

Keeping Things Straight

Acts 13:1-3; 14:8-28

Sent Off

Read Acts 13:1-3.¹ The Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul² to be set apart for a special work, and the church sent them off with their prayers, blessing and support. In this way, Paul's "first missionary journey" began.

1. In what ways does this provide a good example for missions work today?

Message & Miracles

Paul and Barnabas "proclaimed the word of God" in Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch and Iconium (13:4-5, 7, 16-41, 49; 14:1). In Iconium, they spoke "boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders." (14:3, *NIV*).

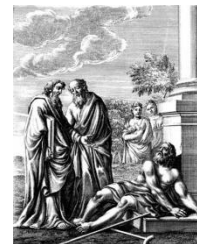
2. Based on Acts 14:3 (*above*), what was the purpose of the "signs and wonders?" Should we expect "signs and wonders" when missionaries proclaim God's word today? Explain.³

Many accepted the message (13:12, 48; 14:1) while others opposed it (13:8, 45, 50; 14:2, 5). In Iconium, their opponents plotted to mistreat and kill (with stones) Paul and Barnabas (14:5).

📖 "But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the gospel" (14:6, *NIV*).

What happened in Lystra? Read Acts 14:8-20.

3. This passage begins with another miracle – the healing of a man who was lame since birth. He had never walked! (14:8) What was needed for him to be healed?⁴



Misdirected Praise

When the people saw what Paul had done, they thought he and Barnabas were gods! (14:11) They wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas (14:13).

¹ Verse 1 lists notable prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch. The Holy Spirit's message (13:2) likely came through one of the prophets. 'Fasting' means going without food. Believers fasted and prayed to concentrate on God and seek his guidance. They 'placed their hands on them' as an act of fellowship and blessing.

² Saul was also called Paul (Acts 13:9). Saul was his Hebrew name, and Paul was his Roman name. 'Barnabas and Saul' become 'Paul and Barnabas' during this missionary journey (13:42; 13:13) as Paul emerges as the leader.

³ Signs and wonders served to confirm that the messenger was really speaking God's message. This was important for the apostles who were involved in the foundation of the church and Scriptures (Acts 2:43; 5:12; Mark 16:20). Paul said that 'signs, wonders and miracles' are 'the marks of a true apostle' (2 Corinthians 12:12). The apostles also commissioned others to do signs and wonders (Acts 6:6-8; 8:5-6). Since the church and Scriptures have already been founded, the function of signs and wonders is different today, though miracles may still accompany the proclamation of God's word in some settings. It should be noted that not all 'signs and wonders' are from God (see Matthew 24:24 & Deuteronomy 13:1-3). We should seek after God and His truth rather than signs and wonders.

⁴ The man 'had faith to be healed' (14:9). As Paul spoke God's message, the man listened and believed. He realized his need, and he believed God was able to heal him. The man was healed by God's grace through faith.

4. How did Paul and Barnabas respond, and why? (14:14-15) How may this apply to us?

Message to Correct Misunderstanding

Paul shouted they were *not* gods! He said, “We too are only human, like you” (14:15). Then Paul proclaimed there was only one, true God. This God is “the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them” (14:15, *NIV*).

Paul said they were bringing them “good news” (14:15). This “good news” was a revelation of the Truth.⁵ Knowledge of truth should result in change. They must “turn from these worthless things (idols, false ideas concerning God) to the living God” (14:15, *NIV*).⁶



Mistreatment & Harm

Some Jews from Antioch and Iconium had followed Paul & Barnabas to Lystra. They convinced the crowd in Lystra to turn against Paul. (What a change in attitude!) “They stoned Paul (tried to kill him with rocks) and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead” (14:19).

5. Read Acts 14:20-23. What do you think about Paul’s actions after his severe beating? What motivated his actions? What does this say about the value of his mission?
6. How does Paul’s example apply to *us*?⁷ As Christians, what things can we do to keep the right attitude and direction in the face of misunderstandings, opposition and difficulties?

Strengthening the Churches & Reporting Home

Paul and Barnabas returned to the new churches to “strengthen the disciples” (14:22). They encouraged them to remain true to the faith despite opposition and hardships. They appointed leadership in each church, and prayerfully committed them to the Lord (14:23). They eventually went back to the church in Antioch and “reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles (non-Jews)” (14:27).

Reflection/Application

- The Christian’s journey has a purpose. It is *God’s* purpose. God wants to accomplish His work in us and through us. What really counts in the Christian’s journey is “what God does through us.” God’s work includes sharing the “good news” message. Are you sharing it?
- Whatever your background, Paul’s message should be “good news” for you. The lame man was healed because he listened to and believed the message. Likewise, when we respond in faith to the “good news” of Jesus, we are made whole. Are you listening and responding?

⁵ The truth is found in Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (*John 14:6*). Though not explicitly mentioned in these verses, Jesus is essential to the full revelation of Truth. The ‘good news’ is that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead, thereby defeating sin and death. Through faith in him, we are set free from sin, shame and death; brought into proper relationship with God the Father; and receive abundant, everlasting life.

⁶ Paul said that God ‘has not left himself without testimony’ (14:17, *NIV*). In other words, ‘[God] never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness’ (*NLT*). How has God done that? He has revealed himself through his creation and continuing provision. See Acts 17:24-28 and Romans 1:18-20.

⁷ Paul’s example points us in the right direction. As Christians, we can become prideful because of misdirected praise, or discouraged because of opposition and difficult circumstances. The answer to both problems is the same. We must be God-centered – pointing to Him, committed to Him, and relying on His strength.