


Acts 079
Persecution's Guarantee
Acts 14:1-7
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Let us open our Bibles to Acts 14:1. You might recall that Acts 1:8 is the outline of the book:

Structure (Acts 1:8)

- Jerusalem (Acts 1–7)
- Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12)
- **Remotest part of the earth (Acts 13–28)**
 - 1st missionary journey (Acts 13–14)
 - Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-35)
 - 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36 –18:22)
 - 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17)
 - Trip to Rome (Acts 21:18–28:31)



The words of Christ, which Luke skillfully uses as an outline, just before Jesus ascended to heaven. He was speaking to the disciples:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem [that is part one of the book, Acts 1-7], and in all Judea and Samaria [that is part two of the book, Acts 8-12], and even to the remotest part of the earth [that is Acts 13-28]" (Acts 1:8).

Even though we are in part three, we are only in the first part of part three, which is Paul's first missionary journey into southern Galatia, modern-day Turkey. This is a big deal. It is the first time the gospel has left the borders of Israel. Even Jesus' own ministry took place totally within Israel, but now the gospel has left Israel.

Paul and Barnabas have been appointed by the Holy Spirit and sent by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). They go to this island called Cyprus, and they have a great ministry there off the coast of Israel (Acts 13:4-12). Last week we wrapped up their ministry in a place called Pisidian Antioch, which is inland. That Antioch is different from the sending Antioch.

The Antioch that sends the apostles on their missionary journey is called Syrian Antioch, and it is different from the Antioch where Paul went to on his first missionary journey, called Pisidian Antioch. It is a little confusing; you have two Antiochs. It is not too different from the United States. Two cities can have the same name, right? I looked up Duluth once, because I go to Duluth for Bible conferences annually, and there are around 20 or 30 Duluths in the United States. In the Greco-Roman world, there was more than one Antioch. That ministry has concluded in Pisidian Antioch. Now we are moving into Acts 14:1-7, which is the ministry in Iconium.

Here is an outline we are going to try to follow, as we navigate this section of Scripture together:

- IV. Iconium Ministry (Acts 14:1-7)
 - A. Preaching (1)
 - B. Unbelieving response (2)
 - C. Ministry (3)
 - D. Division (4)
 - E. Conspiracy (5)
 - F. Escape to Lystra & Derbe (6)
 - G. Lystra & Derbe ministry introduction (7)

Notice, if you will, Acts 14:1, the preaching:

"In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks" (Acts 14:1).

Luke is really good at giving us places of geography. We have left Antioch, and Paul and Barnabas have gone to Iconium. It looks like a short distance on the map, but it is a journey of about 90 miles. This would be 90 miles southeast of Pisidian Antioch, where they went next on missionary journey number one.

You will also notice in Acts 14:1 that it says: *"they entered the synagogue of the Jews together."* Synagogues were places where Jewish people met outside of the land of Israel—and inside the land of Israel for that matter. They were dispersed all over the Greco-Roman world, and Paul made it his practice always to go to the synagogue first in any city he went to, unless it is a situation like Philippi in Acts 16, where he did not go to the synagogue first because they did not have a synagogue. Most cities had a synagogue, and Paul always went there first.

Why did Paul do that? Because of something he would write later on in Romans 1:16, where he would say:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

The Jewish people—the Nation of Israel—was God's and is God's chosen nation. It was Paul's practice to always give them the first opportunity to believe the gospel. He did not have a lot of success with them, by the way. They drove him out basically everywhere he went. He started with them first because he had the most in common with them by way of common ground.

They had what we call Old Testament. They called it Tanakh, Hebrew Bible. He would always try to show them that Yeshua, which is the Hebrew name for Jesus, was predicted in their own Scripture, and typically they would reject it and drive him out. He would go to the Gentiles and give a similar message.

He would not start with Hebrew Bible with the Gentiles, because the Gentiles do not have Hebrew Bible. He would start with the Bible that they did have, which is creation or general revelation. God has expressed Himself in creation, just like He has expressed Himself in general revelation. He would use that as a platform to preach the gospel. They would receive it in droves.

That is the pattern that you see in the Book of Acts. If you go back to Acts 13:14, you see Paul doing the exact same thing in Pisidian Antioch.

"But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down" (Acts 13:14).

He did not have any success there with them, so Acts 13:46 says,

"Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; but since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:46).

In this particular case, though, Paul goes to the synagogue in Iconium, and it says that a lot of people believed.

"...and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks" (Acts 14:1).

The Jews would be the Jewish people gathering in the synagogue, and the Greeks would be a group of people that we call proselytes. Those are Gentiles—like Ruth in the Book of Ruth—that converted to Judaism, because they wanted to seek out a relationship with Yahweh. The proselytes are in the synagogue there in Iconium as are the Jews. Paul preaches there, and he gets a number of people that get saved, which is what it is all about.

Notice it says, "a large number." The church is developing numerically, geographically, and it is going to be changing ethnically from an offshoot of Judaism, the way it started,

to an institution comprised of mostly full-fledged non-Jews, which is what we have today.

You will notice that he did not tell people to close their eyes and pray a prayer. He did not make them walk an aisle. He did not give them the ABC method of salvation—admit you are a sinner, believe in Christ, now go confess or call upon the Lord—and all of these kinds of evangelistic tactics that are common today.

It says that they believed. That is the only condition that has to be met for a lost sinner to be made right with God. They have to believe. Which biblically means to trust. It is more than just data in the mind. For 16 years of my life as an Episcopalian, I could spit out at you all kinds of data about Jesus. I could tell you how He died and where He was born and who His mother was, but I was not trusting in Him for anything. I was not a believer at that point.

Knowledge is good, but at some point it has to move into volitional trust. That is what makes a person a Christian. Becoming a Christian is not a 12-step process. It is one step. Lewis Sperry Chafer tells us that "upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only."¹ You know the famous ones:

"Then [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

You will know Acts 16:30-31, which we will be coming to in a few weeks, where the Philippian jailer asked,

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30-31).

Simple right? It is so simple that you wonder how we made it so complicated. We have to make it very easy on unsaved people, because God does. He loves people and wants to have a relationship with people.

Take a look now at Acts 14:2 and you get an unbelieving response also: *"But the Jews who disbelieved..."* Many of the Jews believed, as did the proselytes, but there is a group of Jews that did not believe.

"But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren" (Acts 14:2).

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. 7, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 265-66.

Notice that some people believed and some people disbelieved, meaning that it is possible to receive Christ and it is possible to reject Christ. Whether you become a Christian or not is a matter of choice, just as you have the free will to receive Him by faith, you have the free will to reject Him.

There are a lot of people in the world like that, very sadly. In fact, when Jesus told the parable of the sower, He talked about the seed being spread. The preaching of the Word of God, in other words, being spread in four batches of soil and each batch of soil represents a different condition of the human heart.

You will see all of this in Matthew 13. Very tragically, in only one batch of soil out of four do we see any lasting fruit. As much as I would love to believe that the whole world is going to come to Christ and get saved, it does not seem like that is going to happen in this age, because people have a choice whether they want to receive Him or reject Him.

People reject Jesus for many, many reasons. That is one of the reasons why this age that we are living in now, between the two comings of Christ, is not the Kingdom. In the Kingdom Age *"the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:9)*. That is not true in this age. The earth is not filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

You have only one batch of soil where there is fruit. The other batches of soil, even where it springs up for a little while, it is choked. We are obviously living in a time period. That is not the Kingdom of God, but it is this Inter-Advent Age between the comings of Christ, before Jesus comes back and sets up His Kingdom.

I am not wasting my time and life right now trying to set up the Kingdom. You can go do that if you want; you are not going to have a lot of success because we are not living in the Kingdom Age. The only one that can set up the Kingdom will be the King. In fact, if you go down to Acts 14:22, it is very clear that we are not in the Kingdom because Paul will say,

"Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22).

Before we have the Kingdom of God we have many tribulations in the present. We have to develop a realistic view of this age and not try to turn it into something that it is not. There are a lot of ministries out there trying to orchestrate the Kingdom, bring it in. They call it the Seven Mountain Mandate, where they want to capture the seven major influences in society—economic, business, academia, media, entertainment. I forgot all seven of them.

Their goal is to get control of these. They think they are going to bring in the Kingdom by doing that. My only question for them is, "How is that working for you? Do you think you are getting control of Hollywood? Have you seen some of the things coming out of Hollywood lately?" Things are not getting better and better. They are actually getting

worse and worse. It is not that we should not try to have some kind of godly presence in those spheres, but to exaggerate that as the Kingdom is biblically unwarranted.

You will notice in Acts 14:2 that *"the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles."* Against whom? Against Paul and Barnabas. The Jews used the Gentiles here, the unbelieving Gentiles. These are what we would call useful idiots. Do you know what a useful idiot is? The communists would call people useful idiots that would mouth the line of the Communist Party; then once the communists took power, they killed all the useful idiots. They were kept alive as long as they were useful to expand Marxism.

You see the Jews here—not all Jews, but the unbelieving Jews—doing this. Luke does not portray the unbelieving Jews very well in the Book of Acts. Do not let that bother you, because God does not look very favorably on unbelieving Jews either.

There is national Israel, the big circle. That is not the group He is going to bring in the Kingdom through. He is going to bring in the Kingdom through a subset within that group, also Jewish, which is the believing remnant.



John the Baptist said,

"And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham" (Matthew 3:9).

God is not impressed with the Jew just because they are a Jew; He is impressed with the believing Jew.

"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is from men, but from God" (Romans 2:28-29).

"But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" (Romans 9:6).

I am very much pro-Jewish, pro-Hebrew, pro-Israel; but at the same time, I understand that Jewish people, just like Gentiles, can behave really badly, and when they behave really badly, God has a name for them. This is what He called them in Smyrna as they were persecuting the church: He called them the synagogue of Satan.

""I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan"" (Revelation 2:9).

He says the same thing to the church at Philadelphia, who were being persecuted by unbelieving Jews.

""Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you"" (Revelation 3:9).

Within the Nation of Israel there is coming a huge division. This is really the point of the seven-year Tribulation Period—to divide unbelieving Israel from believing Israel. It is going to be pretty severe, because Zechariah 13:8-9 says that two thirds of the Jewish people of the Nation of Israel will be broken off in unbelief.

*"It will come about in all the land,'
Declares the Lord,
'That two parts of it will be cut off and perish;
But the third will be left in it.
And I will bring the third part [believing Israel] through the fire,
Refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.
They will call upon My name,
And I will answer them;
I will say, "They are My people,"
And they will say, "The Lord is my God"" (Zechariah 13:8-9).*

It is the believing remnant within Israel that God will bring through the Tribulation Period. The unbelieving Jews will be broken off, and it is that group that He will fulfill His Kingdom program through, after the church has already been raptured to heaven at least seven years before.

Ezekiel 20:33-38 describes this division.

"As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples,

and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,' declares the Lord. 'I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge from you the rebels [unbelieving Jews] and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord'" (Ezekiel 20:33-38).

This group here, that is stirring up the Gentiles, is not the Israel of God, that is unbelieving Jews that God is displeased with. They are destined, if they do not change by trusting in their Messiah, Yeshua—Hebrew name for Jesus—to be broken off in unbelief. This is an important thing to understand, because you have people today that are podcasters and influencers (I call them sinfluencers) that have these massive platforms. People like Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, and you have now in the Congress, Marjorie Taylor Greene, and to some extent Megyn Kelly.

These are really not people on the left; they are people on the right. They are trashing the Nation of Israel all the time. One of the things they do is point out every bad thing a Jewish person does. If we are going to do that, we can find a lot of bad things Gentiles do, too, right? There is a lot of bad in everybody to go around.

They make this case: "Look at how bad these Jews are." They bring up rabbis involved in the occult and sex child trafficking and all of these kinds of things. "Look at the homosexual movement there in Tel Aviv, in Israel." They try to make this point that, "How could they be God's chosen people when they act that way?" They are pushing everybody into Replacement Theology—that God is through with the Nation of Israel.

They are upset that America has traditionally supported the Nation of Israel, because that goes against their definition of MAGA. It is not America first. They want to yank any type of benefit or support we have ever given to Israel. They see our theology as the enemy, because as we are teaching, God is not through with Israel. It gives people an incentive to support Israel.

There is this big propaganda campaign now. The latest casualty in the whole thing is Kirk Cameron, who you remember from "Growing Pains," which was kind of a cute sitcom. I just saw an Instagram post from him where he is on Instagram and videos and everything, spewing all this stuff and it is all about how bad the Jewish people are. I look at that and I say, "What is your point? God is not happy with the Jewish people doing stuff like that either."

What they are not telling you is that God has a plan to purge the Jewish people. It is true that two thirds will be broken off in unbelief and a third will pass under the rod, but by the time God finishes doing His work at the end of the Tribulation Period, every single Hebrew will be in faith—every single one of them. It will be a national regeneration. That is the group that God is going to fulfill His covenants through.

When people badmouth Israel, my point is, "What is your point? that does not throw God's End Times program off at all." The Bible is still pro-Israel, it is just that God is going to divide believing Israel from unbelieving Israel. If you find all these examples of Jews behaving badly because they are unbelievers, that fits with what God says about the future. That does not throw God's program off at all. "Oh, my goodness, they are acting like unbelievers. Can you believe it?" You know why they are acting like unbelievers? Because they are unbelievers.

I bring this up because you are in a propaganda war right now where people are trying to move you away from your pro-Israel belief system, by pointing out Jews behaving badly. Luke is pointing out Jews behaving badly. That does not stop God's End Times program at all because of reasons I have been trying to explain.

Look at the very end of Acts 14:2, these Jews using the Gentiles, *"embittered them against the brethren."* Who are the brethren? The brethren are Paul and Barnabas, and those that were converted—the Greeks, the proselytes, some of the Greeks, and some of the Hebrews within the synagogue. The unbelieving Jews did not like them like that. They tried to stir up the Gentiles that were unbelievers to come against the ministry of Paul and Barnabas.

Then you go down to Acts 14:3 and you see the actual ministry taking place there in Iconium.

"Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3).

Why spend a lot of time there? Why not just move on to Lystra and Derbe, which are the next cities? The answer to that question is that Paul and Barnabas were not about making converts, not making believers. That was not his calling. What is our calling? To make disciples. What is a disciple? A disciple is more than just a believer. A disciple is a follower. Is that not what we are supposed to do?

Matthew 28:19 says, *"Go therefore and make—" Converts. No. Believers. No. "—disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."* If Paul and Barnabas had moved on to Lystra and Derbe it would have been like taking a child home from the hospital that is a newborn and plopping them into the middle of the living room or kitchen floor and saying, "Help yourself to a ham sandwich when you get hungry."

You would never treat a newborn that way, and you do not treat new converts that way that are now brand new children of God. They need to be taught how to live the Christian life. Paul is a disciple maker. In fact, to the Galatians, which is the same group that he is going to address in the Book of Galatians that he is dealing with here, it says:

"My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—" (Galatians 4:19).

They are children, but he is in labor with all of them all over again, not for their birth, but for their growth. This is really one of the black eyes of modern-day Christianity, because most of Christendom is aimed at unsaved people. They teach you over and over again how to get saved, which is great, but if you are in a church where only teach you how to get saved over and over again, what do you do when you are 12 years old in the Lord? You have to learn how to live as a Christian.

The church is not just in the converting business, it is in the discipleship business. That is what Paul is doing. That is why he is tarrying for a while in Iconium, rather than having his missionary checklist. "I got these people reached. Let us move on." Paul does not do that. Modern missions do it that way, sadly, but that is not the calling of the Christian. The calling of the Christian is to make disciples of all nations, not just believers. You will see Paul doing a lot of stuff that goes right against how normal churches and parachurch ministries function today.

As he was doing this he was *"speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord"* (Acts 14:3). God wants us to be bold. What did Paul tell Timothy?

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

This idea where you are timid and afraid of your own shadow, that is not a characteristic of the godly. That is a characteristic of the unsaved.

*"The wicked flee when no one is pursuing,
But the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1).*

I know that every time I am called to do something and I start feeling afraid of it or nervous about it, I can tell you right out of the gate that that is not from God, because the Bible says God has not given us a spirit of timidity or fear. When I am intimidated by someone or a conversation or a potential outcome, I can automatically say that is not coming from the Holy Spirit, that is coming from either the devil or the demons, or it is coming from my sin nature.

Paul and Barnabas had this boldness because they were relying upon the Lord. That is the secret to your strength.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

Someone has said, "The Christian life is difficult." It is not difficult. It is impossible if you try to do it in your own power. But what God orders, He pays for. Whatever God has

called you to do, He is going to give you the equipment via the Holy Spirit to pull it off. If that is true, I do not need to be intimidated, right?

"Who was testifying to the word of His grace" (Acts 14:3).

That is what Paul's ministry was all about. He was all about teaching people that they are not made right with God because of their own good works; they are made right with God because of His good work—Jesus' good work. You receive that by faith as a free gift. That is why Paul's message was attractive to so many.

When he first spoke in the prior synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, it says:

"As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken of them the next Sabbath" (Acts 13:42).

"Come back next Sabbath. We gotta hear more about this," because they had never heard about grace. The only thing they had heard about was obedience—get circumcised and obey the Law of Moses; do this and do that. Paul says, "You know what? Everything has been paid for. All you have to do is receive what Jesus did in your place." They were like, "You are kidding. You have to show up next week." This was a synagogue, so it was Saturday. "You have to show up next Saturday to tell us more about it," because they had never heard this gospel, this doctrine of grace.

A lot of people have never heard it either. I never heard it in the first 16 years of my life. Maybe I heard it and did not get it. That is a possibility. All I heard was, "Try harder and do better." I heard that one pretty clearly. I tried and I thought I did pretty well trying, if I could grade myself.

The problem is that God is my grader, and His standard is: *"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48). "That is a pretty high standard. I guess no matter how hard I tried, I could not quite measure up." That is all people hear sometimes in the world of religion. They never hear anything about grace, unmerited favor, it is not about your performance.

Then it talks about these signs and wonders at the end of Acts 14:3. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this:

"To authenticate the message of grace, God granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Again, only the apostles and their delegates (Acts 15:16; 8:7; 16:18; 19:11-12) were ever able to do these signs and wonders. This may be what Galatians 3:5 refers to, when it states: 'He therefore that supplies to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' Miracles

were not being done on the basis of the Mosaic Law, but on the basis of grace through faith."²

When I say this, I am a guy that believes in miracles. I pray for people to get better when they are sick all of the time. If I did not believe in miracles, why pray right? I do believe in miracles, but we are not living in an age today where there is a cluster of miracles like you are seeing here. Miracles in the Bible have a tendency to cluster around time periods when God is starting a new age.

They are going to cluster around the time of Moses with the giving of the Law. They are going to cluster around the Elijah stories, where God is raising up a new office called the office of prophet, to confront wayward kings. You will see miracles clustering around the ministry of Jesus as the Kingdom was being offered to the Nation of Israel. Miracles cluster around the beginning of the Church Age, which is what we are reading here, where God is starting something new.

We have been in the Church Age for 2,000 years, and the apostles are all dead. I think that is part of the reason why we do not see the same number of miracles in frequency and intensity that you see in this time period. In fact, Paul, at the end of his last letter of 2 Timothy, will say:

"Trophimus I left sick in Miletus" (2 Timothy 4:20).

This is the same Paul that raised up a guy from the dead in Troas, but at the end of his ministry, just before death, he said, *"Trophimus I left sick in Miletus."* That is a demonstration that this capacity to work miracles was gradually being withdrawn.

If miracles happen today—and I still believe they can happen—it is God doing it directly and not indirectly through an apostle. They have a tendency to be probably less common, but if there is no such thing as miracles, there is no such thing as praying. I believe in a lot of miraculous things, but I do not have this unrealistic expectation that I need to see it exactly like it was in the Book of Acts.

Ephesians says of the apostles:

"Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Here the apostles are called the foundation of the church. How many times do you lay a foundation? Anyone in construction knows that you lay a foundation one time. The foundation is not being relayed. The walls are being built, and I think the roof is being put on because we are getting close to the end of the Church Age, but we do not have apostles today like we see here.

² Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 303.

When I was teaching at the Bible college, the students would introduce themselves, saying, "Hi. I am apostle so and so." Sometimes humor is a better way to deal with those kinds of things than just rebuking them. I would say something like, "Man, you look good for your age. Give me your exercise and diet tips because you should be like 2,000 years old by now."

There is a standard for apostles. They had to have seen the risen Christ and to be with the ministry of Jesus from the beginning.

"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

The apostles wrote the Bible and the canon of Scripture has been shut for 2,000 years. You may feel very inspired in whatever it is you are writing. If you share it with me, I would love to read it, but I am not going to take it and say, "That is Revelation 23. Let us tuck that in." What you are experiencing is illumination, where the Spirit is opening your eyes to things. What the apostles were writing was revelation and inspiration. Those two offices shut 2,000 years ago, the moment the apostles left the scene.

The canon of Scripture shut, so when the Mormons come to your house—not if, but when—and want to talk to you about the revelation of Jesus in North America, as revealed in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine of Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, they want to say, "I am glad you are a Bible reader, but you do not have the complete picture. Here are three other books that you need." You just say, "Thanks, but no thanks. The canon of Scripture is shut because the apostles are dead. Joseph Smith did not meet the qualifications of an apostle." When I say stuff like that, they have a tendency of not wanting to come back to my house.

As this is being proclaimed, you see a division happening:

"But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles" (Acts 14:4).

You see what truth does? It divides people. Is that not what Jesus talked about?

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will become members of his household" (Matthew 10:34-36).

You could be in a situation at work; you could be in a situation in a family where you could speak the truth and boom, there is an immediate division. It is easy to get down on yourself and say, "I guess I am not loving" or whatever, but it is the nature of truth. That is what truth does. Truth causes a natural division.

There were two groups here: the unbelieving Jews and the Gentiles that they were stirring up, and then the apostles—apostolic teaching, Paul the apostle. It divided the area here of Iconium right down the middle.

The biggest division I have ever seen in Christianity within my lifetime has been the Free Grace versus Lordship debate. I have never seen something that will take two Christians and divide them. One camp, our camp, says, "You are saved as a free gift." The other camp says, "No, that is not enough. You also have to submit and commit." COPS: commit, obey, persevere, serve—not to grow, but to be justified.

That is what distinguishes our church from a church like that of the late John MacArthur. When I first came here, there were some strong loyalists to John MacArthur. Within a few weeks, these people did not like me at all—even though I think I am a fairly easy person to get along with—because I kept emphasizing grace.

Fortunately, a lot of them have left, which I would call that blessed subtraction. That is what Robert Lightner used to say, our ecclesiology professor. I thought it was unloving the way he said it. He would say, "Men, there are some people you just gotta pray them out of the church." I thought, "That is not very nice." Then I became a pastor and I started to pray people out of the church. I prayed people in the church too, like you guys; it goes both ways. Truth divides.

You see a conspiracy developed in Acts 14:5:

"And when an attempt was made by the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them" (Acts 14:5).

Notice this conspiracy between the Gentiles, the Jews, and the synagogue rulers. The Greek here is interesting. It is "horme" which means to rush on impulse. It is like they rushed him, rushed at him. They were so upset by what was being said that they rushed at him to try to take them out, and they started to shame them. It says, *"to mistreat them."*

The verb used for "mistreatment" is that of an insult. It is "hybrizo." It is used in Matthew 22:6, which says:

"And the rest seized his slaves and mistreated ["hybrizo"] them and killed them" (Matthew 22:6).

That is the same verb that is used here. These apostles—Paul and Barnabas, the brethren that were converted—were mistreated. They were insulted. They were not treated fairly, and then they tried to kill them. The very end of Acts 14:5 says, *"and to stone them."* It is one thing to get mad at somebody; it is another thing to take their life.

I am glad that never happens in America, but we just saw that, did we not, last week? A young man who, although not a perfect person, I think he was out there, best I can tell,

trying to do his best to spread Judeo-Christian truth into the culture and someone killed him. That is what they were trying to do here with these apostles, in this message of grace.

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Is that your desire? Do you want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus? I do. What does the end of the verse say? "Will be persecuted." That is sometimes a way to chart your progress in godliness. You have a bunch of people that are coming against you, and you have not done a thing to them—unprovoked attacks against you. We say to ourselves, "I must have missed God's will." No, that is actually a sign that you are in God's will.

The guy that led me to Christ in 1983 gave me a relationship with him where I could call him under any circumstances. As a 16-year-old convert to Christianity, I would call and cry my crocodile tears. "This is going wrong. That is going wrong. This person's upset. That person's upset." He would say this, and it used to make me mad when he said it, but this is what he said: "I am grinning from ear to ear," which is not what I wanted to hear. The reason he said that was because I was fitting into the mold. This is what happens when you are in the will of God.

In Acts 14:6, they escape to Darby:

"They became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region" (Acts 14:6).

The people wanted them dead, but they were not able to kill them. I do believe—and I do not know who said it, but you can consult Rabbi Google and find out—it is something to the effect of: "The servant of God is immortal until his work on earth is done." God keeps us alive because He has something for us. Once you die, people have actually done you a favor if they have killed you, because absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Exodus two verse 15 says,

"When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well" (Exodus 2:15).

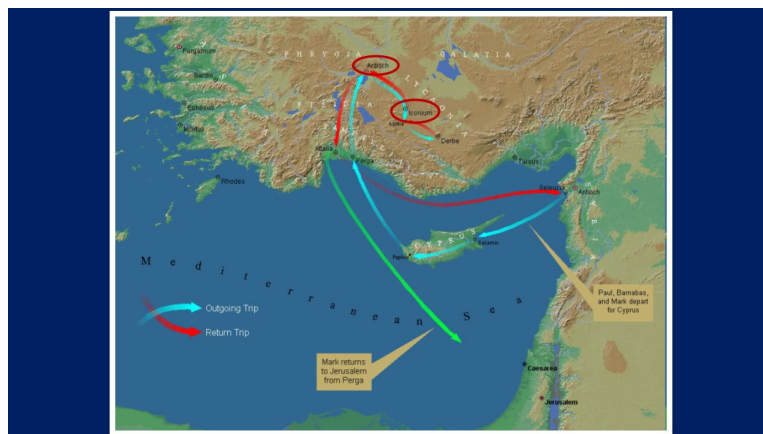
Why did Moses get away? Because his work was not finished yet.

"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.' Therefore they [the unbelieving Jews] picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple" (John 8:58-59).

Why did Jesus get away? Because His work was not done yet.

That is what is happening here with Paul and Barnabas. The interesting thing about persecution is that it keeps you moving. God used persecution to keep the church moving. When Jesus said, "You are going to be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria," He did not tell them how He was going to get them out of Jerusalem, into the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria.

How did it happen? Through persecution from the unbelieving Jews. That is what pushed the initial believers, in this case Jewish believers, out of Jerusalem. God works that way in our lives. He will use whatever He has to do to get us moving where He wants us to be. Sometimes that takes the form of persecution.



Where did they go? They went to Lycaonia. It is like a county. Within Lycaonia is Lystra, where they were. They had come from Pisidian, Antioch, 90 miles southwest, then to Iconium. They are pushed out of Iconium into Lystra, and then later Derbe, which is also coming up in this chapter.

Luke is pretty good at giving you places and names in Acts, because he is using that to convince Theophilus of the birth and growth of the church, which is Luke's theme in writing. He is tracking the church numerically. That is why it says large numbers in Acts 14:1. He is tracking the church ethnically as it is moving away from being a primarily Jewish Hebraic group of believers in Yeshua, to a Gentile populated group like we see today 2,000 years later. He is tracking the church geographically from Jerusalem, at the beginning, all the way to Rome, at the end.

It reads almost like Google Maps—place of geography after place of geography. This is how you can tell that this is authentic history, because the geography is corroborated with everything we know of Greco-Roman geography. This is not, "VeggieTales" or "Jack and the Beanstalk." This is a history book. But it is not just a history book—it is history shaped with a spiritual purpose.

From there they go to Lystra and Derbe. We get the introduction to that ministry in Acts 14:7, which is where we are going to stop tonight.

"And there they continued to preach the gospel" (Acts 14:7).

They preach the gospel in Lystra and then in Derbe. Notice that they did not change the message because they were persecuted. You would think that they would recalibrate. "Let us try a different marketing approach." But they did not do that. They stuck to the exact same message.

Why did they stick to the exact same message? Because it is only the gospel that is *"the power of God for salvation"* (Romans 1:16). Paul says:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

The word translated "power" there is "dynamis" where we get the words dynamic and dynamite. If it is my message or your message, it does not have saving power. If it is God's message, it has saving power.