

Acts of the Apostles

Week 17 – Acts 14:1-28

In Iconium (14:1-7)

- Paul and Barnabas traveled southeast along the Via Sebaste, a paved road that Augustus built to connect military colonies to Iconium and Lystra.
- Their first stop was in Iconium where they followed their normal pattern of preaching in the synagogue (v 1).
- They met with a divided response.
 - o Many Jews and Greeks believed.
 - Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly for the Lord (v 3).
 - “The Lord” confirmed their message by enabling them to perform signs and wonders (v 3).
 - o But a group of Jews stirred up some other Gentiles and “poisoned their minds against the brothers” (v 2).
 - Much modern scholarship points to the fact that Paul’s teaching upset both Jewish sensibilities about purity (Paul included Gentiles) and Roman sensibilities about their civil religion (Paul taught Jesus and not Caesar was Lord).
 - As such, leaders in both groups, often at odds with one another, found a common enemy in Paul.
 - Paul and Barnabas stayed “considerable time” (v 3) in Iconium despite the opposition but moved on when they discovered a plot by city leaders to stone them (vv 5-7).
 - There is a time to stand up in the face of opposition and a time to move on – only the wisdom given by the Spirit can tell us when to do which.

In Lystra and Derbe.

- Lystra was a town on the Via Sebaste.
- Paul came across a lame man who had never walked, saw that he had faith to be healed, and called out for the man to stand up and walk (vv 8-10).
 - o The story parallels Peter’s healing of a lame man in 3:1-10, 16.
 - o The man responded to Peter’s invitation by jumping up and walking. He could have doubted and said, “I can’t. I’m lame.”
- When the man jumped up and began walking, the crowds who witnessed the miracle began to worship Barnabas and Paul as if they were the gods Zeus and Hermes (vv 11-13).
 - o There were local stories about Zeus and Hermes visiting the area disguised as humans once before. An elderly couple supposedly welcomed them into their home and were richly rewarded (Garland, 146).

- Barnabas and Paul reacted to the adoration of the crowd with trepidation. Unlike Herod (12:21-23), they would not allow the crowd to mistake them for gods. They tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd to stop their worship by asserting that they are only human beings.
- They then began to preach the good news and invited the people to turn from these worthless things (idols) to the living God. Their language about God being the creator and the one who brings the rain countered their belief about Zeus being the one who did these things.
- The text says that their words barely prevented the people from making sacrifices to them (v 18).
- While this was happening some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and convinced the crowd that Barnabas and Paul were dangerous.
 - We might wonder at the crowd's swift change of heart, but Paul did call their beliefs worthless.
 - Paul was willing to risk his life for the gospel's sake.
 - The crowd stoned Paul (and not Barnabas?) and left him for dead (v 19).
 - Paul, the one who oversaw Stephen's stoning, was stoned.
 - Unlike Stephen, Paul lived another day. Aided by the disciples, he and Barnabas set off for Derbe the next day.
 - While it appears the preaching in Lystra was without success, Lystra was Timothy's hometown (Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:11). Even in this apparent failure, God was at work.

The Return to Antioch in Syria (14:21-28)

- Barnabas and Paul had great success in preaching the gospel in Derbe winning a "large number of disciples" (v 21).
- Remarkably, they returned to Antioch through Lystra and Iconium, places where people wanted them dead, to encourage the disciples to "remain true to the faith" (v 22).
 - Barnabas and Paul's message of encouragement was simple, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (v 22).
 - They also put into place a structure that would serve the church in its mission of discipleship by installing elders for each church (v 23).
 - They preached in several other spots on their way back to Antioch (v 25).
- Upon returning to Antioch, they gave a report to the church about all that God had done including how God opened the door to the Gentiles (v 27).
 - Luke described Antioch as the place where they had "been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed" (v 24). Luke's phraseology reminds us that even our work is held in God's grace.
 - Upon the return to Antioch, Barnabas and Paul stayed with the disciples for a "long time" (v 28).

Sources

Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teaching the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids MI: BakerBooks, 2017).

I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1980).