

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

Arno C. Gaebelein

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The concluding ministry of the first missionary journey of the apostles, their sufferings and testimony, as well as their dangers and return to Antioch, are the events recorded in this chapter.

**I. The work in Iconium and the persecution of the Apostles** (Verses 1-6).

**II. Their testimony in Derbe and Lystra, the healing of the impotent man and what followed** (Verses 7-18).

**III. The stoning of Paul and further ministries** (Verses 19-24).

**IV. The Return to Antioch** (Verses 25-28).

**I. The work in Iconium and the persecution of the Apostles.**

**“And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were aware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about”** (Verses 1-6).

Iconium was a Phrygian town, bordering on Lycaonia. Later it became a very influential city, the capital of Lycaonia proper and a center of Christianity in that region. It is also known through an apocryphal book, *“The Acts of Paul and Thecla.”* The heroine, Thecla, is said to have lived in Iconium and that she was converted by the preaching of Paul. \*

\* The whole story is an invention. Tertullian has shown that it is a fictitious story written by a certain Presbyter, who was a great admirer of the Apostle Paul. The Presbyter was disciplined for his writing.

Once more the Apostles sought out the synagogue to preach the Gospel there. Jews and Greeks were present to listen to their testimony. It is a far-fetched theory, which claims that they preached nothing but the kingdom in the different synagogues. The preaching of the Apostles is not reported here, but we may take it for granted that the clear and simple Gospel testimony delivered by the Apostle Paul in the synagogue of Antioch was repeated in Iconium.

The message was wonderfully blessed and owned of God. They spake so that not only a few, but a great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed. But the acts of the enemy followed at once. He could not permit such a powerful and successful testimony to go on unhindered. Once more the Elymas character of the unbelieving Jews is brought out. They stirred up the Gentiles, those who had no sympathy with the synagogue, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

But the messengers of the Lord could not be driven from the scene before their testimony was finished. How long they remained is not stated. It was a **“long time”** they abode there, and with much boldness they spoke the Word of God. And the Lord added His seal to the faithful testimony of His servants. Signs and wonders were done by their hands. By these God demonstrated once more to the unbelieving Jews in the dispersion that Jesus is the Christ.

The entire city seems to have been divided. When it came to actual persecutions, and both the unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Gentiles made ready to stone them, and the plot became known, they left Iconium and fled to Lystra and Derbe. No doubt this was the will of the Lord and they followed His guidance. That it was not cowardice or self-protection is seen by the fact that a short time after they returned unto Iconium (Verse 21).

## **II. Their testimony in Derbe and Lystra, the healing of the impotent man and what followed.**

**“And there they preached the gospel. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We are also men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them”** (Verses 7-18).

The two cities Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia proper. The people inhabiting these places

were called Barbarians; they heard the Gospel next. No synagogue was located in Lystra, for there were not enough Jews there to form one. However, we know that a pious Jewess had her residence in Lystra. Her name was Eunice. She had been married to a Greek, who had died.

Her son was Timotheus, and she lived with her mother, Lois. From Acts 16:1-3 we learn that Eunice had believed. The mother was also a believer (II Timothy 1:5). Eunice taught her son the Scriptures. We do not know from the report in our chapter that Paul then came in touch with her, but we fully believe this must have been the case and that the apostles perhaps lodged in her house.

And now another lame man is healed by the power of God. He had been crippled from his mother's womb and had never walked. He heard the Word. Faith came to his heart by hearing, and the Apostle Paul, beholding him, perceived that he had faith to be healed. Then Paul spoke the word and the Lord answered by healing the lame man so that he leaped and walked.

The miracle created a great stir among the people, and they cried out in their own language, **“the gods are come to us in the likeness of men.”**

The mythological superstitions took hold of them, and they imagined that the two apostles, Barnabas and Paul, were some of their gods who had taken on human form. In Barnabas they imagined to see Jupiter and in Paul, who did the most talking, Mercurius. But the two apostles did not know what all the commotion meant, for they did not understand the Lycaonian language. \*

\* They did not possess therefore the miraculous gift of languages and understood not what was said. This answers the statements made by those who believe in the restoration of the **“gift of tongues,”** that speaking in tongues is the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The temple of Jupiter or Zeus, as this god is called in the Greek language, was outside of the city. From there the priests brought oxen with garlands, ready to bring sacrifices to the newly-discovered gods.

It was then that the apostles heard of it, and rending their clothes, ran among the people to stop their foolish endeavors. These servants of the Lord Jesus Christ did not want honors from men, as if they were some great ones. The people tried to idolize them, but they abhorred these wicked proceedings.

The enemy lurked behind this, no doubt, but the grace of God gave to the apostles the power to act as they did. How much of such idolizing is going on in modern days; how men, professedly the servants of the Lord, seek and love the honor and praise of men, is too evident to be mentioned. Seeking honor from men and having delight in the applause of the “religious world” is a deadly thing, for it dishonors Christ, to whom all honor and glory is due. And how much of all this there is in the present day! It is but the result of not giving the Lord Jesus Christ the pre-eminence.

Powerful were the words which the two men of God addressed to the poor Pagans. They did not

preach what they were not capable of understanding. They came right down to their level. They showed them the wickedness of idolatry which puts the creature into the place of the Creator. The message was suited to them and to their needs and paved the way for the Gospel testimony.

**“We are also men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea and all things that are therein.” \***

\* “What is notable, I think, especially for all those engaged in the work of the Lord, is the variety in the character of the apostolic addresses. There was no such stiffness as we are apt to find in our day in the preaching of the gospel. Oh, what monotony! what sameness of routine, no matter who may be addressed! We find in Scripture people dealt with as they were, and there is that kind of an appeal to the conscience which was adapted to their peculiar state. The discourse in the synagogue was founded on the Jewish scriptures, here to these men of Lycaonia there is no allusion to the Old Testament whatever, but a plain reference to what all see and know - the heavens above them and the seasons that God was pleased from old to assign round about them, and that continual supply of the fruits of His natural bounty of which the most callous can scarce be insensible.” - W. Kelly.

Yet even with these burning words they were almost unable to restrain the people from carrying out their purpose.

### **III. The stoning of Paul and further ministries.**

**“And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia” (Verses 19-24).**

Jews from Antioch and Iconium suddenly appeared in Lystra. Not satisfied to make opposition to the apostles and to stir up strife in their own cities, they followed after these men. Word must have reached them of their success in Lystra. They came to stir up the Lycaonians.

What evil things they said against the two servants of God may well be imagined. They persuaded the people that they were not gods; they must have branded them as deceivers and worse. The mass of people who were ready to worship Barnabas and Paul changed quickly and stoned Paul. Most likely the fury turned against him because he had been instrumental in healing the crippled man.

As the stones fell upon him, must he not have remembered Stephen? And may he not have

prayed as Stephen did?

And after they thought him dead, they dragged his body out of the city. But the Lord, who had announced such suffering for him, had watched over his servant. He was in His own hands, as every child of God is in His care.

The enemy who stood behind the furious mob, as he stood behind the attempt to sacrifice unto them, would have killed Paul. But he could not touch Paul's life, as he was not permitted to touch the life of another servant of God, Job (Job 2:6).

The Lord's omnipotent hand shielded Paul, and when the disciples stood round about the apparent dead body, he arose and came into the city. This sudden recovery was supernatural. He refers in II Corinthians 11:25 to this stoning, "**Once I was stoned.**"

Another reference to Lystra we find in his second Epistle to Timothy:

**"Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me"** (II Timothy 3:11).

Blessed be His name, He is the same Lord still and will deliver them that trust in Him.

The next day finds Paul and Barnabas at Derbe, a small town, some thirty miles from Lystra. Here he preached the Gospel to the entire city and taught many. In chapter 20:4 we have Gaius of Derbe mentioned, who in all probability was a fruit of the apostles' testimony in that city.

From Derbe they returned to Lystra without fear, and also revisited Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia. The divine purpose in this was to confirm, to establish the disciples. They had to suffer persecution in these places, and so the apostles exhorted them to continue in the faith and assured them: "**that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the Kingdom of God.**"

The Kingdom of God, however, must not be confounded with the kingdom of heaven, which is another term and has another meaning. That they retraced their steps and looked after those who had believed to help them on in the truth and strengthen their faith, is of much importance.

Modern evangelism, aiming at big things and large crowds, has lost sight of this.

We find in our days but few evangelists who return to the same places to help those who believed and to establish their souls. Besides this the two apostles looked to the proper order for the assemblies. "**They ordained them elders in every church**" that is; "*they chose elders.*" It was not done when the apostles had first labored in these places, for time was necessary to show who was gifted and qualified for the office of an elder.

It is true the apostles looked after this personally, and later Paul commissioned Titus and Timotheus to appoint elders. But the Holy Spirit also has given in the Epistles, for the church throughout the age, the marks of true New Testament eldership.

It is the Holy Spirit who calls and fits elders for their work in the assembly, and the assembly,

having the Scriptures to show the fitness for the office, must recognize such. Confusion, division and disorder in many assemblies are often the result of having ignored this fact. Those who are gifted for oversight must exercise this gift.

After they had accomplished this important and needful work, commending them also in prayer to the Lord, they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

#### **IV. The Return to Antioch.**

**“And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples”** (Verses 25-28).

No report is given of the result of the preaching at Perga. From there they went to the seaport Attalia, and then they returned to the starting point, Antioch, from where they had been called to do the work, and which they had, through the grace of God, fulfilled.

They had been gone for about eighteen months.

The church in Antioch was gathered together to hear the wonderful story of God's grace and power. What a blessed time they must have had together when Paul and Barnabas related what God had done! What praise and joyful exclamations must have welled forth from the hearts and lips of God's people as they listened how the Lord had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles! And there Paul and Barnabas abode in blessed fellowship with the disciples.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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