

The First Missionary Enterprise Pt. 3

Acts 14:1-23

1. **Vv. 1-7. The ministry at Iconium.** Narrate the *travel*, describe the *setting* and tell *what happened* there. Iconium was almost 100 miles SE of Pisidian Antioch dominating a plateau that rested between the Taurus and Sultan mountain ranges. It was an old city that was still Greek when Paul and Barnabus arrived. Today it is Konya the 4th largest city of Turkey. Note that at this stage it is rooted in the synagogue.
 - a. **The activity engaged in.** 3x's the ministry of the word is mentioned. Cf. **Vv. 1, 3, 7**. The ministry of the word is described as persuasive, bold and continuous.
 - b. **The opposition encountered.** **Vv. 2, 5**. lit. 'disobey'; faith and obedience go together, as do unbelief and disobedience. It involved **(1)** slander (**v. 2**) and **(2)** violence (**v. 5**).
 - c. **The support enjoyed.** **V. 3**. As they spoke **'for'** [on] the Lord (the Lord bore witness. Calvin, "God hardly ever allows them (sc. Miracles) to be detached from His word." Miracles are God's way of establishing the gospel. Cf. **Acts 8:6, 13; Heb. 2:4**. It served to confirm the apostolic gospel.
 - d. **The reaction experienced.** **V. 4**. A deep division resulted. The gospel both unites and divides. Cf. **2Cor. 2:12-17**.

It is tough to know why these two small towns were singled out for evangelism. Neither had a large population nor lay on any important trade route. It's possible they were there as temporary refuges.

2. **Vv. 8-18. The Ministry at Lystra¹**. There are four things highlighted: **(1)** the healing of the cripple, **(2)** the idolatrous response **(3)** and an extract of what was preached and **(4)** the account of Paul's stoning.
 - a. **The healing of the cripple.** **Vv.8-10**. No doubt many miracles were performed. This is obviously selected as a parallel to **3:1ff; Lk. 7:17-26**. Several expressions are identical. No doubt it intends to authenticate Paul's apostolic status. Cf. **v. 14**.
 - b. **The idolatrous response of the crowd.** **Vv. 11-15a**. The radical, idolatrous and perplexing response is thankfully illumined by the local background. Fifty years earlier the Latin poet Ovid penned *Metamorphoses*, which had become a local legend. Jupiter (Zeus to the Greeks) and his son Mercury (Hermes) visited the region disguised as mortals. They were rejected by all but Philemon and Baucis.
 - i. They didn't recognize what was occurring until things had progressed

¹Lystra, Timothy's hometown, was made a Roman colony in 6BC and had existed 20 years prior to that. It was 25 miles SW of Iconium and known for being country and backward; a 'less developed part of Anatolia'; the people, militant, intractable and non-Roman in lifestyle. They were known for having little regard for civil law and for being full of robbers.

pretty far because they spoke in the Lycaonian language.

- ii. We must be mindful of the cultural lens and assumptions of the people we would minister to.

c. **The extract of the sermon. Vv. 15b-18.**

Though the message is abbreviated several things claim our attention:

- i. **It is proclamation. “We bring you good news”** that calls us from vanity to the living God.

- 1. **Vv. 16-17.** It is the heralding of a new era in salvation history. In times past.... This doesn't imply the nations got a pass in times past; but that they had no hope, no offer was made. They had witness² but no gospel. **Cf. Ro. 1:19ff.; 2:12.** What is included in common grace?

- a. It is divine restraint operative in **(1)** Governments **(2)** public opinion **(3)** fear of divine punishment.
- b. Its fruit is **(1)** stay of execution **(2)** restraint of sin **(3)** preservation of truth and

morality **(4)** outward civil good and **(5)** many natural blessings.

2. **We bring you good news....**

Common grace continues but something new has entered.

- ii. **His approach.** Though the message remains the same the approach varies.

- 1. Paul here begins with creation and providence to establish a biblical framework for the message. It would not be otherwise understood.
- 2. It was probably gradual- line upon line and precept upon precept. The initial proclamation was but the start of a protracted campaign to overturn their cultural prejudices.

When Jesus was born there was no room at the inn. But today we not only have room at our inn, but a penthouse suite away from reality. Jesus is a V.I.P. to be honored but not believed or followed. In America, he is a custom but not the true Christ; a captured hero of a casual religion, but not Lord of our lives. **Ogilvie.**

² It was plenty enough witness to *condemn* but not accompanied by the grace that would *convince*.

d. **The account of the stoning**³. **Vv. 19-20(5)**. This is not a judicial sentence but mob violence. There is a touch of irony here. **Cf. 9:16; 2Tim. 3:11**. They parallel the actions of Saul. Despite the healing miracle they stone him as a false prophet and leave him for dead.

i. Paul could not but have remembered the stoning of Stephen. Did He pray as he did? **Cf. 2Cor. 11:25**. It may be later reflected on. **Cf. 2Cor. 4:9 or 2Cor. 12:1-10**.

ii. In spite of the air of miracle, we cannot but deeply admire the Apostle's great courage and tenacity. He returns to the city for the night then continues to preach throughout the region⁴.

3. **Vv. 21-23. The example set by Paul.** Luke takes us inside the mindset and methods of Paul. Having established a church in Derbe they retrace their steps⁵. We discover 5 things:

a. **He focused on making disciples.** **Cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 14:21**. Evangelism functions as the precursor to making disciples. Today it is often an end in and of itself.

³ Some think it strange that Jews would travel so far but forget: (1) Paul had already traveled a like distance and (2) they may well have been sister cities with common concerns and mutual social networks.

⁴ Derbe lay some 35 miles to the SE of Lystra on the eastern frontier of the province of Galatia.

⁵ Ramsay suggests that new magistrates had sprung up in all the cities. Still their courage is commendable.

b. **He viewed exposure to danger as normative.** **Cf. V. 22b**. It is almost taken for granted in the NT that tribulation is the normal lot of Christians in this age⁶. It is only those who suffer with Christ now that will share in His glory. **Cf. Ro. 8:17; 2Tim. 2:12a**.

NO SCAR?

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?

I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;

I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star.

Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,

Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent

By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.

Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar?

Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,

And piercèd are the feet that follow Me.

But thine are whole; can he have followed far

Who hast no wound or scar?

BY AMY CARMICHAEL, IRISH MISSIONARY TO INDIA FOR 55 YEARS

c. **He was engaged in ongoing training.** *Strengthening and encouraging* are almost technical terms. **Cf. 15:32, 41, 18:23**.

d. **He established leadership.** *Elders*, it appears to be a plurality of elders. They would've been shockingly young in the faith! **Cf. 1Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17-22; Titus 1**.

e. **He was reliant upon God.** This is evident in the *“prayer and fasting.”* This ‘committing’ is

⁶ What Paul likely has in view is the ‘birth pangs’ of the New Heavens and New Earth.

not a mere administrative exercise but a spiritual one.

4. **Vv. 24-28. The missionary work of the early church was characterized by accountability.** They retraced their ground, also visiting Attalia, the chief port of Pamphylia. **Cf. 13:13.**
 - a. **They returned to their sending Church. Vv. 26-28.** The reference to their having ***“been commended to the grace of God”*** speaks of God’s care and provision for their safe return.
 - b. **The report emphasizes two things:**
 - i. ***“All that God had done with them”***. They understood that it was God’s work ‘through’ them.
 - ii. ***“How He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles”***. The image of a door is one common to Paul. **Cf. 1Cor. 16:9; 2Cor. 12:2; Col. 4:3.**

Finally, this completes the first missionary journey.

- It shows an ongoing pastoral care.
- Solid leadership set up.
- Abiding connections maintained.
- Intentional accountability to the local church.