
Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 14:1-20
Lesson 25 – I'm Still standing!!!

Acts 14:1-20 (NIV)

¹ At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. ² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

⁴ The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.

⁵ There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the good news.

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.

⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:

¹⁵ "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. ¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the same Gospel message produce such different responses in Iconium?

Primary Text: Acts 14:1-4

Cross References: Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 4:12

Discussion : What does this teach us about the condition of the human heart rather than the effectiveness of God's Word?

2. How does the Gospel expose what is already in a person's heart?

Primary Text: Acts 14:2-4

Cross References: John 3:19-21; Luke 8:11-15; Jeremiah 17:9

Discussion : Why is opposition to truth often evidence of a hardened heart rather than a flawed message?

3. Why should believers never measure faithfulness by popularity or public approval?

Primary Text: Acts 14:1-4

Cross References: John 6:60-69; Galatians 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:2-5

Discussion: In what ways can the desire to be accepted cause Christians to compromise biblical truth?

4. According to Acts 14, how does Satan use division to hinder the work of God?

Primary Text: Acts 14:2-5

Cross References: Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; James 3:13-18

Discussion: How can believers recognize when conflict is actually spiritual warfare instead of merely a personality conflict?

5. Why is it important to guard your mind against negative and poisonous influences?

Primary Text: Acts 14:2

Cross References: Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8; Isaiah 26:3

Discussion: What practical habits help believers keep their minds focused on God's truth rather than the enemy's lies?

6. What can we learn from Paul and Barnabas refusing to accept worship from the people after the healing in Lystra?

Primary Text: Acts 14:8-18

Cross References: Isaiah 42:8; Acts 3:12-16; 1 Corinthians 10:31

Discussion: How can Christians serve faithfully without seeking personal recognition or glory?

7. Why are miracles and spiritual gifts never meant to point to the servant but always to the Savior?

Primary Text: Acts 14:8-18

Cross References: John 2:11; John 20:30-31; Colossians 1:15-18

Discussion: How can churches unintentionally elevate personalities above Christ?

8. What does Paul's experience teach us about the danger of building our identity on people's opinions?

Primary Text: Acts 14:11-20

Cross References: Proverbs 29:25; Psalm 118:8-9; Hebrews 13:8

Discussion: Why is God's approval more secure than human applause?

9. What evidence do you see in Acts 14 that spiritual opposition often increases when God's Kingdom advances?

Primary Text: Acts 14:19-20

Cross References: Matthew 16:18; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 5:8-10

Discussion: How should believers interpret seasons of intense opposition?

10. What does Paul's decision to get up and continue preaching reveal about perseverance in ministry?

Primary Text: Acts 14:20

Cross References: 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; Philippians 3:13-14; Hebrews 12:1-3

Discussion: What gives believers the strength to keep serving after disappointment, criticism, or suffering?

11. How does the resurrection of Jesus become the foundation for every believer's perseverance?

Primary Text: Acts 14:20

Cross References: Romans 8:11; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Discussion: In what ways does Christ's resurrection give hope when life feels overwhelming?

12. After studying Acts 14, what does it truly mean to say, "I'm Still Standing"?

Primary Text: Acts 14:20

Cross References: Psalm 124:1-8; Isaiah 54:17; Jude 24; Ephesians 6:13

Discussion: Looking back over your own life, where have you seen God's sustaining grace enable you to remain faithful despite hardship?

Memory Verse:

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 — *"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."*

Personal Challenge Questions:

- Where has God called you to remain faithful despite opposition?
- What "negative voices" do you need to replace with God's promises?
- Are you seeking the applause of people or the approval of God?
- How can your testimony encourage someone else who has been "struck down but not destroyed"?
- What practical step can you take this week to demonstrate that, by God's grace, you are **still standing**?

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

Iconium, the Ancient City: God's Pattern for Preaching and Witnessing, 14:1-7

(14:1-7) **Introduction:** this passage is striking. It gives a clear picture of God's pattern for preaching, for bearing witness to His name. The pattern is seen in what Paul and Barnabas experienced. Their experience shows exactly what God expects of His servant and exactly what the servant can expect as he preaches the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus.

1. (14:1) Preaching: the first step in preaching is a unified spirit and effort. There is emphasis upon the word "together" and the fact that the men were ministering and serving *together*. Remember: the Spirit of God had moved Paul ahead of Barnabas in the ministry (see Deeper Study #4—Acts 13:9; Acts 13:14-16). This speaks volumes on the spirit of Barnabas. He must have been a most unusual man, a strong servant of the Lord. Several factors gave the men a unified spirit.

⇒ They served the same Lord. ⇒ They were called to the same field. ⇒ They bore the same message.

⇒ They loved each other as brothers in the Lord. Therefore, they wished to encourage and support each other as they fulfilled God's call. ⇒ They knew that love was the primary witness to the world.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

Thought 1. The same factors are true of all ministers of the Lord; therefore, the same unified spirit should be true of all. All God's servants should be serving *together*, working together in His Spirit and for His cause.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

2. (14:1) Witnessing— Preaching: the second step in preaching is following the God-given method. The method of God is twofold.

1. First, the servant of God is to *speak*. He is to speak by bearing witness and preaching the Lord Jesus Christ, the salvation that is in Him. God's method is *verbal witness* (see outline—' Acts 13:14-41 and notes—' Acts 13:14-41).

"It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

"And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7).

2. Second, the servant of God is to go where the people are. Note that the first place Paul and Barnabas went was the synagogue

- to go first where the people were, where a ready-made audience was.
- to go first where the religionists (Jews) were, the people who were already familiar with the Scripture.

"Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage" (Matthew 22:9).

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37).

"Go, stand and speak in the temple [church] to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:20).

3. (14:1) Preaching: the third step in preaching is the experience of results. Both Jews and Greeks were reached, and the idea is that they were reached immediately. Note: there was no partiality or favoritism shown to anyone. The evangelistic thrust was to all people throughout the whole city. All were put on the same level; there was no class or social distinction between any. Paul and Barnabas reached out to all who would listen to the glorious gospel. They were obedient to their Lord; therefore, God was able to honor His word and many were reached—many believed the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12).

"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:4-6).

4. (14:2) Persecution: the fourth step in preaching is the grumbling opposition. Note three things.

1. It was the unbelieving religionists (Jews) who stirred up the trouble over the preaching of the gospel. The word "unbelieving" (*apeithēsantes* ^{PWS:4109}) means disobedient. The idea is they were *unwilling* to believe or be persuaded. They deliberately withheld belief, *disobeying* God.

"And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23).

2. The picture is this: they went about stirring up the city against the Lord's servants. The religionists made a deliberate attempt to arouse the people. The religionists...

- spread rumors• poisoned opinions• made false suggestions• made insinuations

They tried to embitter and provoke the people and the officials of the city to get rid of the preachers.

3. They opposed the preachers for three reasons

5. (14:3) Boldness— Perseverance— Minister: the fifth step in preaching is the boldness and perseverance of the preacher. Note three things.

1. Despite the persecution and evil feelings against their preaching, they continued ministering and witnessing for Christ. They did not...

- withdraw or flee. • soften their preaching. • compromise their message. • seek to please the officials.

But note the source of their boldness. They spoke boldly "in the Lord"; that is, they relied upon and trusted Him and His strength to bear them along, looking after their welfare.

Thought 1. Paul and Barnabas must have spent much time in prayer, for boldness is given in answer to prayer.

"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Acts 4:29).

"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Tim. 1:7-8).

2. The preachers were instruments in the hands of the Lord. Note the words, "gave testimony [witness] to the word of his grace." In the Greek the subject of this sentence is Christ, not the preachers. Christ is the One who gave witness, who did the preaching through the lives and voices of the two ministers. They were so surrendered, so yielded to the Lord, He was able to use them to the fullest as His servants to bear witness to the Word of His grace.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Thought 1. Imagine a person being so surrendered, so yielded to Christ that He is able to speak and minister through that person. This is exactly what He expects and demands. We are to be His instruments, His servants, through whom He can live and bear testimony to Himself.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

3. Note the words, "The Lord...granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3). Again, the signs and wonders are worked *by Christ* through the hands of the preachers. He is the Source, the Power, the Minister, the Healer. They were only the instruments and servants in the hands of the Lord. (God grant that we be so yielded to Him!)

"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30).

"God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will" (Hebrews 2:4).

6. (14:4-5) Ministers— Persecution: the sixth step in preaching was the divided opinions about the preachers. Preachers can *expect* divided opinions. Some people will support them; others will not support them. No preacher has ever been acceptable to all persons. Note three points.

1. The greatest impact that a preacher can make is to be so surrendered to Christ that he becomes the very instrument and voice of Christ. The whole city had heard about Christ and they were affected by the message and ministry.

Thought 1. What a challenge the dedication of Paul is to preachers...

- his dedication in the study of the Word.

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

- his dedication in prayer.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephes. 6:18. See outline—' Ephes. 3:14-21 and notes—' Ephes. 3:14-21 for what Paul prayed.)

- his dedication in preaching.

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine....But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:2, 5).

- his dedication in making disciples.

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

It was because of Paul's commitment to all the duties of a minister that God was able to use him so dynamically.

2. The people were divided over the preachers. They formed cliques and factions over the Lord's servants. Some favored; some opposed.

Thought 1. Christ came to bring division to the earth.

"For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law" (Luke 12:52-53).

3. The opposition won out and actually made an assault (*horme*) upon the two men. The word means an impulse, a rush upon. Apparently a mob gathered and headed for the men, either rushing into their residence or rushing about trying to find them. Note: both Gentiles and Jews were involved, that is, both non-religionists and religionists, both those who were unfamiliar and those who were familiar with the Scriptures.

Thought 1. There are two facts the Lord's servant must never forget.

- 1) Christ came to bring division to the earth.

"For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law" (Luke 12:52-53).

- 2) The servant of the Lord shall suffer persecution.

"Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things will they do unto you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you" (John 16:1-4).

7. (14:6-7) **Ministers:** the seventh step in preaching is turning away to willing hearers. Very simply, the preachers discovered that the opposition was about to attack them. More harm to the gospel would be done if

they remained, and the important thing was for the gospel to go forward in its saving power. So the preachers turned away and fled for the sake of the gospel. They turned to willing hearers and continued to preach the gospel.

Thought 1. Note two stirring lessons.

1) When facing opposition, the Lord's servant must carefully weigh what is best for the spread of the gospel. Sometimes taking a stand will bring greater results; sometimes leaving will bring greater results. The servant must always do what is best for the gospel.

2) The Lord's servant is not to become defeated and give up the ministry because of opposition. He must always go forth, looking for new fields in which to preach Christ.

"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matthew 24:9).

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John 16:13).

DEEPER STUDY #1

(14:1) **Iconium**: this city was located in the Roman district of GALATIA or modern day Turkey.

Paul's First Great Missionary Journey: Cyprus & GALATIA (Acts 13:1-14:28) Paul's Second Great Missionary Journey: Europe (Acts 15:36-18:22) Paul's Third Great Missionary Journey: Asia Minor & Europe (Acts 18:23-21:16) Paul's Final Journey: To Rome as a Prisoner (Acts 23:12:28:31). The city was about ninety miles east of Antioch Pisidia. It was called the Damascus of Asia Minor. The city actually claimed to be older than Damascus. It lay along the edge of the great central plain of Asia Minor, one of the most fertile plains imaginable. It was known for its plum and apricot orchards. The major road between the west and Syria passed through the city; therefore, it was a commercial center. A person can just picture Paul and Barnabas. They had suffered persecution and been kicked out of Antioch of Pisidia, but as they walked along the great Roman road in the midst of the beautiful fertile plain and lush orchards, they were rejoicing in the Lord and in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They were victorious in Jesus their Lord. They marched forward to claim Iconium for Him.

A large church was established in Iconium; a "great multitude" of both Jews and Greeks believed (Acts 14:1). But again, the church was founded in the midst of unbelief and persecution (Acts 14:2, 4-6). Despite the opposition, Paul and Barnabas were able to remain in the city for a long time, rooting and establishing the believers in the faith. Eventually however, their lives were threatened and they were forced to flee (Acts 14:6). Some of the same Jewish persecutors hounded Paul, following and arousing the people throughout GALATIA against him (Acts 14:19). Paul mentioned the terrible persecutions which he suffered at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Tim. 3:11). The Iconium church...

- was founded on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:1-6).
- was revisited by Paul on his return trip (Acts 14:21-22).

- was visited by Paul and Silas and Timothy on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-5). He also visited the city on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23).
- was one of the churches to whom Paul wrote the Book of Galatians.

F. Lystra, the Frontier Town: Preaching to a Heathen and Superstitious People, 14:8-20

(14:8-20) **Introduction:** there are people all over the world who know very little about God and Scripture, people in both industrialized and primitive societies. They are the lost of the world, people gripped with heathen and superstitious beliefs and philosophies, people without God and without hope for the future. How can they be reached? What is the message that needs to be preached to a heathen and superstitious people?

1. Paul preached on the city streets (v.8).
2. The nature of a superstitious people, the nature that necessitates a special message (v.8-13).
3. The message to a superstitious people (v.14-18).
4. The minister needed to reach superstitious people (v.19-20).

1. (14:8) Preaching— Witnessing: Paul preached on the city streets. There is no mention of a synagogue in Lystra, but there were at least a few Jewish citizens living in the city. Scripture mentions Timothy's mother who was apparently Jewish

If the Jews had been meeting together, Paul would have joined them and begun his preaching ministry among them. But as is seen in this passage, he was apparently preaching in the streets and sharing Christ with whoever would stop and listen. The statement "there sat a certain man at Lystra" seems to point also to open air preaching. The man was most likely a beggar.

Note another fact: Paul and Barnabas had to struggle against a language barrier. They did not know the Lyconian dialect, and only the educated Jew would know Greek and Aramaic, Paul's natural languages (Acts 14:11). Note the immense dedication of these men. Despite a language barrier they struggled to make Christ known to everyone.

2. (14:8-13) Superstition— Humanism: the nature of superstitious people, the nature that necessitated a special message. What happened gives clear insight into the nature of superstitious people.

1. Superstitious people are open to faith in Christ. This is pictured in the cripple sitting on the side of the street. It seems the cripple was one of the few who took time to stop and listen to Paul. This is concluded from the loud shout of Paul, which was apparently to attract an audience.

- The man was utterly helpless; both feet were crippled and had been from birth. He had *never walked*.
- The man listened to the gospel. He "heard Paul speak."
- The man's heart was opened to the gospel; therefore...
 - he was affected.

- he sensed that the message was from heaven.
- he experienced the stirring of faith in Christ.

d. The man actually "had faith to be made whole" (*echei pistin tou sōthēnai* ^{PWS: 1901}). The words "made whole" mean both to be cured and to be saved. Paul, of course, was preaching the gospel, and the man's heart was stirred to believe and trust Jesus to save him. Paul noticed this; he saw a faith rise up in the man, a faith strong enough to heal him as well as save his soul. All the man needed was to be pointed toward such power in the name of Jesus.

e. Paul *shouted out* with a loud voice (*eipen megalē phōnē* ^{PWS: 2425}), "stand upright on thy feet." And the man leaped up and walked. Note: Paul did not reach out for the man; he did not touch the man at all. He simply spoke to the man. The power was of Christ and the faith was within the man. The man had to exercise his faith, believe in and really trust in the Lord Jesus to be healed just as he did to be saved.

The point is this. The heathen and superstitious people of the world can and are to be reached for Christ. Their hearts are just like the hearts of the civilized and educated of the world. Their hearts...

- are of the same nature.
- are in just as much need.
- are just as open and subject to the truth.

Thought 1. Note: there are even heathen and superstitious people in civilized and industrialized societies. Any person ignorant of the Scripture and the truth about Christ...

- is a heathen: a pagan, an irreligious person, a foreigner toward God.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephes. 2:19).

- is trusting his fate and destiny to some form of superstitious and false belief.

2. Superstitious people are prone to deify men. Practically everyone within earshot of Paul would naturally run to see what was causing such a commotion. From what happened, the incident took place in a very busy section of the city. The picture is that of a large crowd running together, stunned, shocked, and excited. They began to run all about the city shouting the belief that "the gods" had come to visit them in the form of men. Of course with so much excitement the whole city soon heard about the miracle and became involved in *making gods* out of the two miracle workers. The point is this: there is a tendency within the world to deify both *mankind* and certain people, to hold to the superstitious and heathen belief of humanism...

- to deify mankind, worshipping the ability and feats of men whether in science and technology or in magic and sorcery. There is a tendency to worship and believe man is the one who determines his own fate and destiny.
- to deify certain persons, esteeming them too highly, putting them upon pedestals and places of honor because of their apparent power, achievements, knowledge, fame, or ability to read the future.

Such deification of men is idolatry, superstition, and heathenism. Worshipping self is the tendency of man's heart, whether a heathen in the wilds of a jungle or a heathen in the most industrialized society.

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:20-23).

"And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness" (Romans 2:19).

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

"I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me" (Job 33:9).

3. Superstitious people believe myths. The people of Lystra identified Paul and Barnabas with two man-made gods, Zeus (Jupiter) and Hermes (Mercury). The widely held myth ran like this.

Long ago the two gods disguised themselves as men and came to earth seeking people who would welcome and entertain them. Their search was futile. Everyone rejected them except two peasants, Philemon and his wife, Baucis. Disappointed and angered, the two gods destroyed the whole population, but they rewarded and honored Philemon and his wife.

Note how quickly the people of Lystra associated the two gods with Paul and Barnabas. The two gods were thought to have visited the earth in the region of Lystra. Seeing such a phenomenal event—a crippled man healed by the shout of Paul, a crippled who had never walked—stirred the imagination of the Lystrians. They made the connection between the two preachers and the mythical gods.

They were not about to make the same mistake again. They wanted the favor and blessings of the gods, not their judgment and condemnation. They called Barnabas Zeus, the king of the gods; and they called Paul Hermes, the god of speech and the messenger of the other gods. The points to note are these:

- a. The heathen believed in myths: they held to false ideas about reality and truth, the origin and power of the world, the nature and presence of God.
- b. The heathen mistook man's ability and power for God's ability and power: they were immediately ready to pay homage to man in honor of his achievements.

4. Superstitious people offer the wrong sacrifice. The people were wildly excited. They rushed to pay honor to the two *god-like* men. They were ready and even prepared to make sacrifice to the two. Why? To secure their favor and blessings.

Note the idea of sacrifice or of giving oneself in order to secure favor and blessings is not just an idea of religion. It is a fact of all reality, a fact that holds true for everything man does. A man has to sacrifice and give himself to any endeavor if he wishes to reap the benefits of the endeavor (its favor and blessings). Whatever the

project, a man's being, time, energy and effort are required if he wishes to have the blessings. The point is threefold.

- a. The heathen, the lost of the world, sacrifice and give themselves to men of power, ability, wealth and achievement. They give themselves to such men, treating them as *god-like* men. They do it to secure the favor and blessings of their power, ability, wealth, and achievements.
- b. The humanists, the heathen who follow the basic myth of the world, sacrifice and give themselves to men of science and industry, ability and achievement. Why? To secure the favor and blessings wrought by their *god-like* hands.
- c. There are only two genuine sacrifices.

⇒ There is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for man, the giving of His life in order to save man.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

⇒ There is the sacrifice of man to Jesus Christ, the giving of his life in order to be acceptable to God.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

3. (14:14-18) Preaching— Message: the message to superstitious people. Note what Paul and Barnabas did. The people had been shouting and carrying on their activities of worship in their native tongue. Many of the people would be bilingual, speaking both their own language and Greek. But Paul and Barnabas could not understand what they were saying in their native Lyconian tongue (Acts 14:11). When they finally grasped what was happening, they courageously protested against such heathen behavior. They ran into the midst of the crowd tearing their clothes. The tearing of one's clothes was a sign of holy indignation against sin. By this symbol the people would know immediately the two men were protesting.

⇒ Paul *cried out* (Acts 14:14), declaring exactly what a heathen people needed to hear. The people were ignorant of the Scriptures, so Paul had to approach them on the basis of "the living god, which made heaven and earth" (Acts 14:15). Paul declared five points.

1. Men are only men: "We also are men of like passions with you." The word "passions" (*homoioipatheis*^{PWS: 2345}) means the same nature. It means that all men have the same...

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| • heart
(<u>Psalm 33:15</u>) | • temptations
(<u>1 Cor. 10-13</u>) |
| • feelings | • sufferings |
| • infirmities | • aging and dying bodies
(<u>Hebrews 9:27</u>) |

a. Note who is declaring this: one of the greatest men who ever lived...

- the man chosen by God Himself to be the witness and pattern for all men.

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:16).

- the man who could say to all other men, "Be followers of me" (1 Cor 4:16; 1 Cor. 7:7; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; Phil. 4:9; 2 Thes. 3:7; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:13).
- the man who was the epitomy, the supreme example, of human religious achievement.

"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more....concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:4, 6).

"And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14).

This man, Paul, rejected the honor and homage of men; he declared that all men are mere men. No man is a *god*.

b. Note that Paul knew who he was: he was not a *god-like* man; he was a messenger who preached to men. He was a preacher declaring that men should repent and turn from their vanities, turn from the empty things and man-made idols of this earth.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ezekiel 18:21).

2. There is only one living God. The people were worshipping one of two things:

⇒ man-made idols which were lifeless and totally helpless in saving men from sin, death, and judgment.

⇒ man himself who was aging, suffering, and dying, totally unable to save himself from sin, death, and judgment, much less save anyone else.

There is only one living God, only one God who possesses the very...

- energy of life • essence of life
- power of life • principle of life
- force of life • quality of life

Therefore, *the living God* is the only God who is to be worshipped.

"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thes. 1:9).

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

3. The living God is the creator of *all* things, of "heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein." He is the Creator of man, everything about man, and everything surrounding man. Therefore, *the God of creation* is the only God who is to be worshipped.

"Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee" (Neh. 9:6).

"But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:7-10).

4. God permitted men to walk as they willed. Note the point: Paul was explaining why people worship idols, that is, "these vanities," the empty things of earth. Men worship the empty things of earth because God has given man a free will. Man is allowed to walk in his "own ways." God "suffers," that is, allows, puts up with man, longs and aches for man to turn to Him as the only living and true God, the only God who deserves the honor and worship of men.

Note: the Book of Romans explains what happened to man (cp. Romans 1:18-32).

5. God has always given witness to Himself. No man has ever been left without witness. There is the evidence...

- of *good* in the world (ontology, being). of rain.
- of fruitful seasons.
- of food. of gladness (joy).

The laws of nature do not just happen. They were given and are controlled by the only living and true God. He is behind all the good that happens to man.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

"Nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

Note: Scripture teaches that man has always had at least two witnesses of God...

- the outward witness of natural revelation stressed by Paul in this passage.

"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20).

- the inner witness of both conscience and thoughts.

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Romans 2:14-15).

"They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities" (Deut. 32:21).

4. (14:19-20) Minister: the minister needed to reach a heathen and superstitious people. Note three qualifications needed by the minister who seeks to reach the heathen of the world:

1. The minister must be willing to suffer persecution, even martyrdom. Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium were the two cities that had threatened and expelled Paul and Barnabas. Some Jews were so incensed over the preachers—over their ministry and message—they were now hounding and dogging their steps, arousing the people against them.

Note how fickle, changeable, and impulsive the heathen were, and how carnal and evil the religionists (Jews) were. Yet the minister was willing to suffer in order to *help them*, the very ones who opposed him. The people stoned Paul and left him for dead

2. The minister must be faithful in witnessing and in bearing disciples. Note some disciples were standing around Paul as he lay upon the ground, assumed to be dead! (See Deeper Study #3—Acts 14:20 for list of the disciples.)

3. The minister must trust God's delivering power. Note: Paul "rose up" (*anastas*). This points toward a miraculous recovery by God.

Thought 1. Paul had given everything to God; therefore, he was God's. His life was in the hands of God to do as He willed.

"There hath no temptation [trial] taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever" (2 Tim. 4:18).

DEEPER STUDY #2

(14:19) **Stoning, Death by:** this was a cruel and inhuman means of death. Stones large enough to crush a man's bones and head, yet small enough to be thrown with force, were used. It was a slow, painful death, unless a vital spot in the head was immediately hit. After the stoning, the body was dragged by the heels outside the city gates and left for the savage dogs and beasts that ran wild through the wilderness.

DEEPER STUDY #3

(14:20) **Discipleship:** Paul bore a faithful witness in Lystra and disciplined the believers. The believers of Lystra who are mentioned in Scripture are the lame man (Acts 14:8-10), Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 3:11), Lois and Eunice, Timothy's mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5).