

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

A Story of Three Cities

Chapter Fourteen

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Acts 14:1 “And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

Acts 14:2 But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren.”

We must always remember that the first thing we are to do for the people is to preach/teach the gospel and we leave the results to God. The manner in which they spoke does not refer to their wonderful eloquence but it refers to the message they delivered to the people. God had appointed these people to believe and all that Paul and the others had to do was to tell them the gospel message. People believed and division occurred and this is the way it will always be. Jesus told us the result of the word being sown on different kinds of soil and the result depended upon the type of soil, not on the way in which the seed was sown.

Matt 13:3 “And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow;

Matt 13:4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.

Matt 13:5 “And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil.

Matt 13:6 “But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

Matt 13:7 “And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.

Matt 13:8 “And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

Matt 13:9 “He who has ears, let him hear.””

The soil is prepared before the seed is sown and so the soil that is fertile and ready to produce sprouts from the seed will do so. The soil that is not prepared ahead of the time of the sowing of the seed will not be ready to receive it and the result will be no growth. As we know, the analogy is that God must prepare the heart so that people will have ears to ear the truth and to accept it as the truth. Many of these people at Iconium had been so prepared by God and so many of them believed. But the ones whose hearts had not been prepared did not believe. We must trust God for the result and not think that many people did not believe because we were ineffectual.

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

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

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

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

Acts 14:7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.”

Luke tells us that they did rely upon the Lord and that even signs and wonders were being done by the Lord through their hands. This area is called South Galatia and many people think that Paul was addressing these people in his letter to the Galatians. There is much dispute about whether such is true or not but if it is so then we can learn a lot about these people from Paul’s letter. Dr. Boice thought that the letter to the Galatians was indeed intended for these people. The longer the gospel was preached the more division occurred. Finally the division reached the state that severe trouble was about to happen. The Lord got the message to this band of missionaries and they left. The experience did not deter them from their mission for they continued to preach elsewhere.

Acts 14:8 “And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother’s womb, who had never walked.

Acts 14:9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well,”

This person’s plight was severe for he had never walked. This person had never developed his muscles and tendons to the state that we walking people take for granted. It indeed would be impossible for a person who had never walked to suddenly walk. In February of 1992 I tore my ACL tendon and in March I had reconstructive surgery. In such open surgery the muscle above the knee just collapses and it took about a year of hard work to get it functional again. So I know a little bit about what it would be like to have limited leg muscles. But this man would have had absolutely no leg muscles! And we will see that God had prepared the situation so that indeed a miracle was needed and it did occur. What is the origin of this faith? So many people misunderstand faith and I have heard of some awful uses of such incorrect knowledge. Remember that faith is the enabling power of God given to us by God. People have said to Joni Erickson-Tada that if she had a stronger faith she would be walking and that infuriates me! God is the soul source of our faith and any criticism of people for not having enough faith is a direct criticism of God! When Jesus healed Him, as God, could see that God had given the person faith for healing. Now with God working with these apostles, Paul could also somehow see that God had given this man the needed faith for healing. Then all Paul had to do was to tell the man to get up! This story is similar to that faced by Jesus in the man who was blind since birth:

John 9:1 “And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.”

A person who had never had physical sight would have never had the connection from the eye to the brain function and it would indeed take a miracle for sight to be granted. These two miracles are then similar in that a major miracle was required for function to return.

Acts 14:10 “said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

Acts 14:11 And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us.'”

Here is the extreme miracle that is told to us by the physician Luke. A person who had never walked could not physically leap up and begin to walk unless God had worked a miracle in the person’s totally body. The people saw Paul tell the man to get up and assumed that the healing came from Paul. Since the man had never walked before the people recognized this change as a miracle but they attributed the healing to Paul. As we will see below, Paul refused to take this blasphemy and gave the glory to God. Of course the healing came from God, not from Paul. It is interesting that the people suddenly began talking in their native language, which was other than Greek. Paul and the others did not understand this language, which explains why they did not immediately begin to object to what the people were saying. They had to notice that the people were very excited but surely they just thought that such excitement was due to the healing and not that the people thought that they were gods.

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

There was a book published in 1961 in which a man had gathered many mythological stories. One story he printed was about Zeus and Hermes (Mercury) visiting a valley near Lystra. They went to a lot of houses and nobody would take them in but an elderly couple (Philemon and Baucis). In the morning the gods took the couple up a mountain and when they looked back the gods had flooded the valley killing everyone else. Then they looked and saw that the gods were transforming their humble house into a splendid castle. This story would have been well known in this area so when the people saw this miracle they probably thought that Zeus and Hermes had returned and they feared offending them. They did not want to have their valley flooded again!

Acts 14:13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

Acts 14:14 But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

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

It was not until a priest brought forward material to offer a sacrifice to them that the apostles finally understood what was happening. They reacted now as we would expect them to react because only God is to be worshipped.

Acts 14:16 "And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;

Acts 14:17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. "

Acts 14:18 And even saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them."

They began telling them some of the history of God interacting with the people in a way that told of the mercy of God and how He gave them good things. Paul told them that God satisfied the people's hearts and not just their physical needs. Even with these reassuring words about the God that they served it was difficult to control the crowd and to divert them from their worship of them. Indeed the tale of Zeus and Hermes visiting these people earlier is a strong indication of what emotional state these people were in.

Acts 14:19 "But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

This seems like a drastic change from people willing to worship Paul to the mob that stoned him and left him for dead. But remembering the tale and how the people reacted we can see how they would have been offended at first and then very embarrassed to have been so self-deceived. People who have been shown that their religious interpretations are incorrect can be very dangerous as we saw with the way the Jews reacted to Jesus. It is a strange phenomenon but they could have taken the refusal of Paul and Barnabas to accept their sacrifices as an affront to them. They would really rather have had the missionaries pretend to be the gods rather than telling them that they were not gods. They had seen a real miracle worked through Paul and now he tells them that he is just a man like they are. Then if Paul is just a man like them why could not they have done this miracle also? This entire action/reaction event turned out to be a fierce fuel for the fire of self deception burning in their hearts. They were prime targets for the Jews who had come from about 100 miles away to do their damage. The Jews had followed them after they chased them out of Iconium. Then the Jews found this turmoil and used it to their advantage to carry out their original plan to kill Paul.

Acts 14:20 But while the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city. And the next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

Luke the physician does not elaborate on this situation of someone being stoned, left for dead, and then seemingly calmly getting up and going back into the city. I would love some details of what happened when he went back into the city! But the Holy Spirit leaves those details out and just tells us that he went then with Barnabas to Derbe.

Acts 14:21 And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,
Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 14:24 And they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia.

Acts 14:25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia;

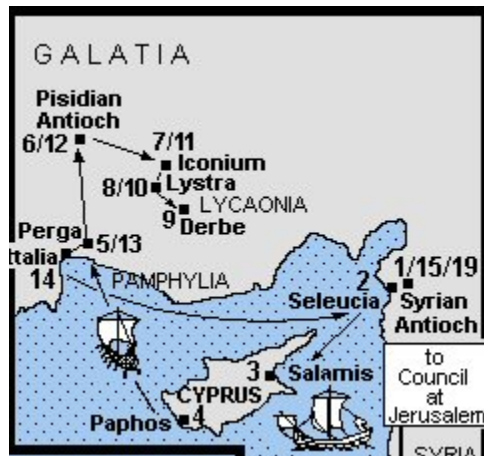
They went back to these new churches and set up a governance structure for them. Probably they went back to these cities also to reassure them that they were fine after all the mistreatment and to encourage them because they also would face a lot of trials and tribulations. It would have taken a lot of discernment and dependence upon the Holy Spirit to pick out new elders from the new converts in the new churches. But this was an unusual time and the Holy Spirit gave them the wisdom needed.

Acts 14:26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.

Acts 14:27 And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 14:28 And they spent a long time with the disciples."

What a trip!





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