

The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

Chapter 14

14:1-7

Some people have interpreted Paul's reaction by turning to the Gentiles at the end of chapter 13 as a complete transfer of the message of the Gospel from Jews to Gentiles as a whole. But what was the first thing Paul and Barnabas did when they arrived in Iconium? They went right to the local synagogue. So that means what took place in chapter 13 was a local turning to the Gentiles. They were still committed to taking the gospel to the Jews.

The response in Iconium was mixed. A number of Jews and Gentiles believed, while others rejected the message and prepared to stone Paul and Barnabas. That's when they decided to leave town.

In verse 4, both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles. Back in 1:20-21, when Judas was replaced among the 12 Apostles, they established the criteria of the replacement having been with Yeshua from the beginning days of His ministry and being an actual witness of His resurrection. Neither Paul nor Barnabas were present at the beginning, and Paul encountered Yeshua on the Damascus road in chapter 9, and only by His voice and not visually. So they could not be Apostles in the same sense as the twelve. The Greek noun *apostolos* is derived from the verb *apostello*, which means "send forth" or "send away." That description applies to the twelve, for they were set apart and sent forth by Yeshua in Matthew 10:5. It also applies to Paul and Barnabas who were set apart by the Holy Spirit in Acts 13:2 and sent forth by the Antioch assembly in the next verse. So, the term has some interchangeability, in the same way that the word "disciple" sometimes refers in Scripture to the twelve and sometimes to the greater number of Yeshua's followers.

v. 7 – They went to the nearby town of Lystra and continued preaching the Gospel.

14:8-19

v. 8-10 – But what really got the attention of the people was Paul's healing of a man who was lame from birth, which indicates that Paul was given the gift of healing by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:30).

v. 11-13 – The people called Barnabas, Zeus and Paul, Hermes because they were trying to explain the things they observed using their existing framework, which was Greek mythology.

In fact, there is a particular background story to this episode. In the year 8 A.D., a Roman poet known as Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso) wrote an epic poem called *Metamorphose* that encompassed a total of 250 myths in 15 volumes, written in Latin. One of those poetic myths, called "Philemon and Baucis," told the story of the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury coming to earth in human form. In this myth, they travel from home to home, but no one offers them hospitality, until they reach the home of Philemon and Baucis. Ultimately, everyone in the region of Lystra is hit with a flood except the home of Philemon and Baucis, which turns into a magnificent temple.

The Roman God Jupiter is called Zeus in Greek, and the Roman deity Mercury is the same as the Greek Hermes. Because Paul and Barnabas demonstrated the miraculous

power of healing, the local people concluded that they were the literal fulfillment of the myth written by Ovid. And, not wanting to experience judgment for a lack of hospitality, like in the myth, they showed a willingness to offer hospitality and sacrifices to these supposed gods appearing as men. So, these people were just interpreting the world around them and acting according to the influence of their own religion.

- v. 14-17 – Paul and Barnabas handled this attention effectively by deflecting it and making sure that the people understood they were mere men. Then they contrasted their human limitations with the reality of God, using an explanation of General Revelation—the existence of the true God reflected in creation. It is important to notice that they did not criticize the pagan belief system of the Greeks. Instead, they simply affirmed the truth they had come to know themselves. They were offering Good News (v. 15), which contrasted the Greek understanding that the gods brought harsh judgment on those who were not worthy of blessing. But Paul and Barnabas did not focus on the error or the bad news of that kind of belief. They simply proclaimed the Good News of Yeshua.
- v. 18-19 – This great popularity suddenly dissipated when their opponents from Iconium, and Antioch showed up and agitated the crowd. This led to Paul being stoned and, presumed to be dead, his body was dragged outside of the city. This experience may very well have led to permanent scars on his body, which may be what he had in mind when he writes in Galatians 6:17 that he bears on his body the marks of Yeshua.

14:20-28

- v. 20 – But Paul survived and they went to the next town of Derbe.
- v. 21 – After making many disciples there, they turned around and retraced their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and (Pisidian) Antioch.
- v. 22-23 – This time their purpose was not evangelistic, but ministering to the disciples in the new believing assemblies of those communities. They took care of administrative matters by appointing elders to shepherd the people. They also had a very specific message that was based on their recent personal experiences—continue in the faith, in spite of the tribulations/persecution that will come your way. That message is consistent with what Paul would later write to Timothy: “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12).
- v. 24-25 – Then they made their way back onboard a ship to their home base in Antioch, and restored their fellowship with the believing community there.

We can conclude that this first missionary journey was successful, in spite of great obstacles that had to be overcome—difficulties of travel, abandonment by John Mark, confrontations even to the point of being driven out of town, being tempted to receive adoration, and yet facing stoning with the intent to kill. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas never wavered in God’s calling upon their lives. And that should lead us to consider how we have a calling in our lives that will require similar dedication because of the obstacles that we face personally.