

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## ACTS 13-14

Paul was Christianity's most prolific missionary.

Throughout the centuries folks have marveled at *his brain*, his vast intellect... *his heart*, his deep passion for people... *his shoulders*, his responsibility for the churches... *his back*, the beatings he endured for the Gospel's sake... But never underestimate **Paul's feet!**

Paul crisscrossed the Roman empire four times.

In the portion of Acts that covers his travels forty different cities are mentioned by name. His three missionary campaigns logged more than 8100 miles, and kept him on the road for more than a decade.

**Imagine all the stamps on Paul's passport!**

Oswald Sanders once wrote, "Other missionaries have opened continents to the Gospel. Paul opened a world." Tonight we embark on Paul's first missionary journey, which took him nearly three years to complete.

It won't take us that long to hit the highlights...

Acts 13, "Now in the church that was at Antioch..."

Notice the shift. Until Chapter 13 headquarters of the Jesus movement has been Jerusalem, but now its epicenter moves north to Syria - the church at Antioch.

And *Paul* replaces *Peter* in the spotlight. Peter was the apostle to the Jews, but Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles.

Antioch was the gateway to the west, and will be the hub of the Gospel's spread among the Gentiles.

Verse 1, Now “at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers:” First was “Barnabas...” His name means “son of encouragement.” In Acts 11 we learned Barnabas was an early leader in the Antioch church.

“Simeon who was called Niger...” The nickname “Niger” means “black.” Simeon could've been a black skinned man from Africa, or present day Nigeria.

“Lucius of Cyrene...” Remember Simon, the man who carried the cross for Jesus? He was from Cyrene in North Africa. *Perhaps Simon witnessed to Lucius?*

I think its important to note the role played by dark-skinned people in the early church... Remember, the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 was a black man. Here two black men lay hands on Paul and launch his ministry.

It's interesting that many of the most famous early church fathers were of African descent. Augustine was black. His mother Monica was a Berber, with dark-skin.

Athanasius who helped defeat the Arian heresy was known as “the black dwarf” because of his dark skin and small stature... The early apologist, Tertullian, was from North Africa, and probably a black-skinned man.

Often people are taught that Africans were first exposed to Christianity on the slave plantations of America. Not so! Blacks were among the apostles and prophets who laid the foundation of the early Church.

In fact, it's a fact that **the Gospel came to a black Africa years before it arrived in a white Europe!**

There were two other leaders in Antioch... **“Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch...”**

This Herod was Antipas - the man who beheaded John the Baptist. He married his brother's wife, Herodias, and lived in open, defiant immorality.

Jesus called Herod the tetrarch, **“a fox.”**

Herod and Manaen started out either close pals or relatives. But their paths split. Manaen's conscience was *saved*... Antipas' became *seared*... And last on the list... **“Saul.”** Soon his name will change to **Paul**.

Verse 2, **“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”**

The rest of Acts tracks Paul's exploits, all the way to Rome. He'll shake the world for Jesus, but note, it started at a prayer meeting in Antioch. And notice why the church had gathered, **“they ministered to the Lord.”**

We think of Paul *ministering for the Lord*, but first he **“ministered to the Lord.”** And this should be our track.

What a joy it is to know that I, a *finite human being*, can minister to the *infinite God*. We can make Him happy, by pouring out our love and singing His praise.

God saves us not just to *serve Him*, but to *spend time with Him*. Here the church gathers not to seek anything *from God*, but to give *Him* their devotion.

Yet, it was on such an occasion that the Holy Spirit spoke to the church, *"separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them."*

And the question arises, *"How did the Holy Spirit speak?"* Was it an audible voice, or handwriting on the wall, or maybe just an inner witness? We don't know!

But there's a clue. Notice verse 1 tells us some of the men who were praying were *"prophets."* The Spirit may've spoken through an extemporaneous message.

*"Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."* Since his conversion, Saul knew he would ministry to the Gentiles, but he waited to go to them until he was sent by a church.

Too many Christians launch ministries on their own without the confirmation, and support, and prayers of their local church. *Paul didn't just went, he was sent - and behind all his efforts was a praying church.*

*"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia (this was the port nearest Antioch), and from there they sailed to Cyprus."* Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea - south of Turkey.

*"And when they arrived in Salamis (the port on the eastern end of Cyprus), they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews."* This will be his pattern that was modeled after Jesus. In all cities, Saul preaches the Gospel first to the Jews; then to Gentiles.

*"They also had John as their assistant."* This man is also called *"Mark"* in Acts 12:25... Colossians 4:10 tells us John

Mark was Barnabas' nephew. Tradition says he was also the author of the Gospel of Mark.

Verse 6, “Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos...” Paphos was the capitol city - at the west end of the island - 90 miles opposite Salamis.

Paul and his pals had preached their way across the width of Cyprus. And at Paphos “they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus...” or translated, “son of Jesus.” Remember, “Jesus” wasn’t yet a name given to Christians. In the first century it was still a popular Hebrew name.

This “Bar-Jesus was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man.” Of course, if he was so intelligent it makes you wonder what he was doing buddying up to a false prophet... This Sergius Paulus was the “proconsul” or Roman authority on the island.

But he was bright enough “to call for Barnabas and Paul... to hear the word of God.” And it always shows your smarts whenever you seek to hear God’s Word.

“But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.” “Elymas” is an Arabic word for “sorcerer.” Apparently, this was another name for “Bar-Jesus,” Sergius Paulus’ spiritual advisor.

And of course, the idea of a political figure consulting a psychic is nothing new. This is what Joan Quigley was to Nancy Reagan, and Jean Houston was to Hilary Clinton. In the White House both first ladies consulted soothsayers

regularly. It's sad when politicians turn to demonic influences rather than to God for wisdom.

Here, Bar-Jesus knows if his client hears the true Word of God, he's out of a job. Real Christianity and the occult can never co-exist. *So he opposes Saul...*

Verse 9, "Then Saul, who also *is called Paul*, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?*"

And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.*"

And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord." *Here's the kind of teaching that opens eyes.*

Recall this is what it took for Paul to see the truth. On the Road to Damascus God blinded him with a bright light. Now he does the same to the sorcerer. He turns out the *physical lights* so the man can see *spiritually*.

As a side note, it's in verse 9 that Saul's name changes to Paul. "*Saul*" meant "*the requested one.*" Saul was a man in demand. Whereas, "*Paul*" means "*little.*" And this name marked a change in his attitude.

Saul went from being a *haughty* man to being a *humble* man - he was content to live in Jesus' shadow.

Verse 13, “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia...” They docked on what is today, the southern coast of Turkey.

“And John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.”  
*Why did John Mark leave? We’re not sure.*

It could’ve been the fear of persecution... or the rigors of travel... Perhaps as a Jew, he had doubts about preaching to Gentiles... The early church father, Chrysostom, said, “the lad wanted his mother.”

But a more likely answer may be tied to the phrase, “*Paul and his party.*” Until now the two have been referred to as “*Barnabas and Saul,*” but over the winter spent in Cyprus, apparently Paul assumed leadership.

It’s now “*Paul and his party.*” Paul and Barnabas will eventually split company. This may be the first crack in the break-up. Perhaps Mark saw Paul taking charge and became jealous for his uncle. If so, it won’t be the last time a person’s *envy* gets in the way of *ministry*.

“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.” There were actually seven Antiochs in the ancient world. Paul’s group originated in *Antioch of Syria*, now they’re at *Antioch in Galatia*.

*Notice what they’ve done...* They landed in Perga, a seaside city. But there’s no record of any ministry there. Instead they immediately journey 100 miles and climb 3600 feet to the mountain village of Antioch.

Why didn’t they preach in Perga before the climb?

Paul later writes to these same people of Antioch, in Galatians 4:13, "You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the Gospel to you at the first."

It seems some physical ailment drove Paul out of the tropical climate of Perga to seek the higher ground of Galatia. At the time, coastal Turkey was known for a deadly strain of malaria. People who contracted it said it was like a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead.

Some early traditions say that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" were migraine headaches caused by his malaria.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul notes their love for him when he says "you would've plucked out your eyes and given them to me." It's reasonable Paul suffered some sort of eye disease. Perhaps his condition was tied to the headaches and malaria, and triggered by the hot and humid climate on the Turkish coast. *Something* caused Paul to head straight for Antioch.

He arrived in Antioch, "And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

Telling a preacher to "*say on...*" is like saying sic'em to a bulldog. "Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen..." *Do you know anyone who can't talk without using their hands?* Several times in Act it says that Paul motioned with his hands before he spoke.



He speaks to the Jews in verse 17, “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it.

Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. After that He gave *them* judges for about 450 years, until Samuel the prophet.” This is a quick overview of Jewish history.

And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.” King Saul lived for people’s approval. The Saul speaking lived to please his Lord!

“And when (God) had removed (King Saul), He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, *‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’* Notice Paul is speaking to Jews so he begins with God’s dealings in Jewish history. He’ll use a different tack when he speaks primarily to Gentiles.

But here he follows the same outline as Stephen in the Temple. Remember, Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7. It got him stoned. And I’ll bet Stephen died thinking his words had fallen on deaf ears. But recall God’s promise in Isaiah 55:11, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” Share God’s Word... it never fails! It always comes home to roost.

It's ironic, there must've been one person who heard Stephen. Saul was in the crowd that day, and although he rejected it at the time, he remembered it, and here he patterns his sermon after what Stephen taught him.

In Paul's account of history, when he gets to King David, he calls him *"a man after (God's) own heart."*

Then he says in verse 23, *"From this man's seed..."*

And this was the purpose of the genealogies in the early chapters of Luke and Matthew. Jesus had been a branch on David's family tree. Jewish history led up to David's seed! God promised a descendent of David that would be an eternal king. The Hebrews called Him *"Messiah."* He would deliver Israel and rule the world.

Now Paul points to Jesus, *"according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior - Jesus - after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'"*

John the Baptist bowed to none other than Jesus!

Both the genealogies and John pointed to Jesus.

Verse 26, *"Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God..."*

He's speaking to both Jews, and God-fearers - men like Cornelius, who had rejected Roman paganism and gravitated

to Jewish monotheism and morality. The “God-fearers” were Gentiles who sought the true God.

To them both “the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*.” The OT predicted the Messiah would be rejected by His own.

Psalm 69:8 is the prophetic cry of the Messiah himself, “I have become a stranger to My brothers, and an alien to My mother's children.” The Jews read the sacred Scripture each week, but missed their Messiah.

“And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.

Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.” Even the crucifixion played out according to God's script - just as God had said.

Put Psalm 22, and Isaiah 53, and Matthew 27 side by side, and every detail from His *bloody back*, to the *spikes in His hands and feet*, to the *soldiers shooting craps for His coat* - were all foretold by the prophets.

Verse 30 records the greatest miracle of all time, “But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.

And we declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.

As it is also written in the second Psalm: *'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'* Jesus was "*begotten*" or given life a second time upon His resurrection!

Verse 34, "And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: *'I will give you the sure mercies of David.'*" Realize, Jesus wasn't the only person raised from the dead. In the OT Elisha raised the widow's son. On three occasions Jesus raised the dead. In Acts 9 Peter raised a woman.

But all these folks were raised to die again. They died twice. Their bodies eventually rotted. Death was delayed, but **not defeated**. The only body that never deteriorated belonged to Jesus. He never saw corruption. He's as alive today as the day He was born.

"Therefore He also says in another *Psalm* (or 16:10): *'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.'*

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption." Obviously, the promise of Psalm 16 wasn't to David, for his body turned to ash. God's "*Holy One*" is Jesus. He alone rose to never die again.

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which

you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Paul tells the Jews that observing their own Law won’t bring salvation. We’re “justified” or treated “*just-as-if-I’d*” never sinned by faith in Jesus.

And His resurrection is proof! The fact Jesus overcame *the corrupting effects of sin* was evidence He had authority to forgive *the penalty of sin*. Salvation is by faith and faith alone in the name of Jesus Christ.

“Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: *‘Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.’*” Paul quotes Habakkuk 1:5.

The marvel God did in Habakkuk’s day was to *use pagan Gentiles* to judge His own people. The marvel in Paul’s day, went a step further, He *saved Gentiles*.

Paul warns the Jews, “*don't harden your heart and miss out on God's miracle.*” God is changing programs.

The requirement is no longer *keeping the Law*, but *having faith*. The offer is not only to Jews, but Gentiles.

“So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to *continue in the grace of God.*” Read Paul’s letter to the Galatians and you’ll learn these Jews failed to continue in grace.

They embraced Jesus, but thought to please God they had to add elements of Judaism. *They accepted the false notion that Jesus was not enough...* You had to add circumcision, Sabbath worship, a kosher diet.

A lie festered in the Galatian church. It was a mixture of law and grace, faith and works, flesh and Spirit. It was “**Grace Plus**” *theology... to be right with God it takes grace plus (blank). Fill in your legalism.* And the teachers who promoted it were called **Judaizers**.

In Galatians 5:1 Paul exhorts us to reject the lies of the *Judiazers*, and stand in grace, “**Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**”

Verse 44, “**On the next Sabbath** (again, this is in Antioch of Galatia - we’re going to study Galatians soon and this is the backdrop of Paul’s letter) **almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.**”

**But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.”** Paul was drawing a crowd. The whole city had come to hear him.

The Jews were jealous of Paul, and attacked his message. It’s sad that envy can derail a move of God.

I like this definition, “**Envy is the consuming desire to have everybody else as unsuccessful as you are.**”

**“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of**

everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us:”

And he quotes Isaiah 49:6. *‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’* The Jews were suppose to be a light to the Gentiles, not an obstacle. “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.” Wow, it hit them. God desires to save all tribes. His salvation is grace for every race!

“And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Here’s another way to stress that Gentiles weren’t saved by accident, but by God’s predetermined will. The Gentiles were also appointed to eternal life.

Verse 49, “And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.”

The mob pressured city hall. The Jews used their political connections to expel Paul and Barnabas from Antioch... God’s men split, but God’s Word spreads.

And “they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” I love this, they *get run out of town*, but it doesn’t *get them down*. They shake off the dust from their feet, and look for the wind!

They’re filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. They trust God to keep fresh wind in their sails. If you’re rejected for Jesus

sake, don't dwell on it - shake it off and move on. **You'll never get *shook up*, if you learn to *shake off*!**

In the words of Taylor Swift, when haters hate and fakers fake you've got to *shake it off, shake it off...*

Chapter 14, **“Now it happened in Iconium (which was 90 miles up the road from Antioch) that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.”** Both Jews and Gentiles were being saved. This was an unprecedented move of God.

**“But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.”** It's been said, **“The only thing better than going to heaven is taking someone with you. But the only thing worse than going to hell is also taking someone with you.”**

The Jews were doing the latter. They didn't want to share God's favor with Gentiles, so they sabotaged their salvation by stirring up rumors against Paul.

Gossip is a serious sin, especially when directed at God's messengers. Sour a person's attitude toward a pastor or a church, with baseless accusations, and you cripple their ability to deliver God's Word. It can even cost folks their salvation. We should guard our tongue!

**“Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”** Miracles occurred in Iconium.



“But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.” And Jesus said the Gospel would have this effect! In Luke 12:51 He said, “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.”

People are ultimately *reconciled in Christ*, but initially they might be first *divided by Christ*. You’re either *in Christ* or *outside Christ - lost or found - a saint or ain’t*.

The Gospel in Iconium initially caused division.

Verse 5, “And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them (that is, Paul and Barnabas), they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there.” Paul was booted more times than a football. Here, he’s kicked out of Iconium, and he moves to *Lystra*, 18 miles southwest.

“And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked.” It wasn’t that he *couldn’t walk*, he had *never walked*. He suffered from a birth defect.

“*This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!”

What tipped Paul off to the crippled man’s faith we’re not sure. Perhaps it was the gift of discernment or knowledge. Whatever it was, Paul ordered the man to his feet... “And he leaped and walked.” A miracle!

Verse 11, “Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.”

When Paul arrived in Antioch and Iconium he went first to the Jewish synagogue, but there was no synagogue in Lystra. The town had very few Jews.

Unlike the bigger cities, Lystra was backwoods, a hick town. The citizens of Lystra were uneducated and superstitious. They were simple and excitable people.

They were Gentiles who worshipped the Greek pantheon of gods, and walked on pins and needles not to offend one. That’s behind their motivation here...

The Roman poet Ovid told a tale about a couple near Lystra. The Greek gods Zeus and Hermes came to earth disguised as humans. Everywhere they visited they were shunned, until they came to the hut of these peasants. The couple showed them great hospitality.

Afterwards, the travelers took the couple to the top of a mountain where they saw the region wiped out, but the couple’s hut was turned into a beautiful temple.

The couple became its caretakers. When they died they were turned into two trees planted by its entrance.

The residents of Lystra were steeped in this kind of mythology, and didn't want to repeat their ancestors’ mistake. Because of the miracle healing they assumed that once again the gods had come incognito. Paul did most of the talking, so

they figured he was Hermes, the messenger god - and Barnabas was Zeus. The locals of Lystra didn't want to mistreat their divine visitors.

Verse 13, "Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them..." Remember with a Jewish crowd Paul would start with Hebrew history - but with Gentiles he starts with creation. Worship the God who made "*all things.*"

I believe, this was the most dangerous moment in Paul's life! *Forget the stonings, beatings, jailings, shipwrecks... Here was Paul's greatest temptation...*

When explorer, James Cook, came to the Hawaiian islands, the natives thought he was their god, Lono.

But rather than correcting their assumption he played along. He enjoyed the ruse. For weeks he was treated like a god. Natives catered to his whims. One night he was about to take advantage of another woman when her husband snuck up and clubbed him over the head.

The blow staggered Cook. He started to bleed and eventually passed out. The islanders rightly concluded that

gods don't bleed, so when Cook woke up they accused him of deceit, and murdered him on the spot.

Paul could've pulled a James Cook and enjoyed the perks. But he quickly diffused any misconceptions and set the record straight. He was just a man. They need to turn from their worthless myths to the living God.

I wonder, *if given the same opportunity, what would we do...* pull a James Cook and bask in the limelight reserved only for God? We all can be tempted.

This is why our most dangerous moments are not our times of hardship, but when folks sing our praises, and think more highly of us than they should.

Remember, *“Paul”* changed his name to *“small”* for a reason. It was a constant reminder *it's all about God.*

Paul continues with a sermon about the living God...

*“Who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”* Paul tailored his sermons to his audience. The Gentiles in Lystra knew nothing of Israeli history, but they knew nature and the seasons.

*“And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.”* Apparently, the crowd were in a frenzy. They weren't listening to Paul.

*“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.”*

Here's proof of the frenzied nature of the crowd. Until now they're one step away from sacrificing to Paul. But when the Jews who had opposed Paul at Antioch and Iconium catch up, and start mingling in the crowd, they play on their superstitions. It doesn't take long for them to turn a *worship service* into a *lynching*.

This happens more than you think. Today's media specializes in shaping public perception regardless of the reality. They can create heroes and villains.

This happened to Paul. The pagans made him *more than he was* - the Jews painted him *less than he was* - thus, he went from *hero to bozo* in a few minutes.

It was the power of fake news in the 48 AD. *Paul went from receiving sacrifices to being a sacrifice.*

Verse 20, "**However, when the disciples gathered around him...**" Imagine the scene. Paul's friends gather round him to plan his funeral. They check his wallet to see if he's an organ donor and notify the next of kin. They size him for new suit. *They think that he's dead...*

When all of a sudden, Luke writes, "**He rose up and went into the city...**" What they thought was a corpse staggers to his feet, balances himself, brushes off the dust and blood, and heads back into the city to finish his sermon! *Talk about a guy with guts!* His enemies asked, "**How do you stop a man like this?**" The answer is, "**You don't!**" Paul was *devoted and determined!*

“And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” Years later Paul writes to the Corinthians about a special experience. In 2 Corinthians 12:4 he says he “was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

Paul visited heaven, and saw sights that words fail to express. He wasn't even sure if he was “in the body or out of the body.” Was it a vision or had he died?

Jewish literature records four rabbis who caught a glimpse of Paradise... The first, *Rabbi Azzai*, died as a result. The second, *Rabbi Zoma*, went nuts. The third, *Rabbi Abuyah* couldn't handle the knowledge. He became prideful, and became a heretic. Only *Rabbi Aqiba* survived the experience unscathed.

Some of us bemoan the fact that the Bible doesn't tell us more about heaven. I think the problem isn't God's reluctance to *reveal*, but our inability to *receive*. Heaven is too heavy a reality for mortal men to handle.

What's significant about Paul's revelation of Paradise in 2 Corinthians is that he pinpoints the timeframe of his vision to his first missionary journey into Galatia.

Recall, Stephen saw heaven open as he was being stoned at the hands of Saul. Perhaps the heavens also opened for Paul, during his stoning at Lystra...

Verse 21, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city (Derbe), and made many disciples...” Jews didn't follow Paul to Derbe. There he was finally able to minister to the Gentiles without Jewish interference.

“They returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (they return the way they came), strengthening the souls of the disciples.” It was closer to home to go east over the Tarsus mountains, but they backtracked to organize the churches and strengthen the new believers.

“Exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Realize, Paul taught that persecution is part of every disciple’s training. As Amy Carmichael puts it, “Can he have followed far, who has no wound, no scar?” Real faith is persevering faith.

Later, Paul addresses these same people in Galatians 6. His readers are questioning his sincerity.

He answers them by recalling his stoning in Lystra...

“Let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” Anyone who doubted his love for Jesus just had to take a look at Paul’s scars.

One young man was certainly influenced by those scars. In 2 Timothy 4 Paul reminds Timothy that he witnessed his stoning. Lystra was Timothy’s hometown. Tim saw Paul’s faithfulness in the face of persecution.

Verse 23, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Notice here, Paul appointed the elders.

In Acts 6 deacons were selected by the church, but elders were *and should be* selected by existing elders.

“And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.” Notice, this time Paul preaches in the coastal city of Perga.

It’s possible the weather conditions had changed.

“From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.” They’re back home!

“Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” That had been the big breakthrough.

“So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.”

Paul’s first missionary journey had lasted three years. But they won’t be resting for too long. They’ll be off again - first, to a pastors conference in Jerusalem.