

ACTS 14: Extending God's Kingdom Enrages the Enemy

Review Acts 13.

14:1-7: P & B at Iconium - Powerful in Word and Deed

P & B preached in the power of the Lord. "They spoke in such a way that a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed." The HS inspired their preaching. Dr. Luke's phrase "they spoke in such a way" includes the "signs and wonders." Many Jews and Greeks believed because the Gospel was validated by "signs and wonders." Remember, we need *dunamis* (power) to back up the *didache* (teaching). The HS's internal conviction of sin and righteousness and external signs and wonders are the *dunamis*.

The Greeks were not associated with the Jewish quarter of the city or the synagogue. They were pure idol worshipers. Powerful preaching of the word with HS conviction would be enough to convince the God-fearing Gentiles. The pagan Greeks would've needed something more since they had no understanding of the word, the OT. The "signs and wonders" usually refer to two types of validation: casting out demons and healing the sick. These types of validation of the Gospel would be important for idol-worshipping Greeks.

14:4: The people of Iconium were divided. The Gospel divides. Jesus predicted it would divide. Luke 12:49-53: ⁴⁹ "I've come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already ablaze! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and what stress I am under until it's completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I came to bring peace on earth? Not at all, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on, five people in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Has the Gospel, commitment to Christ, divided your family? I'm sure it has. We always pray and hope it will bring unity, but it divides. Why does it divide?

P & B stayed a long time and opposition to their ministry slowly built up. Opposition continued to increase until it formed into a plot to murder them. People's minds get poisoned with propaganda (14:2).

14:8-18: P & B at Lystra - An Attesting Miracle Misunderstood

P & B didn't go to a synagogue because there wasn't any. There were not enough Jews in Lystra to form a synagogue. Lystra was a pagan Greco-Roman city without a substantial Jewish witness. Paul probably preached in the city square. A man lame from birth was healed and the Lystrians went crazy! They had never seen a miracle like this before. The miracle could not have been done by the lesser spirits they placated every day. So the Lystrians assumed P & B must be the greater gods they worshiped: Barnabas = Zeus (GR) or Jupiter (Roman) and Paul = Hermes or Mercury. The Lystrians were excited and spoke in their native language. P & B didn't understand and didn't know what was happening until the priest from the Temple of Zeus came with oxen with beautiful garlands around their necks to sacrifice. Only decorated oxen would be worthy of sacrificing to Zeus the top god of the Greek pantheon. The attesting miracle had been totally misunderstood.

Let's notice how Paul dealt with the misunderstanding. Paul didn't condemn the Lystrians. Paul couldn't preach about Jesus the Messiah fulfilling OT prophecies. The Lystrians didn't know the OT. Paul delivered a message about worshiping the Creator and not the creation. In the minds of the Lystrians if Zeus and Hermes didn't do the miracle then there must be a god higher than them. Paul tried to tell them about the true God. 14:15-17: *"Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you 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 the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; ¹⁷ and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."* Paul's message is about the creator God. He focused on God's goodness as creator. Paul quoted from the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20:11.

In Acts 13 there was a "power encounter" with a demon-possessed magician. In Acts 14 we have an "allegiance encounter." Joshua said it to the Israelites after Jehovah proved more powerful than the gods of Egypt: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." (Joshua 24:15) The HS demonstrated the greater power of Creator God and the Lystrians were faced with a decision whether they should give their allegiance to Zeus and Hermes or switch it to Jesus Christ. Should they abandon the Temple of Zeus and worship the God of the Bible who created all things?

Dr. Luke doesn't say it but I believe the healing of the lame man was arranged by the HS. The HS did the attesting miracle to bear witness to the word of His grace. The HS gave the lame man the faith to believe and be healed as he listened to the word of God.

Hebrews 11:6: *Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently search for him.*

There is clearly a biblical relationship between faith and divine healing. Almost every healing encounter in the Gospels shows some level of faith.

This is similar to the healing of the lame man at the temple gate in Acts 3 with one difference, the location of the faith necessary for the healing. The location of faith for healing varies from case to case. In Acts 3 the faith was present in Peter and John, not the lame man. A3:16: *It is Jesus' name—that is, by faith in his name—that has healed this man whom you see and know. Yes, the faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.*

In this healing the faith was in the lame man. The HS enabled Paul to see the lame man's faith and empowered Paul to speak a "command prayer." Paul spoke the healing command, "Stand on your feet!" Paul didn't say, "Come up to the front and let me pray for you." Paul didn't pray for the man; he spoke a command empowered by the HS. This is imitating Jesus. Jesus performed miracles the same way with commands. Jesus never prayed for anyone. Jesus spoke with authority. He commanded sickness to be healed and dead to be raised.

[Biblical signs and wonders still happen today. Karen Feaver was part of a US congressional delegation to Beijing in 1994 led by Chris Smith. She met with some Christian women from Sichuan province. Here's a snippet from the article written in Christianity Today: "After making sure all curtains were drawn against the prying eyes of the Chinese security service, our translator invited the three women to share their stories. For three hours, our delegation of privileged Americans, headed by Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey and including members of Christian Solidarity International, heard how **a new chapter of Acts is being written throughout China.**" They told Karen about persecution but also said, "Wherever we go, signs and wonders follow our sisters and brothers." In one particular village in which no one wanted to hear the Gospel they felt the HS gave them faith for healing and they told a woman who had been lame for 70 years to stand up. She got up and walked. Then many believed in Christ when they preached the Gospel.]

14:19-28: Tribulations to Enter the Kingdom of God

Jews from Antioch and Iconium concocted a plot to murder Paul but it was exposed and P & B fled to Lystra. The Jews eventually made it to Lystra and persuaded the crowds to stone Paul to death. Saul presided over the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7) and made sure he was dead. The Jews thought Paul was dead and dragged his body out of the city to the dump. The disciples gathered around Paul and I assume PRAYED for his life! This was probably like the “earnest prayer” for Peter’s release. Paul came alive.

Was Paul really dead? I think he was. Jews were experts as stoning people to death. They didn’t throw rocks at the feet. They aimed for the head. I assume they looked for his pulse and found none. (This would be like executing a prisoner on death row and then having a doctor verify his death.) Even if Paul wasn’t dead he would have wounds all over his body, cuts, bruises, broken bones, cracked skull. Paul rose up and went back into the city the same day. That must have shocked the Lystrians! Dead or not it’s a miraculous healing and restoration equal to raising the dead.

Jesus said to the Ananias, the disciple who helped Saul at his conversion (A9:15-16): *But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”*

Paul mentioned all his sufferings for the sake of Christ’s name to the Corinthians: 2 Corinthians 11:24-25: *Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.*

[Example story from *The Elijah Challenge*: Christian preachers in India beaten with rods and chained in a cattle stall and left to die. The Lord healed their broken bodies. They were heard praying and singing. The village cows mysteriously died and the Hindu man who instigated the beating died in a car crash a few days later. The village people released the preachers and believed the Gospel. Jesus Christ proved more powerful than their Hindu gods.]

The next day P & B went to Derbe. They preached the Gospel and made disciples without opposition. It was a needed rest.

P & B returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to encourage the disciples. Their main message was “Through many trials we must enter the kingdom of God.”

First, we become citizens of the kingdom of God by believing in the king, Jesus Christ. But to actually enter the kingdom we must pass through this life with its

trials, tribulations, and tests. My family had a guaranteed reservation at a condo in Estes Park, CO, but we had to drive 2 days to enter the condo and enjoy it. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and we have reservations in His coming kingdom. Second, when Paul said “Through many trials we must enter the kingdom of God” he meant primarily persecution. It’s the persecution experienced for living in obedience to Jesus Christ and sharing the Gospel. Paul wrote to Timothy (3:10-13): *You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

We may include any trials we experience in this world, but so do unbelievers who will not enter the kingdom of God. So, the real application is persecution for obedience to the word of God.

Application Lessons:

First, before preaching Jesus Christ we may need to clarify who God is. We may need to preach Genesis (God is creator) and Exodus (the Law) before the Gospels. Most people today have a distorted image of God and need to know who God is. It is challenging to preach Jesus Christ when the people don’t even know who God is and what He demands. Paul wrote in Romans that everyone knows God exists because God has provided a witness for everyone to see – creation (Romans 1:18-23).

Know the four basic proofs for God’s existence:

1. **Cosmological:** First cause, universe had a beginning and is running out of energy, 2nd Law of Thermodynamics.
2. **Teleological:** Watchmaker Analogy: design presupposes a designer, intelligent design implies an intelligent designer, DNA a chemical language, fine-tuned universe.

3. **Ontological:** Answers the question “Where did God come from?” God is the Maximally Great Being.
4. **Moral:** If God does not exist then objective, absolute moral values and duties do not exist. They exist. Therefore, God exists.

These arguments are good, but not enough to convict of sin and righteousness. We need the Law, the 10 Commandments, to know who God is and what He demands of us. This is part of the moral argument.

Recommend Ray Comfort’s *Faith Is For Weak People*.

Second, “Through many trials we must enter the kingdom of God.” If you aren’t suffering persecution for the sake of Christ, then financially support and pray for those who are. I do this through *The Voice of the Martyrs*.