

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 14:19-28 | Session 37 | Stoned But Not Suppressed

Continuing on their first missionary journey to spread the gospel, Paul and Barnabas entered the city of Lystra where they healed a man crippled from birth. Upon seeing the miracle, the pagan people of the city thought Paul and Barnabas were gods come down from heaven; Barnabas they called Jupiter, and Paul Mercurius. As the priest of the people began to sacrifice oxen to the gods, Paul and Barnabas pleaded with them to stop and not do such a thing. After all, “We are also men of like passions with you...turn from these vanities.” Verse 18 says, **And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice to them.** In other words, with much difficulty they convinced them not to sacrifice. That might have solved the problem and Paul and Barnabas could have continued preaching the gospel to the Jews of Lystra and even the pagan Gentiles, but things changed very quickly.

Verse 19—

And their came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium. We get the impression that the Jews (Ioudaios= Judeans) were following Paul and Barnabas. I am going to speculate the **Antioch** here is **Antioch Pisidia**. Remember, it was there Paul first voiced the grace gospel (Acts 13:38-39), and the Jews (same, Judeans) there didn’t like what they heard insomuch they *were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.* It was in **Antioch Pisidia** that Paul and Barnabas *shook off the dust of their feet against them.* In **Iconium** you will recall, as Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel, *the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.* Paul and Barnabas got word they were going to be stoned and they *fled unto Lystra and Derbe.* Now, they are being hunted.

The crowd in Lystra changed their minds quickly. This same *fickleness* of the masses is common. We will see it in Acts 28:4-6, but with the opposite crowd emotion; there they first thought Paul was a murderer, and then changed their mind and said he was a god. Likewise, recall when Jesus entered Jerusalem the week before his death, the crowds were shouting “Hosana!” but just a few days later, “Crucify him!”

The Judeans join in with the pagan idolators of many gods to **persuaded the people** of Lystra to kill the one preaching only One God.. **They stoned Paul, drew (dragged) him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.** The law stated stoning was to be administered at the gates of the city, or outside the city. Here it appears they stoned him in the city, and, supposing (thinking) he was dead, dragged him outside.

Verse 20—

Was Paul dead? He should have been dead, but he apparently survived. There is no mention of the miraculous here **as the disciples stood round about him.** Paul stated in other passages that he *often faced death* (2 Cor. 1:9-10; 11:23,25). The **disciples** mentioned are probably those who heard his grace message and believed. **He rose up, and came into the city.** Most likely they washed his wounds and cared for him, **and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.** The next time you wake up and decide to not go to work because you have a slight headache, think of Paul!

Verse 21—

Having just been left for dead in Lystra, they arrived in neighboring Derbe where they **preached the gospel to that city.** For how long, we do not know. But Paul never stopped to have a pity party, he continued doing what he had been *called* to do. After this, bravely, they reverse course and go back the same way they came to **Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Pisidia).** (See your map of Paul’s journeys).

Verse 22—

Here is a problem verse for us to deal with. The first part is not too difficult, **confirming...and exhorting them to continue in the faith.** Through sound teaching, Paul was accomplishing these things. The Greek word for **confirming** is *episterizo* which can be translated, to strengthen. Under grace we cannot lose our faith, but we can certainly lose the *strength of our faith.*

It’s the second half of the verse that is problematic for the grace believer. Along with **confirming...and exhorting**, Paul says **that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.** It seems that Paul is saying, tribulation is a prerequisite to entering the Kingdom. That goes against the message of salvation by grace through faith and not of works (or tribulation). Who are the **“we”** Paul speaks of? If the **we** refers to the Jewish nation, then Paul is stating a truth regarding Israel, they will go through tribulation before they are able to enter the kingdom of God. The last time this form of pronoun was used was in Acts 11:15 where it is clearly referring to the Jews. I think it is safe to say Paul is referring to the Jewish nation.

Verse 23—

Paul and Barnabas **ordained**, or appointed **elders in every church.** It is a fact they appointed multiple **elders** (we would say *pastors*). The word **ordained** means, *a vote, or they lifted up their hand to choose.* The question is does this verse support multiple pastors within a local church? I don’t believe so. Literally, the passage can read, *“And when they had appointed elders by assembly...”* Certainly, the mainline evangelical church today believes there should be multiple elders within a local church (I once held that position). But are they correct? We can’t prove it from this passage, but we could certainly begin building our case of one pastor per church from passages like 1st Timothy 3:1-13.

And had prayed and fasting, them commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. Fasting is rarely mentioned in the N.T. and only one other time in Paul’s writings (1 Cor. 7:5). We probably shouldn’t build an entire doctrine of fasting from two scant verses.

Verses 24-28—

Paul and Barnabas head home, back to **Antioch** in Syria from where they were first sent. Notice there was no denomination that sent them, it was the local church.

It becomes very clear from verse 27, that it was on this journey that the *church* as we know it today, or *The body of Christ*, began. Paul says when they got back to their sending church in Antioch **they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.** We could assume that when they left Antioch on their journey, the church there was sending them to go as missionaries and spread the gospel about Jesus as Messiah. Somewhere along the course of the trip, Paul received the revelation of the mystery of the body of Christ (Ephesians 3:1-9). We have speculated this revelation was given sometime in chapter 13 when Saul changes his name to Paul, and when Paul voiced the grace message in 13:38-39.

The passage doesn’t tell us the reaction of the Jews in Antioch to Paul’s missionary update, but it must have been positive since **they abode long time with the disciples.**

With this new *body of Christ* established the question will arise among the Judeans, what does a Gentile have to do to be a believer? Some were teaching they had to be circumcised or they were not really saved. We’ll look at that next time.