

## Acts 14

- Picking up where we left off in chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas have returned to the synagogue as requested
  - They preached a second time, or at least they tried to preach
    - The second trip to the synagogue resulted in the Jewish leaders in the synagogue to contradict Paul's teaching and blaspheme
    - Blaspheming here means they were speaking blasphemous things against the Christ, Jesus
      - Though the Jewish leaders themselves were unaware of their own blasphemy of course
  - As a result of their mistreatment of Paul and the message of the Gospel, Paul declares that they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life
    - Before we move into the rest of the chapter, let's take a moment to consider what Paul has just declared
    - Is Paul implying they have not earned eternal life?
      - Clearly, this isn't the proper understanding of Paul's words
      - Paul himself wrote on numerous occasions that salvation only comes by faith in Christ apart from any works
    - So what does "unworthy" mean in this context?
      - First, the word in Greek is actually two words: ou + axios
        - Uo is the negative prefix no, not or "un"
        - Axios, has a variety of meanings, all similar but subtly different
          - Usually it means fitting or in keeping with or deserving
          - We get the English word axiomatic from the same root, which means self-evident
      - When taking the negative of the word axios in this context, the meaning becomes "self-evidently not in keeping with"

- So Paul says that when the Jewish leaders heard the Gospel and responded with blaspheme, they were repeating the sins of the Pharisees in Jesus' day
  - And self-evidently, their reaction proved (or judged) them to not be those who were intended to receive the Gospel
  - They were unworthy in the sense that God had not determined to grant them his grace
- This interpretation will become even clearer in a minute as we read further and see Luke contrast the Jewish leaders with Gentiles

[Acts 13:48](#) ¶ When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

[Acts 13:49](#) And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

- In contrast to the Jewish leaders, the Gentiles in the synagogue react very differently
  - They gladly received the news of God's mercy through Christ
    - This is opposite of the Jewish leaders who received the news with jealousy
  - Then the Gentiles glorified the word of the Lord
    - While the Jewish leaders had contradicted it and blasphemed
  - Finally, those Gentiles who had been appointed to eternal life believed, Luke says
    - One of the clearest and most powerful affirmations of predestination found in the New Testament
    - Who is the One doing the appointing in this verse?
      - Luke doesn't mention the subject, but the answer is easy
      - The thing being appointed is eternal life
      - And Who can appoint someone to eternal life except God Himself?
    - So God is appointing certain Gentiles to eternal life
      - And because they are appointed to eternal life, they believe

- Notice the order here
  - Those who have been appointed (past tense) are the one who believed in this moment
  - Their belief didn't create the appointment, as if to suggest that they were the ones creating this outcome by their decision
  - Rather, Luke makes it clear that it was God's divine appointment to eternal life which precipitated their belief in the Gospel
- We can see further proof of this in the way Luke contrasted the Gentiles with the Jewish leaders
  - While the Jewish leaders were jealous, the Gentiles were joyous
  - While the Jewish leaders were blaspheming, the Gentiles were glorifying
  - And while the Jewish leaders gave evidence that God had judged them undeserving, the Gentiles gave evidence that they had been appointed to eternal life
  - Luke has taken the two scenes and intentionally set them in opposition to make a point about God's sovereignty
    - We can see the difference wasn't Paul's preaching style
    - Or differences in the audiences' intellect
    - The only difference to explain why one group rebelled and another received was that God rejected one and appointed the other
- Furthermore, we know this was God's plan from the beginning, according to God's word
  - The Jewish people will be given eyes to see not and ears to hear not
  - While God says He would be found by a people who were not His people
- And so Luke says on this basis, the word of God was being spread throughout the whole region

[Acts 13:50](#) But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

[Acts 13:51](#) But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

[Acts 13:52](#) And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

- When the Jews see Paul and Barnabas receive a hearing among the Gentiles, it must have been intolerable
  - Not only were Paul and Barnabas teaching a truth that angered the Jews
    - But the Gentile dogs were actually believing and declaring Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah
    - This was too much to bear
  - So the Jews stir up two different camps against Paul and Barnabas
    - First, they stir up devout women of prominence
      - The Greek word for devout is literally God-fearing, which is a reference to proselytes
      - These were prominent Gentile women who followed the Jewish law and customs but did not receive Christ
    - Secondly, they stir up the leading men of the city
      - From the Greek, it's implied that these men were the husbands of these women
      - This makes sense because the women wouldn't have had power on their own to force Paul and Barnabas out of the city
    - The women were Gentile converts to Judaism and they convinced their powerful husbands, who were not proselytes themselves, to push Paul out of the city
      - Remember, this is a Gentile city so the Jewish leaders needed the support of these Gentile leaders to get rid of Paul
      - So they stir up the wives, to stir up their husbands, to get rid of Paul and Barnabas

- Paul and Barnabas then perform the apostolic ritual of judgment prescribed by Jesus
  - They take off their sandals and shake the dust in the direction of the town
    - Jesus gave these instructions in the Gospels, recorded in Matt, Mark and Luke

[Luke 9:5](#) "And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

- This was the instruction Jesus gave the apostles particularly in this day
  - As the message of the Gospel first arrives, there is an opportunity for the city
  - But if the city forced them out, then the apostles were to perform this symbolic act to break fellowship
- But despite the rejection, the disciples were continually filled by the Holy Spirit and were joyful
  - Take a moment to reflect on that fact
  - The joy of the early believers was a true spiritual joy found in their relationship with the Lord
    - They were persecuted, they were poor in many cases
    - And they were often rejected by their families and cultures
    - And yet they were joyful because of their faith and the hope it gave them for eternal life
  - How often do we say we're having a bad day or we experience a bad mood
    - That's normal, of course, but it shouldn't be for a Christian
    - The world's emotions and attitudes wax and wane with their circumstances
      - But a Christian's attitude shouldn't vary with what happens in the world

- Because our focus and source of happiness should be in the eternal heavenly realm
- Perhaps easier said than done, but the next time you feel a pity party coming on, ask yourself this
  - Are your circumstances worse than the first century believers who were dying for their faith?
  - And yet they were continually filled with joy because of their faith
- So Paul and Barnabas move on to Iconium
  - This town was about 85 miles southeast of Antioch
    - It was unique as a bastion of Greek culture largely unpolluted by the Romans
      - It had a reputation as resistant to Roman conquest and influence
      - It's modern-day Konia in Turkey
    - It was situated in an oasis-like setting
      - Surrounded by deserts, it occupied a fertile lush plain of orchards and farms
      - It was a successful town selling its produce on the busy road that ran through the town
- The story in Iconium will sound very familiar to us

[Acts 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.

[Acts 14:2](#) But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.

[Acts 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.

- As always, Paul hits the synagogue first to preach to Jews
  - But as before, both Jews and Gentiles hear the message, and both groups see converts

- And like before, the Jews are disturbed by this development
  - And since it was a Greek city, their response was to appeal to the Gentile leaders and convince them to run Paul and Barnabas out of town
  - And this tactic also resulted in the Gentiles in the city becoming embittered toward the believers in the city (the brethren)
    - This means that the movement had reached a point where there was an active church body
    - But now they were a target of hostility among the Gentiles
- Interestingly, the apostles determined to stay there a long time despite the opposition
  - Apparently the opposition couldn't force the Apostles out of the city
    - And this was ultimately to the city's benefit since it meant there wouldn't be any "sandal shaking" in their case
  - But their stay was made possible by their reliance on the Lord
    - It was Christ Who allowed them to be bold in the face of opposition and to stand against it
    - And the word they preached was the word of grace
    - As the Lord granted signs and wonders
- Here again we have a wonderful testimony of God's sovereignty found in Luke's narrative
  - Compare Iconium to Salamis
    - In Salamis, the opposition succeeded in running Paul out of town
      - And the result was the town got the sandal treatment
    - In Iconium the Jews take the same tactic, yet this time Paul can remain

- And he remains in the face of opposition because the Lord makes the stay possible
- And they are given power to perform miracles and signs
- We should ask that if they can manage to stay in one city and perform miracles despite persecution, why did they have to leave the earlier city?
  - Luke gives us the answer
  - The Lord made it possible in one city while calling them to leave in another case
    - In fact, Paul's willingness to shake his sandal was a testimony that he believed his departure was the Lord's will for that city
    - So Paul was simply declaring by his symbolic act that the city's destiny had been set by God
- Eventually the opposition gets (or is given?) the upper hand

[Acts 14:4](#) But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

[Acts 14:5](#) And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,

[Acts 14:6](#) they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;

[Acts 14:7](#) and there they continued to preach the gospel.

- Once a plot was uncovered to kill Paul and Barnabas, they decided it was time to leave
  - And they flee to surrounding cities to continue preaching
  - We might ask at this point how did Paul know to flee in this moment
    - Why didn't he assume he should stay in place and suffer death if necessary to preach the gospel?
    - The simple answer is run if you can
      - There is a difference between being willing to die for your faith and inviting it
      - Paul was always willing to die, and he knew one day he would

- But he made every effort to survive expecting that when the time came to die for the Lord, the outcome would be inevitable
- Then comes one of the more humorous and yet tragic moments in Paul's ministry

[Acts 14:8](#) ¶ At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

[Acts 14:9](#) 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,

[Acts 14:10](#) said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

[Acts 14:11](#) 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."

[Acts 14:12](#) And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

[Acts 14:13](#) 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.

- Paul comes to Lystra with Barnabas and performs this miracle while preaching the Gospel
  - Lystra was south of Iconium and was very pagan in the Roman style
  - The man Paul heals here was crippled from birth
    - Imagine the miracle...not only is he healed but he learns to walk instantly
    - And the basis for his healing was his faith, which Paul surmised
  - The crowds respond to the sight of the healing in an appropriate but uninformed way
    - They see the healing as supernatural and credit it to the work of deity
      - But they wrongly credit it to the Roman and Greek gods
  - Notice they aren't speaking in Greek, which Paul understood
    - They speak in a language known only to the Lycaonian people
    - The significance of this is that Paul and Barnabas don't immediately understand what's happening around them

- The people give names to Paul and Barnabas
  - They say that Barnabas must be Jupiter, a Roman god
    - In Greek, Jupiter is Zeus
    - Statues of Zeus show a tall bearded man, which tells us something of Barnabas' physical stature and appearance
  - They say that Paul must be Mercury, the Roman name for the Greek God Hermes
    - They see Paul as Hermes because he speaks the most
    - Mercury is known as the herald of the gods
    - He was the son of Zeus and was also short
      - Perhaps Paul was not only shorter than Barnabas but also a younger
  - The people begin to prepare a sacrifice to these gods

The sudden urge to sacrifice to two human beings who were mistakenly identified as the gods Jupiter and Mercury can be understood from the background of the legend of Baucis and Philemon. This legend was recorded by the Roman historian Ovid. The legend says that Jupiter and Mercury came down disguised as men, but no one in that area was willing to provide hospitality to them except one elderly couple named Baucis and Philemon. The two gods destroyed the local population for its lack of hospitality, but Baucis and Philemon became the priest and priestess of the temple of Jupiter because of their hospitality. Because of the legend prevalent in that city, and because they had just seen a miracle, they felt that the two gods had come again. Not wanting to be destroyed, they were ready to offer sacrifices. - A. Fruchtenbaum

- And still Paul and Barnabas don't understand what's happening in their midst
  - At least not until they see the animals being prepared as a sacrifice
    - Perhaps some of the crowd were starting to prostrate themselves before Paul and Barnabas in worship
  - Whatever it triggered their understanding, Paul and Barnabas eventually figured out what was happening

[Acts 14:14](#) But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

[Acts 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.

[Acts 14:16](#) " In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

[Acts 14:17](#) 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."

[Acts 14:18](#) Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

- At the news of what was happening, the apostles tear their clothing as a sign of their intense dismay over the circumstances
  - And they tell the crowd to cease worshipping them
    - They declare themselves to be men of the same nature as the crowd itself
    - And they reiterate they bring the gospel for the very purpose that it would replace - not encourage - their idol worship
  - Paul calls their worship of these Roman gods vain, because idol worship is empty and self-serving
    - Consider the meaning of the word vain
      - Empty, void, prideful
    - All these things are true in describing the futility of worshipping objects made in our own image
  - Paul then goes on to describe the true God Who these Romans have never known
    - Paul says God is the Author of Creation
    - Who in generations past permitted the Gentiles to go their own way
  - This is the definitional distinction of the Church Age since Pentecost
    - Before the Gentile people of the world were largely outside the grace of God

- The Jewish people were the chosen people and Gentiles were not

[Eph. 2:11](#) ¶ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands —

[Eph. 2:12](#) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[Eph. 2:13](#) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- Paul later says in Galatians that he was the one blessed to have the mission to usher Gentiles into the family of God

[Eph. 3:8](#) To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

[Eph. 3:9](#) and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

[Eph. 3:10](#) so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

- Paul's efforts to stop the crowd were only partially successful, since they were still trying to sacrifice

[Acts 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.

[Acts 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.

[Acts 14:21](#) After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

[Acts 14:22](#) strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

[Acts 14:23](#) When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- Here for the first time we see organized opposition to the Gospel
  - Paul and Barnabas have been moving from Antioch to Cyprus to Iconium and upsetting Jews in each place
    - Now those Jews have traveled 90 miles to find Paul and continue to persecution

- They succeed in convincing the populace in Lystra that Paul should be killed, and they begin to stone him in an act of mob violence
- We don't know where Barnabas is in all this, but apparently he escapes the crowd
- Paul is left for dead and dragged outside the city
  - Obviously, Paul wasn't dead but merely unconscious
  - Some believers come to his rescue outside the city, and he is revived
    - There is no suggestion of a miraculous return from the dead in these verses, so the the best interpretation is to assume Paul was simply injured but not seriously
    - Nevertheless, the speed with which Paul revives and returns to the city and continues his journeys does suggest a miraculous strengthening
  - He can re-enter the city because Paul's attackers would have returned to their home towns assuming Paul to be dead
    - The residents of Lystra were not Paul's enemies
- Finally, Paul uses this experience to teach a lesson to the church in Lystra, a lesson he will repeat many times in his letters
  - The church will undergo many tribulations as it awaits entry into the Kingdom of God
  - This is a basic principle of the Christian faith
    - All generations have and will experience tribulation at the hands of unbelievers who are driven by the enemy from behind the scenes
    - Satan opposes God and Christ and so he opposes you as well
    - And the world is filled with unbelief, children of their father the devil, who stand ready to do his bidding