

^{14:1} 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. ² But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren^a. 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^b. ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. 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^c; ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel^d.

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^e. 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^f. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and

^a 14:1-2 **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. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.** The idea of willful unbelief is well within the meaning of the word the NIV translates "refused to believe" here. Here you see the consummation of man's "free will." Total depravity darkens man's will and renders it incapable of responding favorably to Christ apart from grace.

You could translate the phrase at the end of verse two with the words *stirred up and embittered the souls of the Gentiles...* When you are jealous and your arguments lack substance all you have left is slander.

^b 14:3 **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.** This "testimony" of the message with signs and wonders was necessary before the completion of the New Testament. The miracles demonstrated that these men did indeed represent the miracle-working Savior.

^c 14:5-6 **And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region.** When is it not cowardly to run? There were times when Paul faced his tormentors and times when he ran from them. Certainly the motivator for this flight was not the fear of man but the furtherance of the message. This is evident in that Paul and Barnabas eventually came back to the Lycaonian towns (14:21).

^d 14:7 **and there they continued to preach the gospel.** The men fled, but their flight only spread the gospel further.

^e 14:8-10 **At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 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, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and *began* to walk.** This account is similar to the one in Acts three, where Jesus healed another lame man through Peter. The lesson is that the resurrected King working through Peter among the Jews is the same person working through Paul among the Gentiles.

Lystra was about 20 miles from Iconium. There apparently was no synagogue there or Paul and Barnabas would have gone there first.

^f 14:11-13 **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." And they *began* calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief**

rushed out into the crowd, crying out^a 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^b. ¹⁶ In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 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^c.” ¹⁸ *Even* saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them^d.

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^e. 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^f.^a

speaker. 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 Roman poet Ovid had recorded a few years before this event a myth that Zeus (or Jupiter), the chief god of the Pantheon, and Hermes (Mercury), his messenger, had once visited this region (Phrygia) as men. The people, accustomed to pagan worship and prone to believe such myths, reasoned that the two had returned. Barnabas may have been the older and more soft-spoken of the two and Paul an eloquent speaker, thus matching images in their minds of what such a theophany would look like.

^a 14:14 **But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out.** Twice in this chapter Barnabas is called an apostle (see also v. 4). The word evidently can have two meanings, as evidenced by its use in Philippians 2:25 (Epaphroditus the “messenger”). In Paul’s case it has reference to those chosen by Christ to occupy one of twelve seats and wield apostolic authority (Acts 1:15-26; 2 Corinthians 12:12). In the case of Barnabas the word likely carries the broader meaning of a “messenger.”

^b 14:15 **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.** There is a marked difference in Paul’s preaching here because of his audience. He did not start with Scripture as in the synagogue (13:16-41) because here he addressed pagans. Instead he started with simple truths of creation like he later did in Athens on Mars Hill (Acts 17).

^c 14:16-17 **In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 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.** How do you begin to explain the living God to a mob of simple country folks who worship the Pantheon? You ask: “Where did you get that bread?”

Paul chose to present the living God as the person behind rain, food and joy. Every human appreciates the blessing of food and pleasure. We would do well to let the unbelieving world see in us a regular acknowledgement of God’s continual provision and a genuine rejoicing in those blessings.

^d 14:18 **Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.** It is awkward when you are trying to direct people to bow the knee to Jesus and they start to bow the knee to you. Contrast the reaction of Paul and Barnabas to worship with that of Herod in Acts 12:21-23.

^e 14:19 **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.** Depraved humans are easily swayed from love to hate; from worship to murder. Paul looked dead.

^f 14:20 **But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.** Some have argued that this is the third heaven experience Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 12:2. This could not be the case because the “fourteen years” from his writing the Corinthians (A.D. 55) epistle would have put the humbling heavenly encounter several years before the events at Lystra recorded here.

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^a 14:1-20 It is noteworthy that Paul and Barnabas just went on preaching from town to town, even returning twice to the place that thought it had killed Paul. It is clear from Paul's preaching and letters that he fully relied on the sovereignty of God. The practical outworking for Christians who believe in God's absolute and loving control over all events and people in His universe is this:

1. You can know that people will respond to the Truth you present. It is that very Truth that God uses to draw sinners to repentance. Paul and Barnabas had both opposition *and* conversions everywhere they went.
2. You can be confident when you are opposed. Nothing "bad" can happen to you. Paul and Barnabas were only experiencing the fulfillment of Jesus' words in Matthew 24:9, "...you will be hated by all nations because of me." Could persecution have been a comfort to them?
3. You have hope to offer confused people. God has ordered his creation and revealed himself even to his enemies. Paul and Barnabas did not move on when they were opposed, but saw opposition as a sign that they should stay longer.