

## On the Mission Field, Part VI- Backtracking

Text: Acts 14:21-23

### Introduction:

Paul and Barnabas have been working their way east, along the mainland of southern Asia Minor, Galatia and Lycaonia, and their primary, providential means of motivation for leaving one city and heading to the next, was persecution. After being expelled from Antioch of Pisidia, they travelled to Iconium. And when a violent attempt in Iconium, had arisen, to abuse and stone them, they headed further east to Lystra. Then, in Lystra, after exhausting themselves in trying to keep the people from worshipping them, Jews from Antioch and Iconium had arrived there, and turned the multitudes against them, leading to the stoning of Paul. Thinking the Apostle was dead, they dragged him out of the city, and left him there. And so, the next day, they left Lystra, and headed even further east, to Derbe. And last time, we left off, having considered the first portion of verse 21, where we are told that they preached the Gospel in Derbe, and made many disciples there.

Now, being about 100+ miles (straight) west of Tarsus, Paul's native city, you might deduce that the logical, and most safe route to travel for the weary and afflicted Paul, would be further east to Tarsus. There they could certainly be refreshed and regain their strength, before heading the remainder of the way east, about an additional 115 miles to Antioch of Syria, where their sending church was located. Since Derbe is their last stop east, this would seem like the logical route they would take. But, since convenience and comfort and avoiding conflict, were not their first priorities, we actually find them doing the unthinkable!

In verse 21b, we are told, "they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch..." Now, aside from the obvious fact that this was a much longer route to travel (about 60 miles from Derbe back to Lystra, then at least another 100 miles, wrapping around Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, back to Perga of Pamphilia, only to travel to the coast, to travel by boat over 300 miles back to Antioch of Syria), you could easily understand that they might want to avoid going that route, because of the more than "potential" persecution that they could face, along the way. Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, were the three places, which they had just been chased and stoned out of! And so, factoring in the pain, the agony, the travel distance (without the convenience of airplanes and automobiles...etc), Tarsus is looking pretty good, right about now, isn't it?

Question #1: What would compel them to backtrack through the very dangerous and lengthy path, which they had already traveled? [Read verse 22; also see verse 23]

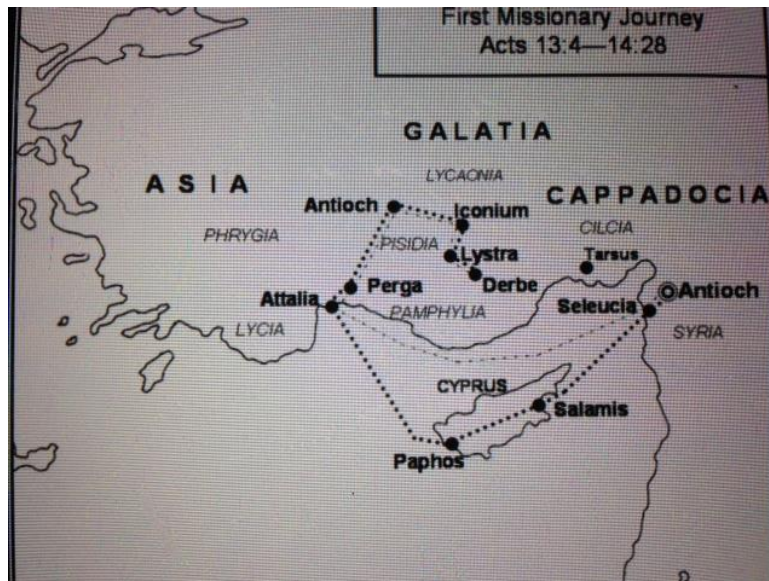
Question #2: What might this great, difficult and sacrificial risk, have done for the brethren in the cities, to where they had traveled back? What was more than likely, up ahead, for these young churches [Remember Galatians]? Consider the value that Barnabas and Paul had placed on their own lives and convenience, in comparison to what they had done here.

Question #3: How can we apply these things to us? Where does this meet us, in our own present day context, especially regarding the health and life of our church? Should this move us in any way? What ways ought we to be sacrificing more, for the glorious church of Christ? Where can we make changes in our own lives, to this end? [Discuss Philippians 2:19-24]

Question #4: How do we "strengthen the souls" of the brethren? What specific steps can we take to do this? How can we exhort one another to "continue in the faith?" Is there a need for this type of exhortation, in our own church? Why?

Question #5: How does the last portion of verse 22, apply to us, in our present context?

Question #6: Why was it important for them to do what they had done in verse 23?



Discuss the "praying, fasting and commendation," that takes place here. Why is this important