we stand for Truth that we suffer persecution and tribulations. This is a necessary part of the Christian life. The entire New Testament promises this, **John 15:19-21; 16:1-4; 33; 1 Peter 4:12-16**. Tribulation and persecution is something to be expected in the Christian life, so because of this God built in a supernatural principle into this suffering that makes us grow and become stronger through the persecution. It's the process of being refined in the fire of tribulation. The process of building and strengthening our proven genuineness, δοκίμιον, **1 Peter 1:6-9; 5:10**; James 1:2-4, 12; Romans 5:3-5; Proverbs 17:3; 27:21. Our sufferings are the pathway to glory, Romans 8:17; Heb 10:32-36; 2 Tim 2:10-

12. This is our blessed Hope, living Eternally with Him in His eternal glory. We don't hope for sufferings, and we don't go looking for suffering, but in the suffering, we rest our Hope in Jesus and being one in Him for all eternity.

Paul and Barnabas are now traveling back through Galatia strengthening and establishing the churches, setting up elders in every church.

23) So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

This word "appointed" is χειροτονέω. It literally means "to stretch the hands." Luke is describing the people in the church taking a vote on which elder they might choose to oversee the church in their area. This was done with prayer and fasting and then Paul and Barnabas commended them to the Lord. This is the same pattern as we saw in chapter 6 when the people selected seven Deacons, and then the Apostles ordained them into the service by laying hands on them, Acts 6:3-6. Paul and Barnabas follow the same pattern and they commend them, or place them alongside the Lord, in the One whom they have believed. After they had ordained these elders and established the churches in Galatia, they begin heading back the same way they came.

24) ²⁴ And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

After all the persecutions they had to endure up in Galatia, now they have to travel back through the treacherous Pisidian mountains filled with robbers and thieves. After coming through the Pisidian Highlands of Pamphylia they come to Perga. Perga was the city where Mark abandoned them, Acts 13:13. They had traveled through Perga once before on their way up to Galatia, but there was no mention of them preaching the Gospel that first time. But now Luke says they **preached the word in Perga**. Everywhere they go, they are preaching the Gospel. Then they make their way to the seaport of Attalia and find a boat to sail back home to Syrian Antioch.

26) From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

Their mission was complete, the Gospel had officially gone forth to the Gentiles. And now after two years, they are returning home to Antioch where it all began. Because you remember it was after the church of Antioch was formed, after the events of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas as His vessels to the Gentiles, and it was the church of Antioch that released them to the grace of God to do this work.

27) Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas gather the church of Antioch to tell them the good report of all that God had done. Notice they don't take any credit. They give God all the glory... **that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles**. The door of faith is an interesting analogy. Because Jesus is the Way, John 14:6, and He is even the Door, John 10:7, but the only way to go through that door is through faith, by grace through faith. Not by works, not by Legalism or following the Law, but through faith. Because faith is what apprehends and connects us to God's grace and Salvation.

What a glorious meeting that would have been. Gathering the saints from Antioch together and telling them of all the things that God had done with them. So Paul and Barnabas tell them about all the churches that had been planted on their journey and all the believers who have found everlasting life. Churches that are full of both Jews and Gentiles alike, brought together in Christ Jesus as one new man in Him. The

church of Antioch was the first Christian church that had both Jews and Gentiles together in one church, and now there are other Christian churches in Galatia with multitudes of believers.

28) So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Luke literally says, “they stayed there not a little time.” Which happens to be around 4 years because chapter 15 begins the Jerusalem Council meeting in 50AD. Paul and Barnabas had left Antioch on this first missionary journey near the beginning of 45AD and returned to Antioch nearly two years later toward the end of 46AD. So after they get back to their home church, they stay in Antioch edifying and strengthening the disciples there for about four years until they journey down to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council meeting.