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Paul's First Journey

Key Passage

- Acts 14:1–20

What You Will Learn

- How God used Paul to share the gospel in Iconium.
- How the people responded to the gospel in Lystra.



Lesson Overview

Paul traveled with Barnabas on his first missionary journey. Wherever Paul traveled, his purpose was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. He did that boldly. God healed through Paul and did other signs and wonders to show that what Paul was preaching was true. Some people believed and others did not. In both Iconium and Lystra, unbelieving Jews stirred up violence, and the two moved on.

Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.



Prepare to Learn

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

After Jesus's death, Resurrection, and ascension back to His Father, God quickly presented circumstances that allowed the gospel to spread to all nations. He used the great persecution which arose against the church at Jerusalem to scatter believers throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). God sent an angel to the missionary Philip to preach to an Ethiopian man (Acts 8:26–27). It is very likely this man went back to his homeland of Ethiopia with the good news of Jesus Christ, the Savior (Acts 8:37).

God continued to spread the gospel through the Jew Peter who preached to the Gentile Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:24–25). Until now, Jews and Gentiles were separated. They couldn't eat together or visit each other's homes. But God was changing all that. And God showed Peter that anyone can be saved! People from every nation—whoever fears God and believes the gospel—will be accepted by God (Acts 10:35).

God's plan was that more Gentiles be exposed to the gospel. That was the mission He ordained for the Jewish leader Saul. This powerful Jew was bent on making havoc of the church, dragging off men and women of the Way and committing them to prison (Acts 8:3)—until he met the living Savior on the road to Damascus and was dramatically transformed (Acts 9:5–6).

Saul, who is also referred to as Paul in the Bible, was a means God would use to preach the gospel to the Gentiles through three remarkable missionary journeys. He was accompanied by other apostles as he traveled. The first journey included sailing to Cyprus where Paul preached in Salamis and Paphos. They

then continued on by boat to Perga in Pamphylia. They departed Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. They moved on to Iconium and continued to preach. From Iconium they proceeded to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13–14).

As Paul preached in these cities, he would first of all speak in the synagogues to the Jews, telling them that God had fulfilled the promise of a Savior made to the fathers (Acts 13:32–33). Unfortunately, many of these Jews did not believe. And often it was the Gentiles who begged to hear Paul preach and who wanted to learn the truth (Acts 13:42). As Paul preached, and the word was gladly received by many, the Jews became envious. They contradicted, blasphemed, and openly opposed the things Paul was teaching (Acts 13:45). Their own unbelief was judging them to be unworthy of eternal life. This response led Paul to turn his attention and preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

Reactions were varied and unpredictable to Paul's message of salvation. In Iconium, there were unbelieving Jews who tried to stir the Gentiles up and poison their minds against the truth. This did not dissuade the missionaries; in fact, the Bible says they remained a long time there, speaking boldly in the Lord, who allowed them to do signs and wonders as witness to God's grace and truth (Acts 14:2–3).

In the city of Lystra, the Bible records an incident that occurred where God allowed Paul supernatural power to heal a man (Acts 14:9–10). This evoked yet another reaction. The people in Lystra were so moved by the miracle that they believed their idolatrous gods had come down to them in the form of Paul and his companion, Barnabas.

They even intended to make sacrifices and worship the two men (Acts 14:11–13). Paul quickly denied this to be true or acceptable. He explained these were the very useless things and customs they should turn away from as they turn to the living God (Acts 14:15).

How fickle and easily influenced these people were! It wasn't long before the Jews from Antioch and Iconium who had not believed Paul's message followed Paul to Lystra. These Jewish leaders stirred up the people of Lystra once again—this time in opposition to Paul! And they were persuaded to stone him and drag him out of the city (Acts 14:19).

God mercifully spared Paul's life, and he continued on his journey from Lystra to Derbe, where he preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples (Acts 14:21). His journey was nearing the end. But Paul could not think of ending this first missionary journey without going back to see those he had preached to—who had believed on the name of Jesus Christ. He longed to see how they were getting along. Although it surely meant more danger for him, he went back to the cities where he had preached to strengthen and encourage the converts in the truths of the gospel (Acts 14:22).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Most scholars believe that Paul, the apostle, was born around AD 5 in the city of Tarsus. Saul, as he was called then, was raised in an orthodox Jewish home, moved to Jerusalem as a child, and studied under the Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He persecuted the church following the day of Pentecost in AD 33, but was saved dramatically around AD 35 on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). During Saul's meeting with

the living Lord and subsequent salvation, he lost his sight (Acts 9:8). After his sight returned (Acts 9:18), Paul traveled to Arabia and then back to Damascus where he spent three years—a time in which he, no doubt, studied the Scriptures (now as a believer), solidified his new faith, and preached boldly in the name of Jesus (Galatians 1:15–24). After this, Saul came to Jerusalem but because of plots to take his life, he was sent to Tarsus where he stayed for a number of years (Acts 9:26–30). There is little known about these years. However, it is believed that this was when Paul had his heavenly visions discussed in 2 Corinthians 12:1–10.

Around the mid-40s AD, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul, and brought him back to Antioch, the capital of the province of Syria. Here the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch set apart Barnabas and Saul for a ministry to which the Holy Spirit had called them (Acts 13:1–3). And Paul's first missionary journey began about 11 years after his conversion.

The first century, when Paul was alive, was much different from our time and culture. For one thing, travel took much longer. There were no automobiles or airplanes; travel was mostly done on foot, on a donkey, or by boat. However, travel was much easier than it had been a hundred years earlier. The vast improvements made by the mighty and wealthy Roman Empire made travel far more efficient.

Historian Lionel Casson notes the conditions for travelers of the time: A traveler "could make his way from the shores of the Euphrates to the border between England and Scotland without crossing a foreign frontier. . . . He could sail through any waters without fear of pirates, thanks to the emperor's patrol squadrons. A planned network of good roads gave him access to all major

centers, and the through routes were policed well enough for him to ride them with relatively little fear of bandits.”

Due to the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) instituted under Emperor Augustus (27 BC–AD 14), these conditions prevailed when Paul traveled the Roman world. The philosopher Epictetus declared, “There are neither wars nor battles, nor great robberies nor piracies, but we may travel at all hours, and sail from east to west.”

The Roman roads extended across the Roman Empire—a total of 63,000 miles of paved roads, connecting centers of government, culture, and power. This helped to advance the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to the known world at that time. It is clear that God had certainly ordained this time in history for His Son to come as the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Even with the nice roads, travelling was often tiresome. Travelers would wear heavy shoes or sandals, had capes and broad-brimmed hats, and often carried bedding, tents, and provisions. The average traveler walked three miles per hour for about seven hours a day—or about 20 miles per day. So, for example, the 90-mile walk from Perga to

Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14) would have taken about 4–5 days.

Travel during the winter was difficult due to the snow that sometimes blocked high passes, and the heavy rains in the fall and spring caused the rivers to swell making them difficult to cross. When in remote areas, travelers might face dangers from robbers, as well as from wild animals such as bears, wolves, and boars. It’s likely that Paul had some of these difficulties in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians: “I have been . . . in perils of waters, in perils of robbers . . . in perils in the wilderness” (2 Corinthians 11:25–26).

This first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas occurred sometime between AD 46–50. Paul and his companions traveled between 1,300 and 1,500 miles, by land and by sea, over a period of about two years. They boldly preached the gospel of the risen Christ and made many disciples. Elders were appointed for the newly established churches, and then the missionary party returned to Antioch and reported all that God had done through them (Acts 14:21–26).

See the Online Resource Page for more information on this topic.



Studying God's Word

How did people respond to the first missionaries?



First Missionary Journey

Paul's first missionary journey is described in Acts 12:25–14:28. In the space below, record what Paul and Barnabas did in each city and the positive and negative responses they received.

1. Syria, Antioch (12:25–13:3)

- Actions:

2. Seleucia (13:4)

3. Cyprus, Salamis (13:4–5)

- Actions:

4. Cyprus, Paphos (13:6–12)

- Actions:

- Positive Response:

- Negative Response:

5. Perga (13:13)

6. Pisidia, Antioch (13:14–51)

- Actions:

- Positive Response:

- Negative Response:

7. Iconium (13:51–14:6)

- Actions:
- Positive Response:
- Negative Response:

8. Lystra (14:6–20)

- Actions:
- Positive Response:
- Negative Response:

9. Derbe (14:20–21)

- Actions:
- Positive Response:

10. Lystra/Iconium/Antioch (14:21–23)

- Actions:

11. Perga/Attalia (14:24–25)

- Actions:

12. Syria, Antioch (14:26–28)

- Actions:

13. What patterns did you notice in this passage?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Acts 14:1-7

Acts 14:8-20



God's Word in the Real World

1. As you think about the events of this first missionary journey, what impresses you the most about what Paul and Barnabas were able to accomplish in serving the Lord?

2. In what way are the experiences of Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel a model for us as we do the same?

3. What are some examples of what this might look like practically in your daily life?

4. Do you tend to follow a pattern when you share the gospel with others? What are the benefits of a pattern? What are the dangers?

5. Some people think that proclaiming the gospel in marketplaces and parks used to be normal and more acceptable, but it is not a good idea today because of the opposition. How does this claim stand up to the description of Paul's experience of preaching the gospel in similar environments?

6. How were the actions of the church in Antioch a part of the Great Commission? How is your church body involved in similar activities?

7. When Paul was preaching in the synagogue in Antioch, he used many Old Testament passages and directly quoted them. When he was trying to pacify the masses in Lystra, he loosely talked about God's attributes and common blessings for all people. What does this approach teach us about how to use Scripture in different circumstances?



Prayer Requests
