

From Antioch to Iconium**Acts 13:44—14:15**

Paul had traveled from Antioch in Syria to Antioch in Pisidia (currently south-central Turkey). It was here that we get a detailed description of Paul's preaching and the affect that it had on the people. Many Gentiles came to listen to Paul in the synagogue and asked for him to return the following Sabbath. Jews and Gentiles followed Paul and Barnabas. When they returned to the synagogue the following Sabbath, multitudes came to hear what they had to say. When the Jewish leaders saw how many came to hear Paul and Barnabas, they became envious and began a campaign to publicly discredit them.

Paul's response was to tell them that since they wanted nothing to do with Jesus Christ, and were rejecting eternal life, that they were now going to turn to the Gentiles. This also happened in Corinth and finally in Rome. These rejections of the gospel happened over a period of approximately 12 years. They have to be viewed geographically to really understand why Paul keeps saying that he is now going to the Gentiles. As Paul spreads the Gospel of Grace to different areas, he makes sure to include both Jews and Gentiles. This is one reason he preached in synagogues, which are also general meeting places for all people. As the Jews continued to reject Jesus Christ, Paul moves on to a new area to continue his ministry. By Acts 28:28, Paul has given the unbelieving Jews ample opportunity to believe Jesus Christ for their salvation. After Romans 28, Paul no longer specially sought out Jews to preach the gospel to, but he is also not seeking to keep them from hearing. They can still hear and believe, but there is no longer any effort to make sure that they have the opportunity to hear.

The book Acts is confusing because one dispensation came to an end and another was inaugurated. From God's point of view, the two dispensations were never mixed together. Once Israel was put aside and Paul was raised up as a minister to the Gentiles, all who were saved after Paul became members of the Body of Christ (1 Timothy 1:15–16). This idea however, is a point of contention within the mid-Acts camp. One reason for the disagreement is that the Gospel of the Kingdom was still being preached even after Paul was saved. There are many who say that whichever gospel a person heard and believed would determine their eternal position. Those who heard the Gospel of the Kingdom would be ruling on the earth in the Millennial Kingdom. Those who heard the Gospel of Grace would be ruling in the heavenly places. This, I believe, contradicts Paul's teaching that he was the first (chief) and the pattern for all who would follow him in believing Jesus Christ for life everlasting. Notice that this verse only speaks of those who believe on Jesus Christ. This is a common connection of both gospels. Once a person puts his full trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, they are saved. I believe the Bible indicates that after Paul was saved, whichever gospel was preached and believed, they would become part of the Body of Christ. Although they didn't fully understand salvation in this Dispensation of Grace, they did understand that trusting Jesus Christ was the only way for eternal life. This means that when Cornelius heard and believed the Gospel of the Kingdom from Peter in Acts 10 that he was saved into the Body of Christ. It could have been years later before he fully understood what salvation was all about.

Similarly, when I was saved at a very young age, I only knew that I didn't want to go to hell, and that I needed to trust Jesus alone for my salvation. I later matured in the faith and now have a much better understanding of what salvation is and what it means. Even though I did not fully

understand that a person needed to believe in the Person of Jesus Christ and in His work on the cross of death, burial, and resurrection, I was saved. It was years later before I could accurately articulate salvation in this Dispensation of Grace.

As Paul continues on his first apostolic journey, we see him continually being accepted by Gentiles and rejected by the Jews. This is exactly what happened in Antioch Pisidia. When the Jewish leaders saw how many people were interested in what Paul was preaching, they became jealous (verse 45) and began speaking against what he was saying. Paul announced that he was now going to the Gentiles. This was a regional declaration (verse 49).

Iconium

They traveled about 90 miles southeast to Iconium and, as was their tradition, they went to the synagogue to preach. Once again the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles to go against Paul and Barnabas. These unbelieving Jews are mentioned in John 3:36 as those who will not see life. We also see them in action in Acts 17:5 and 19:9 as they continue to hinder Paul. In spite of this opposition, they stayed in the city of Iconium a long time (verse 3).

To prove that they were preaching a message from God they did many signs and wonders. The Lord gave them the new message of Grace and then proved it was from Him by allowing them to do miracles. In spite of the signs and wonders, the city split their support between Paul and the unbelieving Jews. Those who did not believe Paul rose up to stone him and Barnabas, but when they found out what they were planning, they fled to the area of Lycaonia where they continued to preach the Gospel of Grace.

Lystra

The first city they visited while in the region of Lycaonia was Lystra. There, Paul met a man who had been lame since birth. This man was interested in what Paul was preaching and Paul recognized that that he had faith to be healed. Paul commanded him with a loud voice to stand up. The man leaped up and immediately walked. His healing was immediate and complete.

The people watching this were amazed and thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods. The people were into astrology because they thought Paul was Mercury (Hermes) and Barnabas was Jupiter (Zeus). Mercury was thought to be the bearer of messages from the gods while Jupiter was worshipped as one of the most powerful of the gods. He was thought to be the god of sky, and to confer power to kings and other human leaders. Jupiter's temple was located just outside of the city and the priest of that temple came to sacrifice in honor of these "gods." Paul and Barnabas were barely able to stop the people from sacrificing to them. They finally convinced the people that they were only men, but with a special message from the one true God.

The message Paul preached was that they needed to turn from these worthless idols to the one, true God. Imagine the courage it took to tell them to get rid of the gods they depended upon since birth, and to turn to the one true God. Paul and Barnabas had already gotten the people's attention with their miracles, now they needed to see the worthlessness of worshiping their dead gods. Getting people to change is very difficult, but God gave them everything they needed in order to believe on Jesus Christ. This same message went out to the Thessalonians and they also turned away from their worthless idols (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Everywhere Paul preached he proclaimed the revelation that he had on the road to Damascus, that Jesus Christ was alive.

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