

49. Paul and Barnabas Preached in Iconium

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn why Paul and Barnabas told the Jews that they were turning to the Gentiles. We also saw that those Jews and Gentiles who turned to the Lord and believed in Christ and His death and resurrection were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas were finally expelled from the region of Antioch of Pisidia, but they then went to the city of Iconium. In this topic, we will see how the message of the death and resurrection spread to Iconium and the surrounding area.

Paul and Barnabas came to the city of Iconium. Acts 14:1-2 says, “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. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.” Paul and Barnabas had been expelled from the region of Antioch of Pisidia. Iconium was about 80 miles southeast of Antioch. The first place Paul and Barnabas went in each city was to the synagogue. That was the place where they could meet both Jews and Gentile proselytes who wanted to learn more about the true God.

In this synagogue, Paul probably spoke the same things that he had spoken in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. However, Paul received a much different response to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ than he received when he first spoke in Antioch. Here, we see that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. That meant that those who believed in this city had a background of the Old Testament. Christ said in Luke 24:44-45, “Then He said to them, ‘These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” That background would make it easier for them to grow in their understanding of Christ because of the many verses in the Old Testament that teach about Christ.

We do see that the response of the unbelieving Jews in Iconium was the same as the response of the unbelieving Jews in Antioch. We see that these unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds. The word translated “poisoned” means *to harm, to hurt or to cause to become bitter*. This same word is used in Acts 18:9-10 where the Lord told Paul, “Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’” In these verses, the word is translated “hurt”. Here, we see that it only takes a small group who reject the message about Christ to get a lot of people angry and upset. Those who reject Christ have done this in many countries.

However, it took these Jews a long time to turn the minds of the Gentiles against the Christians. Acts 14:3-5 says, “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. But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them.” We see that Paul and Barnabas were able to stay a long time in this city. This was

important, because it gave them enough time to help those who had repented and placed their faith in Christ to really grow in their faith.

Throughout the time that Paul and Barnabas were in Iconium, they continued to speak the Word of God boldly. Since we first read about Barnabas in Acts 4, Barnabas probably told the Christians in Iconium what the Christians in Jerusalem had done when Peter and John were threatened by the Jewish religious leaders in that city. Acts 4:29-31 says, “‘Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” Paul and Barnabas demonstrated that same boldness in Iconium and it gave the new Christians in that city an example to follow as they began to experience opposition.

The Lord was also confirming the message of Paul and Barnabas in another way. We see that the Lord, “...was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” The Lord did a similar thing to what He had done in the city of Jerusalem a few years earlier. Acts 5:12 says, “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.” There was a large number of Jews in the city of Iconium. In 1 Corinthians 1:22, we read, “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.” Since there were many Jews in this city, the Lord chose to bear witness to the word of His grace by granting signs and wonders to be done by the hands of Paul and Barnabas.

We see that the Jews who were poisoning the minds of the Gentiles by the things that they were saying about Paul and Barnabas caused the people of the city to become divided. One group joined the group in opposition to the message of the apostles. The other group believed the message of Paul and Barnabas about Christ. We need to understand why the message of forgiveness of sin brings division. That division is first seen back in Genesis 4:2-5 where we read, “Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” Cain depended on his own efforts to please God. Abel came to God by faith with a blood covering for sin. God accepted the offering of Abel. Cain was angry when his own works were not accepted. Those who depend on their own works often oppose Christ. Their own works cannot save from sin.

Finally, the unbelieving Jews had poisoned minds of enough Gentiles that they were ready to try and kill Paul and Barnabas. We can see that this attempt to kill the apostles came from the Jews, because stoning was the Jewish way of killing those that they accused of blasphemy against God. Paul understood that fully, because Acts 7:57-60 says, “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they

stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” Paul had held the coats when the unbelieving Jews stoned Stephen.

The unbelieving Jews got both the Gentiles and the rulers of the city to join them in this attempt to injure and then stone Paul and Barnabas. The word translated “rulers” spoke of the leaders of the city. Many times, the rulers of a city will oppose those who place their faith in Christ, because they feel it will hurt their business. This is illustrated in Acts 19:24-26 where we read, “For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.’” The gods of this world such as idols, pleasure, entertainment and many other things provide much income to those who have businesses related to these gods.

However, someone found out about the plans to injure and stone Paul and Barnabas. Acts 14:6-7 says, “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.” Here, we see that Paul and Barnabas had to flee for their lives. Hebrews 6:17-18 says, “Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*.” In the world, many religions fight other religions. As true Christians, we can flee to God, because our refuge is the hope that is set before us. Two things strengthen our hope. Those are the message of the resurrection and the message of the return of Christ. That is why we can have hope in the Lord and do not need to fight the way the world fights.

Paul and Barnabas just fled to the cities of Lystra and Derbe and the region around those cities. They kept right on preaching the Gospel in that region which was in a different Roman province even though Lystra was only about 18 miles from Iconium. This city had a much smaller Jewish population than Iconium. Paul and Barnabas give us a wonderful example for our lives and for the lives of our children. Even though they faced opposition and even possible death, they did not stop preaching the message of the Gospel. We want to provide that same example for our children. When we share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ, there will be opposition from those who depend on their own works to try and be acceptable to God. No works can save any person. As a result, we want to show our children by our example how to show love even to those who would oppose the message of the Gospel. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to show love to those who oppose the Gospel.