

## I. Introduction

Good morning! At the end of Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas left Pisidian Antioch and moved on to Iconium. The city of Iconium is still a thriving city in Turkey today, although the name has been changed to Konya. Paul and Barnabas were in the city in about 48 AD, halfway through their first missionary journey.

After Iconium, they will also visit Lystra where some interesting things will happen before they move on to Derbe. On this map, we can see the whole route of their journey, starting in Antioch, then going to Cyprus and on to what is today central Turkey and then returning to Antioch. Today we will cover Acts 14:1-20. Let's begin by reading verses 1-7.



## II. Scripture Reading

1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. 2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. 4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. 5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. 6 But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, 7 where they continued to preach the good news.

## III. Teaching

Paul and Barnabas went first to the synagogue and preached to the Jews and Jewish converts. There was an excellent response and a great number of Jews and Gentiles accepted their message and believed in Jesus. We can imagine a large and growing crowd gathered every evening to hear Paul preach about the love of Jesus and about His grace and mercy poured out through His death on the cross. Opposition arose, but they continued to preach boldly and the Lord confirmed their message of grace through signs and wonders.



**Acts 14:3, “So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.”** Some people may feel nervous when they hear talk about, “**Signs and Wonders.**” But, as we can see here, confirmation of the message of the gospel through signs and wonders is a sound Biblical concept.

In various times and places, the Holy Spirit of God has empowered believers to perform miracles in order to demonstrate the power of God and to lead people to the truth of Jesus Christ. God has all power and might, and in His perfect wisdom, He sometimes decides that this is the best way to bring people to faith and salvation in a particular place and time. Miracles are real. I have experienced a few.



However, I want to add that there is good reason to be cautious about reports of signs and wonders. Especially when we hear that some preacher or evangelist is advertising that they will do signs and wonders. There are, sadly, false teachers who claim to be miracle workers in order to gain fame and wealth. There are also sincere Christian workers who fall into the error of presumption.



These are the ones who saw or experienced a few miracles and then began to assume that God would always do a miracle when they asked. They forget that God alone decides when He will provide signs and wonders.

We want to always praise God and give thanks for real miracles! But we also want to be on the lookout against those who use the gospel of Jesus for personal gain and those who have become presumptuous. Remember Jesus' warning in **Matthew 24:24**, **“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible.”**

After Paul and Barnabas left Iconium, they moved on to Lystra and begin to preach the Good News there. Let's continue our reading with Acts 14:8-13 and see what happens in Lystra.



#### IV. Scripture Reading

8 In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. 11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

#### V. Teaching

**Acts 14:8**, **“In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.”** In this work, Karel Dujardin made Paul much older than I imagine Paul at that time, but it is certainly a powerful painting. The crippled man is on his knees, with short crutches under his arms, propping him up. Only a few people are shown, but in the background we see the base of a large column, reminding us that the miracle occurred in the city, not in some remote place. Paul had been speaking to the crowd. Now, however, his attention is focused on the lame man.



From birth, this man has been unable to walk, but now Paul sees a willingness to believe in the man's face. Paul commanded (**Acts 14:10**), **“Stand up on your feet!”** And, **“the man jumped up and began to walk.”** The man was probably well-known in the city. From birth he had been unable to walk and he might have been begging food in that same place for years. But at Paul's word, his legs and feet were suddenly and miraculously strengthened; and he stood, strong and straight. Everyone immediately knew that a great miracle had occurred. But they did not understand that the miracle was from the One True Creator God.



**Acts 14:11-12**, **“When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.”** In the Greek pantheon of mythical gods, Zeus was father and king, and Hermes was the messenger of the gods. The Greek religion was popular in Lystra; they had a temple of Zeus just outside their city. Since Paul was the talkative one, they decided he must be the messenger god, Hermes. There is a hint here that Barnabas must have been an impressive and powerful-looking man, because they called him Zeus, king of the gods.

In Iconium, there was a well-established Jewish synagogue, so the people of the city may have known something about the Creator God. But in Lystra, there does not seem to have been any synagogue. So the One True Creator God may have been completely unknown to the people and so they interpreted the miracle from their own religious viewpoint. In addition to the differences in cultural and religious background, there was also a language barrier. Paul usually preached in Greek, the main language of trade throughout the Roman world. But many places also had a local language. In Lystra this was the Lycaonian

language, so Paul and Barnabas probably did not understand anything until someone interpreted for them.

The result of all of this was a huge misunderstanding. Instead of praising the Lord for the miracle, the crowd thought Paul and Barnabas were gods. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Christians do not experience miracles as often in some cultures as others. For example, here in Japan, there are few reports of miracles in the churches. I wonder if maybe this is because of the danger that many Japanese might tend to honor the person they saw as the miracle worker instead of honoring the Lord.

In any case, things got more confused before they got better. **Acts 14:13, “The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.”** This is what we might call the missionary’s nightmare. If you don’t communicate clearly, you can end up being the center of attention instead of Jesus. When we share the gospel, we do not want people to honor us; we want them to honor Jesus.

Let’s get back to our story. In 1515, Raphael painted the scene like this. Paul and Barnabas are on the left and the priest of Zeus and the crowd are coming to offer sacrifices. How will Paul and Barnabas respond? Let’s read Acts 14:14-20.



## VI. Scripture Reading

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. 16 In the past, he let all nations go their own way. 17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." 18 Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. 19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. 20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

## VII. Teaching

**Acts 14:19b** says, **“They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.”** Paul and Barnabas had already run into opposition several times, but I think this is the first time that they experienced such extreme suffering for the Name of Jesus. Paul was stoned and it is likely that Barnabas also suffered violence.



But in a short time Paul rose to his feet again. **Acts 14:20** tells us, **“But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.”** Some people think Paul really was dead and was resurrected when the disciples prayed. Others think there was a great miracle of healing. Whatever the case was, I think it is amazing that Paul went back into the city of Lystra. I wonder if any of the people who had stoned Paul saw him come back into town. I think that Paul’s return to the city must have made a big impression.

As far as I know, none of us here have ever faced stoning. But whenever we boldly share the Good News of Jesus, we are likely to face opposition. The devil does not want people to know about Jesus. And people who are under the influence of the devil will oppose the preaching of the gospel of Jesus. This is a reality of life in this fallen world and we should be prepared to face opposition and even persecution.

Getting back to Lystra, when Paul realized that the people had misunderstood his message, Paul explained by saying (**Acts 14:15b**), **“We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven**



**and earth and sea and everything in them.”** The Creator God who made all things is worthy of worship. All the other so-called gods are without value and truth.

Before we close for today, I want to focus on **Acts 14:16-17** for a minute. Speaking of the Creator God, Paul continues, saying, **“In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”**

God has not always given every nation in history access to the Scriptures. But, even so, God has revealed Himself and His love to all nations through the blessings of nature. Here, Paul points especially to, rain, crops, and seasons, and food and joy.



Do you know the word, “providence?” The dictionary defines providence as, *“The protective care of God or of nature as a spiritual power.”* God is the sovereign ruler over the whole universe. And God is love; He actively cares about all of His creation and about everything that happens. Because He cares about us, God provides for us and blesses us in many ways. The good we see and the joy we experience in life come from God’s providence.

The word providence rarely appears in Scripture. In some translations it does not appear at all. Nonetheless, the providence of God is revealed on every page of the Bible. Here are a few verses as examples.

**Job 10:12, “You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit.”**

**Psalms 3:5, “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.”**

**Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**

God gives us life, shows us kindness, watches over us, sustains us, and brings to completion the good work He has begun in us. These things are only a few of the many ways in which His providence reveals His love for us. There is much, much, more, for example, **Psalms 104:14-15** says, **“He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate— bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.”** The loving providence of God is wonderful and it is revealed all around us if we have eyes to see.

## VIII. Conclusion

There is much that we can learn from Paul and Barnabas in today’s Scripture passage and we would do well to follow their example of courageous, bold, preaching of Christ. But I also want to encourage all of us to think about the providence of God and to meditate on how we can follow God’s loving example. God cares for all of His creation. He loves all and He gives grace to all. If we follow God’s example, then we also should learn to love all people. As a closing thought for today, let’s read **Matthew 5:44-45**. In these verses Jesus teaches us that the example of God’s loving providence should inspire us to love all people. **“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”**

Let’s pray.

## IX. Prayer