

Sunday, Nov. 30, 2025 | Missio Dei

Week 3 | Acts 14:1-28 | "Homeward Bound"

READ: Acts 14:1-28 (ESV)

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.**

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.

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.

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.

We're nearing the end of Paul's first missionary journey, which roughly lasted from about the spring of 48 to the fall of 49.¹ All told, he traveled from Antioch of Syria to Seleucia, then to

Salamis and Paphos on the Island of Cyprus, then to Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and then, turning around, he mostly retraced his steps, visiting a new city, Attalia, and bypassing Cyprus, on his way back to Antioch of Syria.

The terrain varied wildly on this journey from sea voyages to island ecology, from coastal towns to



¹ H. W. Hoehner, "[Chronology of the New Testament](#)," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 197.

treacherous mountain passes, from highland cities to open plains. Round-trip, these men covered about 1,400 miles in a relatively short amount of time without any of the comforts or conveniences of modern travel.²

That Paul and Barnabas made it home is a testament to God's grace. There is no way they would've made it so far, let alone survive to tell the tale, if not for the Lord's leading and provision. The believer does not need a guardian angel. They do not pray to some patron saint of travel. They would hardly need something like AAA when the God of the Universe looks after them. All who rely upon the Lord will make it safely home, be it in this life or the next.

This passage is divided into four parts:

1.) Vs. 1-7 – The **Defamation** of the Disciples

Vs. 1-2 – “Iconium” was about 100 miles east of Antioch in Pisidia, and with it and other cities such as Lystra and Derbe was a part of the Roman province of Galatia. Iconium was an agricultural center famous for its wheat fields and apricot and plum orchards. Its ideal location and climate helped establish it as a significant link in trade routes between Syria, Ephesus, and Rome.³

According to Greek mythology, Iconium was the location where Prometheus and Athena breathed life into mud sculptures after a great flood had destroyed all of humanity. This is a clear knockoff of the man's creation and the flood narrative told in Genesis. But it demonstrates that the flood account was, in some sense, common knowledge. This is not to say the flood story, as told in the book of Genesis, is the Christian version of this event, as if it were merely appropriating mythology for its own purpose. Instead, it is the *definitive* version from which all others are forgeries.

Iconium was also the primary location of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, an apocryphal work which supposedly recounts the ministry of a woman named Thecla. This document promoted an ascetic lifestyle, encouraging celibacy and foregoing marriage. It is no wonder that the Catholic church has erroneously venerated her as a saint. The text became the backbone of a vibrant cult, which was resoundingly condemned by early church fathers such as Tertullian for its emphasis on female pastors, something that directly contradicts Paul's teaching elsewhere (cf. 1 Tim. 2:11-14; 3:1-7; 1 Cor. 11:1-3; Titus 1:5-9).

² Henry Thorne Sell, *Studies in Early Church History* (Willow Grove, PA: Woodlawn Electronic Publishing, 1998).

³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Iconium,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1013.

As it was their habit, Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in the “synagogue” and, as before, it was initially met with approval, with “a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.” But, as was the case in Antioch in Pisidia, the “unbelieving Jews” opposed Paul and Barnabas. Luke says the Jews “stirred up the Gentiles,” and they did this by “poison[ing] their minds against the brothers.” How they did this, we’re not told, and, really, it makes no difference.

Vs. 3 – Interestingly, rather than leave and shake the dust off their feet, as they did when Antioch in Pisidia rejected the gospel, Paul and Barnabas stand their ground. They stayed “for a long time,” during which they spoke “boldly for the Lord.” Luke often mentions the boldness of believers (cf. Ac. 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31). One of the sources of this boldness was the New Covenant, a ministry through which the Spirit brings life (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12). When one realizes the power of the gospel one cannot help but share it with any and all who will listen (cf. Rom. 1:16). And often, when we see Christian brothers and sister suffering for the name of Christ, we ourselves are emboldened to proclaim the gospel all the more (cf. Phil. 1:14). Persecution purifies the church, purging her of dead weight and making her a fierce contender for the faith.

Through the bold proclamation of Paul and Barnabas, the Lord “bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders.” Here again (cf. Lu. 5:24; Ac. 2:22; 8:6; Heb. 2:3:4; see also Filled, week 16, point 1) is the principle that “signs and wonders” endorsed “the word of his grace.” Though such a means of validation is not always required (cf. Matt. 8:5-13; Jn. 4:46-53; 20:29; Ac. 16:13-15; 17:10-11), miracles helped validate the apostolic message.

Vs. 4-6 – The miraculous works only served to further the divide between the believers and the unbelievers. So much so that a coalition of unbelieving Gentiles and Jews, with the help of Iconium's “rulers,” attempted to “stone” Paul and Barnabas. When the disciples learned of this, they left Iconium and went twenty miles south to “Lystra” and, eventually, ended up in “Derbe,” which was east about 80 miles. Luke also says they went throughout “the surrounding country” as well.

All the while, “they continued to preach the gospel.” As heralds of the gospel, they proclaimed the good news wherever they went. Interestingly, this well illustrates the passive participle of “Go” in the Great Commission (cf. Matt. 28:19). It was *as they were going*, that they “preached the gospel.” Though they were headed somewhere, their destination was, for the most part, inconsequential; it was *what they did* during their journey that mattered. In other words, arriving safely at their destination wasn’t their primary goal; preaching the gospel, by which disciples are made, was the whole point of their journey.

Takeaway #1: The Christian life is never **aimless**, for in every motion or still moment, it is always **aimed** at making disciples.

2.) Vs. 8-18 – The **Deification** of the Disciples

Vs. 8-10 – Paul and Barnabas arrived in “Lystra.” Lystra was well off the beaten path, isolated on a hilltop in a secluded valley on the border between the Taurus Mountains and the Anatolian Plateau. The only reason the town even existed was the enemy mountain tribes that plundered Roman settlements.⁴ Augustus settled the town with army veterans to keep the locals in check.⁵ Interestingly, Timothy, Paul's soon-to-be protégé, was from Lystra (cf. Ac. 16:1-2).

As Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the gospel, there was in the audience a man who had been crippled since birth. He was actively listening as Paul spoke. Paul noticed this man and, prompted by the Holy Spirit, saw that he “**had faith to be made well.**”

Luke uses the Greek word *sōzō* and, while it can have the sense of being **physical** wellness (cf. Lu. 8:48, 50), it can also be used in the sense of **spiritual** wellness (cf. Lu. 7:50; 19:10; Ac. 2:47; 4:12).⁶ As such, Luke is likely using a double entendre. After listening to the gospel, the lame man had faith to be saved, but Paul showed that the same faith that saves the soul can also heal the body, if the Lord wills it. And, here, this is precisely what the Lord wanted since Paul told the man, “**Stand upright on your feet,**” and, remarkably, “**he sprang up and began walking**” (cf. 3:8).

Vs. 11-13 – The reaction to the miracle wasn't what the apostles expected. Those of Lystra were steeped in the cultic worship of Zeus and Hermes. There was even a temple of Zeus situated at the entrance to the city. Rather than worship the Lord, the people of Lystra began worshipping the apostles themselves, saying, “**The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!**” They then called Barnabas “**Zeus**” and, since Paul was the speaker, they named him after the “**chief speaker**” of the gods, “**Hermes.**” Then, to make matters even worse, “**the priest of Zeus...brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.**” This passage demonstrates why miracles, on their own, aren't sufficient for saving faith. Given the context, particularly one that was extremely pagan, they could even become a stumbling block to the gospel.

⁴ James Strahan, “Lystra,” in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* (2 Vols.), ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916–1918), [1:728](#).

⁵ Paul Anthony Hartog, “Lystra,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), [834](#).

⁶ DBAG (2000), 982.

Vs. 14 – Once it became known to Paul and Barnabas that the people were worshipping them rather than the Lord, Luke says, “[they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd.](#)” In a Jewish context, tearing one's clothes was “Primarily associated with mourning, such action was an expression of deep sorrow and heartfelt grief. It was also a natural reaction at times of great distress and in cases of sincere repentance.”⁷ The act was sometimes accompanied by other signs of grief, such as shaving one's head, throwing dust on oneself, or wearing sackcloth (cf. Job. 1:20). People would tear their garments in response to various personal tragedies such as death (cf. Gen. 37:34), rape (cf. 2 Sam. 13:19), loss of position (cf. 1 Sam. 15:27-28), and national leaders would often do so when facing national calamities or spiritual failures (cf. 2 Ki. 19:1; Ez. 9:3).⁸ Biblical examples of this practice include David mourning Saul and Jonathan (cf. 2 Sam. 1:11-12), Elisha grieving Elijah's departure (2 Ki. 2:12), Mordecai responding to Haman's plot (cf. Est. 4:1), and, as is the case here, Paul and Barnabas reacting to potential idolatrous worship.⁹ **Unlike Herod Agrippa, who sought glory and paid with his life for his mistake (cf. Ac. 12:20-23), Paul and Barnabas knew that glory belonged to God alone. As such, the credit for healing the lame should not have gone to them, but to the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Vs. 15-17 – The disciples' response is **twofold**: anthropological and theological.

- 1.) **Anthropological** – They say, “[Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you.](#)”
- 2.) **Theological** – They say, “[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. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 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.](#)”

Takeaway #2: **Creaturely-oriented worship incurs the Creator's wrath.**

In Romans 1:18-25, Paul said, “[For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without](#)

⁷ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009)

⁸ John A. Beck, in *The Baker Illustrated Guide to Everyday Life in Bible Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), [272](#).

⁹ Got Questions Ministries, *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014–2021).

excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” It is no wonder that Paul and Barnabas tore their garments. The last thing these men wanted was to be, in any way, esteemed like gods. It is for this reason that the Catholic practice of venerating saints is wrong; it is flat-out idolatry.

Vs. 18 – Though Paul and Barnabas were clear, Luke says, “Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.”

3.) Vs. 19-23 – The **Determination** of the Disciples

Vs. 19 – Shortly after this debacle, “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.” Stoning was reserved for heinous crimes such as adultery, idolatry, sorcery, blasphemy, and the like. Likely, the Jews thought they were doing the Lord's work by executing a supposed blasphemer. That these Jews traveled so far (Antioch was 130 miles, and Iconium was 21 miles from Lystra) demonstrates well their misplaced zealotry.

Vs. 20 – Although the Jews would've done a thorough job of stoning, Paul survives. Presumably under his own power, Luke says, “he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.” Derbe was situated about 25 miles from Lystra.¹⁰ That is quite the distance for a man who had just been stoned and left for dead.

Vs. 21 – After preaching the Gospel in Derbe, one might think that the disciples would continue traveling east along the *Via Sebaste* or the Royal Road. This would mean traversing the Taurus Mountains via the famous Cilician Gates, where they'd end up in Saul's hometown of Tarsus. In fact, this is the very route Paul takes when he begins his second missionary journey (cf. Ac. 15:41). All told, the distance from Derbe to Tarsus is about 150 miles, and such a trip would've taken about a week.¹¹ But, instead of taking the most direct route home, Luke says, Paul and

¹⁰ Youngmo Cho and Hyung Dae Park, *Acts: A New Covenant Commentary*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 2:60.

¹¹ Alan S. Bandy, *An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle Paul: His Life, Ministry, and Missionary Journey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 81.

Barnabas “[returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.](#)” Paul and Barnabas traced their steps through the very cities where people wanted them dead.

Vs. 22-23 – Why would Paul and Barnabas venture back into hostile territory? The men wanted to accomplish **four things**: educational, motivational, directional, and organizational.

- a. **Educational** – The men traveled through enemy territory, “[strengthening the souls of the disciples.](#)” Every believer needs their souls strengthened by the apostolic teaching. These new believers had much to learn about the faith. And this is primarily accomplished through the church. Hebrews 10:24-25, “[And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.](#)” **When church becomes optional, the Christian becomes miserable.**
- b. **Motivational** – The men went throughout enemy lands, “[encouraging them to continue in the faith.](#)” As Paul's stoning illustrates, the Christian life can be discouraging. When believers are confronted by persecution, they'll be tempted to fall away. We need to be regularly reminded to persevere and to not lose heart. Paul says, “[And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up](#)” (Gal. 6:9). **Being a Christian is a profession leading to an obsession.**
- c. **Directional** – The men went throughout enemy lands, [saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."](#) As we've said many times, persecution isn't the exception; it's the rule (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12-13). New believers must come to grips with this; otherwise, they're at risk of falling away (cf. Matt. 13:21). But the key to persevering, despite persecution, is to focus on Christ. The writer of Hebrews says, “[Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God](#)” (Heb. 12:1-2). **When the Lord is all we see, no trial will be too great, no mountain too high, or no valley too low.**
- d. **Organizational** – The men went throughout enemy lands and “[appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.](#)” The word “[elders](#)” is in the masculine. **As mentioned before (cf. Ac. 13:1) and as is the case in the home (cf. Eph. 5:23), the foundation of a healthy church is godly male leaders.** And though Paul and Barnabas are tasked with appointing

the elders, the process was carried out "with prayer and fasting." Ultimately, the appointment of church leaders is a spiritual decision. Christ is the head of the church, and he has the final say on who gets to be an under-shepherd.

Takeaway #3: Danger is no impediment to brotherly love.

John says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 Jn. 3:16). Christians seek to love their fellow believers, even if they have to endanger themselves to do it.

4.) Vs. 24-28 – The Declaration of the Disciples

Vs. 24-26 – Paul and Barnabas made it back to "Antioch [of Syria], where they had been commended to the grace of God." To be "commended to the grace of God" indicates that the success of their journey was due to God's gracious favor. The men wanted to recount all "the work that they had fulfilled" due to God's amazing grace.

Vs. 27-28 – After getting everyone together, "They declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." And, interestingly, they didn't then immediately depart for another missionary journey. Luke says, "they remained no little time with the disciples." If the Holy Spirit led before, he would do so again. In the meantime, they will minister in familiar territory.

Takeaway #4: Godly ministers reflect God's glory and deflect it back to God.

soli Deo gloria

Video Description:

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We're nearing the end of Paul's first missionary journey, which roughly lasted from about the spring of 48 to the fall of 49.[1] All told, he traveled from Antioch of Syria to Seleucia, then to Salamis and Paphos on the Island of Cyprus, then to Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and then, turning around, he mostly retraced his steps, visiting a new city, Attalia, and bypassing Cyprus, on his way back to Antioch of Syria. The terrain varied wildly on this journey from sea voyages to island ecology, from coastal towns to treacherous mountain passes, from highland cities to open plains. Round-trip, these men covered about 1,400 miles in a relatively short amount of time without any of the comforts or conveniences of modern travel.[2]

That Paul and Barnabas made it home is a testament to God's grace. There is no way they would've made it so far, let alone survive to tell the tale, if not for the Lord's leading and provision. The believer does not need a guardian angel. They do not pray to some patron saint of travel. They would hardly need something like AAA when the God of the Universe looks after them. All who rely upon the Lord will make it safely home, be it in this life or the next.

[1] H. W. Hoehner, "Chronology of the New Testament," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 197.

[2] Henry Thorne Sell, *Studies in Early Church History* (Willow Grove, PA: Woodlawn Electronic Publishing, 1998).

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