



# First Baptist Church Selmer

THE ROAD TO ROMANS •

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY: PERSECUTED, BUT PERSEVERED • ACTS 14:1-28 •

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## MAIN POINT

Through Paul's first missionary journey, we see a clear picture of the highs and lows of serving Christ.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Over the course of the last week or two, what was your highest high and your lowest low?**

**Looking back, how do you see God at work during both the high and the low? Did you notice how He was working at the time or only in hindsight?**

We all experience the weekly (and sometimes daily) highs and lows. What seems too good to be true typically is, and moments of hardship seem like they will become the new normal. We will continue again today on Paul's 1st Missionary Journey (**See Appendix B**). Paul is living on mission, faithfully proclaiming Jesus to the nations, and seeing many come to faith, but even in the middle of God's will, Paul experiences hardship and suffering. Pastor and author Tim Keller reminds us, "The greater the effectiveness of a ministry, the greater the resistance and opposition."

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 14:1-7.

*1 "Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. 5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel." (ESV)*

**What opposition did Paul and Barnabas face? How did the missionaries respond to being opposed (v. 3)? How did the Lord help them?**

**What opposition have you faced in your life while attempting to live faithfully for the Lord?**

**Share a story about that experience if you have one. How well did you handle it? What did you learn about God through the experience?**

Verse 3 seems to be a sort of bold declaration of the gospel's power even in the midst of opposition. Although their enemies sought to do Paul and Barnabas harm, God gave the missionaries a long and effective ministry. The Lord demonstrated His power by confirming the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

**What factors likely motivated Paul and Barnabas to press on?**

**What motivates you to press on when faced with opposition to your faith?**

Paul and Barnabas were driven by their devotion to Christ and the lostness of people. These two factors also motivate us to persevere in mission involvement. Our devotion to the Lord, coupled with a burden for the world's lost people, will prevent us from giving up when times get tough. Ministry in the face of growing opposition is never easy. Even though God placed His stamp of approval on the missionaries' ministry at Iconium, controversy continued to mount.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 14:8-20.

8 "Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And he sprang up and began walking. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, 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. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.' 18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. 19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe." (ESV)

**Based on these verses, what can we conclude religious life was like in Lystra?  
How is it similar to or different than our community?**

**The people Paul and Barnabas encountered along the way interpreted the gospel through their own lenses, even calling them Hermes and Zeus. How common is it for people to interpret the gospel by their own prejudices and beliefs?**

**How might we face persecution in today's time for preaching or staying true to our convictions as Paul did?**

When people praise us for our ministry efforts, we are tempted to accept that praise and take pride in the good work we've done. But as we see from Paul and Barnabas's example, this praise should be reserved for God alone. When people misunderstand us or our presentation of the gospel, we must tactfully, patiently, and lovingly explain the truth to them.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 14:21-28.

21 "When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples." (ESV)

**If you're being honest, what would you do if you knew you would face opposition for sharing the good news about Jesus?**

**What specific attributes of God are helpful to think on during times of opposition?**

**What evidence do we read in this passage about the missionaries' commitment to their faith?**

Instead of leaving town, Paul got up and went back into the city. What an example of courage and boldness. Although Lystra was not a safe place for them, Paul and Barnabas remained there overnight. The next day, they left for Derbe. Here we see again the missionaries' faithfulness to continue with their work. Even though Paul had been injured, he and Barnabas continued to press on, preaching the gospel to those who had never heard. When people persecute us because of the gospel, we can persevere by being faithful to the task God gives us. Persecution today may be in the form of opposition or character assassination for your Christian standards and values.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are some circumstances that might tempt us to "quit" the Christian life? When and why?**

**Seeing Paul and Barnabas's courage, faith, and endurance, how are you challenged to serve the Lord more completely? Which of those three traits do**

**you most struggle with?**

**With what attitude should we face difficulties that come because of our faith?**

## PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to give us the courage, faith, and endurance we need to persevere during the lowest of lows we face as we carry out His work in the world. Thank Him for Jesus' work on the cross, which brings us peace and hope in the day when all our hardships are removed.

## COMMENTARY

| ACTS 14:1-28

14:1 Having been run out of Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas regrouped and targeted another important city for evangelization—Icnium. The city was an important trade center and probably the most important city in the area. Paul's ministry there shows again his interest in reaching major population centers. The approach Paul and Barnabas used at Icnium was the same as at Pisidian Antioch—they went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. Paul never lost his desire to see Israel saved (see Rom. 9:1-4). Even though most of his fellow Jews would reject the gospel again and again, Paul's normal pattern when entering a new city was to preach in the synagogue. Once again, he preached so powerfully that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

14:2 As in Pisidian Antioch, unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles against the missionaries. Once again, a small number of Jews created trouble for Paul and Barnabas. How did they turn the people against the missionaries? They poisoned their minds. The word translated poisoned means to harm or to embitter. It denotes that which is destructive, injurious, or evil. The Jews used rational arguments designed not merely to have the people run Paul and Barnabas out of town but to have the people harm them.

14:3 Although their enemies sought to do Paul and Barnabas harm, God gave the missionaries a long and effective ministry. They persisted not only in spite of the opposition, but because of it. The Lord demonstrated His power by confirming the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

14:4 Notice Paul and Barnabas are called apostles. Apostle literally means one sent forth. Only here and in 14:14 is this term used to refer to anyone other than the original twelve apostles.

14:5 Eventually, the opposition party developed a plot to harm the missionaries. The word translated plot literally means a violent impulse or assault. They intended bodily harm against Paul and Barnabas, desiring to mistreat them and stone them. Mob violence was planned against the Lord's servants.

14:6-7 Somehow, the two apostles discovered the plot against them and fled the city before the plan could be implemented. They journeyed to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe. Some may contend this was not an appropriate response by the missionaries. Sometimes the Lord does call missionaries to martyrdom, but on other occasions He calls them to seek safety and resume their work later.

14:8-10 Forced to leave Iconium, Paul and Barnabas continued their ministry. They traveled to Lystra, about 20 miles to the south. No mention is made of a synagogue in Lystra. Evidently, the city did not have the minimum of 10 Jewish men. Paul healed a man who had been born lame.

14:11 The crowds who saw the miracle were astonished. They shouted in the Lycaonian language. The missionaries apparently did not understand what the people said. The crowds interpreted the miracle to mean the gods had come down to them in the form of men.

14:12 The people of Lystra called Barnabas Zeus, the Greeks' chief god. That may have been because he was older and had a more imposing appearance. As the pair's main speaker, the people called Paul Hermes, the Greek gods' messenger.

14:13 A temple for worshiping Zeus stood just outside Lystra. The priest who presided over worship there brought oxen and garlands to the gates. Sacrificial oxen were decorated with garlands of wool that sometimes had flowers attached to them. The priest intended to lead the people in offering a sacrifice to the missionaries.

14:14 When Barnabas and Paul understood the people's intentions, they were alarmed. Barnabas is mentioned first because he was considered to be Zeus, the chief god. He and Paul were apostles in the sense of being God's messengers. They tore their robes as a symbolic gesture of horror at and strong protest of the attempted sacrifice to mere

humans. The two missionaries rushed among the people in an attempt to prevent the sacrifice.

14:15-18 Barnabas and Paul asked the people the reason for their action. The missionaries vehemently denied being gods; they shared the same human nature as the people in the crowd. This speech, delivered by both Barnabas and Paul to a pagan audience (rather than Jews or God-fearers), is Paul's second missionary speech in Acts. It drew upon natural theology, which is knowledge of God that can be derived from creation. This approach was appropriate for a group of pagans who thought of their gods as part of nature. Paul also used this approach in his Areopagus speech (17:16-32) with an audience of pagan philosophers, and in Romans 1:18-32.

14:19 At Lystra, Paul and Barnabas once again saw an initial positive response to their ministry, this time centering around a man's miraculous healing (Acts 14:8-18). Unfortunately, as before, their great beginning turned sour. Some Jews from Pisidian Antioch (some 100 miles away) and Iconium followed the apostles to Lystra and won the crowd over, turning the people against the missionaries.

14:20 Some of the converts at Lystra then gathered around Paul, apparently after the mob had disbanded. Apparently, Paul was unconscious, but he was not fatally injured. The Lord protected Paul from death, enabling him to continue his missionary activity. Instead of leaving town, Paul got up and went back into the city. Although Lystra was not a safe place for them, Paul and Barnabas remained there overnight. The next day they left for Derbe. Here we see again the missionaries' faithfulness to continue with their work. Even though Paul had been injured, he and Barnabas continued to press on, preaching the gospel to those who had never heard.

14:21-22 In Derbe, the two men preached Jesus and won a large number of disciples. Unlike before, the missionaries experienced no persecution at Derbe. When they had completed their work, the missionaries then revisited each congregation they had previously established. Returning to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch was dangerous, but the apostles did not want to leave the area without contacting the churches. They wanted to strengthen and encourage the many new converts to remain true to the faith. Paul and Barnabas had experienced hardship on this first missionary campaign, and they wanted to prepare the Galatian believers for the same. One of Paul's missionary strategies was to plant permanent indigenous churches. He did not evangelize in a superficial, unorganized manner. His goal was to leave a city with an established church with leaders in place so the work would continue long after he was gone.

14:24-25 These verses identify the apostles' final stops on their return trip to Syrian Antioch. They descended from the mountains of Pisidia to the lowlands of Pamphylia, arriving at Perga, where they had first stopped after leaving Cyprus. Acts makes no mention of any preaching ministry during their first visit to Perga, but on the return trip, the apostles preached the word there. They were committed to finishing the work they had begun. The two missionaries then traveled to the seaport of Attalia in order to board a ship for their home base at Antioch.

14:26-28 This first missionary journey probably lasted 2 to 3 years and covered some 1200-1500 miles in distance. Along the way, the two missionaries had seen the Lord work mightily. Many Jews and Gentiles had become believers, and new churches had come into existence. They had encountered some difficulties, but God had shown Himself faithful every step of the way. They had successfully completed the work they had begun. Still, one important task remained—reporting to their sending church. Antioch is where they had been committed to the grace of God. The church would rejoice as the two missionaries shared how God *“had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* (14:27).