

# Following Christ: What to Expect

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Acts 14:1-28

## Acts 14

### Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

[1] 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. [2] But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. [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. [4] But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. [5] When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, [6] they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, [7] and there they continued to preach the gospel.

### Paul and Barnabas at Lystra

[8] Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. [9] He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, [10] said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. [11] 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!" [12] Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. [13] 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. [14] But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, [15] "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. [16] In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. [17] 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." [18] Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

### Paul Stoned at Lystra

[19] 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. [20] 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. [21] When they had preached the gospel to that city and had

made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, [22] 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. [23] 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.

### Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch in Syria

[24] Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. [25] And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, [26] and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. [27] 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. [28] And they remained no little time with the disciples. (ESV)

## Introduction

- The Old Testament and Jesus Himself anticipated a day when not only Israel, but people from every nation would experience God's salvation.
- In Acts 1 verse 8 Jesus told his disciples they would be His witnesses to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.
- Because of what happened in Acts 13-14 the kingdom of God is no longer restricted to one people group or nation—it is even now going to the very ends of the earth. The message of Jesus is now going to the whole world!
- In chapter 14, moving on from Pisidian Antioch, the Apostle Paul proclaims the gospel in the Galatian cities of — Iconium, Lystra and finally Derbe.
- At the end of chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas then circled back to each of the churches they had planted in order to strengthen and encourage the new believers there as well as install elders in those local churches.
- Finally, Paul and Barnabas returned to their home base — the church of Antioch in Syria and reported back to the congregation there, all that God had done over the two years or so since they were first sent out on this mission.
- Their report was a good one: it was that the mission had been accomplished. The gospel had been successfully taken into Gentile territory and churches were planted and established there.
- The wonderful news is - this work God initiated through Paul and Barnabas—of proclaiming Christ and building local churches —He continues by His Holy Spirit, through His people even still today.
- As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are involved in the same work that they were—making disciples—maturing disciples--and building God's church even as we eagerly await and anticipate the return of our Lord.
- As we engage in this glorious work, our passage informs our expectations. It helps us to know what we can expect along the way as we participate in this mission God has called us to.
  - Paul's missionary journey informs our missionary journey so to speak.
  - His road of discipleship informs our road of discipleship.

- While obviously our lives won't exactly look like his,—he was an apostle! —there are certain timeless principles which apply to all disciples in every generation that we can glean from what Paul experienced here in c.14

## Principle #1: Expect tribulation

- At the end of our passage, after Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the gospel and seen God save many, they returned to those cities vs 22 - "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."
- It is instructive that when Paul traveled back to the cities and sought to pastor these young converts in Galatia, he placed a high priority on telling them that following Christ involved tribulation.
- He placed a high priority on this because he wanted them to “continue in the faith....” He didn't want them to become disillusioned with Christian life when it turned out to be harder than they may have at first anticipated.
- The Apostle's own experience on this first missionary journey confirmed the truth he spoke.
- Years later the Apostle testified:

[24] Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; [26] on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; [27] in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. -- 2 Cor. 12:24-27

- The Apostle is saying to the believers in Galatia -- and us -- -- on the pathway to heaven --trials/tribulations/suffering are inevitable -- you cannot avoid them—as you follow Christ, they will be part of your lot in this broken fallen world.
- While not all believers will experience tribulation/suffering as severely as Paul -- all will experience tribulation -- the Galatian believers -- and us.

In the world you will have tribulation (John 16:33).

- The New English translation translates the Greek word for tribulation as “trouble and suffering”

"Note, It has been the lot of Christ's disciples to have more or less tribulation in this world. Men persecute them because they are so good, and God corrects them because they are no better. Men design to cut them off from the earth, and God designs by affliction to make them meet for heaven; and so between both they shall have tribulation." — Matthew Henry

“....tribulation will be sure to come to us, Christ tells us so. It may come in the form of temporal [earthly] trial of some shape or other; it may come in the form of temptation which wild alight upon us from our fellow-men; it may come in the form of persecution to

a greater or less extent according to our position: but it will come. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." -- CH Spurgeon

- It is very right and good and healthy to not compound and amplify our grief in suffering with a false expectation that "this should not be happening to me."
- One of the kindest possible things Paul could do for the new converts in Galatia was to prepare them for what lay ahead — to tell them to expect tribulation.

## **Principle #2: Expect God to move powerfully**

- At the beginning of c.14 - we see that in response to the preaching of the gospel in Iconium "a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed."
- In that same place the Lord "bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."
- In Lystra of course this amazing miracle took place. A man crippled from birth, was miraculously healed!
- The end result of the ministry that took place through this entire missionary journey can be seen in vs.27.

"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."

- The Gospel went to the Gentiles, churches were planted and the mission was accomplished.
- This narrative confronts our expectation that the Christian life will be easy. It also presses us towards faith-filled expectation that God will move powerfully in response to risks we take for the sake of the gospel.
- This missionary journey was a "high risk" mission (see Acts 13).
- The passage doesn't encourage foolish risk taking. It does however move us in the direction of prayerfully considered, faith-filled risks in the mission Jesus Himself gave us.
- If our lives are so calculated so as to remove all possibility of failure, are we truly living the life of expectant faith God has called us as believers to live?

My experience now, after 32 years in the ministry of the word, is that very little happens of any significance in an individual life or a church or a family or an organization that does not involve taking risks. And so I want things to happen in your life. I want you to be able to accomplish things that you never dreamed for the cause of Christ. And I promise you: you don't have to be a big great person in order for God to use you to do extraordinary things for him. But you do need to take risks. -- John Piper

## **Questions for Discussion/Application**

- Re-read the text, Acts 14:1-28. What initial observations and insights do you have from reading this text?
- Look at verse 22. In what ways specifically did Paul and Barnabas themselves experience "tribulation" in this passage?

- Re-read the Matthew Henry quote and Spurgeon quote under point #1. Summarize what those quotes are saying.
- What are some of the ways we experience tribulation/trials/suffering that come to us from the world around us? What are some of the other ways a believer might experience suffering?
- Is there anyone here experiencing tribulation or walking through a trial in a way that you really feel your need for prayer right now? Consider taking time to pray for anyone in this category before the evening is over.
- In what ways was this missionary journey/church planting venture what you might call "high risk" ?
- How should we as believers think about this whole idea of taking risks for the cause of Christ?
- When was a time you took a risk to do something to you felt the Lord was leading you to do. Are you glad you took that risk? Why or why not?
- Re-read the Piper quote at the end of the Sermon Recap. How do you think this passage applies to you personally today?
- Consider taking time to pray for anyone who is suffering in the group. Also ask God to help all of us to be willing to take faith-filled risks for the glory of Christ.