

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

TRAVEL NOTES

- A. To Iconium, 45 miles east of Pisidian Antioch.
- B. To Lystra, 20 miles south of Iconium.
- C. To Derbe, 60 miles southeast of Lystra
- D. To Syrian Antioch via Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Perga

TO ICONIUM AND LYSTRA: ACTS 14:1-20a

- A. At Iconium (1-7)
 - 1. Gospel proclamation (1-3)
 - a. Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium and spoke at the synagogue (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.*
 - 1) *Iconium*
 - a) This city was much more Greek than Roman and the population was primarily Phrygian, native to the area.
 - b) It had a large Jewish population.
 - c) It was on the main trade route connecting Ephesus to Syria.
 - 2) There was only one synagogue in the city.
 - a) It was not as large as the one in Pisidian Antioch.
 - b) It did have members who were influential enough to enlist local officials against Paul and Barnabas.
 - c) It appears that Paul and Barnabas shared ministry responsibilities, including speaking.
 - 3) Many Jews and Greeks believed.
 - a) Hearts were opened by the Holy Spirit.
 - b) They responded to the message of faith in Christ alone.
 - c) Paul and Barnabas were successful because they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Some Jews encouraged the Gentiles not to believe the Gospel message (2), *But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.*
 - 1) *unbelieving*
 - a) Literally, *disobedient*.
 - b) Those who heard the message but refused to believe.
 - 2) *poisoned their minds*
 - a) Literally, *caused their minds to think evil*.
 - b) Richard Lenski, *A uniformly used weapon against the gospel and its true believers is this process of poisoning the minds of those who as yet do not know the gospel.*
 - c) The unbelieving Greeks included Phrygians.
 - 3) *the brothers*
 - a) This surely refers to Paul and Barnabas.
 - b) Also, it probably refers to those who made professions of faith in Iconium.
 - 4) As in Pisidian Antioch, Jews led the opposition against the Gospel and its messengers.

c. Paul and Barnabas remained there for a long time empowered by the Lord (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.***

1) *so*

- a) Opposition was proof of God's working in people's hearts.
- b) Paul and Barnabas stayed to respond to those who would discredit their work.
- c) Their ministry would focus on evangelism and discipleship, resulting in the establishment of a church.

2) Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly for the Lord.

- a) Richard Lenski, *...free and open speaking that holds nothing back.*
- b) Note Paul's prayer for such boldness, Ephesians 6:19, 20, and *(pray) also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*
- c) Richard Lenski, *So many try to preach with an eye to their personal interest by toning down unpopular doctrines, flattering themselves that they are up-to-date, progressive, even wise. Not so these two great heralds.*

3) They witnessed *to the word of His grace*

- a) This was not their message but it was the message of God.
- b) The Gospel is a message of grace.
 - 1] It speaks of favor granted that is undeserved.
 - 2] It reveals the work by Jesus which enables grace to flow from God to man.

4) God supplied miraculous events confirming the message and the messengers.

- a) Paul would later remind them of God's working signs and wonders in order to validate His Gospel as a message of grace not works, Galatians 3:5-6, *Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?*
- b) Richard Lenski, *These signs and wonders the Lord appended as seals and credentials to the Word; it was like signing his own name to it. All those credentials stand to this day and are for this very reason not repeated; for genuine seals need no further seals to prove them genuine. If seals must have still other seals, this would prove only that none of them are sufficient, which is the claim of those who deny the reality of miracles.*
- c) Donald Barnhouse, *These signs and wonders were specially given to the apostles and early Christian church workers because there was no written New Testament as yet. Not a line of the New Testament had been written at this point, and there was no solid authority to which the apostles could point and say, “See, we’re preaching truth. You can check it in the Word of God!” There was no completed Word of God. So God enabled the apostles to perform wonders and signs to authenticate their ministry, but these wonders and signs would fade as God’s Word came into being.*

2. Responses to their ministry (4-7)

a. Some were for and others were against the Gospel message (4), ***But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.***

1) The Gospel of Christ divided the city even as Jesus predicted, Matthew 10:35, *For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.*

2) One must make a choice when the Gospel is proclaimed.

- a) Some rejected the message, especially the Jews.
- b) Others accepted the message by faith, especially the Gentiles.

- 3) Richard Lenski, *Paul and Barnabas filled the entire city with the sound of the gospel, filled it so that practically no person remained neutral. In this they had the aid of the hostile Jews. The more these agitated, the more the gospel became known. People simply had to go and hear what these men were teaching and doing...When light comes, darkness resents it; when righteousness appears, the unrighteous assail it; when life comes, the powers of death bestir themselves to destroy it.*
- 4) *Apostles is the general use of the term, those sent with authority as representatives of another.*

b. An attempt was made to harm Paul and Barnabas so they went to the region of Lycaonia (5-7), ***When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.***

- 1) A concerted effort was made to harm Paul and Barnabas.
 - a) The group included Jews, Gentiles and local officials.
 - b) Their intent was to stone them.
- 2) Paul and Barnabas learned of the plot and chose to preach elsewhere.
 - a) Kenneth Gangel, *The word for plot indicates a spontaneous reaction uncontrolled by reason and planning.*
 - b) Richard Lenski, *Paul and Barnabas are not cowardly but prudent. When it was necessary, Paul risked his life, otherwise he did not. His work had been completed in Iconium, the whole city knew about the gospel. The missionaries did not flee because they were defeated; they merely left one victory behind in order to start winning another.*
- 3) They headed east to the region of Lycaonia to preach the Gospel.
 - a) It included the cities of Lystra and Derbe, and surrounding cities in what we identify as Galatia, today.
 - b) A ministry change would become necessary because neither Lystra nor Derbe had a synagogue.
 - c) They would now be ministering in completely Gentile pagan cities.
 - d) Kenneth Gangel, *Surely Paul's wide education had prepared him to know he was entering pagan darkness. Lystra represented primitive idolatry, people who knew neither Hebrew religion nor Greek philosophy. Essentially, Lystra's population consisted of Roman military veterans, a "retirement center" for that vast army.*

B. At Lystra (8-20a)

1. Paul performed a miracle while proclaiming the Gospel (8-10), ***Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.***
 - a. A man crippled from birth listened intently to Paul speak.
 - 1) He had never walked.
 - 2) Richard Lenski, *Here was a case that was absolutely beyond human help.*
 - b. Paul noticed the man and knew he had faith to be made well.
 - 1) The man was believing God could heal him and that was all the faith he needed.
 - 2) This knowledge came from the Holy Spirit Who was preparing to do something miraculous.
 - 3) There was no synagogue in Lystra so God used another means of reaching the people, a miracle.
 - 4) J. Vernon McGee, *They came into these places without any New Testament with the message of the gospel. What were their credentials? How could they prove their message was from God? The sign gifts were their credentials—they needed them. Today we have the entire Bible, and what people need today is to study this Bible and to learn what it has to say.*

2. The crowd responded to the miracle by attempting to worship Paul and Barnabas (11-13), *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!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 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.*
 - a. The crowds were overwhelmed by the miracle and thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods.
 - 1) They tied Paul and Barnabas to a local legend, Richard Longenecker, *According to the legend, Zeus and Hermes once came to the Phrygian hill country disguised as mortals seeking lodging. Though they asked at a thousand homes, none took them in. Finally, at a humble cottage of straw and reeds, an elderly couple, Philemon and Baucis, freely welcomed them with a banquet that strained their poor resources. In appreciation, the gods transformed the cottage into a temple with a golden roof and marble columns. Philemon and Baucis, they appointed priest and priestess of the temple, who, instead of dying, became an oak and a linden tree. As for the inhospitable people, the gods destroyed their houses.*
 - 2) They took Barnabas for Zeus and Paul for Hermes, Stanley Toussaint, *Zeus was the chief god and Hermes the messenger...Why then would Barnabas be referred to as Zeus when Paul was the leader? The answer is that Paul was the spokesman and would therefore be called Hermes and Barnabas, the more retiring of the two, would be seen as Zeus, the dignified, behind-the-scenes god.*
 - 3) Tom Constable, *If Satan cannot derail Christian witness with persecution, he will try praise. Too much persecution has destroyed many preachers, and too much praise has ruined many others. One of the problems with miracles is that they often draw more attention to the miracle worker than to God.*
 - b. The priest of the temple of Zeus wanted to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas.
 - 1) He encouraged the crowd to join him in worshipping them.
 - 2) He brought oxen with decorative wreaths for the sacrifice.
3. Paul and Barnabas urged the crowd not to worship them (14-18)
 - a. Paul and Barnabas did not immediately know what the crowd was about to do but when they knew they tried to stop them (14-15a), *But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news,*
 - 1) As noted in verse 11, the crowd was speaking in Lycaonian and Paul and Barnabas did not immediately know what was taking place.
 - 2) When they realized what was happening, Paul and Barnabas tore their garments, a common way Jews expressed grief, and here, horror over blasphemy.
 - 3) They shouted that they were not gods, but that they were men just like everyone in the crowd.
 - 4) They declared that they had good news to share with them from the true God.
 - b. They proclaimed a message geared to those without a biblical background (15b-17), *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. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 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."*
 - 1) Paul proclaimed the reality of a living God.
 - a) He started with the fact that there is one true God, I. Howard Marshall, *With a pagan audience it was necessary to begin a stage further back with the proclamation of the one true God.*
 - b) He moved to natural revelation.
 - 1] God made everything.
 - 2] He is the creator and preserver of all men.
 - 3] Richard Lenski, *True natural theology leads to a correct knowledge of God; we need it even in the case of Christians. It contains no gospel yet is a step toward revealed theology with its gospel fulness.*
 - 2) He declared that God had allowed all nations to go their own way but there was always a witness available.
 - a) God has always manifested knowledge of Himself to Gentiles.
 - 1] It was through creation as seen in His provision of physical needs.
 - 2] It was through His work in the nation of Israel, note Romans 1.

- b) Paul was not saying that Gentiles who lived before the Apostolic age would not be judged but that they were accountable for their response to general revelation, Romans 1:18-20, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*
- 3) Now, God is giving new revelation concerning Himself to Jews and Gentiles.
 - a) It is the message of the Gospel.
 - b) It is truth made known to non-Jews for the first time.
- c. The people were barely restrained from offering sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas (18), *Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.*
 - 1) Paul's message declared it foolish to worship men when there is only one true God Who is to be worshiped.
 - 2) Many in the crowd were more impressed by the miracle than they were by the message.
 - 3) Yet, by God's grace, the sacrifice did not take place.
- 4. Jews from Antioch and Iconium incited the crowds to stone Paul (19-20a), *But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city,*
 - a. Jews from Antioch and Iconium talked the crowds into stoning Paul.
 - 1) Their hatred for Paul and his message took them to Lystra in hopes of destroying him.
 - 2) Possibly, converts in Antioch and Iconium were a constant reminder of the need to get rid of Paul.
 - 3) It appears that the Jews were more persuasive than was the message from Paul.
 - b. Paul was stoned and presumed dead.
 - 1) Disciples gathered around Paul who had condoned Stephen's stoning and now was the one stoned by mob violence.
 - 2) Timothy was probably one of the disciples who looked down at the lifeless body of Paul.
 - 3) It appeared that the First Missionary Journey had ended.
 - c. Paul rose up and went back into Lystra.
 - 1) He may have been knocked unconscious by a stone.
 - 2) Paul mentioned this event in 2 Corinthians 11:25, *Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;*
 - 3) Some believe he died and was restored to life, 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, *I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.*
 - 4) We do know that Paul would live to proclaim Jesus another day.

CONCLUSION

- A. The Gospel is at the center of the battle between good and evil.
- B. Everyone takes sides, some for the Gospel and others against it.
- C. God confirms His message and His messengers as He sees fit.
- D. Only God is to be worshiped.