

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 14:1-18

Topic

After being rejected and run-out of Iconium
Paul and Barnabas are nearly revered as gods in Lystra

Title

Paul Revered

Acts 14:1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

Acts 14:2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

Acts 14:3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Acts 14:4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

Acts 14:5 And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them,

Acts 14:6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.

Acts 14:7 And they were preaching the gospel there.

Acts 14:8 And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

Acts 14:9 This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,

Acts 14:10 said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

Acts 14:11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

Acts 14:12 And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

Acts 14:13 Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

Acts 14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out

Acts 14:15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them,

Acts 14:16 who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.

Acts 14:17 Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Acts 14:18 And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

Introduction

Reaction to Paul and Barnabas went from one extreme to another:

1. At Iconium they were slandered and defamed by the unbelieving Jews. A good word to describe how they were treated would be *vilified*.
2. At Lystra they were revered as gods by the unbelieving Gentiles. A good word to describe how they were treated would be *venerated*.

Vilified one day; venerated the next. This was serious mission work that kept Paul and Barnabas on top of their spiritual game.

We may not be out on the same kind of mission field as they were but neither are we on the sidelines or in the stands. We're in the game. Wherever we find ourselves *is* our mission field. It's serious mission work and we, too, should be on top of our spiritual game.

Out in the field people still vilify God's servants and they still venerate God's servants. Both are errors you do not want to be drawn into.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Let Yourself Be Drawn Into Vilifying God's Servants, and #2 Don't Let Yourself Be Drawn Into Venerating God's Servants.

#1 Don't Let Yourself
Be Drawn Into Vilifying God's Servants
(v1-6)

Vilify means *to slander, to defame, to speak ill of*. I wish we could say that this never happens in the church. Sadly, it does happen. When it does it threatens the work of edifying God's saints and evangelizing sinners. We need to be ready for it.

Paul and Barnabas had been expelled from Antioch of Pisidia for preaching the Gospel. Undaunted they traveled to Iconium and went immediately to the Sabbath day service at the local synagogue.

Acts 14:1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

The **synagogue** was a great place to begin their ministry in a new city. There they would be able to address an audience familiar with the Scriptures. They could prove from the Scriptures that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world promised by God.

- being changed to bring change -

Another reason for starting in the synagogue was that if they preached first to Gentiles the Jews would never listen to them.

Their teaching from Scripture and preaching about Jesus resulted in **a great multitude both of Jews and of the Greeks believ[ing]**. **Greeks** probably refers to Gentiles in the synagogue who were proselytes to Judaism. They will be contrasted to the unbelieving Gentile population of Iconium in the next verse.

Acts 14:2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

The **brethren** refers to the newly born-again believers. Isn't it wonderful that when you get saved God puts you into a family?

Other believers are not just fellow disciples. They are your brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Have you heard the saying, “*The enemy of my enemy is my friend?*” Unbelieving Jews went to Gentiles, whom they normally had no dealings with, to find support against the missionaries. They vilified Paul and Barnabas and the new converts in such strong language that Luke compared it to **poison[ing] their minds**.

Acts 14:3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

You see something of a shepherd’s heart in this statement. Paul and Barnabas **stayed there a long time** in order to protect and strengthen the believers during this attack. They continued to do their regular ministry of **speaking boldly in the Lord**.

If you are ever vilified while doing the work of the Lord, recognize it is a strategy to get you to stop and waste energy defending yourself. Shake it off and keep doing your work for the Lord!

God was **bearing witness to the word of His grace**. People were getting saved despite the vicious campaign against the brethren and their leaders.

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God was also **granting signs and wonders to be done by [the] hands** of Paul and Barnabas. It was a powerful one-two punch: People were getting saved and wondrous signs were accompanying the ministry.

You’d think that would silence the opposition. *You’d be wrong!*

Acts 14:4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

The campaign of slander caused division. It threw suspicion on the work of the Lord.

Note in passing that Luke calls both Paul and Barnabas **apostles**. He’s using the word in the sense of them being messengers sent out

from the church to preach the Gospel. Today we use the word *missionaries* so that people don't get confused. There are no apostles in the same sense that the twelve in Acts and Paul were personally commissioned by the risen Jesus Christ.

Acts 14:5 And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them,
Acts 14:6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.

Some of the Roman **rulers** of Iconium joined in against them. Fearlessness doesn't mean foolishness. Paul and Barnabas **fled** leaving a thriving church behind.

Vilifying Christians is a favorite strategy of our enemy. I have more examples than I care to of instances just in my life and towards my family. While it hurts those targeted, it is more harmful to you. Luke said it **poisoned minds**.

No one comes up to you with a syringe full of poison and asks if they can inject it into your brain. But that's exactly what happens on a spiritual level when we listen to them slander, gossip, and backbite.

In our context it was nonbelievers injecting the poison. It's even worse when it's a believer who holds the syringe.

- being changed to bring change -

We need to become more sensitive to slander and gossip and backbiting. We need to avoid it like we would any dangerous poison.

#2 Don't Let Yourself
Be Drawn Into Venerating God's Servants
(v7-18)

One author describes Paul by saying he preached at Athens and was mocked; he preached at Jerusalem and was mobbed; he preached at Rome and was martyred. **Woe is me**, Paul would write, **if I do not preach the Gospel!** (1Corinthians 9:16).

Acts 14:6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.

Acts 14:7 And they were preaching the gospel there.

There is no mention of them going to the synagogue. That tells us there were not even ten male Jews in this region. They were way out of any comfort zone they may have developed!

Acts 14:8 And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

Acts 14:9 This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,

Acts 14:10 said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

Paul was probably **speaking** in the open marketplace. Don't be too quick to judge as fanatics folks who are preaching out in public.

A lifelong cripple, almost certainly a beggar, **heard** Paul. Don't try to make too much of the statement **he had faith to be healed**. There is no teaching here or anywhere else in the Bible that healing is a matter of how much faith you have. It's a false teaching, a damnable heresy, that says you can always be healed and enjoy health and wealth to your heart's content.

In this case God gave Paul discernment that this cripple believed he could be healed and that God would heal him if Paul would act. It was more like a gift of faith that God granted right then.

Acts 14:11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

Acts 14:12 And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

Acts 14:13 Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

The Roman poet Ovid records the Lystran legend that one day Zeus and Hermes disguised themselves as men and visited the region. They were treated inhospitably by everyone except an old couple named Philemon and Baucis. Thus they sent a flood, killing everyone except Philemon and Baucis. Afterwards they turned the old couple's humble cottage into a temple and appointed them priest and priestess.

With that frame of reference, the Lystran's assumed **Zeus** and **Hermes** were at it again. In their mythology **Hermes** was the spokesperson for **Zeus**. Thus Paul was thought to be Hermes, Barnabas thought to be Zeus.

They were not gods; they were messengers *of* God!

Acts 14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out

Not knowing the language, Paul and Barnabas didn't immediately realize they had been chosen the next *Lycaonian Idol!* Once they did, they reacted to show the crowd they were just as human as they were.

Once they had the attention of the crowd they spoke boldly against idolatry:

Acts 14:15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them,

This is pretty strong language. They called their religion and beliefs **useless**. Sometimes the most tactful approach is blunt honesty.

Paul and Barnabas appealed to the Lystran's to look at creation. Creation is a witness that there must be a God. Design demands a Designer.

All men everywhere for all time have the witness of creation. It's not a full and complete witness but it's enough to cause any rational person to seek after more truth about the living God.

Sadly, men do not want to be subject to God so they turn from Him and begin to worship the creation rather than its Creator.

Acts 14:16 who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.

God allows nations of men to turn from Him and worship creation instead of its Creator. Why? The alternative is judgment. Judgment is indeed coming. You can read all about it in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. God is patient; He is longsuffering; He is not willing any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

If men have chosen to **walk in their own ways**, and God allows it because He is longsuffering, **then the problems in our world can be laid upon the human race and not God!** Don't be blaming Him for the suffering in our world.

Acts 14:17 Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Even though men reject Him, God goes on being good. As much as men have tried to deny God and eliminate Him, He continues to witness to them in the orderly processes of the natural world we all depend upon.

Acts 14:18 And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

These guys were hardcore Zeus fans. They probably had their Zeus jerseys on, with a few Hermes helmets.

The missionaries were successful at stopping the sacrifice. Sadly there is no mention of any conversions.

We still idolize people. It can and does happen among Christians. There are always certain charismatic preachers who become wildly popular. They appeal to both Christians and nonbelievers by presenting a watered-down Gospel that teaches material prosperity and human potential.

If you are well-taught in the Bible you are not likely to be drawn into venerating these men and women. But likely you know people who do venerate them. It is dangerous, it is idolatry, that will lead your friends and family away from the living God. Pray and ask God how you can tell them the truth.

Applying God's Word...

- Don't get drawn into vilifying your brothers and sisters. It only hurts you because you are ingesting poison.
- Be aware of your friends and family being drawn into venerating men and women who are serving up a watered-down version of the Gospel at best and a false Gospel at worse.



