Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 14

Paul’s First Missionary Journey Ends
Notes on Acts Chapter 14

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Introduction - Paul’s First Missionary Journey (Itinerary)

This is a refresher on Acts 14 as that chapter pertains to Paul’s first missionary journey in approximately 45-47 AD. (See Note.)


The first journey began when Paul, Barnabas, and Mark (John Mark) set out from Antioch (Acts 13:4). This journey started after 44 AD and ended a “long time” (Acts 14:28) before 50 AD. We read this history in Chapter 14.

Then it was on to Iconium, where they abode a “long time” (Acts 14:3), Lystra, where Paul was stoned, but lived (Acts 14:19), and Derbe. Then they retraced their steps back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (in Pisidia) (Acts 14:21).

Paul and Barnabas went throughout Pisidia, Pamphylia, then to Perga, Attalia, and sailed back to Antioch in Syria (Acts 14:24-26)

The first journey ends in Antioch, Syria, where Paul and Barnabas stay there a long time (Acts 14:28).
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Chapter 14 - Paul’s First Missionary Journey Ends

Acts 14:1-7 - Iconium Divided over the Apostles

Acts 14:1-7: 1 Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. 5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel. (ESV)

[Note: The term “brothers” appears as a form of address several times in Acts. Stephen had used this form of address in his speech recorded at Acts 7:2 and 26. Peter used it (Acts 2:29; Acts 3:17). Paul used it (Acts 13:26 and 38; Acts 23:1, 5 and 6; Acts 28:17). It is reminiscent of Psalm 22:22: I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you. (ESV)]

Persistence in Mission and Witness

When Paul and Barnabas learned that they were to be harmed or killed, they left Iconium but continued preaching in Lystra and Derbe. They were persistent as Jesus had been. Jesus was persistent in His ministry getting up each day to face people’s apathy, ignorance (even from His own disciples), and hostility, and he continued doing so. He even stayed up nights praying, not sleeping, and then starting out the next day for a full day of work - to teach us, heal us, and even feed us. Persistence in mission may be somewhat like persistence in prayer. It is apparent that God is interested in us if we are interested in what interests Him. Think of the people whom we have met of whom we think most highly. Chances are they showed interest in us. So it may also be with God. Just as we cannot expect Jesus’ interest in interceding for us if we do not pray, and pray with our spirits, and be persistent in prayer, likewise, we cannot expect Jesus’ to empower our ministry if we do not pray and persist in our witnessing. Nor can we expect that any our mission - teaching, preaching, giving testimony to acquaintances - should succeed except by the power of Jesus and His Holy Spirit, who ever lives, interceding for us.

We are to make a business of testimony, and be earnest in it. We are to persist in being Christians by our acts and words as a beggar persists in asking alms or as a lost traveler in asking the way. Display our faith as a thing of value. All are welcome to the throne of grace, if they come in faith in Jesus - whether Jew, Gentile, atheist, unchurched, agnostic, young or old, rich or poor, high or low, manager or employee, learned or unlearned. The comparison is with earthly parents who pray, teach, correct, and encourage their children persistently out of love for them. With prayer and persistence of witnessing, the Holy Spirit will move people according the will of the Father to glorify the Son. Jesus’ teaching about prayer and persistence as it is found in Matthew 7:7-11, Luke 11:5-10, and Luke 18:1-8 applies also to prayer and persistence in our mission to witness. Luke 11:5-10 is quoted here.

Luke 11:5-10 And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock,
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and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (ESV)

Rabble Rousing

Although “a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed” the message presented by Paul and Barnabas, those Jews who did not believe chose not to ignore them but to create a public disturbance over them. Jesus tells us that we are to expect hostility and how we are to respond to it.

Matthew 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (ESV)

John 15:18-20: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.” (ESV)

Apostles Identified by Luke


Acts 14:4: [At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas received a mixed reaction to their preaching. Luke refers to them as apostles.] But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. (ESV)

Acts 14:14: [At Lystra, Paul and Barnabas received an unexpected reaction to their preaching. The people thought that they were gods. Luke refers to them as apostles.] But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, (ESV)

Acts 16:4: As they [Timothy, Paul, and Silas] traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles [the original apostles and Matthias] and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. (ESV)

Acts 14:8-20 - Paul and Barnabas Mistaken for Gods

Acts 14:8-20: 8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, 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. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” 18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. 19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded
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the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when
the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with
Barnabas to Derbe. (ESV)

[Note: Acts 14:15-17 records Paul’s first speech to Gentile pagans.]

Healing the Crippled Man

Commentators contrast the healing of the lame man in Acts 14:8-10 with the one in Acts 3:1-10
when Peter and John healed a lame man who had was begging for money. We read in Acts 3:1-10
how a man, lame from birth, asked Peter for alms. Peter told the man that he had no material
goods to give him, but that in the name of Jesus of Nazareth he should rise and walk. Peter
preached repentance, telling his audience of their sin in killing the Messiah and identifying Jesus
as the power that raised the lame man. By contrast, the lame man in Acts 14:8-10 did not ask for
anything but exhibited some sign of belief in Jesus because of Paul’s preaching. Without his
asking Paul for anything, Paul told him to stand up, and he stood up and walked. God told
Solomon (1 Kings 3:11-14) that He would not only give him the wisdom he prayed for, but also
riches and honor. Jesus teaches us to seek the Kingdom first and worldly needs will be satisfied
also.

Matthew 6:31-34: “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows
that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things
will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for
itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (ESV)

Paul and Barnabas Thought to Be Gods

A lesson repeated throughout acts is that we are to know the people to whom we are witnessing.
We ask the Holy Spirit to know when to speak (and when not), to help us know what to say and
how to say it, and even give us the words.

Luke 12:11-12: “And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do
not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will
Teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (ESV)

Jesus, however, had divine abilities in his earthly mission that we do not have. He knew
people’s attitudes and dispositions.

hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you
may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” - he said to the man who was
paralyzed - “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” (ESV)

Paul and Barnabas, although educated men aware of the Gentile world, had not anticipated the
reception that they would receive at Lystra. The people of Lystra became most excited -
emotionally aroused - over the physical appearance of their visitors combined with the miracle of
restoring the lame man to health. The people who were prepared to worship Paul and Barnabas
as gods were not Greeks or Romans, but native Lycaonians who lifted up their voices, saying in
Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” (Acts 14:11). The
association between Zeus and Hermes belonged to the religious beliefs of the native population,
rather than to that of the educated society of the colony. Their religion had a tradition that these
gods had visited them once before, were rejected by the native population, and destroyed them.
They did not want to repeat the same mistake. (See Note.)
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[Note: The native story was narrated by the Roman poet Ovid (43-17 BC) in *Metamorphoses VIII*, “The Story of Baucis and Philemon”.]

**Blessings of the One, True, and Living God**

In Acts 15-17 Paul attributed to only the One, True, Living God all of the blessings that his audience had credited to many gods. The thought is that God both overlooks ignorance and provides evidence of His existence - reveals His existence - in creation. That message is similar to his address at Athens (Acts 17:23-31) and his writing at Romans 1:18-32 and Romans 2:14-15. The message consists of the following ideas (See Note.):

- God has revealed Himself to the Gentiles in nature and conscience.
- His revelation is sufficient to make us responsible for knowing of His existence. We can have an “inner law”, a “light”, that tells us that He exists.
- Obedience to our “inner law”, God’s light in us, can merit God’s approval. Disobedience can justly merit His displeasure.
- Paul’s Gentile audiences have not followed obedience to God’s light, and have wickedly brought upon themselves the wrath of God and the penalties of His moral law.


Old Testament Scripture testifies to the nature of God as Paul described it in his protest against attempts to deify him and Barnabas (Acts 14:15-17).

- Jeremiah 14:22: *Are there any among the false gods of the nations that can bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are you not he, O Lord our God? We set our hope on you, for you do all these things.* (ESV)
- Jeremiah 5:24: [*God gave Jeremiah a message for rebellious Israel.]* “They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the Lord our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.’” (ESV)
- Leviticus 26:4: *then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.* (ESV)
- Psalm 104:27: *These all look to you, to give them their food in due season.* (ESV)

**Paul’s Audience**

Paul’s challenge (Acts 14:15-17) was to persuade his listeners of monotheism. This seemed to be a first step in Paul’s later preaching to Gentiles as alluded to in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

- 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10: *For they themselves [believers in Macedonia and Achaia] report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.* (ESV)

Up to this point in Acts we have seen the Christian message presented differently to different audiences, apparently because of each preacher’s assessment of the knowledge and needs of individual audiences. We see the following differences.

Acts 2:14-42 records the first Christian sermon. The apostle Peter spoke to “Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” and “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5 and 14) and people from abroad who were in Jerusalem for the feast. He had an audience who believed in the promised Messiah and told them that they had killed Him - Jesus. Peter elicited repentance from an audience that understood sin. They learned what they had to repent of.
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Acts 13:16-25 records Paul’s first sermon. It is to Jews and Jewish proselytes. He illustrated the continuity between the history of Israel and Jesus the Messiah emphasizing that the Scriptures foretold Jesus. He related the good news of redemption found in Old Testament prophecy and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Jesus. He emphasized the positive aspect of God’s kindness - His grace toward His people. He obliquely blamed Jews in Jerusalem for rejecting Jesus. Paul did not call for repentance on the part of his audience. He called for belief in Jesus as the Redeemer of both Jew and Gentile.

Reaction to the Christian Message - Then and Now

Throughout Jesus’ ministry He faced apathy, ignorance, and hostility.

Although the Gospels do not specifically describe apathy, it is easy to imagine that there were people who may not have fully believed - or had only a childhood-based acquaintance with - God’s promises, the Law, and the prophets. There may have been people who avoided the crowds around Him, and people in the crowd who lost interest and left.

The Gospels do describe ignorance. Ignorance often manifested itself in an honest inability to understand who He is or what He said. The following passages apply to our world today. He is our shepherd. We should pray to Him, and read, study, and discuss His Holy Word to hear His voice.

Hostility to Jesus and unwillingness to believe what He said and did are recorded in the Gospels. Opponents of Jesus adhered to the meaning of the Word (logos) as it had been passed down through oral tradition, adherence to the letter of the Law, but not adherence to the Word of God’s Messiah when He would come. They accuse Jesus of violating the Sabbath (John 5 and 9), blasphemy (John 5:17-18; 8:58; 10:24-28), false teaching (John 7:14-18; 18:19-24), and opposition to the nation (John 11:47-53).

(See Note.)

[Note: E. W. Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament]

Acts 14 does not suggest apathy to the Christian message, but rather ignorance of it. The ignorance of the Lycaonian people at Lystra caused them to welcome Paul and Barnabas as divine figures who they were not. However, people do not like to be disappointed. After Paul and Barnabas tried to disabuse them of their false hopes of visitation from pagan gods, many must have been disappointed and willing to listen to the voices of the Jewish dissenters. A mob became hostile, dragged Paul from the city and stoned him, leaving him for dead.

People like to mold God into their preconceived notions and sources of security and comfort. Some people respond with hostility when confronted by the truth of the Gospel. The threat of hostility is great even from within the Church. Remember how Jesus’ own disciples responded to His teaching about the Bread of Life and eating His flesh.

John 6:60-66: When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. (ESV)

There is also the danger of “softening” the Gospel message to gain a wider audience and allowing the preacher, and not the message, to become the focus of attention - good or bad. Both human nature and the way the world works confront our Pastors and members of our congregations with temptations to be admired and grow the congregation. Historically, there
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have also been Pastors and congregations who separated themselves and joined or founded new worship groups. We are not to ask the Lord to give us tasks equal to our abilities. Rather, we are to pray for the Lord to use His power in us to meet the sometimes seemingly impossible tasks He puts before us.

There is another danger that seems even scarier than just discussed. That is treating Jesus like a VIP to be honored but not necessarily to be believed or followed. The question before us since Jesus’ time on earth has been “What are we to do with Him?” (See Note.)

[Note: Lloyd Ogilvie, Acts of the Holy Spirit - God’s Power for Living]

Mark 5:16-17: And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. (ESV)

Mark 15:12: And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” (ESV)

Acts 4:15-16: But when they [the Jewish rulers, elders, and scribes] had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.” (ESV)

Persistence in Preaching the Christian Message

There is nothing to suggest that all Paul’s audience were not persuaded. The preaching at Lystra had more results than just the hostility of a mob. As Paul and Barnabas did, we must point to Jesus and say that the credibility of Christianity does not hinge on Jesus’ followers, but on Jesus himself. We must encourage ourselves and others to lay aside our feelings about institutions or people that represent Christianity to us, and let the focus be on Jesus. Paul and Barnabas clearly did this and were successful in making disciples at Lystra as noted in Acts 14:20: But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. (ESV) It is likely that the believers were a minority perhaps outnumbered by the mob. Possibly the disciples gave not only physical assistance but also prayed. Paul and Barnabas persevered. They returned to the town probably to encourage those who had believed them and settle them into some manner of practicing their newly gained faith. Matthew Henry commented on this as follows.

“All who are converted need to be confirmed in the faith; all who are planted need to be rooted. Ministers' work is to establish saints as well as to awaken sinners. The grace of God, and nothing less, effectually establishes the souls of the disciples. It is true, we must count upon much tribulation, but it is encouragement that we shall not be lost and perish in it.” (Commentary on the Whole Bible (Concise), “Acts 14”)

Hostility toward Christians from without the Church leaves us basically where the Church has always been - at odds with the world. However, that does not mean retreat. Christians should stop being surprised when they are persecuted. Jesus tells us we will be persecuted (as quoted below).

Matthew 5:11: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” (ESV)

Matthew 24:9: [Jesus tells us.] “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.” (ESV)

Some people say “I’m hostile to Christianity” rather than “I’m hostile to Jesus”. Most people have a good impression of Jesus even though they think his followers have been in error and
done horrible things in Jesus’ name. But we cannot “trash” Jesus because of what other people do. We need to cut through the emotion and identify the real issues.

Many attacks on the faith today come from the area of secular science, which can leave Christians confused about what parts of the Bible to believe. The debate over creation could be characterized as the “issues of all issues” facing the Church if it is to correctly communicate the reliability of God’s Word. If the first book of the Bible cannot be trusted then naturally one cannot be confident where the truth actually begins in Scripture.

Acts 14:21-28 - Paul and Barnabas Strengthen the Disciples

Acts 14:21-28: 21 When 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 that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples. (ESV)

Elders (Acts 14:23)

The terms we use to designate our pastoral leaders (e.g., pastor, elder, bishop, deacon) vary from one church group to another and from Western churches to Eastern. While there are three different words to offer perspective on who the elder is, what he does and how he does it, it is important to note that the words are used synonymously and refer to the same office and person. The three words are: presbuteros (Greek “elder”); episkopos (Greek “overseer”); and poimen (Greek “shepherd” or “herdsman”). The Greek presbuteros is the most commonly used word in the New Testament for church leaders. (See Notes.)

[Notes: From New Testament Greek Lexicon, “presbuteros”, “episkopos” and, “episkopos”; from Alexander Strauch, Biblical Eldership, Chapter 1; and frm Theopedia, “Elder”.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-2 and Titus 1:7, Paul drafts nearly identical lists of qualifications for elder and overseer, while 1 Peter 5:1-2 draws all three concepts together in one passage.

1 Peter 5:1-2: So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; (ESV)

The Apostles Spent Time with People

Acts 14 (27-28) closes with a statement about the Apostles’ approach to establishing new churches: “And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples. Luke mentions many times that the Apostles stayed with people and did not just preach and move on. He stayed apparently to ensure that a church took root at each location. In each of the following verses we read that the Apostles remained for a time with those who came to believe. Although not stated in all verses, the context indicates that they were probably teaching and preaching as exemplified by the following cited verses.

At Joppa Paul stayed for many days with a barber (Acts 9:43).
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The centurion’s family asked Peter to stay with them for some days (Acts 10:48).
Barnabas and Paul met with the church and taught a great many people for a whole year (Acts 11:26).
Barnabas, Paul, Judas, and Silas stayed with the brothers at Antioch for some time (Acts 15:35). Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.
At Corinth Paul stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God (Acts 18:11).
Paul spent many days at Corinth. At Ephesus, when the Jews asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined saying “I will return to you if God wills”. (Acts 18:18-22)
Paul lived in Rome two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him. (Acts 28:30-31).

Bibliography for Acts Chapter 14

  http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/acts.html