

Acts 14: Paul's first Missionary Journey is Rocky!

GALATIAN COUNTRY

Now in chapter 14 Paul and Barnabas face the almost impenetrable paganism of Galatia. I personally believe that the Galatian field was the hardest mission field that Paul ever entered. You need only to read the Epistle to the Galatians to discover that. Galatians was the harshest epistle that Paul wrote. He wrote it to a group of people who had a spiritual bent in the wrong direction. They were constantly going off the track. He visited those churches more than any others.

Let me give you this brief background of the Galatian country which Paul is entering on this first missionary journey. The people for whom the province was named were Gauls, a Celtic tribe from the same stock which inhabited France. In the fourth century A.D. they invaded the Roman Empire and sacked Rome. Later they crossed into Greece and captured Delphi in 280 A.D. At the invitation of Nikomedes I, king of Bithynia, they crossed over into Asia Minor to help him in a civil war. They were a warlike people and soon established themselves in Asia Minor. In 189 A.D. they were made subjects of the Roman Empire and became a province. Their boundaries varied, and for many years they retained their customs and language. The churches which Paul established on this first missionary journey were included at one time in the territory of Galatia, so this is the name which Paul would normally give to these churches.

The people were blond orientals. These Galtic Celts had much of the same temperament and characteristics of the majority of the American population, which came out of that same stock in Europe and the British Isles. Caesar had this to say of them: "The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves, fond of change, and not to be trusted." Another writer of that period described them as "frank, impetuous, impressible, eminently intelligent, fond of show, but extremely inconstant, the fruit of excessive vanity." Paul wrote them a very harsh letter because they needed that kind of letter. The majority of the people in the United States are like them. That is the reason so many cults and "isms" have begun in this country. We are a fickle people. One day we follow one leader, and the next day we follow someone else. It is amazing to watch the polls of our political candidates. If they make one statement, one slip of the tongue, the entire population shifts from them to someone else. We are a fickle people—very much like the Galatians.

All of this should make this section especially interesting to us. Martin Luther used the Epistle to the Galatians for the Reformation because it was written to folk who are like we are. - McGee

Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

Act 14:1-2 Now, it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

In Iconium, as in other places where there was a synagogue, Paul and Barnabas were permitted to preach, in accordance with the custom prevailing among the Jews at that time. The Spirit of God accompanied the word with such power that a great number of Jews and Gentile proselytes accepted the Lord Jesus. This aroused the ire of those Jews who refused to obey the gospel, and they in turn stirred up the Gentiles ... against the brethren. In the Book of Acts the unbelieving Jews were the instigators of much of the persecution of the apostles, though they themselves did not necessarily administer the punishment. They were masters at persuading the Gentiles to carry out their wicked purposes. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 14:3 Therefore, they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Acts 14: Paul's first Missionary Journey is Rocky!

Although they knew trouble was brewing, the preachers continued to speak boldly in the name of the Lord, who confirmed the divine nature of the message by empowering them to perform signs and wonders. Signs and wonders are two different words for miracles. The word "sign" simply means that the miracle conveys a lesson, whereas the word "wonder" suggests that the miracle creates a sense of awe. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 14:4-7 But, the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there.

As tension built up in the city, sides were naturally formed. Some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. Finally, the unbelieving Gentiles and Jews made a determined rush to assault the apostles. To escape stoning, they fled to LYSTRA (lis'-tra) and DERBE, both cities of LYCAONIA (lye-kay-own'-ia), a district in the center of Asia Minor. With no lessening of ardor, they continued preaching the gospel in that entire region.

When Paul and Barnabas were threatened with stoning, they fled to Lycaonia. At other times in their missionary labors, they seemed to remain in a place, in spite of danger. Why did they escape at some junctures and stand their ground at others? There does not seem to be any neat explanation. The great controlling principle in Acts is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These men lived in close, intimate communion with the Lord. Abiding in Him, they received marvelous communications of the divine mind and will. To them, this was the important thing, rather than a well-arranged set of rules of conduct. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra

Act 14:8-10 And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

As we have seen, Paul and Barnabas had the gifts of an apostle, the sign gifts. They came into these places without any New Testament with the message of the gospel. What were their credentials? How could they prove their message was from God? The sign gifts were their credentials—they needed them. Today we have the entire Bible, and what it has to say. If only we could get people to do that!

The other day I played golf with a very affable, generous, bighearted man. He is an unsaved man, and he told me very candidly that he was chasing around. Mutual friends had asked me to play with him. I attempted to talk with him about the gospel. He knew the facts of the gospel as well as I do. And you know something else? He believed them. He said he believed that Jesus died and rose again, and he believed that if he put his trust in Jesus, He would save him. So I asked him why he didn't do that. Then he began to mention names, names of certain men whose lives just didn't measure up to their profession of faith. So I said to him, "For goodness sake get your eyes off men. In the first century the apostles performed miracles, and men got their eyes on the apostles. So it was necessary to get their eyes off the apostles and turn them to the Book which presents the Lord Jesus Christ. You need to get your eyes on the Word of God and learn what God says today. He tells us that the important thing is our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. All those other men you mention will not even enter into the picture when you stand before the Lord Jesus someday. The only question will be your personal relationship to Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the Word of God. Go to the Word of God." I'll be very frank with you; I didn't really get very far with this man. He did say that I had given him a new approach; he had

Acts 14: Paul's first Missionary Journey is Rocky!

never heard it that way before. He thought maybe he would try it. I encouraged him again to get his eyes off other Christians because we all have feet of clay.

The people at Lystra were looking to Paul and Barnabas. – McGee

What was the criteria Paul used to see if the Lord would heal this man? Why is this important to us today?

Act 14:11-12 Now, when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

As soon as Paul commanded the man to get up on his feet, ... he leaped and walked. Since the miracle had been performed openly, and since Paul had undoubtedly attracted considerable attention by speaking with a loud voice, the people were greatly impressed. In fact, a popular movement began with the purpose of worshiping Barnabas as Zeus, and Paul as Hermes. The people actually believed that their gods had paid them a visit in the person of the two missionaries. For some reason not stated, they looked on Barnabas as being the chief god. Because Paul had done the speaking, they designated him as Hermes, the messenger of Zeus. – Believers Bible Commentary

If our eyes are on man or even ourselves, we have missed the point. Jesus is our High Priest, through Him we access not only the Father, but we have the Holy Spirit, and we shall do greater works.

John 14:12-14 "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Act 14:13 Then, the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

Even the priest of Zeus became convinced that a divine visitation had taken place; he rushed out of the temple that was at the gateway of their city with oxen and garlands for a great sacrifice. This entire movement was a more subtle form of danger to the Christian faith than all the other forms of opposition recorded. For a successful Christian worker a greater peril than persecution is the tendency for people to center their spiritual attention, not on Christ, but on His servant. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 14:14-16 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.

Paul and Barnabas are not only startled and amazed that these people want to worship them, but they are completely shocked. They rush in among them, shouting, "We are human beings like you are!" You will remember that Peter had to say the same thing to Cornelius when Cornelius bowed down to him to worship him.

Certainly, none of us is to bow down to worship any man. A Christian is not to be so obsequious that he gets down to lick the boots of anyone. Unfortunately, even in Christian work, we find some people who want others to bow to them. How tragic that is. – McGee

Acts 14: Paul's first Missionary Journey is Rocky!

Act 14:17 Nevertheless, He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

It is noticeable that Paul and Barnabas did not quote the OT to these Gentiles, as they did to the Jews. Rather, they began with the story of creation, a subject of immediate interest to Gentile peoples in all countries and in all ages. The missionaries explained that in bygone generations God allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Even then, however, they had evidence of the existence of God in creation and in providence. It was He who lovingly provided rain ... and fruitful seasons for them, filling their hearts with food and gladness. This latter expression is a figurative way of saying that in providing food for their bodily means, God filled their hearts with the gladness that comes from the enjoyment of food. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 14:18 And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

The message had its desired result. The people reluctantly desisted from their intention of sacrificing to these servants of the Lord. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Paul Stoned at Lystra

Act 14:19-20 Then, Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

How amazing this is. Such fickle people! One day they are ready to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods. The next day they stone Paul to death.

(How like Americans—we follow fads. One time it is the hula hoop. Then it is the miniskirt. We simply follow one fad after another.)

They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city "supposing he had been dead." Do you think he was dead? I'll tell you what I think. I think he was dead. Later Paul writes of the experience he had: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2Co_12:2-4). Who was that man? It was Paul himself. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2Co_12:7). I don't think that crowd left him there half dead; I think they left him dead. I believe that God raised him from the dead.

Why would God permit this stoning? Gal_6:7 tells us: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Paul reaped what he had sowed. He had ordered the stoning of Stephen. Maybe someone will object that now he is converted. Yes, but even after conversion we will reap whatsoever we have sown. This is a law of nature as well as a law operating in our lives. We shall reap whatever we sow. Because Saul took part in the stoning of Stephen, years later the same thing happened to him. - McGee

Act 14:21-22 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 14: Paul's first Missionary Journey is Rocky!

Considerations of personal safety were not uppermost in the minds of the missionaries. This is seen in the fact that when they had preached the gospel at Derbe, they returned to LY STRA, the scene of Paul's stoning. This illustrates what has been called "the power of comeback and quick recovery."

Although Timothy is not mentioned here, he may have been saved at this time through the preaching of Paul. When the apostle next visited Lystra, Timothy was already a disciple, and was highly regarded by the brethren (Act_16:1-2). However, the fact that Paul later spoke of him as his true child in the faith (1Ti_1:2) does not necessarily mean that Paul had won him to Christ. He may have been a "true child" by following the example of Paul's life and service.

When their work at Lystra was completed, the missionaries revisited ICONIUM and PISIDIAN ANTIOCH, where churches had already been established. Their purpose at this time was what we call "follow-up work." They were never satisfied merely to preach the gospel and see souls won to the Savior. For them, this was only the beginning. They then sought to build up the believers in their most holy faith, especially by teaching them the truth of the church and its importance in God's program.

Erdman points out:

A proper missionary program has as its aim the establishing on the field of self-governing, self-sustaining, self-propagating churches. This was ever the purpose and the practice of Paul.

The exact nature of their follow-up work was strengthening the souls of the disciples and establishing the Christians in the faith by instructing them from the word of God. Paul described the process in Col_1:28-29 : "We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about him, so that, if possible, we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ Jesus. This is what I am working at all the time, with all the strength that God gives me" (JBP).

Second, they exhorted them to continue in the faith, an exhortation especially timely in view of the widespread persecution then prevalent. With this exhortation went a reminder that we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. This refers to the kingdom of God in its future aspect, when believers will share Christ's glory. A person enters the kingdom of God in the first place through the new birth. Persecutions and tribulations do not have any saving value. However, those who enter the kingdom of God by faith at the present time are promised that the pathway to future glory is filled with tribulations. "If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom_8:17 b). – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

At this time, the missionaries also appointed elders in every church. In this connection, several observations should be made:

1. New Testament elders (presbyters) were godly, mature men who exercised spiritual leadership in the local church. They are also spoken of as bishops and overseers.
2. In the Book of Acts, elders were not appointed when a church was first founded. Rather, it was when the apostle revisited the churches that this was done. In other words, during the intervening time there was opportunity for those who had been made elders by the Holy Spirit to become manifest.

Acts 14: Paul's first Missionary Journey is Rocky!

3. Elders were appointed by the apostles and by their delegates. At this time the NT was not yet written to give explicit instructions concerning the qualifications of elders. The apostles knew what these qualifications were, however, and they were able to single out the men who met the scriptural requirements.

4. We do not have apostles today to appoint elders. However, we do have the qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Therefore each local assembly should be able to recognize those men in it who meet God's requirements as undershepherds of the sheep.

After Paul and Barnabas had prayed with fasting, they commended the believers to the Lord. It seems extraordinary to us that assemblies could be started in such a short time, that they should receive such brief periods of instruction from the missionaries, and yet that they should go on brightly for the Lord, functioning as autonomous churches. The answer ultimately lies in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit of God. However, the power was manifest in the lives of men like Paul and Barnabas. Everywhere they went they exerted a mighty influence for God. People detected reality in their lives. Their public preaching was backed up by the example of their own lives, and the influence of this twofold testimony was incalculable.

Verses 21 to 23 give the apostolic pattern—preaching the gospel, teaching the converts, and establishing and strengthening churches. – Believers Bible Commentary

Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch in Syria

Act 14:24-26 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now, when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

After they had passed through the district of Pisidia, they traveled south to PAMPHYLIA. There they revisited PERGA, then they went down to the seaport city of ATTALIA where they boarded a ship and sailed to ANTIOCH in SYRIA. This brought them to the end of their first missionary journey. It was from Antioch that they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had just completed. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 14:27-28 Now, when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch to give a report of the work because this is the church that had sent them out. They revealed that God had now definitely opened the door of the gospel to Gentiles. When the gospel started out, the churches were comprised entirely of Hebrews. Then they became partially Gentile. And now the gospel is going definitely to the Gentiles. Now the churches in Asia Minor are comprised entirely of Gentiles. Although there may also have been some Jews in these churches, it seems that in most places the Jews rejected the gospel and the Gentiles received it. – McGee

They stayed in Antioch **a long time with the disciples**. Estimates vary between one and two years. – Believers Bible Commentary