

Acts 14

The successful preaching of Paul and Barnabas brought about contradictions, strife and persecutions from the disobedient in Antioch and this was the pattern in other places in Paul's journeys. Having fled from Antioch, the two evangelists made their way to Iconium. Their synagogue preacher again made believers of great multitudes of Jews and Greeks and once more disobedient Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made them evil affected against the brethren (14:1, 2). Nevertheless they continue a long time in the city, speaking boldly in the Lord to the word of His grace. While the historian says that God bore witness by granting signs and wonders, he does not specify the specific nature of these signs. That will be reserved for the next city they visit. Paul's "new teaching" met stiff opposition from "die-hards." The multitude was divided: Paul held with the Jews and part with the apostles. Once more disagreement gave place to violence. An effort to stone the apostles became known to them and they fled to the cities of Lyconia, Lystra and Derbe.

Having fled Iconium, the two travelers arrived in Lystra. There they saw a lame man, impotent in his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked (14:8). This man heard Paul's preaching and Paul, seeing he had faith to be made whole, cried with a loud voice "Stand upright on thy feet." Immediately the man leaped up and walked (14:9f).

I believe it appropriate at this point to break into our summary of the narrative to make a few observations. First, whether Luke intended such, or it was simply coincidental, there is almost an "item by item" chronicle of Paul's activities with those of Peter. Peter worked a miracle that warned of the danger of tampering with God when Ananais and Sapphira died for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5); Paul did the same in pronouncing blindness upon Elymas, the sorcerer (Acts 13). Peter had unpleasant experiences with a sorcerer as did Paul (Acts 8:18-24; 13:6-12). Peter's "fame" as a worker of miracles became so great that people carried their sick into the streets in hopes they might be healed as his shadow passed upon them (5:15-16). In Ephesus, God wrought by Paul special miracles insomuch that unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body and the diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went out (19:11f). Peter raised Dorcas from the dead; Paul raised Eutychus (12, 20). Spiritual gifts were bestowed by Peter laying hands on the Samaritans; Ephesians received spiritual gifts through the hands of Paul (8:14-17; 19:6). Peter healed the lame man at the gate Beautiful

in Jerusalem; Paul healed a lame man in Lystra (3; 14:8f). Whether intended comparisons or not, they show that Paul was equal to Peter, that God had given him his apostleship to the Gentiles, just as He had given Peter his apostleship to the circumcision (Gal. 2:7f).

Second, sometimes faith was a condition in healing, as in the case of the impotent man. Paul saw he had faith to be healed. Jesus sometimes made faith a condition to healing (Matt. 9:27-30), but not always. It could not have been in the case of Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, Dorcas or Eutychus. Nor is there evidence faith was requested of the blind man in John 9. The man healed at the pool of Bethesda did not even know who had healed him, nor is there evidence faith was required that he might be healed (John 5). Third, how did Paul "see" that this lame man "had faith" to be healed? The only way to know such was for Paul to possess the gift of "discerning of spirits" for "who among men knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11).

Back to Lystra. The healing of the lame man was startling to the crowd, to say the least. Whether in their excitement they "fell back" to the use of their native tongue or they knew no other language, they said in the Lycanonian language "the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men" (14:11f). They called Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury because he was the chief speaker (14:12). The priest of Jupiter brought oxen and garlands to offer sacrifice to these men. They seemed at first to be unconscious of such activities, but when they discerned what was about to take place, they were appalled and rent their garments (showing distress and anguish) and leaped forth among the multitudes saying, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passion with you and bring you good tidings that ye should turn from the vain things unto a living God who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that in them is..." (14:14f). Even these efforts on the part of the apostles were scarcely sufficient to restrain them from their worship of them. Then, they stoned them! How fickle can man be? Dissenting Jews from Antioch and Iconium had followed them there and persuaded the multitude. Human opinion changes rapidly! Later, Paul reminded Timothy of these events in 2 Timothy 3:10f.

This region of Lystra, Derbe and Iconium is identified by many as the churches of Galatia to whom Paul wrote. It is true there is an area to the north of these cities which is identified on maps as "Galatia" and through which Paul traveled on his second journey (16:6), but there is compelling evidence that these cities and this region of Lycanion WAS the area for whom Paul's letter to the Galatians was intended. The Galatians were

fickle and quick to make rash decisions. This characterized the temperament of the people of Lystra. First they wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas. Later they stoned Paul.

Paul left Lystra for Derbe. This was apparently his last point of preaching for from here he turned and preached in the cities he had just been driven from. Human passions and wraths had spent themselves in their earlier efforts. There is no record of these people resuming again their earlier failed attempts to slay the apostles.

In this "back tracking" Paul and Barnabas had several aims in mind. First, they wished to confirm the souls of the disciples, urging them to continue in the faith. Second, they reminded them that through much tribulation "we must enter into the kingdom of God" (14:22). Similar warning was issued to the Thessalonians. He urged that none of them be moved by "afflictions; for yourselves know that hereunto we are appointed. For verily when we were with you we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction, even as it came to pass, as ye know" (1 Thess. 3:3f). Then Paul and Barnabas wished to appoint elders in these churches (14:23).

Their first journey was completed and they proceeded back to report to Antioch, the good church that had sent them out. They rehearsed all that had happened and how that God had "opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles" (14:27).

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