

Sermon Title: Mission: Possible
Scripture Text: Acts 14:1-28 (Acts #33)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-4-24

We come now to a new chapter in the Book of Acts: Chapter 14. It has actually been *seven weeks* we've been away from Acts. I knew there would be one for Christmas, but this year it had to be two because I was gone Christmas Eve, and I didn't want to miss preaching on a Christmas, so we did *two* Christmas messages; and then I could not make it back the next week because my voice wasn't ready for prime time yet; and then my New Year sermon became *three* New Year sermons; and then I tacked another one on last week.

I feel like I can *finally* sigh and say, "Oh, boy, *back home!*"—because *this* is what feeds our souls: the systematic proclamation, study, learning, taking, and applying of God's Word (Neh. 8:8; Acts 20:20, 27; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2). And those other things are like punctuations that come along the way.

I thought of a hymn that we could sing this morning that we could have used to set the stage for this. You are familiar with this tune; the tune was *originally* titled by its composer: "Burning Fuse," but it was *published* as the theme of "Mission: Impossible"—so I looked up the words: "dum-dum, dum-dum-DUM-dum"—I didn't think that would be real edifying, but I thought it might set the stage for us doing the opposite: We are going to talk about "Mission: Possible," and this is going to be the last record of the last half of the First Missionary Journey of the Apostle Paul, when Barnabas was with him.

And I would like to claim that I was smart enough to figure out that we could be here to a chapter totally devoted to cross-cultural missions on the first Sunday of our Missions emphasis, but I'm not that good; God is. And we are going to be thinking about how we might apply these things that we see here.

Now, as I said: This chapter records the second half of the First Missionary Journey. The entire trip lasted about a year and a half. There are not specific time markers to tell us, but it went from somewhere in the year A.D. 48 to somewhere in the year A.D. 49—and as I say, over a year that it took.

I am going to again take on an entire chapter today. That will be *three times*, I think, in just the first 14 chapters of the Book of Acts. I *absolutely* promise you we *will not* get through Chapter 15 in one Sunday. We will begin that next Lord's Day, but that is one of the most momentous chapters in all of the New Testament.

But as we look through this chapter, it's a travelogue: "We went here, we did this, we went there, we did that." But we can observe *many* things here which are transferrable to our lives. Of all the things that Paul and Barnabas do in this chapter, there are only *two* that you and I cannot do. There is a marvelous miraculous healing, and there is a situation in which Paul is given direct revelation from God. Now, those things are part of "the signs of a true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12), but the era of the Apostles is long gone (see Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1). But I want you to catch on: *All* the other things that are in this chapter *illustrate* mature Christian character and appropriate zeal for the Gospel, and there are many things here you and I can learn from and we can imitate—and that is how the passage should be applied to our lives.

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How *wonderful* that that man formerly known as Saul—who was *so* accustomed to travelling for spiritual ends in order to find Christians, arrest Christians, and arrange to have them killed—*now* he is out there making Christians by the power of God as he proclaims the Gospel of the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

So I have just a catchy little outline for you. This will probably get stuck in your mind; you'll be thinking this over and over through the week:

1. Iconium (vss. 1-6)
2. Lystra and Derbe (vss. 6-20)
3. Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (vss. 21-23)
4. Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga (vss. 24-25)
5. Attalia to Antioch (vss. 26-28)

Does that just give you *goosebumps*, or what? Well, the point is to show you that this was all part of a plan orchestrated by God (see Acts 9:15; 26:17).

When we were last with Paul and Barnabas, they had just been driven out of the district around the city called "Antioch" in the region called "Pisidia." That's not the same Antioch from which they were sent; that is Antioch of Syria—that's where they started, and that is where they finish up. But there were several places named "Antioch" because of Antiochus Epiphanes, and people liking to name things after themselves (Ps. 49:11).

They had just been expelled from Antioch. We saw in Acts 13:51, just before the end of that chapter: "But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them"—the Jewish way of symbolizing, "We are done with you"; and Jesus said when He sent the disciples out: If they won't "receive you...shake off the dust from your feet" and go on (Lk. 9:5). So, "they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against" the ones who opposed them in Antioch, and then they "went to Iconium." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Number 1: So, we rejoin the group in the city of Iconium. And we are going to see, in the first six verses, what they did there.

The first word I would choose to describe what happened in Iconium was an outbreak of "faith." Look at Chapter 14, Verse 1—"In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together..." Always "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16; cf. Acts 13:46)—wherever they went: Find the synagogue, go use your credentials as a rabbi (Acts 13:15), proclaim the Gospel, and lead as many Jews to Christ as you can. So, "In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks."

We know that there were those non-Hebrew-speaking Jews—the "Hellenized" Jews (Acts 6:1; 9:29)—and there were also those who were not official proselytes—not official converts to Judaism—but they had given up their pagan idolatry, and they hung around the synagogue; they were trying to worship the true God. They saw some Jews come to Christ, and they saw some of those non-Jews come to Christ.

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This place called "Iconium"—not a really well-known resort town; it was a fairly well-known place in those days, though, and Paul visited there more than the twice mentioned in this chapter.

The natives there were "Phrygians"—and I bet *that* helps you a lot. It doesn't mean they were cold; that's a group of people that had lived there for many centuries.

But the city of Iconium became a "melting pot"; it included Greeks and Jews and Romans, in addition to the native Phrygians—so there was quite an amalgamation of people there.

We saw in Acts 2, where there is that list of people who had come to Jerusalem and were present on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came—there were some from "Phrygia" who were there (vs. 10), some from probably this city. It *might be* that some of *them* may have come to Christ in those *very first days* after the Holy Spirit came, and they may have gone back; so there may have already been a little bit of seed sown in this place. We don't know, but we *do* know there was a notable outbreak of faith when they first came.

But the Faith leads to Foment. The Gospel had that quick and significant impact. We are told "a large number of people believed." But as is *always* the case, whenever the light begins to shine where the darkness has reigned, and people are rescued from "darkness" and brought into the "light" of eternal life in Christ (Acts 26:18), the Enemy is outraged (cf. 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:17), and he strikes back.

So, look what happened in Iconium: Verse 2—"But the Jews who disbelieved..." Alright, now there's a dichotomy: the "Jews" who "believed" (vs. 1) and "the Jews who disbelieved" (vs. 2). "The Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren." So, they put the word out around town: "These guys are *troublemakers!* We have to *deal* with them!"

Verses 3 through 5—"Therefore..." I *love* that! "People are *really* angry at us!" "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them"—comma, pause; we'll be back to that in a moment.

It divided the Jews; it divided the Gentiles—"the city" was "divided." And notice, it says: "an attempt was made...to mistreat and to stone them." That word that is translated "attempt" is a word that can actually mean "rushing upon someone" (cf. Acts 19:29). The implication is that this place became obviously *dangerous* for Paul and Barnabas.

So, not surprising, after the Faith and the Foment, we get to [the Fleeing in] Verse 6—"they became aware of it"—that is, of the threat to them—"and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, and the surrounding region."

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Alright, let me explain those words a little bit. You probably haven't been exploring vacation opportunities in the region of "Lycaonia" lately. "Lycaonia" is the region, and the two main cities are Lystra and Derbe. So maybe by analogy you might say, "The Apostles were driven out of [the city of] Mountain Home, and they came into the region of Ada [County] to the cities of Boise and Nampa." So, it's a region with two main cities.

Now, that is all we know about the ministry in Iconium—well, until a few verses later when they come back to Iconium. But what might you learn from that?

Well, notice, it starts out, as *all* of the ministries in *all* of the cities that Paul has gone to has been: "they entered the synagogue." They used the connections that they had. Paul was a credentialed pharisaical rabbi—he had an "in" in the synagogue there, as Barnabas would have had an "in"; he was a Hellenistic Jew. They used those opportunities to spread the Gospel (see Acts 13:15).

Now, understand: You are not an Apostle. You *probably* haven't been invited to preach in a synagogue lately. But you can apply the same principle: You live in *your* neighborhood, or you work where you work, or you go to school where you go to school, or you belong to whatever organizations you belong to, and you have the friends you have, and you have the family you have *specifically* by the design of God, and He placed you there so that *you* can be *His* "ambassador" there (2 Cor. 5:20).

Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is: *Be you—where* you are—where you belong to Christ, and you *proclaim* what is most important to you. It isn't all that complicated to figure out! We just become like arctic rivers—frozen over at the mouth—when we have a chance to let the Gospel flow through us.

Would you notice, also: People "*believed*." That is what *happens* through the "hearing" of the Gospel (Rom. 10:17). When we preach the Gospel, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), by "the power of God" (Rom. 1:16), and the Holy Spirit moves in their hearts (Acts 16:14), people believe! There is *no other way* anyone will be saved (Jn. 6:44-45, 65).

And would you notice: The *very same message* reached the "Jews" and the "Greeks." We don't *adapt* the Gospel—change it according to the audience (Gal. 1:10). There is *one* Gospel (Acts 11:17; Gal. 1:8-9). Everybody has the same problem: You are "dead in your trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). That is how you witness to *anyone*!

"Do you understand what the *Bible* says, my friend? Our sin—because we are the descendants of our father Adam, we are 'alienated' from God (Col. 1:21; cf. Is. 59:2). We need to be *saved*!" And we always talk about "saved from your sins," "saved from your problems," "saved from your addictions." "Do you know what you need to be saved from? *God*! (Rom. 5:9) Because *He* is going to send you to *eternity* in 'the lake of fire' (Rev. 20:10, 13-14) unless you accept His 'free gift' of 'eternal life'!" (Rom. 6:23)

We preach that message, and some people will come to new life in Christ (Acts 13:48)—and some will turn on you and attack you (Acts 13:45, 50). You never know what your influence will open up for you by way of opportunity for the Gospel.

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But also, we should learn that unbelievers will not only...well, be unbelievers—they will not only refuse to believe, but *some* will do all they can to *stir up others* and embitter them against you (e.g., Acts 13:45, 17:5, 13; 18:12; 19:24-29; 1 Thess. 2:14-16).

I have seen that applied *firsthand* in Russia: When our Russian friends will be out, and they will typically go out and they will put on a concert and they will invite people, and they will preach the Gospel to them; they will do special works: distributing food or helping out, whatever they can; and do the children's ministries, like what they do at Christmas in the "Immanuel's Child"—that's one of the things we will emphasize in our next few weeks in our "Missions Month."

But I have been there where the Christians are doing something, and the police car rolls up; and you look inside there, and in the back seat there is a passenger—not somebody who has been arrested; it's the local Russian Orthodox priest giving them directions where to go; and as they pull in, you will see the priest say, "Okay, arrest him, her, arrest him, gather up them..." The unbelievers—*especially* the most religiously *zealous* unbelievers—will embitter others—get them to turn on you, if they can.

But would you notice, it also says that "they spent a long time there," and that *follows* the part right after the people being "embittered...against" them. It says: "*Therefore* they spent a long time there." It wasn't that Paul and Barnabas enjoyed opposition. It was because it was clear: The Gospel was having an impact! Don't take *opposition* as a sign to stop speaking God's Word! (see Acts 5:42; 1 Cor. 16:9) It's probably a good sign to *be more clear* in speaking God's Word.

And then, would you notice also, it says "they became aware of it and fled." That shows the other side of the balance. Don't unnecessarily keep yourself and your team in harm's way (cf. Matt. 10:23a). If they are rushing upon you to stone you, I think it's a good time to move! How did Mr. Miyagi put it? "Best defense: not be there when punch come!" So, be wise, know when—and that take discernment.

Alright, Number 1: Iconium. Number 2: Next comes the sister cities of Lystra and Derbe.

The next region over—like I said, sort of like for us going from one county to another—was Lycaonia, and the two main cities were Lystra and Derbe. You might think that you know something about them—but no, Lystra is not the city where Listerine was invented. Derbe is not the hub of horseracing. But you might remember the names of the cities, right?

The first thing we see is: Leaping in Lystra.

Paul and Barnabas get there, and an interesting thing: There is no record of a synagogue there. Probably, there was not much of a Jewish population there. But they did not change what they did: They preached the Gospel. So they probably got together in some sort of a public square, because they had some significant crowds there; and three main things happened in Lystra: There was a remarkable healing; then a bizarre thing—the pagans trying to worship Paul and Barnabas; and then, Paul being stoned.

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So, pick it up at Verse 6 where we left off, and go on to Verse 7—"They became aware of it"—of the danger to their lives—"and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, [that is] Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; and there they continued to preach the gospel."

Now, it doesn't say this in the text—remember, this is only a summary—but it is quite likely that some of the disciples from Iconium probably came with Paul and Barnabas to Lystra. If you watch Paul's style *all the way* through his ministry: *Always*, he was building the team, building the team, building the team, challenging people, "Come with us! Be part of this thing that God is doing here." So, *probably*, they brought some with them. But whether that is the case or not, "they continued to preach the gospel."

And immediately, one certain man became the focus. There is *no doubt* of the condition of this man; it's in Verse 8—"At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked." Alright, no doubt: three descriptions of him. This was not a sprained ankle from playing tennis the day before. The guy had "never" taken a step!

And what happened next is absolutely glorious! Look at Verses 9 and 10—"This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And he leaped up and began to walk."

Now again, I love the economy of words, the simplicity of that, the *glory* of it all. Oh, how I wish I could do things like that! I *can't*; neither can you. But I started wondering: What might have gone through Paul's mind? As they were praying the night before, had Barnabas said to Paul, "Hey, hey, hey—*tomorrow*, why don't you *heal* a guy?" Did they *plan* that? Did they *know* this guy? We don't know. I mean, they weren't saying, "Well, let's give it a try—I hope this works!"

No. Paul *saw* "that he had faith." How do you do that? You *can't*. I can't look somebody in the eye and say, "You have faith. You don't have faith. You have faith in your left eye; your right one is still..." No! How did he *know*? God gave him that revelation! "The signs of a true apostle" were going on there—revelation and healing. And for the first time in this man's life, he not only took a step, "he leaped up and began to walk." I bet he didn't sit down again that day (cf. Acts 3:8).

And then, something bizarre happened. It is rooted in the pagan superstitions of the people of that era, and those superstitions came into play. I'm calling it "Lycaonian Lunacy." Look at Verse 11 through Verse 13—"When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language..." Now, *that* is significant, that that detail is there, because Paul and Barnabas did not speak or understand "Lycaonian." I'm sure they were preaching in Greek; that was the lingua franca of the whole region around the Mediterranean Sea at that time, but they didn't know the local dialect. So these people were saying in their own language: "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." They *knew* that this was supernatural. "We couldn't help this guy!" And *instantly*, having "never" taken a step in his life, this adult man is "walking" and "leaping." *How wonderful!*

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" 'The gods have become like men and have come down to us.' And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes"—I don't know how well you know your fake gods; they called him "Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 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."

Now, there have been a lot of reactions to preaching the Gospel, even in the Book of Acts. *This* one is unique. Well, there is a specific reason for it. We know of that reason from the writings of a Roman poet named Ovid. He is the one who recorded the folklore in Lystra which said that the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes once came to Earth incognito, disguised as men. When they arrived at Lystra and asked for food and lodging, everyone refused them. That's what the myth says. At last, we are told, an old peasant named "Philemon"—not the "Philemon" to whom Paul wrote; it was a common name—an old peasant named "Philemon" and his wife "Baucis" took them in—that's what the myth says. The gods, then took revenge against the inhospitable neighbors in Lystra, and they drowned them in a flood. But Philemon and Baucis saw their humble little cottage turned into a magnificent temple. That myth obviously provided some good reason to get people to raise money to build an opulent temple to Zeus—which was right outside of town. That's the absolutely fabricated mythology that was behind this bizarre reaction.

The myth goes on to say that when they died, Philemon and Baucis were turned into two stately trees. I don't get that! That *hardly* sounds like heavenly rewards! I mean, "Give you all for your god, and someday you can be a *spruce!*" I don't get that. But, so the myth goes.

Well, the people who were present, when they saw the supernatural healing of this man, they did not want to *repeat* what they had been led to believe was the error of their alleged ancestors, so they so they decided that they were being given a chance to get it right. So, this *must* be "Zeus and Hermes"—chief god and his mouthpiece. Barnabas was probably the more stately of the two, and it was quite clear that Paul was the motor-mouth of the two; he was the communicator, and that was the role of "Hermes," so hence those designations. And so they *quickly* called the local "priest of Zeus" to come and make "sacrifices" to what they believed were their visiting gods. As I said, Paul and Barnabas did not understand the Lycaonian language, so they did not immediately know what was going on. Well, as soon as they figured it out, they did some emergency theological triage to make sure these people understood who God really is.

Now, being the theologian that I am, this called to my mind the third Star Wars movie, when among the Ewoks, they decided that C3PO was a god. And *remember* how he capitalized on that—saved his friends and made up these stories and told them all of these things. That's not what Paul and Barnabas did. They told the truth. Look at Verse 14 and following: "But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul..." Curious thing there: "*apostles* Barnabas and Paul"? Barnabas is never named an "apostle," but this is an apostolic ministry; it was the apostolic work of Paul and Barnabas together, so don't get hung up on that. He was a very close associate who worked with the apostles (e.g., Rom. 16:7; Gal. 1:19).

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"But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 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 that you should turn from these vain things to a living God"—these gods you are thinking of: they are *fabrications!* You should turn "to a living God" (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9)—and then, a quote from Exodus 20 and Psalm 146—"God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them" (vss. 14-15)—the Creator God of Heaven and Earth, in other words.

He continued: "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 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" (vss. 16-17; cf. Rom. 3:25b). In other words, he was telling them about the grace of God—the general grace of God that provides for everyone, so that they would have an opportunity to repent and come to Christ (Acts 17:26-27). And Verse 18—"Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them."

Well, they got *that* fire out; but soon, it turned ugly again. Some of the hateful unbelievers who had driven them out of Antioch back in Chapter 13, and had driven them out of Iconium earlier in this chapter—they showed up now in Lystra to try to finish what they started against Paul and Barnabas. Just like Paul had formerly hunted down believers in Christ, he is now the hunted by the enemies of Christ.

So now we come to Lynching, and then on to Derbe.

Look at Verses 19 and 20—"But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe." Again, in two verses—that I could read in about *15 seconds*—the summary of that whole event.

What an *astounding* testimony to the sustaining grace and the sufficiency of God! You know, being "stoned"—that doesn't have to do with ingesting something; it means rocks rained down on you by a mob of people. And apparently, those "Jews" who "came from Antioch and Iconium" and teamed up with the unbelieving Jews in Lystra—apparently, they persuaded the local authorities in Lystra that Paul and Barnabas *were not* actually gods, they were actually *blasphemers*; and so therefore, according to Jewish law, they needed to be stoned to death. Nobody was looking up the constitutional rights of Roman citizens at that time.

Now, *probably*, because he was always the one who spoke on behalf of the team—the one who spoke in public—they wound up targeting only Paul. Or, maybe Barnabas successfully stole away into the crowd—we don't know. But the same people who had wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas, thinking they were "Zeus" and "Hermes"—*now* they are happy to join the party and start throwing rocks at them!

Well, they did a good job of it. "They stoned Paul" and presumed that he was "dead." They left him for "dead." Well, obviously, God healed him.

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Now, there are people who say, "Well, he really did *die*, and this is a resurrection." I think if he died and he was resurrected, the text would probably say that he died and was resurrected. It says they "*supposed* him to be dead." And "the disciples" were still "around him"; I can imagine they were praying up a storm. But when they stop throwing the rocks, Paul gets up, and he goes back into "the city."

Now, I don't care if you have survived a stoning or not—*it can't be fun!* "It's going to leave a mark," we would say. But he got up, went back into the city, and then said, "Hey, Barnabas, let's go to Derbe! It's only a 60-mile walk! We'll head out tomorrow." God took care of His man.

What might we apply from this? What might we learn?

Would you notice, above all: They never stopped preaching. They were driven out of Antioch for *preaching*. They were driven out of Iconium for *preaching*. They were stoned for *preaching*. They didn't go *take a few weeks off* in Derbe, and lick their wounds. Understand: There is *nothing* more important that we will *ever* do than to help someone understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ! (see Jas. 5:20)

Would you notice also that the presence of false worship has to be met with, not "riding the wave"; not trying to figure out, What is the myth system that the people believe? And how can you buy into that? How can you relate the Gospel to that? There is some really bad Missiology training that will teach you that. No, you "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) about who God is (Acts 17:24-26), and how we are "alienated" from Him (Col. 1:21; cf. Rom. 8:7-8; Eph. 2:12; 4:18), and about how He and He alone made the way for us to be "reconciled" to Him (Rom. 5:10). To just be *popular* is *never the goal!* Paul and Barnabas would have *nothing* to do with getting attention for the wrong reason. They just steadfastly *stayed on point*.

And even when the opposition turned more vicious than ever—it got to that physical point of stoning—they continued. You know, if it happened in our day, that someone was preaching the Gospel and they were stoned, and they survived the stoning, they would probably clear their calendars so they could go on the interview circuit and write a book about the "miraculous recovery." That wasn't the point! For Paul, the next day: "Let's head to the next city, Barnabas! It's only 60 miles! We'll be there in a few days. Let's go!"

So, back to our *chillingly* exciting outline: Number 1: Iconium; then Number 2: Lystra and Derbe; then Number 3: Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

The farthest point of the missionary journey was Derbe. They started in Antioch of Syria; down to the seacoast; across a little piece of the Mediterranean Sea; from one end to the other of Cyprus; up from the west end of Cyprus up to the mainland; and then kind of that curving arch to go around those really, really difficult Taurus mountains; and then they made a loop, and the *far end* of the loop was Derbe. Then, they retraced their steps and came back through those same places, and went back home the same way that they had come.

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That entire ministry in Derbe is summarized in three verses: "After they had preached the gospel to that city"—the antecedent of that is "Derbe"—"and had made many disciples"—more converts, more fruit—"they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.." "So, what are we going to do now? Let's go back to the last three places that we were *attacked!*"

And what did they do? They sought out the believers. Verse 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.' 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" (vss. 22-23).

So, would you first of all notice the priorities? They "made many disciples." It says that in every city. Then, "they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch," where they were stoned and where they were run out of town earlier before.

Visit Number 1, as they came through—the priority is: Preach the Gospel. Now, there are "disciples" there. It took a little while—days, weeks, possibly months. Go over to Derbe, come back. Visit Number 2, the same places—what do they do? They "strengthen" the Christians that are there, because they are not going to *stay*; they are going to plant churches—and the work of Christ planting His "Church" (Matt. 16:18) will go on.

Notice *more* about the priorities: They were "strengthening the souls of the disciples." You do that by *teaching* them the Word of God (e.g., Acts 15:32; cf. Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 2:2; Jude 20). In the case of anyone that might be the least bit wavering, they were "encouraging them to continue in the faith." But you do that also with the ones that you "strengthen"—"strengthen" them and "encourage" them to stay "in the faith" (cf. Acts 11:23; 13:43; Col. 1:23).

Another thing to learn: Never fall into the error of thinking that if you love Christ and you seek to serve Him, that things will be easier for you. If you hear someone preaching, "Come to Jesus!—He wants you *well!* Come to Jesus! He wants you *wealthy!* Come to Jesus—He wants to bless you! Come to Jesus so you can get rid of your hang-ups and your problems, and you can be happy, and you can be fulfilled!"—*turn off* whatever you are listening to, or *burn* whatever book you are reading! *That is not the Gospel!* That is a *man-centered, come-and-get-what-you-want-for-yourself* actualization message, which is *antithetical to the Gospel!* "Deny [yourself]...take up [your] cross *daily*" (Lk. 9:23). *That* is the response to the *glorious* good news that though we were "dead in [our] trespasses and sins," (Eph. 2:1), "God" has granted us "the free gift" of "eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23).

What is the Christian life like? Well, as we have been saying in our New Year messages, and like we are going to say in our Vacation Bible School this year: It is "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5); it is preaching the Gospel. That is *declaring war* on a "world" that "hates" Christ (Jn. 7:7b). So, "Through *many tribulations* we must enter the kingdom of God." (cf. Ps. 34:19; Jn. 16:33; 2 Cor. 12:10; 1 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:3; 3:12; 4:5; Heb. 11:36-38; 1 Pet. 4:12).

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By the way, just a little tidbit: Those verb forms on "strengthening" and "encouraging"—they are both in a form that means that was their *constant* activity. Whenever they came, and there weren't Christians, they preached the Gospel until there were Christians. When they came, and there were Christians, they "strengthened" them and they "encouraged" them (e.g., Acts 15:32, 41; 16:4-5; 18:23; 1 Thess. 3:2).

And would you notice also, to learn—it's just mentioned here; we are going to see a lot more about it later in the Book of Acts; and it's the same Paul who wound up writing First Timothy and Second Timothy and Titus, about what kind of spiritual leadership is needed—but realize: Spiritual health and spiritual growth requires godly spiritual leadership (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 1:1-3). They took the time to make sure that "elders" were trained and recognized and publicly commissioned. They would not leave those places until they had handed off the responsibility.

Now, think about that for a moment: How long did I say this whole missionary journey took? About a year and a half. They had come through Antioch, come through Iconium, come through Lystra, gone to Derbe, made a U-turn, and gone back; and then they are appointing elders. How long had those elders known the Lord? It *cannot* have been more than *months*—maybe even *weeks*!

Now, again,, I would think there is probably some supernatural revelation going on to the apostles, to recognize who God was gifting and calling for those things, but understand: In *every* situation where the church of Christ is at work, you want to look for spiritually mature and spiritually maturing people to whom you can entrust more and more ministry (2 Tim. 2:2). And we are going to see that fleshed out in much greater detail later on.

So, Number 4: We are going to go to Pisidia, Pamphyila, and Perga.

This wraps up the remainder of the travelogue. Look at Verses 24 and 25—"They passed through Pisidia [region] and came into Pamphylia [region]. When they had spoken the word in Perga [city], they went down to Attalia [seaport]." And "Attalia" is that same seaport where they had arrived on the mainland after they finished their ministry across the island of Cyprus. And from there, they headed back home—which brings us to:

Number 5: Attalia to Antioch

Verses 26 through 28—"From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had"—now notice these verbs—"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. And they spent a long time with the disciples."

Verse 28 *literally* says: "And they spent *not a little time* with the disciples." Compared to the time that they had spent in all those places that we have heard about in Chapter 13 and Chapter 14—a year and a half—they were *thrilled* to get back home and to *linger* with the brothers and the sisters who had sent them away.

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What might we learn about this?

Well, I think we need to learn to close the circle. I can imagine how much joy and anticipation was unleashed when it says they "arrived." Please notice that not only were the missionaries called, trained, commissioned, prayed for, and sent—they were *received back*, and they "reported." This is the collective work of the Body of Christ.

I mentioned to you when we arrived at Chapter 13: *This* example from *this* missionary trip is the reason that we chose the label "The Antioch Initiative" for the training that we do in Russia—the same kind of thing that Scott is doing in Africa and in Mexico. The church at Antioch of Syria was the first Gentile church to recognize, send, support, and receive back missionaries. *That* is what we are all about! (see Acts 26:29; Rom. 10:1; 2 Tim. 2:10).

So, would you notice that the fruit that is borne by the missionaries—it is *all* the work of God (Jn. 6:37, 44; Acts 13:2, 48; 16:14)—but it is the fruit of the *entire local church*. They joyfully "gathered...together" to hear the reports. I have to admit: When I was a brand new Christian, I *loved* coming to church and I *loved* being taught the Word of God; and when they would say, "We have a missionary with us today," I would kind of glaze over. "Okay, slides...you know—seen one, seen 'em all." *Now* I realize: What a *glorious thing!* We have a *part in this!* They *joyfully* "gathered...together" to hear the reports.

And would you notice, finally, that fellowship is not a hit-and-run encounter. The church met together, "and they spent *not a little time* with" one another.

Our mission is: "Mission: *Possible*." *Impossible* for us—we can't do this in our own strength. But by God's grace and by God's power, the unfinished work in progress now rests with *us in this generation*, in places *just like* Heritage Bible Church! Would you please ask God to give you wisdom to see what things from the example of Paul and Barnabas that *you* might apply to your life? Might God call you to cross-cultural missions? If you aren't sure, just hang out with our youth ministry for a while—*that* is a different culture. Maybe God would want to call you somewhere across the ocean. How might you better pray for and support and encourage those whom He calls to such ministry?

First Missionary Journey complete! Check that box—and brace yourself for what is coming in Chapter 15, one of the most *significant* chapters in the Bible.

My friends, let's carry on with "Mission: Possible"—and let's pray to that end:

Father, thank You that You would use humble—as it were, clay pots like us—to be Your instruments to do things that only You can do. We ask that You would teach us evermore to rejoice in what You are doing around the world. We pray that You would remind us every day that right where we live is where You want us to be Your ambassadors, to be Your spokespeople, to be Your hands of compassion and Your lips of "speaking truth in love," and Your open arms to receive those that You call to Yourself. Let us not be discouraged by opposition. Let us be wise in stewarding the opportunities. And we'll pray in Jesus' name. Amen.