

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### DIVIDED (ACTS 14:1-7) THE APOSTLES IN ICONIUM

Iconium was a very wealthy and beautiful area that was predominantly Greek. Here, the missionaries followed their basic plan and headed to the synagogue to tell the Jews about Jesus.

- In Pisidia they had moved on from reaching out to the Jews, but we see that Paul starts fresh in Iconium and wins over both Jews and Greeks.

### OLD ADVERSARIES STIRRING UP TROUBLE

Just like in previous cities, it wasn't Gentiles that brought opposition to the apostles, but the unbelieving Jews. Here Luke says they "poisoned their [Greeks] minds" in order to turn them away from the Christians.

- Notice the response is different this time. Instead of "knocking the dust off their feet," they "stayed and spoke boldly."

### PERSECUTION GAVE THEM A REASON TO STAY

Luke writes that they "testified to the message of His grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders."

**It's not that miracles and supernatural things don't happen today, but they seem to have been more blatant and frequent in Acts because there was no completed Word of God.**

### REJECTED FOLLOWERS

Though they stayed "a long time" in Iconium, the time came for the apostles to leave because of the majority rejection of the gospel. The persecution grew from just slander to people wanting to "mistreat and stone" them. The disciples moved on to the surrounding countryside to preach in the rural areas.

### THIS SEEMS PRETTY FOREIGN TO US

These rejected disciples of a rejected Christ stand in stark contrast to celebrity Christian leaders today. **The objective wasn't politics, influence, popularity, or wealth, it was simply the gospel.**

- **Maybe it's time for the church to get back to the fundamental objective of our faith: sharing the gospel.**

### GODS (ACTS 14:8-13) IF YOU THOUGHT ICONIUM WAS BAD...

There was opposition and fear of being hurt in Iconium, but Lystra was going to be much worse. Lystra was overtly pagan and a primitive, idol worshipping community of mostly Roman military vets. Lystra had no synagogue or Greek philosophy.

### RIGHT OFF THE BAT WE SEE THE MIRACULOUS

Paul had already taught a message in Lystra, and obviously he **communicated in such a way that even people extremely distant from God could grasp the gospel**, because a man "lame from birth" has faith in Jesus and is healed.

- **The gospel can be understood by anyone that has a desire.**

### THE RESPONSE TO THE MIRACLE WAS UNIQUE

Though miracles had garnered big responses in the past, the Christians never expected to be treated like gods. In a local language the people started calling them Zeus and Hermes and wanted to sacrifice animals to them. The priest of Zeus even brought bulls out to sacrifice to the visiting "gods."

### UNRELENTING (ACTS 14:14-20) "WHY ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS?"

When Paul and Barnabas realized what was happening, they tore their robes (a Jewish way to express sorrow) and begged the people to stop the sacrifices.

- Paul made it **clear that they were just normal men and that there is only one God** saying that **worship to anyone but Jesus is "worthless."**

### CLARITY AND HUMILITY

The majority of the world at this time was polytheistic, especially the Romans. Everywhere the Christians went they were clear that there was one Creator "who made the heavens, earth, sea, and everything in them." **They taught clearly the exclusivity of Jesus, but they did it with love and humility.**

### HERE COMES THE REAL BAD GUYS

Wherever the early Christians travelled, the antagonistic Jews weren't far behind. Some came from Antioch and Iconium to stir up the crowd in Lystra to the point that they tried to kill Paul. The angry mob stoned Paul and dragged his body outside the town "thinking he was dead."

### WAS HE DEAD OR NOT?

Many people debate whether Paul had been killed and when the "disciples gathered around him" he was raised from the dead, or that he was simply unconscious and came to once dragged outside the city.

- It's safe to assume he wasn't dead, because such a miracle would have been more clearly stated. (2 Corinthians 11:25)

### WORK (ACTS 14:21-23)

### ABOUT A 60 MILE TREK

Paul and Barnabas left Lystra and travelled southeast into the area of Derbe. After making "many disciples" in Derbe, they travelled back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in order to minister to people that were receptive in those cities.

### WHY SUCH LITTLE FOCUS ON DERBE?

Apparently the missionaries had great success in this rural town, but it doesn't get much press here. This is probably because Luke revisits this later when he talks about Paul's other trips.

- Others suggest Luke was like many of us today; he didn't care as much about the rural areas as he did the cities.

### THIS BRINGS UP AN INTERESTING POINT

One, we learn that Luke is human like the rest of us. Two, we see that if we are not careful, **our focus on the majority can easily make us miss the minority.**

- Remember, the Good Shepherd will leave the 99 to go after the 1. **As followers of Christ, we cannot forget the easily forgettable!**

### WE MUST ALSO REMEMBER RURAL AREAS

Though reaching cities is important, history has shown that more ministers actually came from smaller towns (Timothy and Gaius came from Lystra and Derbe).

- Paul and Barnabas headed back to the bigger cities because they needed encouragement during times of persecution.

### "HARDSHIPS" FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

When Paul told the churches that it "is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," he didn't mean that our suffering earns salvation.

- **When we're saved by grace through faith** (Ephesians 2:8-9) **we choose to share in Christ's sufferings along the way to heaven.**
- (Romans 8:17, Colossians 1:24)

### SELECTING PEOPLE TO LEAD THE CHURCH PLANTS

While Paul and Barnabas planted churches throughout Asia Minor, the method of selecting leaders was different than in established churches like Jerusalem.

### SEASONS (ACTS 14:24-28)

#### ANTIOCH WAS THE HOME BASE

The missionaries travelled back south through some areas they had previously ministered in, then they hopped on a boat and headed east to Antioch (Turkey).

- The mission they had set out to do was finished, though 2 more trips lay ahead. The first trip covered roughly 1400 miles of land and sea.

#### REPORTING BACK TO THE HOME CHURCH

The first missionary trip took almost 2 years, and when they returned home, they shared all of their experiences with the church in Antioch.

- There would have been many congregations in such a big city, but they were united and met as one to hear Paul and Barnabas' testimony.

#### NOW WHAT?

The objective of the first trip was successful: "open the door of faith to the Gentiles." Now they were back home, they decided to spend "considerable time" with their church family. The hardworking missionaries were going to go into a brief season of rest, fellowship, and teaching/writing (Galatians) locally.

#### SEASONS

- **Work** is something we are called to do and do well. Life is full of seasons where we must go the extra mile and work long hours in tough conditions.
- **Resting** is also commanded and modeled by God. If we are to work well, we must learn to rest well.
- There are seasons of loneliness, but there are also times of intentional **Fellowship** when we find strength in community.
- If we have a strong work ethic, learn to rest well, and find healthy community, we can enter into seasons of **creativity** and **giving** to the greater good.
- Don't take for granted or be discouraged by the season you're in. **Learn to ask God what lesson He has for you to learn during this time.**
- Remember, the greatest things often come from the hardest seasons. **God never brings us to a place just so we can fail.**