

"1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them, 6 They were ware of *it*, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: 7 And there they preached the gospel.

8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: 9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, 10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. 13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

14 *Which* when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard *of*, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

19 And there came thither *certain* Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead. 20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." (Ac 14:1-20 AV)

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We are continuing to follow the apostle Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey into what is now Asia Minor, or the nation of Turkey. I am not interested in the geography so much of this region. The present situation of these cities, if they are known, can be found in Bible Dictionaries or geographic summaries of the New Testament. The events that took place in

these towns are simply narrated by Luke and those are the things we will look at in order to understand the heroic nature of the ministry of the apostles and the power of God on their behalf.

- I. First we will see the trials and the persecution, along with the patience of the missionaries.
  - A. There was a seeming great success in the beginning as a great many people among the Jews and the Greeks "believed."
    1. "Believed" is used in various ways in the New Testament, and sometimes means to be convinced of the truth of something in a temporary or naïve way. As Simon the Sorcerer "believed" or the soil that received the word in thorny ground or hard ground "believed." In the same sense the multitude in John 6, believed for a time, but then turned away and walked no more with Christ.
    2. Jesus said one time to those who "believed" on Him: "If you continue in my words, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. John 8:32.
    3. This is the reason we are commanded in the book of Hebrews to press on to the full assurance of faith and not to draw back. Peter also warns us to give diligence to make our calling and election sure: for if we do these things we shall never fall. We are to be established in the present truth. 2Peter 1:10-12
    4. The "P" in Tulip stands for perseverance which is included in our election unto eternal life. This does not mean that we shall be saved whether or not we continue in the faith, but guarantees that the Lord Jesus will give us His Spirit to guide and chasten us so that we will truly persevere and not turn back unto perdition.
  - B. Soon the unbelievers stirred up trouble and there was a change in atmosphere and the people turned against the apostles, and an assault was planned against the missionaries by Jews, Gentiles, and the rulers of the city. The missionaries knew of this and retreated from the city to go to Lystra and Derbe to preach the Gospel there.
  - C. Those who preach the Gospel must be aware of the difficulties and the trials that go with it.
    1. Satan does not yield his ground meekly, but assault the truth and the messengers of the truth.
    2. Even the boldness and the miracles of Paul and his companions did not convince the multitude.
    3. There is always power and money involved in the slavery of the people to unbelief and these forces are often not friendly to the faithful ministry of the truth.
    4. All are not called to suffer as the apostles suffered, but all are called to bear witness of Christ in the measure that God has given them opportunity and privilege.
    5. Here is fulfilled the words of Christ to His disciples, that they would be hated of all men, persecuted and slain for the witness of the Gospel. Yea, as Paul said, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.
    6. A minister, especially, must be willing to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, for our Lord has not promised us a bed of ease and sweet perfume and dainties.

II. In the Second Place, a new and perhaps a greater temptation faced the missionaries.

- A. A man, crippled from birth, was healed by the Lord at Lystra. Paul saw that he had faith to be healed, and cried for him to stand up. The man did and the whole town was shaken by the news.
  - B. The whole city came together, thinking that the gods had come to earth, and that Barnabas was Jupiter and Paul was Mercury, probably because Paul was shorter and less handsome than Barnabas. The priests brought garlands and oxen and were preparing to offer sacrifices at the gates of the city.
  - C. So, in the space of a journey of a few miles, they had changed from being devils and thrown out of Iconium, to being gods and sacrifices offered in Lystra.
  - D. Men desire to have the supernatural in their lives, but they often do not recognize it or give God credit when it occurs. The Lord knew this about his ancient people: Isaiah 48:1-8
  - E. Men give false causes for God's blessing and chastenings. La 2:14 Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.
  - F. So it was at Lystra. The religious experts knew immediately what the reason for the healing was and tried to change men into gods.
- III. Finally, in the Third place, we see Paul speaking of the witness of God through all the ages of history.
- A. Paul protested with the greatest vigor, barely able to stop the idolatry.
  - B. We are men of like passions, just as you. We are preaching that you should turn from these vanities to the living God. The idealization of ministers and the idolatry that often goes with it is a worse temptation for the ministers than hatred and persecution. The latter brings the hatred of the devil; the former the hatred of God.
  - C. The love of the world is vanity; idols of silver and gold are fraudulent and a snare.
  - D. God was longsuffering in allowing the nations to lie from the flood unto Christ, restraining their sin, because of the people that should be born.
  - E. We see here the great patience of God in His education of the world, preparing for the coming of Christ, preserving the nations until the time of the Gospel. See Isaiah 30:12-18. God will judge the nations in due time, but He waited patiently through all those centuries because He had other things to do, principally the salvation of the remnant of the Jews and the Gentiles.
  - F. Romans 9:22-24 God bore long with both Jews and Gentiles, in order to save the remnant in His own time and place.
  - G. Through all the years, God left a witness of His goodness: He did good to the nations.
  - H. Then the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and Paul was stoned and left outside the city leaving him for dead.

Application: Romans 12:1,2. Giving up your body is your reasonable worship. If Christ gave Himself for me; then I do not belong to myself, but must give myself up for him, with all the life, breathe, strength and energy I have.

