

Acts

Part 35 – “The Good News that Divides”

Acts 14:1-7

In the events Luke describes, the Apostle Paul is in the midst of his first missionary journey which has taken him from Antioch to Cyprus to Pisidion Antioch (Acts 13) and now to Iconium. From Iconium, he and Barnabas will travel to Lystra (14:8-20) and from Lystra to Derbe and Perge (14:21-28). Iconium was located in the region of Galatia and may well have been one of the locations to receive his letter to the Galatians.

The missionary work of Paul and Barnabas is met with opposition and persecution. God confirms their preaching with signs and wonders. The central work of their missionary efforts is preaching and the content of their preaching is the gospel of the Lord Jesus. The experiences of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium parallel their experience in Pisidion Antioch: preaching in the synagogue, the conversion of Jews and Gentiles, opposition from unbelieving Jews, continuing to preach until their lives are in grave danger, taking the gospel to a new region.



Exegetical Outline:

I. The Mission to Iconium (14:1-7)

A. The Proclamation of the Gospel in Iconium (14:1-4)

1. The proclamation of the gospel in the synagogue (14:1a-e)
2. The conversion of a large number of Jews and Gentiles (14:1:f-h)
3. The opposition of the local Jews against the believers (14:2)
4. The continued missionary work of Paul and Barnabas (14:3a-c)
5. The occurrence of signs and wonders (14:3d-e)
6. The divided reaction of the citizens of Iconium (14:4)

B. The Persecution by Local Jews and Gentile Officials (14:5-7)

1. The plan to stone Paul and Barnabas (14:5)
2. The flight of Paul and Barnabas to Lycaonia (14:6)
3. The proclamation of the gospel in Lycaonia (14:7)

Main Idea: The proclamation of the gospel is always met with both belief and rejection. Those who bear witness to the gospel must often endure persecution from those who reject it.

1. The ordinary miracle of gospel witness (14:1, 7)

Vs. 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.

- Proclaiming the gospel is the ordinary means by which God accomplishes the miracle of the new birth (Rom 1:16; 10:14-17).

2. The inevitable responses to gospel witness (14:1b-2, 4-5)

Vs. 4 – “But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.”

- As is always the case, some who heard the gospel believed while others rejected. Notice the violence of the opposition. The gospel calls forth strong passions.
- The gospel calls for decision. It separates believer from unbeliever. Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.” (Matthew 10:34-36)

3. The courage and wisdom required for gospel witness (14:3, 6)

Vs. 2-3a – “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ***So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord...***”

- “So...” – Paul and Barnabas remained for a long time in Iconium precisely because of the strong opposition that the fledgling church was enduring.

Vv. 5-6 – “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...”

- Paul and Barnabas did not have a death wish. They were not seeking martyrdom. Once the opposition against them turned immanently life threatening they left for Lystra where once again they go about preaching the gospel.

Questions for Discussion:

- What is the ordinary way that God brings about the salvation of the lost (Rom 10:17)?
- Why is verbal witness necessary for evangelism (Rom 10:14-17)?
- Why is it that some believe the gospel while others reject it?
- Why does the gospel cause offense? What is it about the message of the gospel that causes such violent opposition?
- What are some of the ways in which the gospel is being opposed today?
- What must Christians be willing to give up in order to remain faithful to Jesus?
- What are some of the ways we can speak “boldly for the Lord”?