

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ
Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 12

Day One: The Risks and Rewards of Service

Acts 14 brings the first missionary journey to a close. Here we pick up Paul and Barnabas in Iconium and by the end of the chapter return them to Antioch in Syria. This chapter will take us into the realm of uncivilized pagan culture where superstitious behavior rules the day, proving once again that God often uses opposition to His word to create occasions for the gospel to be preached.

Iconium was a part of the Roman province of Galatia but its cultural and social influence was more Greek than Roman. Known for its beauty and prosperity, Iconium was bordered to the south by forests and plains and to the north by tall mountains. Here the missionaries would repeat their familiar pattern of going first to the synagogue to preach. Paul had not given up on the Jews and this time the persecution against them would allow for a different result—they would remain for a considerable length of time.

Read Acts 14:1–28.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord. Write down your first impressions.

Memory verse: Acts 14:22 Write out the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.

1. Using Acts 14:1–7 as your reference point, consider the following . . .
 - a. What do we learn about the result of Paul and Barnabas' preaching?

- b. Who stirred up the unbelievers? How?

This time Luke uses an interesting phrase to describe the gospel: *word [message] of His grace*. He links it with the accompanying signs and miracles unique to the apostles to remind us of the transitional nature of this book and because there was as yet no completed written Word of God. In other words, as Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly, it was the Lord himself who bore witness to the *word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands* (v. 3). Hebrews 2:4 speaks of this kind of miraculous intervention: *God bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will*.

2. What ultimately happened over time as the result of their stay in Iconium?

A “violent attempt” [plot] was made by both Jews and Gentiles and *rulers*. This conveys a strong spontaneous reaction that is uncontrolled by reason or planning and accompanied by those in positions of authority. Once the violence erupted, the apostles made their way to Lystra, preaching to those in the small towns and villages in the surrounding regions. Their flight crossed more than geographical boundaries—it also took them to a new political climate as well.

Day Two: One Gospel, Different Responses

Read Acts 14:8–20 for review.

Paul and Barnabas left Pisidia Antioch and Iconium unscathed, but the manifestations of persecution would catch up with them in Lystra, a place known for its pagan idolatry. We note from the text that Paul was apparently preaching as he became aware of a man listening nearby who he discovered was lame. God had given Paul the spirit of discernment in realizing this man had the faith to be healed. And what we see playing out in verses 8–20, are four responses to the message of the gospel going forth. We'll examine these more closely in Deeper Discoveries in an attempt to peel back the layers of what each one means and what we might derive from it.

Deeper Discoveries ~

1. *The lame man's response to the Word* (Vv. 8–10): What is the lesson to be discovered and is there a personal application?

2. *The crowd's response to the lame man's healing* (Vv.11–13): What is the lesson to be discovered and is there a personal application?

3. *The apostle's response to the crowd* (Vv.14–18): What is the lesson to be discovered and is there a personal application?

4. *The disciple's response to Paul's suffering* (Vv.19–20): What is the lesson to be discovered and is there a personal application?

Note: The believers in Lystra who stood by Paul were of a minority, new in their faith, but not afraid to stand with him in his hour of need. This was the only stoning Paul ever endured (2 Cor. 11:25). Some think that this is the moment when Timothy witnessed the event and it eventually led to his relationship with Paul (2 Timothy 3:10–11).

Many commentators also agree that it is this event described in Acts 14 that Paul speaks about in 2 Corinthians 12 where he is caught up into heaven and heard things that he could not talk about. As a result, Paul was given a thorn in the flesh so that his dependence would be upon God and not upon himself. The disciples in Lystra that encircled Paul on the ground that day thought him to be quite dead, and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Day Three:

Taking Care of Business

Read Acts 14:21–28 for review.

After preaching the gospel in Derbe and bringing many new souls into the kingdom of God, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Thus began their journey homeward. Take a look at your Bible map to see that they could have chosen a route that was much easier to travel and not nearly so dangerous. But they traveled back through the same cities where they endured persecution and suffering to minister to the believers they had made on their earlier visits.

1. Consider their determined purpose in going back. From Vv. 22–23, what insight you gain about how they:
 - a. *Strengthened the disciples*—
 - b. *Exhorted the disciples*—
 - c. *Organized the believers*—
 - d. *Commended the believers*—
 - e. Had Paul and Barnabas taken the shorter easier route home, what might have happened to these new believers in the faith?

Paul's word of encouragement and truth to the believers at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch is our memory verse this week: "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (v. 22).

2. In reflecting back on this first journey, how would Paul later state this truth to Timothy, his son in the faith? 2 Timothy 3:12

Before leaving for home, Paul did what would allow him to leave this young flock of believers and have peace of mind—he commended them to the Lord with prayer and fasting (v. 23). He knew it wouldn't be easy for them, they too would endure persecution; but Paul left them an example they could follow. He had to trust them to God.

3. Personal: Is there anyone or anything in your life that you need to give to the Lord? Perhaps with a time of prayer and fasting? In a sentence, please write down the person or the need and commit it to Him. Then trust Him to undertake with the answer!

Day Four:

The Homecoming

Paul's first missionary journey was his shortest in time and distance—encompassing 1,400 miles and lasting two years (46–48 A.D.); but it established Paul as the leader in spreading the gospel. Two years after their initial departure, Paul and Barnabas sailed back home to Antioch: “And gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples (Vv. 27–28).

Look back for a moment at Acts 13:1–4a. Recall who sent Paul and Barnabas out and the anticipation of such a unique and historical adventure. Scan through chapters 13 and 14 again to glimpse the highlights of their trip once they came full circle.

1. How do you think Paul felt and what he thought at the end of his first missionary journey?

2. Personal: Recall a trip you were really excited to take. What do you remember most about it?

- a. How did you feel once you returned home?

- b. What was the first thing you did upon your arrival?

Eccl. 7:8 says, “The end of a thing is better than its beginning.” For Paul and Barnabas, coming home to the disciples and sharing their experiences must've been somewhat like a welcomed retreat coupled with a jubilant celebration! This first one would set the template and tone for the remaining three missionary journeys yet to follow. Paul's method, we will learn, was always the same, he used one approach: faith in Jesus Christ based on Old Testament scriptures pointed at the Jews; and for the Gentiles the goodness and greatness of God in offering His gift of salvation to all. This he accomplished without the use of the modern technology, transportation, and telecommunication we have available to us today! Paul utilized the two simple tools that are at the disposal of every believer in the world: Truth and testimony.

3. As you ponder the person God uses and the ways He uses them to get His Word out to the world, how does it motivate your perspective and priorities? Please explain.

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Ask God to help you use His truth coupled with your personal testimony to get the gospel out to those around you.

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.
