

Central Turkey Journey Continues; Paul and Barnabas Mistaken for Jupiter and Mercury !

V 1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

“Iconium” was a cultural “melting pot” type of city full of Greeks, Jews, Roman colonists, plus the native Phrygians, located 80 miles southeast of Pisidian Antioch.

V 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

“The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles.” As in Antioch the Jews again *“stirred up”* persecution, using deceitful words and *“poisoned their minds against the brethren.”* Throughout history the established order has used this tactic against those of whom they disapproved. Also known as propaganda, this old tactic has been perfected nowadays into a fine art through the application of the principles of social psychology. As long as the established order can control the media outlets of newspapers, radio, television, the internet, and so on, then it is easy for them in the modern day to sway the masses in whatever direction they please.

V 3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

“They stayed there a long time.” Rather than leaving at the first sign of trouble, Paul and Barnabas continued *“speaking boldly in the Lord”* who granted *“signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”* We don’t know exactly what the apostles did, but their miracles were the Lord’s way of *“bearing witness”* - confirming that these were His words being spoken by Paul and Barnabas.

V 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

“The city was divided.” Jesus had once told His disciples, *“Do you*

suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.” (Luke 12:51) And John 7:43 states, *“So there was a division among the people because of Him.”*

Jesus also said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* (Matthew 5:9) Paul and Barnabas were bringing the peace of God, hoping to help their fellow Jews break out of their old ways. But they would none of it. As wonderful as the new way was, the apostles could not introduce the Prince of Peace to those who refused to change.

David said once about his enemies, *“I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.”* (Psalm 120:7) And that was the situation that Paul often had to face. Much as he would have liked to bring peace, his efforts only brought division. But his and Barnabas’ efforts did initiate the process of change, and eventually Asia Minor (Turkey) became a major center of Christianity - the Orthodox Church, and even the state religion of the Byzantine (east Roman) Empire (from A.D. 325 to 1453).

“Apostles.” This word means “one who is sent”. In a stricter sense it was used to refer to those had seen Christ and were sent by Him; Paul would have fallen into this category since he had seen Christ on the Damascus road. But in the general sense, anyone who is sent by Christ to communicate the Word of God is an *“apostle”*.

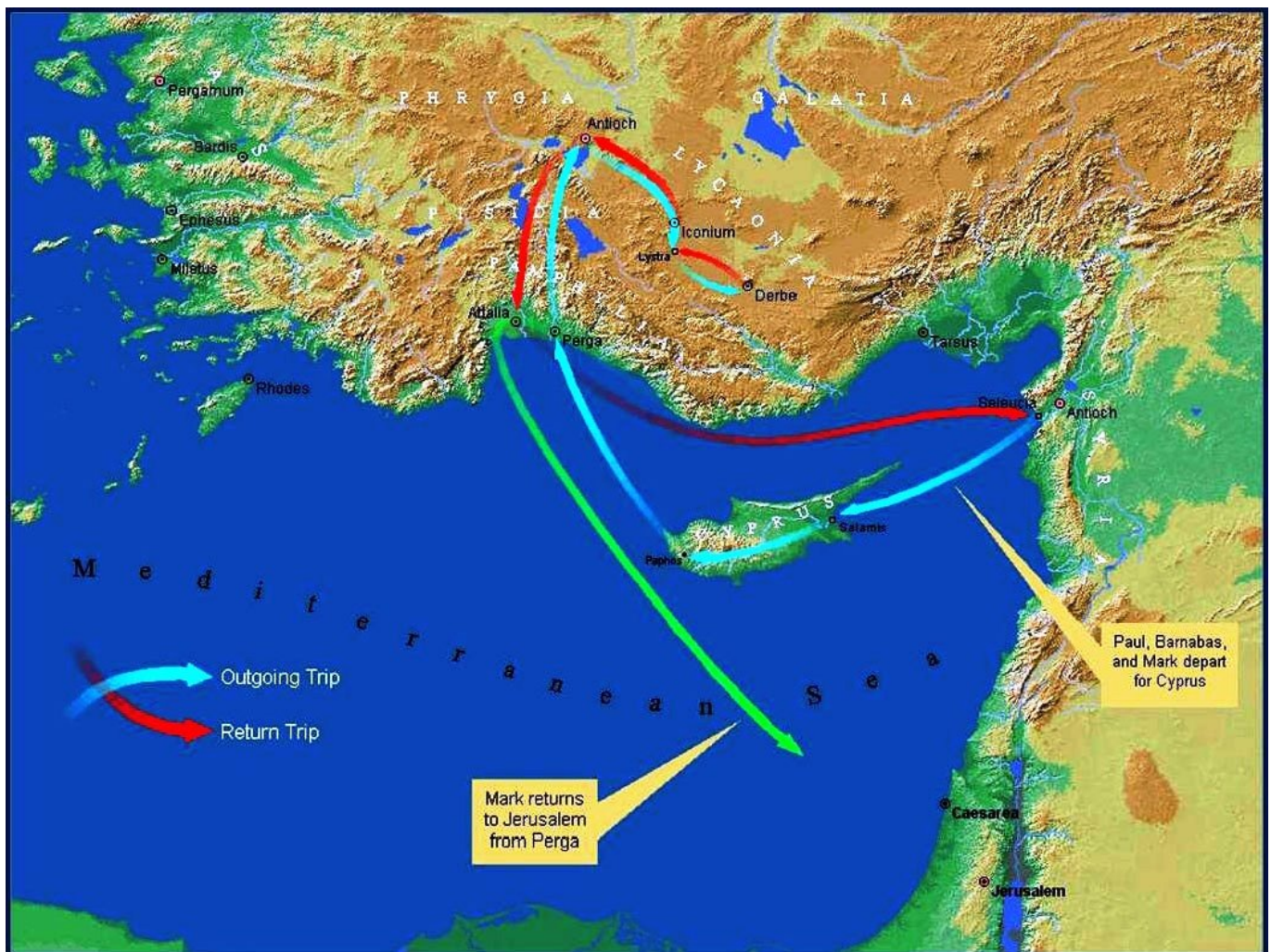
V 5-7 And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there.

“Stone them.” This confirms that the *“unbelieving Jews”* were the instigators; stoning was their method of execution, especially for blasphemy, which is what they thought Paul and Barnabas were guilty of.

“They. . . fled.” But not until they had done much work there; they stuck to the job and called the Devil’s bluff, ignoring the empty threats and criticisms. They only fled when they knew their enemies were about to make *“a violent attempt. . . to abuse and stone them”*. *“He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.”* By following the Lord’s direction,

they didn't flee prematurely; they were steadfast, yet flexible enough to pull up stakes before the situation spiraled out of control.

“Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia.” Lycaonia was a district in the Roman province of Galatia*, to the southeast of Iconium. (* After a failed attempt to attack Rome in the 3rd Century B.C., some tribes of the Gauls fled from Gaul, now France, to the plains and mountains of central Turkey, which became known as Galatia.)



Map of First Missionary Journey

V 8-10 And 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, observing 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.**

“In Lystra.” Only 18 miles from Antioch. They started preaching there without going to any synagogue, which probably meant the Jewish population there was fairly small. However, Lystra was the home of Paul’s future team member, Timothy. (Acts 16:1)

“A cripple from his mother’s womb.” In other words, a hopeless case that only a miracle could heal. ”

Seeing that he had faith to be healed.” Often a prerequisite for healing. When healing people, Jesus often made remarks to this effect: ***“Do you believe that I am able to do this?” “According to your faith let it be to you” “Your faith has made you well.”*** (Mat 9:28-29, Lk 17:19) If you see someone has faith in your power as a man or woman of God, take advantage of it. Their faith can act like a magnet that draws out the power of God.

V 11-13 **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.

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

“In the Lycaonian language.” Not understanding their language, the apostles were unable to guess the intentions of the people.

“The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” According to local legend, the gods Zeus and Hermes (Latin: Jupiter and Mercury) had visited Lystra incognito once upon a time, asking for food and lodging but were turned away. In vengeance the gods drowned everyone in a flood except for one peasant couple who had received them. Not wishing to repeat their ancestors’ mistakes, the people, who believed Barnabas and Paul to be the same two gods, set about to honor and worship them.

(Sounds like the plot for a situation comedy.)



V 14-16 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, “who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.

Paul and Barnabas “*ran in among the multitude*” and declared, “*We also are men with the same nature as you.*” They had to show that they were just ordinary men who happened to be worshiping an extraordinary God.

“*They tore their clothes.*” A Jewish way of repudiating blasphemy, which they would be guilty of if they were to accept the people’s worship

of them. How different was the apostles' reaction compared to that of king Herod when the people applauded him with shouts of *"the voice of a god and not of a man!"* (12:22)

"Living God, who made heaven, the earth, the sea." Because the crowd did not know the Old Testament, Paul and Barnabas dropped their usual jargon about the "God of Abraham etc." and adjusted their message to what the people could understand. Paul said later in Romans 1:20, *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."* The Creation itself bears testimony to the existence of a Creator.

But the tendency of mankind, when he is unable to see God or know about Him through His Word, is to worship His Creation, which is all they can see and understand about God. Nevertheless, people know, almost instinctively, that there has to be a Supreme Being behind the scenes who created the natural world. But since He can't be seen, it is easy to turn instead to the things of the natural world that can be seen.

So, to make their message understandable to the people of Lystra, Paul and Barnabas made mention of the visible things of nature, which the people were caught up in worshiping, and tried to shift their focus onto the invisible Creator behind it all. In modern times we have a similar tendency to worship the things of nature: the theory of evolution is the modern equivalent to the "pagan religions" of old and, like them, promotes worship of the Creation instead of the Creator. *"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen are not made of things which are visible."* (Hebrews 11:3)

"Allowed all nations to walk in their own ways." Since the days of Noah, mankind went on a downward spiral into ignorance of the true God. Only the Hebrews possessed the Word and the right understanding, and even they had trouble following it. Romans 1:18-25 describes well the process of man's fall into unbelief.

V 17 "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts

with food and gladness.”

“Did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good.” The creation and God’s care for mankind bear testimony to His existence.

V 18 And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

“Could scarcely restrain the multitudes.” It is man’s nature to want to have someone in the flesh to worship. But *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:24)

V 19-20 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

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.

“Jews. . . persuaded the multitudes.” They were a rather fickle bunch. Those who are too steeped in superstition can be hard to win over, and it seems they switched sides very quickly. As the Jews in Jesus’ day were disappointed that He did not overthrow the Romans, so these people in Lystra were disappointed that Paul and Barnabas did not live up to their superstitious expectations. They were unwilling to forsake their traditional belief system and so became easy prey for Paul and Barnabas’ Jewish enemies.

“They stoned Paul.” Again, this method of execution by stoning shows the unbelieving Jews were the main instigators of the persecution.

“He rose up.” It was not the Lord’s time to end Paul’s work, so even though they *“stoned Paul”*, even *“supposing him to be dead”*, it seems the Lord helped him to recover very quickly.

“To Derbe.” A city 40 miles southeast of Lystra.

V 21-23 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 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 when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

“Preached the Gospel. . . made many disciples.” It seems Paul and Barnabas didn’t suffer persecution here in Derbe, maybe because their enemies all thought Paul was dead.

“Returned again to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.” They were able to re-enter the cities they had been kicked out of. Their approach was more low-key this time because they came with a different purpose, that of *“strengthening the souls of the disciples”*. It would have been easier to take a shorter route southeast straight to their home base, but they preferred the longer route, re-tracing their steps in spite of the danger, for the sake of their new converts.

“Through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Paul and Barnabas had to let their new converts know that just because they were now saved did not mean their problems would come to an end. In fact, they might have more than before, but now they had the power to rise above, to receive the divine help needed to solve any problem.

Likely, they were also teaching the concept of obtaining a full reward in the Afterlife. Revelation 2-3 has many references along this line: *“To him who overcomes will I give to eat from the tree of life. . . the crown of life. . . the hidden manna. . . power over the nations. . . the morning star. . . confess his name before My Father and before His angels. . . write on him My new name. . . sit with Me on My throne.”* (2:7,10,17,26,28, 3:5,12,21)

“Appointed elders.” It was important to leave behind a group of believers that was organized and had some leadership structure.

V 24-25 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

“Pisidia.” A mountainous, rugged region they had to pass through before getting back to the district of Pamphylia on the coast where they

“preached the Word in Perga”.

V 26-28 From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

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

So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Paul and Barnabas, leaving from Attalia, returned to their “home base”, Antioch in Syria. There they got the church together and testified of *“all that God had done”* and *“that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* - a major breakthrough and step forward in the advancement of God’s work in the earth.

“A long time.” About one year they stayed in Antioch.

[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 15\)](#)