

OpenTheo

Acts 13:42 - 14:28



Acts - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an insightful interpretation of Acts 13:42-14:28, cautioning against narrow interpretations and stressing the importance of examining the entire passage for a comprehensive understanding. He discusses the potential different interpretations of the verse "appointed for eternal life believed," including predestination versus predisposition towards belief. Despite facing opposition and persecution, Paul and Barnabas continue to preach the gospel and establish churches, appointing elders and reminding new converts to expect tribulations. Paul's rebuke of false teachers in his book of Galatians is also mentioned.

Transcript

Alright, we're looking now again at Acts 13. In our last session, I left you hanging because Paul had finished his sermon, but we did not read of the people's reaction. Now, there's some very interesting things here.

This again was Paul's first recorded sermon and the longest recorded sermon of Paul in the synagogue of his city in Antioch on his first missionary journey. And when he finished speaking, it says in verse 42, when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them again the next Sabbath. Now, the Jews left, but it was the Gentiles that showed a real interest that he would speak again on the next Sabbath.

These would be God-fearing Gentiles, or else they would have been called proselytes. In fact, they were distinguished from proselytes in the next verse. A proselyte was considered a Jew even if he was born a Gentile.

He'd been proselyted, he'd become a Jew. But the Gentiles are referring to people who were God-fearers. They were in the synagogue and they liked what they were hearing.

In fact, they were going to go out and tell all their friends about it because the next Sabbath, the synagogue was overflowing with Gentiles. But we see that the Gentiles liked what Paul had to say, even though his message was very much directed to the Jews. He spent most of his message summarizing Jewish history, the Exodus, the

period of the judges, Saul and David, and then, of course, the Messiah coming from David.

You'd think this would resonate with Jews more than with Greeks. And we do find that a large number of Jews and proselytes did respond favorably. Verse 43 says, 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.

Now, again, the team is now called Paul and Barnabas rather than Barnabas and Paul. Paul is the one who spoke up and gave the sermon. And what I find interesting here is that as they're leaving the synagogue, Jews and proselytes are interested in Paul and Barnabas, urge them to continue in the grace of God.

Now, these people have not been baptized. These people are just Jews and proselytes who've heard the gospel for the first time and are making a positive response. But they are certainly not yet baptized.

Now, Paul might have baptized those who are interested after this point. It's not recorded that he did. He probably did.

But they are already being urged to continue in the grace of God. The assumption is they are now in the grace of God and need to continue in it, which suggests that they were converted and believers and saved by grace, even though baptism had not yet occurred. And baptism, of course, is very customary after people were converted.

But even before that point, Paul speaks about them as if they are in the grace of God. In verse 44, the next Sabbath, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. So it was probably these Gentiles, in verse 42, who went and invited all their friends.

So the synagogue was awash with Gentiles. This bothered the Jews that so many Gentiles responded, it says in verse 45, but when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy. And contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

Now, the fact that the Jews were filled with envy is an interesting point because we have to wonder what was it that animated these Jews to be so hostile? I mean, they could say, hey, we don't agree with your doctrine. Don't come and preach here anymore. End of story.

But they had to vehemently, first of all, they apparently could not disinvite them. They invited them to come another Saturday, the next Sabbath. And then all these Gentiles showed up and the Jews were jealous, envious.

You know, it says in Matthew 27, when Jesus was on trial before Pilate, in Matthew 27,

18, it says Pilate knew that it was because of envy that the Jews had delivered Jesus to them. So we see that the Jews are envious of the popularity of Jesus and now of the message about Jesus. Why would they be envious? Well, the Jews, of course, had some measure of success in converting Gentiles to their own religion.

That's why they were proselytes. There were Gentiles who found the Jewish religion desirable and believable, and so they became proselytes. And by doing so, the Jews received more allies.

And in fact, they must have felt somewhat, what should we say, validated when these pagans embraced their faith as Jews. They're saying we're right and they're wrong, and we are right after all. And yet Paul, who was also speaking what sounded like a species of Judaism, another branch, Messianic Judaism in this case, was getting many more responses from the Gentiles.

And I think the Jews thought, you know, he's having more success reaching the Gentiles with his message than we are with ours. Now, no doubt they should have thought, well, maybe he's right. Maybe we should be converted too.

And some Jews were. Some Jews did follow him, but there were some who just wouldn't. And they were envious, but they wouldn't change.

They probably were the rulers of the synagogue, the ones most empowered by the Jewish religion, remaining as it is, and most threatened by changes that would seem to disagree with theirs. And so they would oppose and blaspheme and contradict the things said by Paul. Now, exactly how they did this, we don't know.

I'm assuming that they probably stood up and said, well, Paul, you just said that this scripture is about this man Jesus, but we don't believe it is. They probably were saying, you know, some of these scriptures you're using, we don't think they're really Messianic passages at all, and you're kind of playing fast and loose with the scriptures. I'm sure that that's the kind of contradicting they were doing.

They couldn't be contradicting in the sense of saying, no, Paul, Jesus never walked the earth. No, he wasn't crucified. No, he didn't rise from the dead.

Because first of all, there are lots of witnesses that Jesus had done those things, and these people were not there when it happened. So they would be in no position to say, no, that didn't happen. But they could say, well, even if that did happen, you're wrong in applying these scriptures this way.

Because the Christians did apply Messianic scriptures differently than the Jews did in many cases. Now, some of the scriptures Paul used were probably scriptures that the Jews themselves recognized as Messianic scriptures. It's hard to say, because most of what the Jews thought about their scriptures at this period of time is hard for us to

discern, because the Talmud, which is where we learn most about what the Jews thought about their scriptures, was not written at this time.

The Talmud was written a couple centuries later, and it's from that period that we learn what the Jews thought about this or that scripture. But what they thought before that is hard to say. It's very possible that many of the scriptures that the Jews recognized as Messianic scriptures, that is about the Messiah, in the days of Paul, that they ceased to recognize them as such when they seemed to apply so much to Jesus, and the Jews didn't want to believe in Jesus.

So that, for example, the servant songs in Isaiah 53, as an example, the Jews today think that's not about the Messiah, that's about Israel, the servant of Yahweh. But there's a very good chance that before the time of Jesus, the Jews saw that as a Messianic passage. But because it so clearly speaks of Jesus, and that is so threatening to their position as unbelievers in Jesus, they do not see it that way.

It's possible that Paul was using some scriptures as Messianic and applying them to Jesus, which the Jews at that time were not yet prepared to see as Messianic. Remember, Jesus opened his disciples' understanding that they might understand the scriptures in Luke 24, 45, which means that they would not have understood the scriptures the way they did if Jesus had not opened their understanding. And if the Pharisees and rabbis did not have Jesus opening their understanding, then they wouldn't understand them either, which means there are Messianic scriptures, and the disciples knew which ones they were, which the Jews might not understand as such.

And that could be the basis of all the controversy and contradiction. Verse 46, Then Paul and Barbas grew bold and said, It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first, that is to you Jews first. But since you rejected and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

For so the Lord has commanded us, and he quotes here Isaiah 49, 6, I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth. Now, when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life, believed. Now, this section is very interesting.

Some of the wording we need to consider. It begins by Paul and Barnabas becoming indignant at the opposition the Jews are raising. And they say, Well, you guys had to have the first chance.

It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Why? Why was it necessary that it be first spoken to? He said it was necessary. Well, probably because Jesus came as a fulfillment of the promises made to the Jews.

And the Jews were supposed to be the first to have the advantage of knowing about it. Jesus had come to the Jews and spent his entire ministry among the Jews. He sent his disciples out to all nations, and only belatedly did they realize that they're supposed to convert Gentiles too.

But they knew that this was the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. And therefore, Israel should be the first to know about it. You know, the prophecy in Jeremiah 31 about the new covenant, which is what Christianity is, the new covenant.

In Jeremiah 31, 31, God said, Behold, I'll make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. And therefore, the new covenant was offered first to the Jews, the house of Judah and the house of Israel. Their rejection of it allowed it to go further out to reach Gentiles as well, which it was destined to do anyway.

But Paul said, We had to give you a chance first. After all, you are the people of the old covenant, and God promised you that he'd make a new covenant with you. So we're telling you he did.

If you don't want it, you don't have to have it. But we had to give you a chance. And Paul actually mentions this fact in Romans chapter 1 and verse 16 as well.

In Romans 1, 16, Paul says, For I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Now, Paul could be speaking only historically.

It's true the Jew first received the gospel, as they heard it first, because Jesus came to the Jews. And the apostles were in Jerusalem initially and preached in Jerusalem first. So it came first to the Jews, but also eventually to the Greeks or the Gentiles.

But Paul says that was kind of necessary. And that's why Paul, apparently why Paul, every time he went to a town, found the Jews there first. I mentioned that there would be a logistical reason, a practical reason, because they would already have the foundation necessary to understand the whole concept of the Messiah.

They knew about the Jewish God. They knew about the prophets. And Gentiles didn't know that.

So there'd be a pragmatic reason to go to the Jew first. But Paul said it was necessary to do so, meaning that, in a sense, the gospel was owed to them first. And but he says, but since you reject it, OK, you had the right of first refusal.

Now you're refusing it. So it's going to go to the next interested buyer. You know, we're going to you judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life.

We're going to go to the Gentiles. And then he quotes there Isaiah 49, 6, an interesting

quotation. Because it's about the servant.

It's the servant. It's one of the servant songs in Isaiah. And God says to the servant, I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for the salvation of the ends of the earth.

Now, these servant songs where God is speaking to the servant. They are at one level addressed to Israel. But as you read them, you find that there is the assumption that Israel is going to fail to be a faithful servant and that one Israelite, who is the Messiah, is going to stand up to fulfill them.

So Israel was first appointed to be a light to the Gentiles, but they never were. They never really did include the Gentiles as they could have, as God intended to bring that light to the Gentiles. And so he raises up Jesus to do that.

Now, what's interesting is that Paul says this is a command to us. So he has commanded us. And he quotes a scripture that says, you, I'm appointing you.

I've set you as a light to the Gentiles. The reason I say this is because some of our friends argue when they talk about the epistles, that when Paul says us or we, that in order to see audience relevance, we have to assume he's talking about the people living at that time that he's addressing. For example, when he says, you know, that those of us who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Those of us, some say he must be talking about something that was relevant to that audience living at that time or else it wouldn't be relevant. And if he can't be talking about the end of the world, he must be talking about 70 AD. There's a whole camp that says that every time the second coming of Christ or anything related to it are mentioned in the New Testament, it's referring to 70 AD.

And this particular camp does not believe there's a second coming of Christ further out. And they say because the people Paul addressed were always spoken to in the first person, us, we, and that must mean his audience in himself or else there'd be no audience relevance. This is a very shallow way of understanding Scripture, and it certainly doesn't show much familiarity with Scripture.

Isaiah is speaking 700 years before Paul and says, I've set you as a light to the Gentiles. And Paul says, he's talking about us. But if Isaiah was talking 700 years before Christ, where's the audience relevance if he's talking about something 700 years on? Yet he uses the word you.

Same thing, we found the same thing back in verse 34, Acts 13, 34. Paul's quoting Isaiah 55, 3, where God says to Israel, I'll give you the sure mercies of David. Oh, so the audience of Isaiah living 700 years before Christ, did God give them the sure mercies of

David? No, he didn't.

It was seven years delayed from their time. But they, you, is a corporate entity that transcends generations. Israel, I'm giving you Israel.

Now, not you who are living right now, but a later generation of you. You're still Israel. It's still the same entity.

Likewise, the coming of Christ is going to come where a last generation of Christians are present and are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. But Christians are not simply of one generation. They're part of an entity that transcends 2,000 years.

It's a multi-generational one man, one new man. And when Paul says us and we, he's talking about us Christians, not necessarily us who are living at this moment, but us as part of this global transgenerational phenomenon. And so when people say, well, when Paul said we who are alive remain, he has to mean the Thessalonians he's writing to.

Will some of them be alive at the time Jesus comes back? It's nonsense. It's simply not understanding how Scripture uses language. Paul sees the church as one entity, and we are part of it.

And it lasts for thousands of years. In the Old Testament, Israel was that entity to which was addressed. And God could say to Israel, I'm giving you all those 700 years before it's fulfilled.

I'm giving you the Shermers and Scissors David. Or I'm appointing you as a light to the Gentiles. Which Paul says, that's us.

Paul. And maybe us 2,000 years after that too. Who knows? Any of us who are preaching to the Gentiles might be fulfilling that promise.

But Paul at least saw himself as addressed as you by Isaiah. And in fact, Jesus said to the Jews of his time, well, did Isaiah speak of you when he said, seeing you shall see and not perceive. Hearing you shall hear and not understand.

In other words, what Isaiah said to his own generation, Jesus said, that's you guys living 700 years later, you Jews. Why? Because they're still part of Israel. The reason I go into this is some of you may be totally unaware of the tendency of some people to say, all prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. And there's nothing remaining.

This view is called full preterism. And frankly, one of the arguments, one of their favorite arguments is, well, Paul talked about the second coming as if they would see it. Well, I think they understood him better than the full preterists do.

Which is why full preterism didn't arise until the 1970s or something like that. No Christians ever had a trouble understanding these words prior to that. Because most

Christians read the Bible more carefully than the full preterists do apparently.

Anyway, it's interesting that Paul says, the Lord has commanded us, himself and Barabbas. And he quotes a prophecy 700 years earlier that the Lord commanded us something. So clearly, us and you in these passages are not related to a single generation that's first hearing it.

Although, taken literally, Isaiah speaking to his audience as you, audience relevance would suggest this is going to happen on Isaiah's day. But of course it didn't. And I think we need to be a little more responsible in our treatment of Scripture than sometimes people are.

Because people reach heretical doctrines by missing the way the Scriptures speak. And there's no excuse for doing so. Because there's so many examples that could correct this.

Now, it says in verse 48, Now, when the Gentiles heard this, what? Heard Paul say, we're now going to the Gentiles. They were excited to hear that. Now, we need to spend a few minutes with this particular line, as many as were appointed to eternal life believe.

Because there's a number of ways this can be understood. And perhaps the most common way we hear it is in the Calvinist sense that God foreordained a certain number of people before the world began to believe. To become Christians, in other words.

And that everyone who believes does so because God predestined them before the world began to become Christians. And that those who don't become Christians were likewise predestined not to. This is what Calvinism officially teaches and shamelessly teaches.

They believe that anyone who's saved got saved only because, before they were born, God predestined that they would. Now, you might say, but doesn't the Bible say you have to believe and repent? Yeah, they said, but God predestined that you would believe and repent. Everything you did to become a Christian was God-predestined activity being realized in time.

But it was an eternal decree from before the world began. But see, the opposite is said to be true, too. Those who don't believe, it's because God didn't want them to.

Because according to the Calvinist doctrine, God's sovereignty in those matters is such that anybody he wants to, he saves. And that would, of course, the upshot of that would be anyone who doesn't get saved, God didn't want to save them. Because there's nobody that God couldn't save if he wanted to.

And that people who don't get saved, therefore, he didn't want to save them or else he would. He could add them at no extra expense to himself. He could have added more to the elect.

And so if you know somebody that you love and hope to see saved and they die unsaved, the Calvinist answer, well, God didn't love them enough. Didn't love them as much as you do. You wanted him to be saved.

He didn't. He would have saved them if he wanted to. So your love for them is greater than God's love for them under this view.

They don't say it quite so crassly, but that's exactly what they teach. And this verse, this line in this verse 48, is a favorite verse for this particular point. Because it says, as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

And it makes it sound like these people believed because God had made an appointment beforehand for them to have eternal life. And if the doctrine of Calvinism is true, then this is a very good statement of it. And if Luke was a Calvinist, he may have meant to affirm that.

But it certainly is not the only way this verse can be understood. And therefore, we can't establish Calvinism on this verse alone. If Calvinism is true, it has to be established elsewhere and then could be read into this verse.

But there are other possibilities to understand this verse in addition to the idea of Calvinistic predestination. One is the word appointed. The Greek word is tasso, which means to appoint or to... it can mean to dispose.

For example, let me show you an example where the same word is used very differently than the idea of appointing. In 1 Corinthians 16, 15. 1 Corinthians 16, 15.

Paul says to the Corinthians, I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, that they are the first fruits of Achaia. That means in that region of Greece, Achaia, which is southern Greece. This family, the household of Stephanas, were the first converts.

They are the first Christians to be saved there. He says, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints, that is to serving the saints. This word devoted in the Greek, I should say in the King James Version, the King James Version is addicted.

They've addicted themselves to the service of the ministry of the saints. But addicted is kind of a strange word to translate here. The word in Greek can mean appointed or devoted or disposed.

Now, in this case, almost certainly to say these people have devoted themselves or disposed themselves towards service to the saints is much better than they've appointed themselves. But in any case, we can see that the appointment, if it was made, was made by themselves. They were self-disposed.

It doesn't say that God appointed them to the service of the saints or that God disposed them. He may have, but Paul doesn't say so. It says they have disposed themselves.

I am, by my own choices and temperament, disposed towards certain things and against certain things. Some things that some people would be disposed to, I wouldn't be. Some things that I would be, they wouldn't be.

For example, I'm very disposed to spend all my free time on this ship studying. Other people wouldn't wish to spend their time that way. I'm disposed differently.

I've got other priorities, let's say. Now, to say that means that when it says these people who were appointed to eternal life, we can say they were disposed toward eternal life. Perhaps self-disposed.

Luke does not tell us who disposed them. It doesn't say God appointed them for eternal life. It says they were tasseled, appointed, disposed, devoted.

These are possible translations of the word. That is to say, he could be saying that those who believed were those who were already predisposed in some way toward eternal life. He does not say whether God did it or whether they did it themselves or whether some other factor had so disposed them.

It just says that they were inclined that direction, and so they believed. What's interesting is in the same chapter, two verses earlier, Paul had rebuked the Jews in verse 46 and said, You reject and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life. So you've got one group of people who are judging themselves unworthy of eternal life.

The other are disposed toward eternal life, perhaps disposing themselves toward. It's clear that the ones who rejected it were not disposed by God to reject eternal life. They had judged themselves unworthy.

This is their responsibility, not predestination. And the fact that we have here within three verses space, two opposite reactions to eternal life. And the first is clearly one that the persons had adopted themselves.

It is not said to be God's doing. Then it may weigh in favor of the idea that the second case is also what people had themselves disposed themselves toward and not God's doing. There's no statement that God appointed them to eternal life.

They may have appointed themselves or disposed themselves. I don't know that they did or did not. But certainly the fact that the word can be translated in that way, and is, in 1 Corinthians 16 and 15, and that in the context one group had been contrasted from this group by judging themselves unworthy of eternal life, it's very possible that Luke is saying, unlike those who had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, these people had disposed themselves to eternal life, and therefore they believed.

Now there's another factor here too. A third possibility is that even if we assume this is saying that God had appointed these people to eternal life, it may be that because these people were already God-fearers, that God already recognized them as worthy of eternal life in the sense that he was going to, you know, see to it that they believed, that it's not that it was like he out of nothing decided that they should be appointed to eternal life, but that he saw in them something that made him inclined to open their hearts to the gospel and to help them to believe. This again would not be Calvinism, because Calvinism teaches that God does this based on nothing, that there's nothing in you or in me that God saw to cause him to predestine us to believe, that he just did it on a level playing field, that if you're in a meeting and eventually there's a meeting with some other unbeliever and you're an unbeliever, and you get saved and they don't, there's nothing in you that God saw different than in them.

It's just sovereign, providential, God's choice to save one and not enough. That's what Calvinism teaches. But if there's a reason that God helped me believe, because I already had, let's just say, before I heard the gospel, I had been positively responsive to other influences God had put in my life earlier, then that would perhaps, that would not be Calvinistic, but it would still be God enabling belief.

Let me show you a cross-reference on that. Because in chapter 16 of Acts, in verse 14, it says, Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God.

The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. Now once again, Calvinists point out, see, God opened her heart to believe the gospel. True, but what was she before that? She was a worshipper of God.

She was not some person so depraved that she had no interest in God. She was a person who was worshipping God before she heard Paul preach. And then because she was a worshipper of God, God opened her heart to take the next step and understand the next bit of life that God had for her, namely about Jesus.

So he opened her heart to listen to Paul because she was a worshipper. We can see this here. This is not an unconditional, unilateral election to salvation where God takes somebody who has no interest in the gospel and just makes them a believer, as Calvinism teaches, but rather here's a person who earlier in her life she had made a decision.

I'm going to worship God. But she had never heard of Jesus yet. But she was a worshipper of God, and therefore God graciously allowed her to hear about Jesus and to notice and to come in contact with the gospel.

So those who are appointed to eternal life belief could just mean that these were people who, even before Paul was in town, they were the ones in town who were inclined in the

direction of seeking God and so forth, and therefore God brought them the next step into Christianity. Now another possible meaning of the expression that those who are appointed to eternal life belief is that, and some people think this is what he means, that those who are appointed in terms of the prophecy that Paul quoted, Paul quoted the fact that there'd be a light to the Gentiles and the Gentiles would believe in him. That prophecy itself, in a sense, predestined that, or determined in advance that there would be Gentiles converted, and in terms of that, there were Gentiles who were, that were appointed in terms of the prophecy, not in terms of predestination, but rather in terms that the prophecy had determined that there will be Gentiles saved, and lo, some were.

Now, so we have a variety of ways people have understood this. By the way, too, when it says, even if we take it as God doing the appointing, it doesn't say he appointed them before the foundation of the world. It could be that as they were listening to Paul, their hearts were responsive, and so God, on that basis, appointed them to make the final step to belief.

So there's a lot of ways this could be taken without insisting on the Calvinistic point that God simply had elected these people before the beginning of the world, and that's why they believe. I'd point this out, that if the Calvinist view of this is correct, then we have to assume that every person who was elect from the foundation of the world in that town believed at that day, because as many as were appointed, if that means elect before the foundation of the world, then all the elect in that town were saved that day, because that whole town came out. It says almost the whole city came out, and if the whole city had a certain number that God had predestined for salvation before the foundation of the world, they are the ones who all believed that day, according to Calvinism.

Well, that would mean that there was never one saved in that town after that. No more converts after that. That day, all the pre-appointed ones got saved, and since there's no more pre-appointed ones and no one else could be saved, the church never saw growth again.

That's kind of asking us to believe too much, I think, and because the Calvinist view is very prominent in modern evangelicalism, and this first is understood kind of by default in a Calvinistic way, I think it's necessary for us to rethink it and say, well, there's several other ways it could mean. It could just mean those who predisposed themselves to believe did so, or that they were predestined by God not based on an eternal decree from before the foundation of the world, but based on the fact that they had already made decisions in their lives to be worshipers of God, and now he's taking them to the next step. It's hard to say.

All I can say is, however Luke means it, we don't have to assume that Luke meant it in the narrow sense that is often taken in the Calvinistic system. Now, verse 49, And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stood up

devout and prominent women, and the chief men of the city raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region.

Now, the chief men of the city apparently weren't in their own minds interested in opposing Paul and Barnabas, but their wives apparently got involved. The Jews stirred up the wives. This may be because there were more female proselytes in the synagogue than males.

This was usually the case. It cost a woman less to become a proselyte than it cost a male. A male had to be circumcised.

A female didn't. And therefore, Judaism was much more attractive to Gentile women than to Gentile men. There were some of both, but mostly women.

And these women were prominent women. That may mean that they were the wives of prominent men in the city. And it is the prominent men that drove Paul and Barnabas out of town.

So I think we may understand that there were proselyte women in the synagogue influenced by the Jewish leaders, who were possibly the wives of the rulers of the city. And the Jewish leaders got them stirred up against, and the wives got their husbands stirred up against. And therefore, they drove them out.

We read, But they shook off the dust from their feet, verse 51, against them and came into Iconium, and the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. So there were some presumably baptized. There's no baptisms mentioned specifically, but they probably were baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit.

So Paul and Barnabas left a church in Pisidia Antioch that were spare-filled believers and moved along. Now, they went to Iconium, which is about 90 miles from Pisidia Antioch. This is the modern city of Konya, K-O-N-Y-A, in Turkey today.

This is what was called Iconium in those days. And verse 1 in 14 says, Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and they spoke so that a great multitude, both of Jews and of the Greeks, believed. So these guys are having real success here.

Not just they had quite a few, but a great multitude, presumably a great multitude would be hundreds at least, of Jews and Greeks believing there. A pretty good-sized plant of a church. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

Therefore, they stayed there a long time. Interesting. Therefore means because of that they stayed.

Why did they stay? Because people's minds were poisoned against them and they were opposed. It makes it sound like the opposition simply made them dig their heels in more, say, well, if you don't want us here, we're not leaving. You know, we're going to stay.

Because of the opposition, therefore, they stayed a long time there. Boldly speaking, in the name of the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Now, signs and wonders were not mentioned in Pisidian Antioch.

And it may be that God didn't always do signs and wonders everywhere they went. We know that he blinded Elymas on the island of Cyprus, but that's the only sign or what we read of happening there. We don't read of any signs and wonders in the next places he went, but then he comes to Iconium and God decides to unleash probably healings and other signs, probably exorcisms.

Those are usually the kinds of signs and wonders. There might have been even raisings from the dead, for all we know. But because of this, of course, it enhanced their message considerably because it says these signs and wonders were God bearing witness to what they were saying.

And this is what signs and wonders were intended to be, a testimony of God backing up the witness of the men. See, anyone can come to town and give you a new message. Every cult is started by somebody saying, I've got some new information for you you've never heard before.

It's a revelation I've gotten from God. Let me tell it to you. You follow me.

But most people can't prove that they got it from God. If you can work miracles to it, it tends to give credibility to your claim that you've come from God because God himself is testifying to what you're saying by backing it up with these signs and wonders. Just like the last verse of the Gospel of Mark says, they went everywhere preaching the gospel, the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following.

That's how the book of Mark ends. So God confirmed his word with signs, not everywhere, but in some of the places. And this is one of those places, Iconium.

But the multitude of the city was divided, part sided with the Jews and part with the apostles. Now this is the first time that Barnabas and Paul are called apostles. Paul was no doubt regarded to be an apostle from the day he was converted because on the day of his conversion, Jesus said, I'm sending you to the Gentiles.

We see this in his testimony when he's talking to Agrippa, or actually when he's talking to the crowds in Acts 22. He tells that when Jesus met him, he said, I'm sending you to the Gentiles. Now, sending means apostolizing.

You're an apostle from me to the Gentiles. Barnabas was sent out to remember that the Holy Spirit spoke to the church in Antioch and said, separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the mystery I've called them to. The word send and the word apostle are not used of Barnabas.

But here he is called an apostle along with Paul. So we realize that the word apostle is used more broadly than simply the 12. The 12 were a special group of apostles.

Paul was not one of them, nor Barnabas, but they too were apostles and others are called apostles besides in the New Testament. So part of the city sided with the Jews against them, and part of the city sided with the apostles. By the way, Paul and Barnabas are going to be called apostles again in verse 14 of this chapter where it says, but when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes.

So we find these two men now are referred to as apostles, meaning they've been sent out with the authority of the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers to abuse and stone them, 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.

So persecution simply made them spread out and do more preaching in new areas. Now they went there because they wanted to avoid being stoned. As it turns out, when they went to Lystra, Paul was stoned anyway.

There was danger of them being stoned in Iconium, so they heard about and fled to Lystra. And that's where Paul himself actually was stoned by the locals. Now Lystra, it was about 18 miles south-southeast of Pisidian Antioch, and you can see that in the map that I've handed out to you.

You go south-southeast from Pisidian Antioch and there's Lystra. That's just 18 miles further. Now Derbe, the other town mentioned here, was another 55 miles further than that.

It says, In Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting a cripple from his mother's womb who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul observed him intently, and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand up straight on your feet.

And he leaped and walked. Now this man was listening to Paul preach, and as he was preaching, Paul noticed this guy had the faith to be healed. Now I'm not sure how a man sitting in the audience would exhibit faith to be healed.

The fact that the man had faith to be healed means that the message Paul preached must have had something to do with healing, or else why would the guy have faith to be healed? Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. There must have been

something in the presentation that mentioned at least that Jesus healed people, and perhaps mentioning that people had been healed in Iconium through the power of Christ, also just before they came to this town. Whatever testimonies Paul may have been given, they gave this man encouragement that he could be healed also.

And he had faith, and Paul could tell that. It may be that the guy is getting all excited and showing it in his face that he's kind of expecting to get up and get healed, or maybe the Holy Spirit revealed it to Paul that this man has faith to be healed. But in any case, this man becomes the focus of the meeting.

Paul addresses him, tells him to stand up and to walk, which he did. And he leaped and walked, just like the man that Peter healed, at the Gate Beautiful in chapter 3. He was leaping and walking too. 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. Now Zeus was the chief of the gods of the Greek pantheon. The Latin mythology called him Jupiter.

In Roman mythology, the chief god was Jupiter. In Greece, he was called Zeus. Same god, different names in different cultures.

The spokesman for the gods, or the messenger of the gods, in Roman mythology, it was Mercury. He's depicted with shoes that have wings on them in the mythology, because he's a swift messenger. In the Greek, he was called Hermes.

Hermes was the same as Mercury. Zeus was the same as Jupiter in the different cultures. Now, interestingly, there's a Latin poem by Ovid that preserves for us a legend about this town, about Lystra, that it was said that Zeus and Hermes had come to Lystra in some unknown previous generation, and were unrecognized.

They'd come in human form. And that when they sought lodging, they were turned down a thousand times. Finally, some poor couple took them in.

And even though they were poor, they shared what they had. And so Zeus and Hermes blessed that house with a couple, but they sent floods and destroyed all the people who had rejected them. This was a legend that was local in Lystra.

And so, no doubt, when they were perhaps thinking, Uh-oh, they've come back. We don't want to make that same mistake. Let's honor them.

Zeus and Hermes had been here before, according to legend, and it went badly for those who didn't receive them. Well, they've come back in human form again. Barnabas is Zeus, and Paul is Hermes.

Now, it's interesting that Zeus, the chief of the gods, would be identified with Barnabas. It may be that Barnabas was much older than Paul. Again, Barnabas was a senior Christian, had been around in the movement, even went out with the Seventy in the time of Jesus' lifetime.

And Paul, converted considerably later, was a young man at that time. So Barnabas may have had a greater dignity to his bearing. Paul may have been seen more as an impetuous young man, but the main speaker.

So he could be the messenger of the gods. And they assumed he was speaking for Barnabas, who they thought must be Zeus. Now, why would they think that? Because a miracle had been done.

This man had been lame, and with a single word, Paul had announced him well and made him well. So, oh, these guys must be the gods. And since they already had this superstition that these two gods had come before and received ill treatment, they wanted to make sure not to duplicate that.

And so they decided to offer sacrifices to them. Now, unfortunately for Paul and Barnabas, they didn't understand the Lycaonian language. And it was in that language that people were saying, these are the gods, this is Zeus and Hermes, they've come down.

And so Barnabas and Paul could hear them getting all excited about something, but they didn't understand that local dialect. So they didn't know that they were calling them gods. They didn't know that until the priest of Zeus started bringing a bull out to sacrifice it to Paul and Barnabas.

And then they realized what was going on. We read about this. It says, then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, apparently someone translated for them, hey, they're calling you Zeus and Hermes, they're going to sacrifice to you. They tore their clothes, which is a sign of great anguish among Jews, and they were really disturbed, and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, men, why do you do these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he did not leave himself without a witness, in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

And with these sayings, they could scarcely restrain the multitude from offering

sacrifices to them. Now, this is the message that they give to pagans when they're not Jewish. You know, God, he's the God of everything.

He's not one of these gods you're worshipping sacrifices to, sending sacrifices to. He's allowed you until this point to be ignorant and to walk in your own ways, but now he's given you a break, and he's calling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God. He says, even before he gave evidence of his goodness, because he has given you your rain and your fruitful seasons through the generations, this is the same God I'm talking about, not Zeus, but the living God.

Notice, he refers to Zeus and Hermes as vain or empty things in verse 15, and contrasts them with the living God. The Greek gods were not living gods. They were just myths, but there is a living God.

And he says, we're calling you away from this here. You're doing just the opposite. You're acting like we are these mythical gods.

We're not. There's a real God. We're calling you to leave those and follow him.

And it says that even then, they were hardly able to persuade the people to not sacrifice to them. Then, ironically, verse 19, then the 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. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city.

And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. Now, what's remarkable here is that these people who almost worshipped him, in the very next verse, they try to kill him. I think that Luke likes to point out the fickleness of the Gentiles.

In one verse, they can hardly restrain these people from worshipping him. In the next verse, they stone him to death and drag him out of the city as dead. You see a similar turnabout in chapter 28 when Paul is bitten by a snake.

The locals say, oh, he must be a terrible criminal. He escaped the sea, but now the gods won't let him live. He's been bit by a snake.

He'll die. And then when he shook off the snake, they thought he was a god. Like one verse, he's an evil man, a very evil man.

The next verse, he must be a god. This shows the fickleness and how quickly Gentiles would change their minds, how unstable they were in their beliefs. But what's remarkable is that this was started by Jews who came from Antioch and Iconium.

Now, Iconium was only 18 miles away, but Antioch was almost 100 miles away. There were Jews from Antioch that traveled 100 miles to track down Paul and stir up people in

another city against him. These people were pretty dedicated opponents.

And Paul was followed by dedicated Jews everywhere he went, stirring up trouble, both now and on his later missionary journeys as well. So they stoned him. They thought he was dead.

Now, Luke does not commit himself whether Paul was dead or not. He might have been. He might not be.

All we're told is it seemed like he was. I guess Luke wasn't there, so he didn't take a pulse to see if Paul was dead. Luke could have done that as a physician and found out, but Luke wasn't on this particular missionary journey.

He was on the second one. So Luke didn't know for sure if Paul had died. Probably Paul didn't know if he had died.

Some people think Paul's referring to this very event in 2 Corinthians 12 when he said, I knew a man about 12 years ago who, whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, God only knows, was caught up in the third heaven and saw things and heard things that could not be repeated, unlawful to repeat. He kept saying in that passage, I don't know if he's in the body or out of the body. Most scholars believe Paul's talking about himself in 2 Corinthians 12 when he says these things.

And the fact that he's not sure himself, was this in the body or out of the body? I had these visions, but I'm not sure if I was dead or alive. Maybe that's why Luke, who certainly must have heard this story from Paul's own lips, does not commit to whether he was dead or alive. They stoned him.

They thought he was dead. They dragged him out. Maybe he was, maybe he wasn't.

Even Paul himself might not have known. Was I dead? Was I not dead? Anyway, when the disciples stood around him, probably praying, I would assume, it doesn't say they were praying, but it'd be reasonable to disclose they were, Paul stood up on his feet. Not only was he alive, he could walk.

I'll tell you, these stones would break bones. If you get pelted with large stones, you're very fortunate to get out of there without any broken bones, much less alive. But he was able to walk, and apparently didn't have any broken bones.

Obviously, he wasn't dead. Very probably raised from the dead, and certainly must have been healed of broken bones in this situation. But he went back into the city and say, boy, I'm going to stay far from there.

They stoned me there. He went right back in again. I don't know if it's just like when you get thrown off a horse, you have to get back on.

Even if you don't want to ride it anymore, you have to get on, just let it know who's boss. He got thrown out of Lystra. He goes back in there and say, I'm back.

But not for long. He left the next day. When he and Barnabas left, they went to Derby, which was 55 miles from there.

Derby was the outermost post, the outermost point of their first missionary journey. In verse 21 says, when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, which means they're retracing their steps. There was sort of a crescent arch pattern to the way they traveled outward toward Derby.

They retraced that same crescent backward from Derby to Lystra, Lystra to Antioch, and then Antioch actually to Perga, where they had not preached earlier, and they did preach on this occasion. Now, why were they going back? Well, they had to visit those churches. In most cases, they had spent probably no more than a few weeks or months in each church, and these were pagans who had recently been converted.

They really needed some guidance, and to just leave them to their devices without Bibles, they didn't have Bibles, they had the Old Testament. And there were usually some Jews in the churches because Paul had started in the synagogues preaching, so there were some Jews, some who knew the scriptures in these churches, but they were all new to the Christian faith. And so they'd go back, verse 22, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, we must, through many tribulations, enter the kingdom of God.

So one thing they prepared their new converts for was to expect tribulation, expect trouble. I'm afraid we don't tell our converts that clearly enough. Jesus said there's seed that falls on shallow ground.

These are people who hear the word and they receive it joyfully, but then when tribulation and trials come because of the faith, they quickly fall away because they have no roots in it. I think we have a lot of converts like that. We don't know how many because we haven't had the tribulations come on us yet.

Sometimes very small trials drive people from Christianity. The conversion is very shallow, and the first time they receive any opposition or any disappointment with God, they're gone. But there are many people in the church today who may not have departed, but they have never really known any real tribulation yet.

We do not prepare our people for this like Paul did. Paul knew very well about the tribulation. He'd been stoned to death.

He'd been driven out of town. And he's coming back saying, hey, expect this, expect this. This is what you've signed up for, tribulation.

It's through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God. So be prepared for that. So when they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Now appointing elders in every church, this is their policy. The local churches were governed generally by men called elders. I should say they were led by men called elders because I'm not sure that it was governmental, a governmental appointment.

It was a leadership appointment. You might say, what's the difference? Well, a leader doesn't have to have an official title to be a leader. Leadership in the church should be spiritual.

When it's institutionalized, there's officers who may or may not be spiritual, and they're thought to be in charge because they hold the office. Many churches have elders today or pastors or other officers whose authority in the church is based on holding an office title, and therefore you do what they say. You're told to do so.

But in the early church, people were appointed because of their spiritual qualifications, and it may be that appointing elders simply means recognizing which Christians in these churches, these infant churches, had progressed and had a grasp of Scripture and had good character enough to be pointed out to say, you people follow those guys. Let those guys teach you because the elders were teachers too, as we shall see when Paul describes elders in 1 Timothy or in Titus. We'll say more about elders later on, I think, but right now, just point out that at the first churches they appointed on their first missionary journey, they did not leave them without elders there.

Those elders themselves would be pretty young Christians, probably only months old in the faith, but some of them would have had a background in Judaism, which would put them ahead of the pagans who didn't have that background. Now, when they had preached the word in Perga, remember, we didn't read of them preaching in Perga before, but they're moving back toward the seaport of Italia. They went down to Italia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, which is their original starting point, back to their home church, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

And 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. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples. And we don't hear of them leaving Antioch again until they go up to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council, which is the next chapter.

Now, almost certainly, it was during this long time that they stayed in Antioch that Paul wrote the book of Galatians. The book of Galatians was written to the churches that they had just founded on their first missionary journey. And they found that after they came back from that trip, Judaizers from who knows where had heard of this, and they'd gone

and followed Paul's footsteps and taught the Galatian Gentile Christians that they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.

When Paul heard of this, he was angry, and he wrote the book of Galatians in anger. There's no book in the New Testament written with so much anger as you find in the book of Galatians. And he's basically telling that these Judaizers are false brethren and false teachers.

And so that book of Galatians, the earliest of Paul's written works, though it's not a range first in our Bible, though it is the first chronologically written book of Paul, is written at the point in time we've just read about. When they came back from their first missionary journey, they're in Antioch for a long time. He writes that book, and then the next thing is the Jerusalem Council.

We come to that next time.