



• Lesson 4 (Acts 14) •
Speaking Boldly For the Lord

We pick back up in this lesson with Paul and Barnabas in the midst of their first “missionary journey.” We last left them in the city of Antioch in the region of Pisidia of Asia Minor. Paul and Barnabas had boldly rebuked some Jews who were intent on contradicting the message of the gospel and reviling them in the process: “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). Luke documents the spread of the word of the Lord throughout the whole region (13:49). Having been driven out of the district of Pisidia (13:50), Paul and Barnabas now travel 90 miles southeast to Iconium. Much more than simply documenting meaningless history, Luke is recording for us the beginning of the churches of Galatia to which Paul will later write his famous letter (Gal 1:1-2).

Potential and Poison in Iconium

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. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. (Acts 14:1-2)

- ⇒ Luke uses strong language in Acts 14:2. How might these unbelieving Jews have stirred up and “poisoned” the minds of the Gentiles in Iconium against Paul and his companions?

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. (Acts 14:3)

- ⇒ Read Luke’s phrasing carefully. Who does he want us to recognize as the main character of this narrative? And how is this main character “bearing witness” and “granting”? To what is Luke drawing our attention? What does he want us to understand?

But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. 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. (Acts 14:4-7)

- ⇒ Luke describes Paul and Barnabas as “apostles” in Acts 14:4 and 14:14. The designation has been used to describe someone who had traveled with Jesus during his earthly ministry and seen him risen from the dead—specifically, one of “the Twelve” (Acts 1:21-26). If the word (*apostolos*) carries the general meaning of “one who is sent,” in what way were Paul and Barnabas “apostles”?

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Lystra was about 40 miles to the southeast of Iconium and **Derbe** was about 20 miles farther to the east. **Lycaonia** had been an ethnic province of Asia Minor in pre-Roman times, but in A.D. 25 the cities were incorporated as Roman colonies into the Roman province of Galatia.



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. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done... (Acts 14:8-11a)

- ⇒ How could Paul “look intently” at this crippled man and “see” that he had faith to be made well?
- ⇒ The vast majority of Lystra’s population were Gentiles; there is no record or evidence of a Jewish synagogue having been there. With that in mind, was there an even greater purpose behind this miracle than enabling a crippled man to walk?



Zeus (Jupiter) was believed to be the head of the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses. **Hermes** (Mercury) was regarded as Zeus' messenger. One ancient writer named Iamblichus described Hermes as the god "who is the leader in speaking" (*De misteriis*, 1.1).

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. 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, 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." Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. (Acts 14:11-18)

- ⇒ What does it say about Paul and Barnabas that they would refuse the worship of these Lycaonians? Is there anything we should learn as modern disciples from their example in this instance?
- ⇒ Why would Paul and Barnabas describe what the Lycaonians were doing as "vain things"?
- ⇒ Reflect on the message of Acts 14:15-17. What do Paul and Barnabas want these people in Lystra to understand?

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, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 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. 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. (Acts 14:19-23)

- ⇒ What does it say about these Jews that they would travel a hundred miles from Antioch to oppose the work of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra?

In recounting his sufferings as an apostle, Paul will later describe himself as "often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned" (2 Cor 11:23-25). Even later he will write to Timothy, who was from Lystra (Acts 16:1), "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me" (2 Tim 3:10-11).



- ⇒ Paul will later describe himself in a letter to saints who live in this very region as bearing on his body "the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17). Take the time to meditate on Acts 14:21-22. How would this have been a particularly poignant and powerful message coming from Paul, imagining what his body must have looked like at the time?
- ⇒ Why would the appointing of elders in every church (14:23) have been a high priority for Paul and Barnabas?

Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 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. (Acts 14:24-28)

⇒ **THOUGHT QUESTION:** Paul will use the expression of a “door” being opened on multiple occasions:

...a wide door for effective work has opened to me...
(1 Cor 16:9)

...a door was opened for me in the Lord... (2 Cor 2:12)

...pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ... (Col 4:3)

What do the New Testament writers mean by the use of that phrase? How should the idea behind the phrase shape our own perspective and efforts as disciples today?

A-C-T-S made personal

Based on my study of Acts 14:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture reminded me to **evaluate**...

T - rust: my **faith** in my Savior has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

