**Introduction – Acts 14:1–28**

* **General Overview:** This section closes out the second half of the first missionary journey in Acts. In this chapter, Luke describes what kinds of tremendous hurdles Paul and Barnabas had to overcome before arriving safely back home. It is packed with reminders of how the mission to advance gospel will not only involve opposition but also advance *through it*. Paul summarized this on the tail end of his trip as he turns to other disciples and says, “Through many afflictions we must enter the kingdom of God” (14:22).
* **Textual Emphasis:** Readers should notice how often Luke draws attention to the word and the way it’s proclaimed. For example, Luke says that Paul and Barnabas “spoke in such a manner” (i.e. so effectively and persuasively) that many unbelievers were converted (14:1). Later, when the men faced resistance, Luke tells us that they “spoke boldly, *with reliance* upon the Lord” (14:3). Beyond that, he records how Paul healed a man while speaking “with a loud voice” (14:10), and how he and Barnabas were “crying out” against the pagans who mistakenly tried to worship them (14:14). Finally, it was *by speaking* forth the words of God that they restrained the pagan crowd (14:18). Importantly, all this is highlighted in the context of opposing words and worldviews. So with this theme, Luke shows over the course of the chapter that there’s a “war of words” underway, and when it comes to the good guys, Paul and Barnabas are the tip of the spear.
  + **Day 1:** Luke begins in Iconium, highlighting the effective proclamation of the word by Paul and Barnabas, and demonstrating how their boldness only grew when they began to encounter spiritual opposition. Eventually, opposition turned physical, and at that point missionaries decided to pivot and go elsewhere. But the rest of the chapter shows how this was not due to fear, but to a deeper commitment to continue proclaiming the gospel and gaining ground for the Lord elsewhere.
  + **Days 2–3:** Then, in Lystra (a largely Gentile city), Luke gives an example of how forcefully Paul and Barnabas spoke in the effort to topple the pagan ideologies that were entrenched in these parts. In this section, we see the “war of words” in full swing.
  + **Day 4**: Luke then describes how, though Paul was making progress with the pagans in Lystra, the unbelieving Jews from previous chapters swept in for revenge. Almost in no time, Paul was bludgeoned to within an inch of his life. And yet, readers see how, even then, Paul wasn’t going to be thrown off mission. His experience of overcoming such horrific persecution was the occasion that enabled him to turn and strengthen other disciples with the reminder that “through many afflictions we must enter the kingdom of God” (14:22). And this desire to help others is then seen as the missionaries retraced the steps of their journey to further strengthen the churches in the places they had been.
  + **Day 5:** On the final leg of their trip, the missionaries continue to proclaim the gospel before arriving back at Antioch and rounding out their journey with a good report of all that God had done. Their work was complete, and the church saw yet again that God had “opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:27).

The route of their journey can be traced on the map below:

A map of the greek island of cyprus

Description automatically generated

**14:1–7 – The Bold and Intelligent Advance of the Word**

* **Overview:** This first section reveals the kinds of strategies that Paul and Barnabas used while navigating the new and spiritually unpredictable terrain of the Gentile world. Luke begins by giving us a baseline, showing how the missionaries were giving a strong and winsome presentation of the gospel (v. 1). But when they start to encounter opponents, readers get to see what strategies the team used to overcome them. They can be summarized as follows:
  + When the missionaries faced *spiritual* resistance—they dug their heels in, relied on the Lord, and continued to swing the battering ram of the gospel in the effort to win souls (14:2–3).
  + When they things took a dive and they began to face *violent* resistance—they decided to pivot and go continue the mission elsewhere.
  + What readers can see from this is that the missionaries weren’t hopping from city to city because they were *afraid* of persecution. Rather, they were maneuvering in this way because they wanted to *advance* *the gospel* (v. 7). They’re always on offense. Jesus already told them that pivots were allowed (Luke 9:5; 10:11; Acts 13:51), and so while we don’t see them “retreating,” we do see them “attacking in a different direction.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* **V. 1 –** Verse 1 begins by introducing that an entire story is coming up with the phrase “Now it happened” (with the story of at least vv. 1–2, perhaps vv. 1–7, being the subject of “it”). This helps the reader consider the section as a larger unit.
  + Luke mentions that the team is now in Iconium, a larger city roughly “ninety miles southeast of [Psidian] Antioch,”[[2]](#footnote-2) located in the greater region of Galatia.
  + The missionaries retained their commitment to “Jewish priority” (cf. Rom 1:16) by entering “the synagogue of the Jews together,” and—even despite their rejection in Psidian Antioch—they made it clear that they were there to win souls (cf. Prov 11:30). Luke shows their spiritual strength and effectiveness by saying that “they spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed.” On top of this, Luke adds that these converts were “both of Jews and of Greeks,” referring to the ethnic impact of their speaking and how “all peoples” were being blessed.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* **V. 2 –** Verse 2 shows how the problem of Jewish unbelief remained eerily similar from town to town. Theophilus could see how the unbelieving Jews of this region were unwittingly following in the footsteps of their spiritual brothers over in Psidian Antioch (and Cyprus, and Jerusalem). Luke says, “the unbelieving Jews instigated and embittered the minds of the Gentiles against the brothers.” And by naming them “unbelieving Jews,” he makes it clear that the issue at hand is their own blindness to the gospel. While they are much like Elymas in seeking to turn Gentiles away from the faith (13:8), the language here is more aggressive in that they “stirred up and embittered the minds of the Gentiles ***against the brothers*.**” The context is more combative.
  + The specific word “stirred up” is used in 13:50 for when the Jews initiated a revolt against these missionaries in Psidian Antioch. So, by repeating the phrase, Luke is showing how these Jews are to blame.
  + However, the specific word “embitter” is the word translated as “mistreated” in 7:6 and 7:19, describing how Pharaoh mistreated God’s people in Egypt. So with that, it becomes clear that they want Paul and Barnabas to be treated unfairly. At this point, however, the resistance is strictly spiritual.
* **V. 3 –** Here, we see one of the most important insights into the hearts of the early missionaries. When they encountered spiritual opposition (v. 2) Luke says, “therefore”—i.e. *for this reason*—“they spent a long time there speaking boldly *with reliance* upon the Lord.” So, “Far from being intimidated, they were inspired to even bolder witness.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
  + This is remarkable because it shows how, when things got tough, they didn’t turn tail and flee but kept about their business of engaging in gracious word-warfare (2 Cor 10:4).
  + Luke wants to make it clear that, in all this, the missionaries were leaning on the Lord. They were (lit.) “speaking boldly **upon the Lord**.” And the Lord’s support was clear from how He *Himself* was “testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done through their hands.” So, these men had the miraculous power of God at their backs helping to authenticate their words. For that reason, they leaned *into* spiritual resistance by leaning *into* the Lord—and speaking up.
* **V. 4 –** While the apostles were enjoying success among both Jews and Gentiles, Luke clarifies that it was still a mixed playing field: “the multitude of the city was divided, and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.” This verse prepares the reader to see how the opposing side was large enough to attempt a full takedown of the missionaries.
* **Vv.** **5–7** – These verses describe how the opposition eventually grew sour enough that the missionaries found themselves facing violent *physical* resistance. Luke says that “an attempt was made” by this group “with their rulers” (showing their own strategic efforts, cf. 13:50) “to mistreat and to stone [the missionaries].”
  + The word for “mistreat” is also translated as “insult” (Luke 11:45) and is used for what the Romans did to Jesus before His crucifixion (Luke 18:32). So, here in Acts, the opponents of Paul and Barnabas are literally adding insult (“mistreat”) to injury (“stone”). They don’t simply want blood, they also want to disgrace the messengers of God’s grace. It’s pure evil.
  + And yet, much like how God protected Saul *twice* after his conversion (9:23–24; 29–30), here again he and Barnabas “became aware” of the plot to kill them “and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region.” Verse 7 ends with the note that “there they continued to proclaim the gospel,” which shows two things:

1. The apostles decided to pivot to a new location when their lives were threatened—not because they were scared, but because they were committed to the advance of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Verse 7 ends by confirming that they went to a place where they continued to proclaim the gospel, so we can see that their concern was that the mission not be stopped.
2. The decision to flee from this city led the team into *two more cities* on a new frontier (Lycaonia is the broader region, not a city). In this way, we see again how persecution ironically *amplified* the witness of the gospel, rather than diminished it.

**Day 1 – Questions**

1. Why do you think Luke puts so much emphasis on “the word” and the speaking of the gospel in this section that includes so much about suffering?
2. Summarize the strategy of Paul and Barnabas when they faced spiritual resistance to their message. How does this challenge you when you think about suffering for Christ?
3. Summarize the strategy of Paul and Barnabas when they faced physical resistance to their message. How does this challenge you when you think about suffering for Christ?

**Day 2 – 14:8–13**

* **Overview:** This text gives the first glimpse into the ministry of Saul and Barnabas in a predominately Gentile city. In it, we can see how powerfully the gospel collides with the Gentile world, and how deeply the pillars of paganism were entrenched within it. Paul is first seen speaking and healing a lame man (14:8–10), a miracle which sparks a craze in the city as its pagan people come to worship the apostles *as incarnations of their Greek gods* (14:11–13). The people of this city are so clearly imprisoned in false words, and this gives Paul the opportunity to launch into a sermon that calls them to find life in the one true God.

**The Healing of the Lame Man (14:8–10)**

* **V. 8** – The scene begins “at Lystra,” the first of two cities mentioned in Lycaonia (the broader region). Polhill says, “The region of Lycaonia lay east of Iconium and was also in the Roman province of Galatia. Lystra lay some twenty miles to the south of Iconium, and Derbe was another sixty miles or so southeast of Lystra.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Beyond that, Vaughn mentions that Lystra “was directly connected with Pisidian Antioch by a military road which bypassed Iconium,”[[6]](#footnote-6) so a Gentile like Theophilus may have known that Paul was more or less following the Roman highway system throughout the region.
  + The episode begins with a [certain] man who was sitting by Paul and needed to be healed. The order of the words in Greek draws attention to his powerlessness, literally calling him, “a certain man who was powerless…in [his] feet.” That characterization sets the reader up for a demonstration of power to come through Paul (specifically his *words*).
  + Luke gives two modifying descriptions that help to emphasize the ailment of this man, and what would need to happen in order to prove he was healed:
    1. First, Luke says that he was “lame from his mother’s womb,” which means the healing would have to be miraculous. More importantly, however, this description ties this man to the *other* man who was “lame from his mother’s womb” mentioned in Acts 3:2—whom *Peter* healed. As Peter was the apostle to the Jews, and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, this upcoming healing further demonstrates for Theophilus that God is indeed working among the Gentiles just as He did among the Jews. Thus, we find another reminder that the Gentile mission is legitimate.
    2. Second, Luke says that this man “had never walked,” which prepares rather simply for what healing would look like (i.e. walking). With this context in mind, Luke describes the encounter.
* **Vv. 9–10** – Luke says, “This man listened to Paul as he spoke,” showing how he had adopted the posture of someone who listens to the words of Paul. Such a posture turns out to bless him, and serves to contrast the way that the crowds of the city respond to Paul.
  + Luke does not specify here that Paul was speaking *the gospel* because that is not his mainfocus. Rather, the language draws attention to the power of Paul’s wordsin general (which, of course, are tied to the gospel). This thread becomes clear in the next statement, which describes Paul as one “who…spoke in a loud voice” to this man (vv. 9–10). So, Paul is first seen speaking to the general population, and then he turns to speakto the crippled man. In speaking to the crippled man, we see how Paul’s words carry enough power to heal his sickness, which should lead people to listen to him when he speaks about the gospel. (This is all very much like the way of Jesus’ speech in healing the crippled man in Mark 2).
  + However, before getting to verse 10, Luke first describes what motivated Paul to speak to this man in such a way. He tells us that Paul had “fixed his gaze to him and had seen that he had faith to be saved.”
  + The now-classic phrase “fixed his gaze” signals to Theophilus that there’s some sight that’s worthy of extra attention (cf. 3:4; 3:12; 7:55; 11:6). In this case, it was something about the man. Luke says he “had faith to be saved.”
    1. Regarding the term “saved,” some translations gloss over a potential misperception by saying “made well,” and others try to clarify the nuance by adding italics, “saved *from being lame*.” In either case, the focus is on his physical healing. Clearly, if the man already had faith, his spiritual salvation was already a reality. And in context, the only thing Luke *mentions* that he would need to be “saved from” was his physical ailment. For that reason, it seems best to infer that, behind what Luke mentions here, the man had been listening to Paul speak about the gospel and had already gotten saved. It was after this that Luke zeroes in on his main point: how the man got noticed and then got made into an illustration of the power of the word (for more on faith-healings, see Commentary on Acts 2 – *The Spirit’s Work in Acts and FBC,* part 2, pgs. 13–14). His spiritual salvation is implied, and the context is focused on his physical healing.
    2. Because Luke’s main point is to stress the power of the word, he writes of how Paul simply said with a loud voice (the Greek is literally *mega-phone*), “Stand upright on your feet.” This, of course, addresses the part of his body that was powerless; cf. v. 8, and the power behind Paul’s words becomes undeniable when, at this (without any touch from Paul), the man “leaped up and began to walk,” proving he was healed.
  + As with other “signs and wonders,” the intent of the *miracle* is always to draw attention to the *message* of the gospel. Here, however, the crowds notice the miracle and take everything in a wildly different direction.

**The Response of the People (14:11–13)**

* **V. 11 –** Luke says that “when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice.”
  + On the one hand, this is natural. On the other, Luke’s language is really significant. When we remember that we are reading a story in which Luke makes use of themes—the fact that *Paul’s* loud voice was met with the loud voice of *the crowd* shows how these groups are actually in the process of colliding. The rest of verses 11–13 bear this out.
  + Luke makes all this obvious later on when he says that Paul had to *speak* in order to *restrain* the crowd from sinning—and that talking them down was hard work. So, there’s a serious match of verbal tug-of-war about to start, and this is the first hint of it. All of this is, of course, full of dramatic irony, because the people of Lystra think they’re doing Paul and Barnabas a favor while Luke is showing how the context is actually combative.
  + The combative context is further highlighted by how Luke notes that they cried out “in the Lycaonian language,” which would serve to alienate Paul and Barnabas. The context suggests that the missionaries didn’t immediately pick up on what was being said.[[7]](#footnote-7)
  + And finally, we get the actual words which the people were shouting: “The gods have become like men and have come down to us.” They clearly have all the wrong words to understand the work of God that was done right in front of their eyes.
* **V. 12 –** But wait, there’s more. The text goes on to show just how entrenched this people’s worldview was. Luke says, “they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.”
  + It’s important to keep a Christian lens on the story to properly understand it, because when we do, we can see that the narrative of the crowd is completely bananas. In their minds, this is perhaps the greatest day of their entire lives. In our minds, we see they’re still stuck in vain idolatries.
  + Importantly, the crowd can legitimately discern some of the *shape* of what’s in front of them, but they still do not have the words to rightly describe it. They can see that Barnabas is the senior member of the group, hence why he’s called “Zeus,” the head-honcho god in the pagan pantheon. And they can see that Paul is the more powerful orator of the two, hence why he’s called “Hermes,” “the messenger spokesman of the pagan God’s of Greece and Rome.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Luke wants this last point to be especially clear, so he spells it out, “because he was the chief speaker.” Again, the focus is on *words*.
* **V.** **13 –** Luke moves on to describe how, with such a captivating (false) narrative now in wide circulation, Paul and Barnabas nearly got sucked into headlining a pagan ritual. What a story *that* would’ve been.
  + Luke mentions how “the priest of Zeus” steps onto the scene, signaling how quickly everything is sliding from a verbal exchange into a full-blown pagan party scene. Luke marks how quickly this situation could’ve degenerated into a *complete* disaster when he says that the priest had a “*temple* just outside the city.” But wait, there’s more.
  + The priest was already on the move. He “brought oxen and garlands [ritual wreaths] to the gates, and was wanting to offer sacrifice with the crowds.” Schnabel writes that “‘Bulls’…were often sacrificed to Zeus, the strongest of the gods.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The garlands were either for the animals being sacrificed[[10]](#footnote-10) or the people participating.[[11]](#footnote-11) Regardless, the point is that, to the crowd, it was high time for a sacrificing party.
  + The strength of their pagan impulse is worthy of note. And the fact that they were “**wanting** to offer sacrifice” reminds us that there’s a tug-of-war here (since the verb is in the imperfect tense, stressing the tension of the scene). At this point, someone needs to say something. And thankfully Paul and Barnabas catch on and speak up about how awkward and appalling all of this is.

**Day 2 – Questions**

1. Why wouldn’t Paul have decided to heal the lame man by touching him?
2. What does the response of the Lystrans tell you about the nature of paganism?
3. Why do you think the Lord put Paul and Barnabas smack in the middle of such an awful situation? What does this tell you about God’s love for His people and His glory?

**Day 3 – 14:14–18**

* **Overview:** With the people of this city so clearly imprisoned in their pagan words and worldview, we now see Paul launch into a sermon (14:15–17) and earnestly plead for his hearers to turn away from this nonsense to worship the one true God. This is the first sermon in Acts to a predominately Gentile audience, and as such it gives us a great deal of insight into how Paul engaged the pagan world with the gospel.
  + Peterson writes, “the address in 14:15–17 stands out as the first specific example of how the beliefs and practices of Greco-Roman religion were encountered. The message here is not about God fulfilling his promises to Israel and sending the Saviour, but good news about the possibility of escaping from the futility of idolatry and coming to know the true and living God.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

**The Response of Barnabas and Paul (14:14–18)**

* **V. 14 –** Luke adds that “when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out.” The emphasis is on how they respond to the false narrative of the people (“*heard* of it”) with their own words (“crying out”).
  + Luke mentions that Barnabas and Paul are “apostles.” And while this may seem like an odd time to bring this up, but because the word “apostle” means “sent one,” the use of it here would serve to remind Theophilus that these men are on a mission—and it’s a mission that requires them to lean *into* this situation to try to fix it.
    1. Since there’s no *textual* indication that Barnabas was qualified to be a capital-A apostle, Polhill writes that “Perhaps Luke indicated here that Paul and Barnabas were delegates of the Antioch church, commissioned by them for their mission. Perhaps it indicates Luke’s awareness of the wider application of the word and that he here slipped into the more customary and less specialized usage.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Capital-A or not, Luke’s context does not seem concerned to get that specific. The point is that they are men on a mission. Even so, in light of 1 Corinthians 15:7, Barnabas could certainly be an official apostle, since there were more than just 13 of them.
    2. The fact that Barnabas is named before Paul is a grammatical parallel to the narrative of the people given in verse 11. This seems to be Luke’s way of flipping the script. They called Barnabas “Zeus” and Paul “Hermes,” but Luke is clear to note how these men were, in fact, “apostles.” It’s a battle of narratives.
  + Luke shows how agitated Barnabas and Paul were by three actions: (1) they “tore their garments”—a sign of distress or protest (Josh 7:6; Mark 14:63)[[14]](#footnote-14); (2) they “rushed out into the crowd”—a sign of their eagerness to stop these people from sinning; (3) they were “crying out”—the most important of the three actions, given the contextual emphasis on the word. It is with this level of earnest that Paul gets their attention and launches into a sermon to try to combat this evil with the truth of God.
* **V. 15** – Paul’s sermon is rather simple.
  + He first addresses his hearers as “Men,” appealing to them as those who are responsible for leading their society (the word is the word for “male/husband,” not “human being”).
  + He then asks a simple question that would bring them to consider the beliefs behind their actions: “Why are you doing these things?” He also exposes how they’ve misread the situation when he says, “we are also men of the same nature as you” (lit. men of the same passions)—a direct response to how they were earlier called gods (v. 11). Again, these pagans don’t have the words to read reality rightly.
  + Paul then supplies the right words by saying he and Barnabas are “proclaiming the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God.” This encapsulates the argument of his sermon:
    1. With this call, he assures them that there is blessing to be had, but it’s found in the gospel of the real and living God—not in vain ideas and dead works of their pagan traditions. To have true blessing, these people must cease and desist from their festivities and surrender to the fact that such things are nonsense.
    2. The language of the “living God” contrasts the uselessness of their traditions (narratives, sacrificial system, festive traditions), which evidently demonstrates that all their pomp and circumstance was dead and empty. Even so, Paul is proclaiming that the door is open for them to turn to a living God. He is simultaneously confronting their worldview and persuading them towards meaningful worship.
  + His argument unfolds in three points—all of which frame the topic of God’s goodness:

1. God is the Creator of Everything
2. God has Been Patient in Tolerating Unbelievers
3. God has Been Merciful in Blessing Unbelievers
   * 1. **God is the Creator of Everything** – God’s goodness is first shown in that He created everything. Paul calls him the God “WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.”
        + Paul is likely quoting from Psalm 146:6, which references God’s creatorhood as the foundation of our worship (similar to Exod 20:11). The specific citation is not as important for Paul’s hearers as the content was.
        + For example, there is a wordplay in Greek between the word “made” and the same word that’s translated as “doing” earlier in the verse. It shows how the people’s actions were the exact opposite of God’s. Paul’s hearers were doing/making *empty* things (“vain things”), whereas God had made the world and made it *full* (“and all that is in them [i.e. the heaven, the earth, the sea]”). Whatever these people are, Paul wants to make it clear that they’re not godly.
     2. **God has Been Patient in Tolerating Unbelievers** – Having established how his hearers are way off base, Paul then guides them to see how good the true God has been to them despite their ignorance. The first thing he does is draw their attention to see God’s patience. Paul says that “in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways.” In other words, though they were ungodly, He didn’t deliver instantaneous judgment. He was patient. And seeing this patience should lead these hearers to a sense of awe and gratitude before the kindness of the Lord.
        + It’s important to stress the scope of Paul’s statement. It wasn’t just the people of Lystra with whom God was patient. It was *everyone*, “all the nations,” who were permitted to go their own ways. And it wasn’t just this generation, but “the generations gone by” as well. Lystra is just one of *many* peoples who’ve left their Creator behind, yet God has graciously ordained that there be a gap between the moment of their sin and the moment of their judgment.
     3. **God has been Merciful in Blessing Unbelievers –** The final exhibition of God’s goodness to this audience is given when Paul describes how God did good by blessing unbelieving nations with food and gladness.
        + Lest anyone think that God’s forbearance was just passivity, Paul goes on to say, “yet He did not leave Himself without witness.” Of course, judgment would’ve been a witness, and forbearance was an indirect witness. But when it comes to a clear and undeniable witness of God’s goodness, Paul points to how these people have received tangible blessings directly from their Creator.
        + The way God bore witness to His own existence was by doing “good” to them. This word is used in Genesis to refer to how God made something that would benefit and bless mankind, and for that reason it serves as the theme-setter for everything Paul is about to say next.
        + God’s goodness is expressed in how He “gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons.” These are standard blessings from the Creator God (Deut 11:17) as He is wielding the heavens and the earth to bless mankind. In this way, the flow of Paul’s speech follows the flow of the verse he cited in verse 15 (heaven🡪earth🡪filling).
          - For example, Paul mentions how God gave rain from “heaven.” And because people do not live in the sea but on the earth, he mentions how the rains led to fruitful seasons (i.e. on earth), which ultimately brought about the (lit.) “filling” of their “hearts with food and gladness.” So, God has not only created the world, but He has wielded creation to bring basic joys to people who don’t even thank Him.
          - Clearly, God has not utterly abandoned the unbelieving population of mankind. Even their enjoyment of a warm meal is a message from God to them, and Paul won’t let them think otherwise.
        + While Paul’s sermon draws their attention to God’s tremendous kindness, the word “witness” cuts both ways. Right now, the witness is voicing the kindness of God. But at the same time, if they reject this witness, these blessings would become further grounds for their condemnation. The language of “witness” brings the law-court metaphor into play and leaves the question of judgment looming in the background.

* **V. 18** – Having drawn Theophilus into the glories of the sermon Paul preached (before Paul was evidently cut off) here Luke returns to the fact that these kind words (“in saying these things”) were being wielded in order to push *hard* against the idolatrous tendencies of godless people (“with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them”). The grammar here proves that the missionaries were actually successful in beating back this wave of idolatry, but the jury’s still out on whether the people would actually come to repentance.

**Day 3 – Questions**

1. Explain the difference between the way Herod responded to the people’s praise of him as a god (12:23) and the way Paul and Barnabas responded to similar accolades?
2. Why does Paul begin by addressing the topic of creation, rather than God’s promises of the Messiah in the Old Testament? How does this challenge you to approach evangelism with unbelievers who aren’t familiar with the Bible?
3. What encouragement can you draw from your own meditation on how good, patient, and merciful God has been to you?

**Day 4 – 14:19–23**

* **Overview:** Here, with the verdict of the crowd still uncertain, Luke records how the whole situation unraveled due to some unlikely enemies. However, despite suffering severe affliction at their hands, Paul gets a chance to teach and strengthen other disciples in what it means to be a servant of Christ.

**The Revenge of the Jews (14:19)**

* **V. 19** – Just when it seemed like the crowd quieted down long enough to begin considering the kindness of God that could lead them to repentance, the crowd got hijacked by Paul’s old foes. “Jews…from Antioch and Iconium,” the villains from Paul’s past, just *show up*, some of whom evidently walked—*walked*—about 100 miles for the chance to give Paul and Barnabas a piece of their mind. Luke’s language shows how they came to try to stop Paul dead in his tracks (literally). However, in light of how they’ve consistently failed to stop Paul in the past, Theophilus may have suspected that their plan would backfire, and they would yet again drive Paul *further* into ministry. But right now, the story still has to be told for us to find out, and Theophilus gets a good look at just how vicious the Jews were willing to become in their aggression against the gospel.
  + Once the Jews arrive, it is only a matter of moments before Luke says that “after winning over the crowd [against Paul] and stoning Paul, they were dragging him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” What a plot twist. Theophilus sees Paul go from the edge of a potential revival to being heinously bludgeoned and left for dead. The Gentile crowd has proven to be fickle, and the question becomes what this means for the mission.[[15]](#footnote-15)
  + (As more of an aside, it’s not irrelevant to see how, though these Jews would *never* associate with Gentiles under normal circumstances, their common idolatry against God and the gospel ironically *binds* *them* to God-hating Gentiles, cf. Acts 7:39–43.)[[16]](#footnote-16)

**The Resilience of Paul (14:20–23)**

His Resilience Proven (14:20)

* **V. 20 –** Luke frames the next little bit by his reference to “the city” (vv. 19, 20).
  + Notice the main verb in verse 19 is that the Jews “were dragging [Paul] out of the city.” Why Luke would choose this to be the main verb is clear from the greater flow of the book. Recall how Paul left Antioch and Iconium to go *into* other cities (14:6), but here the Jews are dragging him *out* of the city—thereby trying to prevent the gospel from going to the Gentiles. They’re trying to stop the mission by killing the missionary.
  + In verse 20, however, Luke says that Paul “rose up and entered the city”—meaning he wasn’t about to be deterred. This naturally leads to the question of whether Paul actually died here.
  + **Question: Did Paul Die?** – Luke simply says that the people drug him out of the city “supposing him to be dead.”
    - Polhill is correct in saying that this language would indicate he didn’t actually die.[[17]](#footnote-17) If it were the case, Luke could have easily said so, and if he had the chance to talk about a miraculous resurrection, why wouldn’t he? Such would’ve made for a fantastic story—but God wanted to tell a different one (though equally fantastic).
    - What readers see here is that, even when faced with *this degree* of opposition, Paul is the kind of man who was so driven that he could be bludgeoned to within a millimeter of his life, hauled outside of a city and left for dead, and *then get back up* and *go back into the city*. This tells us that as long as Paul had breath in his lungs, he was going to spend it for the sake of the gospel. He himself explains later in Acts how this was his drive when he says, “the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that… afflictions await me. But I do not make my life of any account nor dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:23–24). In other words, Paul was driven. And after most likely being bloodied, bludgeoned, concussed, and knocked unconscious, he’s still not going to retreat (2 Tim 3:11). They’ll have to kill him to stop him, and here, they failed.
    - The fact that he got back up “while the disciples stood around him,” continues to prove this point in two ways: (1) It shows him rejoining his team. (2) It gives *them* a lesson of what faithfulness looks like. This latter point here is more central, because we will see in the following verses how the focus turns to Paul moving to help other disciples grow in their grit (cf. 14:22).
  + With Paul back on his feet, he returns to the mission and plows ahead to Derbe (the next day). Because we know he’s clearly not *afraid* of violent persecution, we can see that Paul is being strategic here, not scared. He knows the mission is bigger than Lystra, and because he’s devoted to the bigger mission, he can rightfully go elsewhere to gain ground. And because he went to Derbe “the next day,” readers should see how, in light of his condition, this once again proves his tremendous resilience. This is not a retreat.

His Resilience Taught (vv. 21–23)

* **Vv. 21–22 –** The ministry in Derbe doesn’t get much detail. In the broader context, Luke is using it for the more basic point of demonstrating how persecution didn’t stop Paul. Nevertheless, Luke does say that “they proclaimed the gospel to that city and had made many disciples.” So there was success. But the main focus is really how Paul sought to go and help the disciples he had made and left along the journey thus far.
  + Readers can see this as Paul soon retraced his steps through the areas where he had been persecuted (“they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch”), doing so for the purpose of “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith.” So the focus has now shifted to Paul’s work for the disciples. The missionaries have done the plowing, the planting, and some watering, so now it’s time to check back in on their disciples to see how everyone was doing.
    - * Polhill notes, “Had the two chosen to do so, they could have continued southeast from Derbe on through the Cilician gates the 150 miles or so to Paul’s hometown of Tarsus and from there back to Syrian Antioch. It would have been the easiest route home by far. They chose, however, to retrace their footsteps and revisit all the congregations that had been established in the course of the mission. In so doing they gave an important lesson on the necessity of follow-up and nurture for any evangelistic effort. Paul would again visit these same congregations on his next mission (16:1–6).”[[18]](#footnote-18)
    - Notice how the language of verse 22 focuses on the fortitude of the souls of these disciples. Their *bodies* may be subjected to bruising and bleeding and unspeakable pain—like Paul’s—but what they needed more than anything to get them through it was Paul’s inner drive.
    - Also note how Paul is giving them courage to “continue in the faith,” since the temptation is to turn tail and abandon the mission when the stones start to fly. Ultimately, they need encouragement to rely upon the Lord in order to stand in their witness to the world.
  + The main banner which Paul raises is seen in verse 22. Paul taught that “Through many afflictions we must enter the kingdom of God.” This was the substance of his encouragement. Disciples, like soldiers, were to embrace the fact that the path to victory would have to be blazed through the battlefield.
    - Given the emphasis on “continuing” in the faith and finding “strength” the weight of this teaching falls on the word “through.” So, the kingdom is on the horizon for believers (cf. Acts 1:6), but the path to it is, like it was for Jesus, *through* affliction. Suffering for Christ should be expected as a necessary part of life for everyone who desires to follow Christ (2 Tim 3:12).
* **V. 23 –** Paul’s concern for the disciples is further proven in verse 23. Luke says that Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders for them in every church.” Such work was earnest and important, for they did it “having prayed with fasting,” and before leaving “they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”
  + What’s important to see here, in light of the context, is that these elders were part of the effort to strengthen the church *to endure persecution*. Notice how the elders were appointed “for them” (i.e. the disciples) and thus for their benefit.
  + There is a sort of militaristic, joining-of-the-ranks character to this, since Paul says that these men were “commended…to the Lord [true sovereign].” And to underscore their allegiance to the cause, their faithful character is noted when Luke says that “they had believed” in the Lord. These elders would have therefore been men who, like military generals, could be trusted to lead the church through fire.

**Day 4 – Questions**

1. How do you explain the alliance between unbelieving Jews and pagan Gentiles in this section?
2. Did Paul die in this chapter? Why is this important for the story?
3. Summarize the nature of Paul and Barnabas’ ministry to existing churches. What did they need from these missionaries?

**Day 5 – 14:24–28**

**Overview:** The final section covers the final leg of the missionary journey. After fortifying the churches that are situated in the “hot zones” of persecution, Luke narrates how Paul and Barnabas made it back home and gave report to their headquarters in Syrian Antioch. Fittingly, the thing they focus on is what *God* had accomplished during all these days.

* **Vv. 24–26 –** These verses begin to narrate the final phase of the return trip. Simply put, after Paul and Barnabas were done in Antioch (Psidia), they reentered the region of Pamphylia.
  + Here, Luke finds it important to note how “they had spoken the word in Perga.” Before this, Perga was only mentioned briefly as the place where John Mark left the team to go back home. In the story, the only thing it’s known for is that it’s the place where one guy abandoned the mission. For this reason, Theophilus might have wondered if Perga ever received a witness of the gospel, and so here’s Luke’s answer.
  + From there, they went to the seaport city of Attalia, where they caught a boat and “sailed [back] to Antioch.”
  + Despite all the geography, Luke wants to make sure Theophilus is thinking theologically. He adds how Antioch, the city to which they returned, was in fact the city “from where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.” This was ultimately the work of God to extend His grace to the nations, and these men were the tip of the spear in that enterprise. The word “work” is an especially important term because it bookends Luke’s account of the entire journey (cf. 13:2).[[19]](#footnote-19)
* **V. 27** – Luke now gives Theophilus a glimpse into the report that Paul and Barnabas brought with them when they had arrived. Since this is a message of encouragement for the whole church, Luke notes how they “gathered the church together” and “began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”
  + Notice how the concern of the missionaries was not their own perspectives, but the relevant facts of what “God had done with them” as His instruments. So, God is the main character of their story.
  + Moreover, the missionaries want to reinforce the legitimacy of their journey by stating that God was the one who “had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” In the flow of Acts, the fact that Gentiles would be welcomed before God by faith alone still proves to be a pretty scandalous idea to some. It’s only 2 verses later, in 15:1, that some men challenge this idea and say that circumcision is necessary for salvation. But here, Paul and Barnabas are giving clear testimony to the fact that God is the one behind the Gentile mission, and the Gentiles are welcomed by faith alone.
* **V. 28** – This verse ends the episode with another reminder of the concern of these men for the wellbeing of “the disciples.” As time together is one of the most important resources for strengthening the faith of the body, it’s fitting that they “spent not a little time” with those who follow Christ.

**Day 5 – Questions**

1. Why is it important for Theophilus to be thinking theologically about this journey, and not just geographically?
2. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas gathered the whole church together in Antioch before giving their report? What benefit does this kind of story bring to the church as a whole?
3. Who was the Hero of the missionary’s report? What can you take away from this?

1. To quote United States General Oliver Smith. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.1&off=137&ctx=tness%2c+Iconium.%EF%BB%BF53%EF%BB%BF+~It+was+no+easy+journ), 309–310. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac14.1-2&off=1058&ctx=k+in+its+character.+~It+is+likely+that+th), 403, thinks that, given the language, “It is likely that these were God-fearers who were attached to the synagogue (cf. 13:16, 26) rather than full [circumcised] proselytes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.1-3&off=3212&ctx=Lord+(cf.+4%3a29%E2%80%9331).+~Far+from+being+intim), 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.5-7&off=499&ctx=+Derbe+in+Lycaonia.+~The+region+of+Lycaon), 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Vaughan, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/fsgc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac14.8-20a&off=23&ctx=+Lystra+(14%3a8%E2%80%9320a).+~Located+about+eighte), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.11-13&off=841&ctx=+exclaimed+(v.+11).+~At+this+point+Paul+a), 313–314. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Legacy Standard Bible footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac14.13&off=948&ctx=ain+period+of+time.+~%E2%80%9CBulls%E2%80%9D+(%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%85%CD%82%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%B9)%2c+t), 608. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac14.11-13&off=1662&ctx=sacrifices+to+them.+~Animals+were+often+a), 408. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac14.13&off=1063&ctx=est+of+the+gods.336+~Garlands+(%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B5%CC%81%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1)), 608. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac14.1-20&off=727&ctx=earers+in+13%3a16%E2%80%9341%2c+~the+address+in+14%3a15), 402–403. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.4&off=904&ctx=ptions+to+the+rule.+~Perhaps+Luke+indicat), 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.14-18&off=857&ctx=ing+their+garments.+~The+tearing+of+one%E2%80%99s), 315. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.19-20a&off=404&ctx=there+(v.+20a).%EF%BB%BF71%EF%BB%BF+~One+would+have+thoug), 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac14.1-20&off=333&ctx=el+(14%3a1%E2%80%937%2c+19%E2%80%9320).+~This+is+a+remarkable), 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.19-20a&off=1523&ctx=estored+from+death.+~Luke%E2%80%99s+reference+to+), 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.20b-21a&off=313&ctx=for+Derbe+(v.+20b).+~Since+Derbe+was+some), 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac14.26-28&off=103&ctx=+to+Syrian+Antioch.+~Verse+26+forms+an+in), 320. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)